

POLARIZATION AND MASS-ELITE DYNAMICS IN THE AMERICAN PARTY  
SYSTEM

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## ABSTRACT

CHRIS ELLIS: Polarization and Mass-Elite Dynamics in the American Party System  
(Under the direction of James Stimson)

Actions of political party elites are central to many theories of new issue alignment in mass electorates. But these theories seemingly have little to say about the mass party implications of the most important recent development in American party politics: elite party polarization along the *existing* dimension of conflict over the scope of the federal government and its role in providing social services. This project addresses the impact of elite polarization on mass party change in the United States, paying particular attention to how changes in the political context affect the decision-making processes of individual citizens.

Chapter 1 develops an equilibrium theory of mass-elite linkages, showing that mass parties have polarized on the existing dimension and that mass and elite polarization are linked in a systematic way. Chapter 2 explores the impact of this mass polarization for changes in the relative size of party coalitions. The chapter develops a theory of macro-micro linkages in the party system, explaining how macro-context and individual-level behavior *interact* to produce aggregate-level change. The analysis shows that the Democratic Party has become smaller not because of a decline in the importance of social class or the growing prominence of “cultural” concerns, but rather because polarization—and the resultant clarity of elite positions—has caused many citizens with conservative scope-of-government preferences to become Republicans. Chapter 3 addresses the impact of polarization on

electoral decision-making, exploring the relationship between partisanship-policy preference consistency and the decision to cast a party-line vote. I find that, dependent on certain attributes of the individual and context, individuals whose policy preferences are broadly *consistent* with those of their party's elites are more likely to vote for candidates of their party. Recent increases in the number of "consistent" citizens, brought about in large part by elite polarization, explain the resurgence of party voting in the electorate. Taken together, these chapters suggest that scope-of-government issues play a larger role than any time in recent history in defining the mass party system. They also provide a framework for thinking about the dynamic relationships between context, citizens, and political outcomes.

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## CHAPTER 1

### RESOLVING DISEQUILIBRIUM: POLARIZATION AND MASS-ELITE DYNAMICS

A sizable body of research considers changes in the actions of political party elites as vital to mass party alignments on new or newly-salient political issues. At the micro-level, party cues affect how mass partisans frame newly-salient dimensions of conflict, integrate unfamiliar issue content into their existing belief systems, and form opinions on new or newly-salient issues (e.g., Campbell et. al 1960; Jacoby 1988; Zaller 1992). At the macro-level, changes in elite party behavior are integral in causing dynamic change in the mass party system and in changing the issues that define mass electoral conflict.

The idea of a dynamic, long term relationship between the dimensionality and scope of issue conflict at the elite and mass levels is implicit in literature on realignment and new issue alignment (see e.g., Sundquist 1983, Miller and Schofeld 2003). Most notably, the theory of issue evolution (Carmines and Stimson 1989) serves as a theoretical bridge between “micro” and “macro” understandings of the effects of party cues and helps to explain why mass and elite “new issue alignments” are related in a dynamic way. Developed to explain the changing alignment of major parties via issues of race, issue evolution has been extended to a range of other contexts (e.g., Adams 1997; Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002; Carmines and Woods 2002) to explain the individual-level processes that underlie the dynamics of mass party response to changing elite cues on newly-salient issues.

Issue evolution and other theories of new issue alignment have been silent, however, on the aggregate mass party implications of the most important recent development in American party politics: the polarization of party elites on the *existing* ideological dimension. This “liberal-conservative” dimension, understood as the debate over the size of the federal government and its role in redistributing wealth and providing social services, structures elite discourse on the majority of issues in American party politics (e.g., Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Stonecash et. al 2003). Even amidst the emergence of “cultural” conflict (Layman 2001), it is elite behavior on the existing dimension that plays a vital role in understanding the growing importance of parties to policy outcomes (Aldrich 1995; Stonecash et al. 2003) and the representative link between public opinion and public policy (Erikson et. al 2002).

A growing number of scholars are studying the causes and consequences of polarization at the elite level (e.g., Bond and Fleisher 2000; Jones 2001; Jacobsen 2004), and many others have suggested that elite polarization has not been ignored by the mass public (Jacobsen 2000; Hetherington 2001; Layman and Carsey 2002). But because of limitations in both data (there has been no straightforward way to compute an *a priori* valid time series of mass party preferences on this dimension) and theory (theories of new issue alignment cannot explain mass response to polarization on the existing dimension), the impact of elite polarization on the dynamics of aggregate mass party conflict has been largely unexplained. Understanding the dynamics of mass and elite party polarization—and providing evidence that elite and mass party conflict on this dimension are linked in a long-term, sensible way—is important for understanding the consequences of elite polarization for mass behavior. Further, explaining the dynamic association between elite and mass parties on the *existing* policy

dimension provides an opportunity to develop theories of new issue alignment into a broader framework from which to view the relationship between mass and elite party conflict.

In this paper, I argue that the realignment and new issue alignment perspectives can help to explain the dynamics of mass-elite party linkages on the existing issue dimension.

Building on theories of new issue alignment—in particular, the theory of issue evolution—I develop and test an equilibrium model of the relationship between elite and mass party preferences. In this model, the strength and polarization of elite- and mass-party conflict exist in an equilibrium state relative to one another. Any “disruption” of mass-elite equilibrium will lead to a dynamic correction in which the preferences of mass parties will change to more closely correspond with those of elites.

In the current context, an increase in elite polarization on the existing dimension should produce dynamic changes in mass party preferences substantively similar to those of new issue alignments because they stem from the same general cause: a change in elite behavior that disrupts the equilibrium relationship between elite and mass party conflict. These “disruptions” lead to changes in mass awareness of and perceived importance of elite party conflict. It is this changing mass awareness—resulting from either the emergence of a new issue or changing elite behavior on the existing dimension—that matter to mass party change. This “equilibrium” conception of mass-elite relationships has clear empirical implications for the macro-level, dynamic relationship between elite and mass party preferences.

In what follows, I use the framework of party system equilibrium to analyze the dynamic relationship between elite and mass party preferences on the existing ideological dimension. Using Public Policy *Mood* (Stimson 1991, 1999) as a baseline, I create a new time-serial measure of party-level policy preferences on size-and-scope of government issues. I use

equilibrium (error-correction) analysis to show that mass parties have polarized in a way consistent with a dynamic equilibrium model of mass-elite linkages. Building on the precepts of issue evolution, I demonstrate the importance of awareness of elite party change to mass response, showing that a dynamic relationship between mass and elite party positions exists only for the segment of the population most likely to be aware of changes in elite behavior. This paper provides evidence of a dynamic link between elite and mass party polarization and highlights the growing importance of “scope-of-government” issues to mass party conflict.

### **Party polarization at the elite level**

A growing body of work casts doubt on the “party decline” thesis that was so long conventional wisdom in political science. Whether it be through control over the legislative agenda (Aldrich and Rohde 2000), influence in shaping policy outcomes (Aldrich 1995), or influence in mass decision-making (DeSart 1995; Bartels 2000) the role of party in both elections and public policy is large and growing. The most often cited reason for party resurgence is the growing polarization of major party elites. Southern realignment and related factors have helped to create two distinct parties whose scope of conflict is defined almost exclusively along a single ideological dimension.

Perhaps the most straightforward and commonly-used measure of elite polarization on this dimension is calculated using Poole and Rostenthal’s (1997) DW-NOMINATE scores, which estimate ideological positions of Congress members via an analysis of all non-unanimous roll-call votes. Figure 1 shows the distances between the mean scores of House Republicans and Democrats on the first dimension of DW-NOMINATE. Both the interparty distance and the intraparty homogeneity on this dimension have steadily increased since the

1970's (Aldrich and Rohde 2000).<sup>1</sup> Although “cultural” and “social” issues have grown in salience in recent decades and party elites have polarized on these issues as well (Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002), the vast majority of Congressional roll-call votes—and the vast majority of Congressional policy outputs—deal with issues of government spending and economic redistribution (Erikson et. al 2002). This dimension “picks up the conflict, roughly speaking, between rich and poor (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, p. 46).” Elite-level party polarization has occurred, in other words, in large part because of party divergence on the existing ideological dimension.

### **New issue alignment, equilibrium and mass-elite linkages**

The idea that the dimensionality of issue conflict (and the relative importance of various issue dimensions) at the elite and mass party levels are linked in long-term equilibrium is implicit in much work on realignment and new issue alignment. In this view, a “realigning” change occurs when a stable party system—in which the composition of party coalitions, the issues that divide parties, and the strength of parties at the elite and mass levels are relatively constant—is disrupted by a shock to the political environment. This shock—resulting either from an exogenous event to which party elites respond by taking divergent positions or the efforts of strategic party elites working to change the party agenda—disrupts party system equilibrium in a way that emphasizes a different dimension of issue conflict or introduces new issues to scope of elite party discourse (Miller and Schofeld 2003).<sup>2</sup> Over time, the

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<sup>1</sup> All of the analyses in this paper will use NOMINATE estimates from the House of Representatives. A corresponding measure of Senate polarization correlates at .99 with the House measure.

<sup>2</sup> Miller and Schofeld (2003) more explicitly use the idea of party system equilibrium to explain how party positions in multidimensional issue space have changed during the past century. In this view, stable party system equilibria are disrupted by the decisions of strategic

changing positions of party elites leads to mass party response, as citizens—given the choices presented to them by elites—will increasingly make political decisions based on the dimension most strongly emphasized in elite party conflict. Whether a result of a “critical” moment or gradual, “secular” change (Key 1955, 1959), the result of this disruption is a system in which party differences at both the elite and the mass levels are defined along a new issue dimension. The implication of this for mass-elite linkages is that, in the aggregate, the dimensionality of mass and elite party conflict (and the issues most pertinent to party conflict) exist in long-term equilibrium relative to one another (see Aldrich 2003). Disruptions to this equilibrium will, in the long-term, be resolved.

Building on the realignment perspective, the theory of issue evolution (Carmines and Stimson 1989) more explicitly delineates the individual-level processes that underlie mass party response to changes in elite party preferences on new or newly-salient issues. Issue evolution is an elite-driven theory of opinion change in which changes in elite party preferences on a “new” issue lead to an increased ability for the public to perceive important differences between the parties. This perception of differences, in turn, increases mass affective commitment to party with respect to the “evolving” issues. The result of the issue evolution process is an alignment of mass party preferences on this new issue that reflects the alignment of party elites. As party elites gradually (but meaningfully) adjust their own preferences on newly-salient issues such as race (Carmines and Stimson 1989), abortion

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party elites to emphasize or mute party differences on a certain issue dimension (in an effort to gain the support of “disaffected” political activists who care a great deal about that dimension). Certain dimensions at both the elite and mass levels become less important and the party differences smaller, and others—racial issues in the 1960’s, for example—become more important and party positions more polarized as a result of elite and activist decisions.



(Adams 1997) or the role of women in society (Wolbrecht 2000), mass party preferences on these issues typically follow suit.

### **Issue evolution, equilibrium, and the existing dimension**

But while issue evolution was developed to explain new issue alignment, the central tenets of the theory provide a more general framework from which to view the relationship between changes in elite behavior and mass response. Further, the individual-level processes of new issue alignment delineated by the theory present a way to apply and expand the “equilibrium” perspective to understand the dynamics of macro-level mass-elite linkages on the existing ideological dimension. The essential implication of the issue evolution process with respect to mass opinion change is not the emergence of a new issue on which parties align, but the actions—and changes in actions—of party elites. Mass reaction to elite behavior is conditional on changes in the salience and clarity of elite positions: the degree to which a “new” issue becomes important to mass party conflict depends on mass *awareness* of changes in elite party positions on this issue and the *perceived importance* of these changes. The emergence of party conflict on an important new issue may provide this awareness, but new issues are not the only ways in which party cues can become clearer and more relevant to the electorate.

The key idea is to reconsider the idea that party conflict at the elite and mass levels exist in long-term equilibrium to which they tend to return if disrupted. In equilibrium, the structure of issue conflict—and the relative strength of and ideological distance between the major parties—at the mass level will mirror that at the elite level. At equilibrium, in other words, mass parties have adapted to the messages sent by party elites and have structured their own attitudes accordingly. The first step of an issue evolution is a “punctuation”

(Carmines and Stimson 1989, 160) of equilibrium caused by elite party divergence on a new or newly-salient issue. As a result of this divergence, mass-elite equilibrium has been disrupted: the structure of elite party conflict is substantively different from that of mass party conflict. These changes in elite discourse— combined with the increased clarity of party cues that results—make it easier for citizens to understand how their own attitudes on these issues fit into the broader scope of party debate.

Given the increased salience of parties during these times, many citizens whose policy preferences and partisanship do not align on this “new” issue will adjust their attitudes, updating their partisanship (or policy preferences) to more closely match those of party elites. In the aggregate, these changes imply that mass parties will, over time, align themselves in a way consistent with the alignment of elite parties: over time, the disequilibrium in the party system will be corrected. Viewed in this way, the dynamic processes of issue evolution are not explanations of new issue alignments, but explanations of how disruptions to macro mass-elite equilibrium are resolved.

Importantly, however, “disruptions” that change elite party positions—and mass awareness of elite party positions—can take a number of different forms. They can occur, as in times of realignment or new issue alignment, through the efforts of issue activists working to redefine the political agenda and divide party elites along a new issue dimension (Carmines and Stimson 1989), the muting of previously important dimensions of conflict (Miller and Schofeld 2003), or as a result of an exogenous event, such as the Great Depression, to which the parties must respond (Burnham 1970). But they can also occur as result of changes in party positions on the *existing* dimension, movements caused by (for example) Congressional redistricting (Carson et. al 2003), replacement of existing Congress

members with those who hold different policy preferences (Bullock 2000), or partisan activity endogenous to lawmaking institutions themselves (Jacobsen 2004).

These are disparate types of disruptions with diverse sets of causes, but they should have similar effects on mass parties because they share a critical feature: they change the nature of elite party conflict, thus changing the strength and clarity of elite party messages. It is these changes in party cues—and the subsequent mass perception of them—that predicate mass party response to changes in elite behavior. If these conditions are met, any disruption to mass-elite equilibrium—whether caused by the emergence of a new issue, a “realigning” event, or elite party movement along the existing dimension—will be resolved in a dynamic process. In the current context, elite party positions on size-and-scope-of-government issues are in constant, if gradual, change. But if these gradual changes in elite positions change mass perception of elite party “signals,” they have disrupted mass-elite party equilibrium. As a result, mass parties should resolve disequilibrium by updating its positions in a way that reflects changes in elite party behavior.

### **Mass party response to elite party polarization**

An equilibrium relationship between elite and mass party polarization on the existing ideological dimension should exist only if changes in elite behavior have changed the ways in which citizens perceive elite party conflict. A growing body of research suggests that this condition is met. As parties have moved to the ideological poles, the rhetorical and ideological conflicts between party elites have become more combative (e.g., Sinclair 2000; Jamieson and Falk 2000). This sharpening of elite discourse provides the clear changes in elite behavior necessary for the public to react to changes in elite party attitudes. As a result, the degree to which elite positions differ on this dominant dimension has been linked to

growing awareness of differences between the parties, a greater ability among citizens to locate parties correctly in ideological space, and an increase in the proportion of people who hold an affective preference for one party over the other (Hetherington 2001, Pomper and Weiner 2003). Much as in times of new issue alignment, party movement on the existing dimension has made elite positions clearer to the mass public, and citizens have reacted in systematic and meaningful ways.

The end result of this process—macro-level party alignment—is the focus here. Elite movement along the existing dimension, much like the emergence of a new issue, disrupts mass-elite equilibrium.<sup>3</sup> The changing signals sent by party elites that results makes it possible for citizens to perceive and react to changes in elite behavior. Polarization makes citizens more likely to both be aware of changes in party positions and to perceive party conflict as important, and making it more likely that they update their own policy preferences (or partisanship) to reflect the nature of elite conflict. In the aggregate and over time, this updating should drive mass party polarization on the existing elite-structured dimension of conflict over the size and scope of the federal government. Further, the empirical patterns of elite and mass party conflict on this dimension should suggest the presence of a long-term equilibrium relationship to which the party system tends to return.

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<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses solely on the effects of changes in *elite party signals* on mass party preferences: the ways in which elite-generated disruptions to equilibrium precipitate a dynamic mass response. A large body of theoretical and empirical literature suggests that changes in elite behavior should drive mass opinion change, and recent literature places elite polarization as central to the changing ways in which citizens view political parties and form political attitudes (e.g., Hetherington 2000, Pomper and Weiner 2003). But changes in elite behavior are certainly not exogenous to mass behavior in an explicit sense: they are a result, at least in part, of demands of the activist bases of the parties (Miller 1988) and the redistricting and residential self-selection that increases the homogeneity of Congressional districts (Stonecash et. al 2003). This suggests that the idea of systematic, institutional mass-elite equilibrium in the party system can be developed further (see also Aldrich 2003). I return to this point in the conclusion.

## **Operationalizing mass preferences**

Conceptually, the relationship I wish to understand is simple. I want to analyze whether elite party polarization along the existing dimension of policy conflict has caused mass parties to become more polarized on this dimension, and whether this polarization occurs in a way consistent with an equilibrium theory of mass-elite linkages. Empirically, however, exploring this relationship is far more difficult. Public opinion surveys rarely ask a consistent battery of survey questions for long periods of time, and the questions asked in any given year are often geared to “hot button” issues of the time that have little lasting salience. Finding a set of questions representative enough to be considered a reasonable measure of “mass preferences” on this underlying dimension of conflict and also asked for a long enough time to capture meaningful variation in preferences is problematic.

The most widely-used measure of public opinion on the dimension of conflict over the size and scope of the federal government is Public Policy Mood, developed by Stimson (1991, 1999). Stimson finds that, in general, macro-level public opinion on “scope of government” issues moves systematically in response to political and economic events. Further, aggregate public opinion with respect to these issues is structured unidimensionally, with preferences for diverse types of government programs “moving together” over time. Because of its integration of a wide variety of questions thought to tap the concept of “public opinion” on this dimension, Mood is a commonly used measure in empirical analyses that demand a longitudinal measure of public sentiment (see e.g., Durr 1993a; Mishler and Sheehan 1996; Fleming and Wood 1997; Binder 1999; Coleman 1999; Smith 2000; Erikson et. al 2002).

By itself, however, Mood is of little use to this analysis. This measure, constructed using survey marginals from over 1600 questions from dozens of different survey houses, cannot be disaggregated into its component “parts.” Since the measure of Mood for any year is composed of questions from many different surveys, it is impossible to tell directly how the preferences of any individual (or any demographic or partisan subgroup) “compare” to the aggregate at any given time.

What Mood can provide, however, is a useful benchmark against which other, simpler measures of policy preferences can be judged. It can be reasonably assumed, in other words, that a measure of public sentiment on this dimension—even one that is comprised from a far more limited set of survey questions—that correlates strongly with Policy Mood over time is itself a valid measure of the underlying concept of “public preferences” on the size of the federal government. My goal is to devise a measure of public opinion that closely tracks Policy Mood, but also can be disaggregated into its component parts, allowing for meaningful analysis of changes in mass party preferences over time.

To do this, I use data from the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is the best survey with which to conduct this analysis because of the heavy emphasis on scope-of-government issue preferences. The GSS has also asked the same party identification question in every survey since 1973, allowing for an understanding of how the preferences of Democrats and Republicans (in addition to how preferences of the aggregate) move over time. I use responses to the 11 GSS questions asked consistently from 1973-2002 that deal with preferences for government spending on various distributive (e.g., education, the environment), redistributive (e.g., health care, welfare), and social (e.g., fighting crime, solving the problems of cities) programs. Responses are coded as “liberal” (for those that

correspond more closely with the positions of Democratic Party elites) or “conservative.” A moderate (essentially a status quo) option was also offered to respondents: and these responses were coded as “moderate.” (see Appendix A for a complete description of questions and coding).

Principal-axis factoring shows that of these 11 issues, only preferences for spending on space exploration do not load on a common dimension.<sup>4</sup> I thus use the remaining 10 issues to create the analogue to be used here. The marginals to each question were calibrated to a 0-100 scale of Liberalism similar to that of Mood by using the following transformation:

$$[(\# \text{ of Liberal Responses} * 100) + (\# \text{ of moderate responses} * 50)] / N$$

I average the marginals across the 10 issues to create yearly estimates of aggregate Policy Liberalism.<sup>5</sup> The result is a time-series of aggregate policy preferences that correlates with Stimson’s Mood at .92 (see Figure 2). Even though it is comprised of a far smaller number of issue questions, this proxy measures the same underlying concept and captures the same dynamic shifts in public opinion as Mood, and thus can be used to create party-level analogues for mass preferences.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Principal axis-factoring returns a single dominant factor (only one factor with an Eigenvalue greater than .5) on which all issues except space exploration load positively at .12 or greater. That space exploration preferences do not load is not surprising, given that elite party preferences for space exploration spending have never been clearly defined: the “pro-spending” and “anti-spending” parties vacillate based on who is in power and the nature of the international climate.

<sup>5</sup> For sake of simplicity, I weight each of the 10 issues equally in forming the proxy for Mood. An individual-level factor score of preferences on these 10 issues correlates at .94 with the additive scales.

<sup>6</sup> It is certainly not the case that this measure (or Mood) captures the whole of mass issue conflict (see, e.g, Best 1999). In particular, Mood’s may downplay the importance of “cultural” and “social” issues. But this analysis focuses on “scope of government” issues on which parties have neither taken newly-divergent positions nor changed sides, but have

### **Policy Mood and mass party polarization**

I now disaggregate this proxy for Mood into its component parts. Using the same data and coding technique and survey questions described above, I estimate policy preferences for Republican and Democratic identifiers and Independents, essentially decomposing this measure of policy sentiment into the partisan subgroups that comprise it. Graphs of these estimations are shown in Figure 3. At first glance, the series appear quite similar. The questions that comprise this measure (and Mood) are measures of *relative* preferences—asking whether government should spend “more” or “less” in particular policy areas—and thus the meaning of the questions varies as a result of real changes in government policy (saying the government should spend “more” on defense, for example, is far harder— even for very conservative respondents—in 1984 than it was in 1974). As government becomes more conservative, citizens demand comparably more liberal policies, and vice-versa. As a result, the preferences of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents respond to real changes in the political and economic environment. When public opinion turned “to the right” in the late 1970s, all groups became more conservative. Similarly, when it turned “to the left” in the late 1980s, all groups followed suit. Public opinion moves in response to various things (Erikson et. al 2002, Wlezien 2004), but it when it moves, all segments of the population tend to move together.

But there is more. Even as public opinion moves relatively harmoniously in response to political and economic events, party polarization still occurs. All segments of the population

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instead taken increasingly polarized positions. This proxy thus provides a measure of public preferences on the “size and scope of government” dimension as defined by NOMINATE scores. If the goal is to analyze the dynamics of party-specific “policy sentiment” as it is often conceived in applied work, then employing a proxy for the measure of mass preferences used in many studies of mass-elite linkages is a good place from which to proceed.



move in response to real events, but mass *parties* are also moving away from the ideological center. When public opinion becomes more conservative, in other words, both Democrats and Republicans move to the right, but Republicans move more to the right relative to Democrats (and vice-versa). Figure 4 addresses this idea more directly, showing the *distance* between aggregate Democratic and Republican preferences over time. This graph illustrates the polarization between identifiers of the two parties (including partisan leaners). The data show a gradual but real movement toward party polarization. Mass party differences—much like elite party differences—grew slowly until roughly 1990, and accelerated quickly thereafter. By 2002, the differences between mass Democratic and Republican party Liberalism was more than 12 percentage points. Given that the maximum observed range of policy *Mood* during this time period is 14 percentage points, the 9-percentage point growth in party polarization over this time period has significant implications for the structure of partisan political debate.

I now have biennial measures of both *Elite polarization* (the absolute distances between mean party DW-NOMINATE scores for each Congress) and *Mass polarization* (biennial averages of the absolute distances between the policy preference liberalism of Democrats and Republicans).<sup>7</sup> Linking the two series in a way that sheds light on the dynamic relationship

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<sup>7</sup> This paper is most proximately focused on the relationship between elite and mass party *preferences*, while NOMINATE scores are measures of legislative *behavior*. Any broad measure of legislative preferences is necessarily a simplification. But DW-NOMINATE scores can serve as a reliable, if imperfect, proxy for elite party preferences for two reasons. First, since NOMINATE scores are measures of behavior, they include any effects that party leaders have in persuading members to vote against their own preferences and for the wishes of the party. Since the argument here deals with the effects of changes in the strength and polarization of party cues, a measure that focuses on how party preferences manifest themselves in behavior is appropriate. More practically, NOMINATE scores correlate highly with measures of legislator preferences (most notably, scaled scores of responses to National

between them and provides an empirical test of mass-elite equilibrium is the task to which I turn.

### **Resolving disequilibrium: mass-elite dynamics in party polarization**

The idea of mass-elite equilibrium has clear empirical implications. To find support for the theory, we first need evidence that mass and elite party polarization are not only associated with each other, but share an equilibrium relationship to which they tend to return if disrupted. I thus need a model that can analyze the dynamic relationship between two series thought to be associated in this way. The ideal empirical strategy is the use of error-correction modeling.<sup>8</sup>

The equation for the bivariate single-equation ECM is as follows:

$$\Delta Mass Polarization_t = \beta_1 \Delta Elite Polarization_t - \beta_2 (Mass Polarization_{t-1} - \beta_3 Elite Polarization_{t-1}) + e_t$$

The coefficients in the error correction model test for the presence of both short-term (contemporaneous) and long-term (equilibrium) relationships between two series. In this model,  $\beta_1$  represents the immediate effects of changes in Elite Polarization on changes in Mass Polarization. A significant  $\beta_1$  suggests a short-term relationship between elite and mass preferences.

$\beta_2$  and  $\beta_3$  deal with long-term effects: these coefficients test whether two time series exist in long-term equilibrium. If some event (“error”) disrupts this equilibrium in the short-run by moving the series either closer together or farther apart (for example, making elite

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Political Awareness Test Surveys) in years when data for both are available (see Ansolabahere et. al 2001).

<sup>8</sup> See Keele and DeBoef 2005 and Beck 1993 for concise introductions to error-correction methodology, and Durr 1993a for an application of the ECM to an analysis of the dynamics of Stimson’s Policy *Mood*.

parties more or less polarized relative to mass parties) than they would be in equilibrium, there should be evidence that the series move back toward the equilibrium state—that is, that the errors “correct” over time. In this case, a disruption to equilibrium caused by a change in elite party behavior should lead to a dynamic response in which mass parties resolve disequilibrium by adjusting their preferences accordingly. In the model,  $\beta_3$  reflects the equilibrium, or long-run, effects of elite polarization on mass polarization.  $\beta_2$  captures the rate at which errors “correct” themselves over time in resolving disequilibrium: this is the rate at which the long-term effects occur. To see evidence of dynamic error-correction (and, by extension, to infer the existence of an equilibrium relationship between the series), both  $\beta_2$  and  $\beta_3$  must be non-zero, and  $\beta_2$  must be negative, indicating that errors “correct” back to equilibrium in future time periods. The higher the (negative) value of the error-correction coefficient, the more quickly that disruptions to equilibrium are corrected. The error-correction model is estimable using OLS, and all coefficients can be interpreted as regular OLS coefficients.

Error correction models are thus especially powerful in that they allow for the presence of both short- and long-term relationships between series (Durr 1993b, Keele and DeBoef 2005).<sup>9</sup> An understanding of how individual citizens might respond to changes in elite party signals suggests that both short- and long-term effects should be present. There is reason to expect some short-term effects of changes in elite polarization: the actions of party elites

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<sup>9</sup> The error-correction methodology is often associated with the idea of “cointegration”, and ECMs are most commonly used to analyze the relationships between integrated time series (Engle and Granger 1987). The ECM is a linear transformation of the Koyck distributed lag model used for analysis of stationary autoregressive series (Banerjee et. al 1993) and is thus an appropriate methodology for both integrated and “long-memored” stationary data (De Boef and Granato 2000, Keele and DeBoef 2005). Both the Elite and Mass Polarization series are highly autoregressive ( $\phi_{\text{Elite parties}} = .98$ ,  $\phi_{\text{Mass parties}} = .74$ ).

affect mass attitudes relatively quickly in some cases (e.g, Nie et. al 1976, Hillygus and Jackman 2003). But the processes of attitude change delineated in issue evolution suggest that the effects of changes in elite behavior on citizen attitudes also take place over the long run. It often takes some time for citizens to become aware of changes in elite signals—especially subtle ones, such as divergence on the existing ideological dimension—and to react accordingly (Zaller 1992). The full effects of changes in elite behavior will thus be reflected not simply through short-run change in mass attitudes, but also through the process of long-term equilibration.

Further, the process by which macro-level mass parties adjust their preferences results from two micro-level factors: *issue-based change in partisanship* (as the increased clarity of party cues makes it easier to understand party positions, citizens change their partisanship to reflect their policy preferences) (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders 1998), and *party-based change in issue preferences* (as parties polarize, existing party identifiers follow their party elites to the ideological poles) (Layman and Carsey 2002). Partisanship is relatively stable for most citizens, and changes in partisanship may occur in the long-run, over a period of several years. But issue preferences are less stable than partisanship, and those who choose to follow their existing party's leaders to the ideological poles will likely do so relatively quickly. If this is true, many important changes in the relationship between elite and mass preferences will occur *within* the biennial gap between data points, appearing as short-term effects. By focusing on the dynamic association between variables, error-correction modeling can account for both types of “micro” change and thus provides an effective strategy from which to understand the long-term relationship between “macro” elite and mass political parties.

I conduct two analyses of the relationship between Elite and Mass Polarization using a single equation ECM. The first tests the simple relationship between Elite and Mass Party Polarization as operationalized in Figures 1 and 4. The second takes the same form, but excludes all Southern respondents from the Mass Polarization estimates used in the analysis. The reason for estimating a model that excludes Southern respondents is straightforward. Changes in the mass party system over the past 30 years has been driven in large part by the South. This change is in large part due to elite party divergence on racial and cultural issues, and mass party polarization on these issues has thus occurred largely because of the “sorting” of southern democrats along racial and cultural lines (see, e.g., Stanley 1988, Carmines and Stimson 1989).

This paper focuses exclusively on the existing ideological dimension and, as a result, the effects of Southern realignment should not be especially important to party polarization on this dimension issues: Southern and Non-southern parties should react similarly to changing elite behavior on issues where parties are already divided. But if the effects of Southern realignment have also caused a disproportionate number of Southerners to hold size-and-scope of government preferences consistent with their party identification (as for example, a disproportionate number of Southern Democrats who are conservative on both racial *and* scope-of-government issues have become Republicans), then evidence of mass party polarization and macro-level party system equilibrium may be in part an artifact of realigning changes occurring solely in the South. I estimate this second model to guard against this possibility.

Results are presented in Table 1. First, there is clear evidence of a long-term relationship between mass and elite party polarization: the error-correction coefficient ( $\beta_2$  *Mass*

*Polarization*<sub>*t*-1</sub>) and the lagged value of elite polarization are both significant. Mass and elite party polarization move together in long-term equilibrium, and changes in elite party polarization that disrupt mass-elite party equilibrium cause mass parties to “correct” (by becoming more or less polarized) in subsequent time periods. The high values of the error-correction coefficient suggests that disruptions to equilibrium are corrected quickly, as changes in Elite Polarization are rapidly “adjusted for” through a corresponding change in Mass Polarization. The error-correction coefficient estimate of -.89 indicates that “disruptions” are corrected at a rate of 89% per two-year period (the time period between observations).

In addition, there is evidence of a powerful short-term association between elite and mass party polarization. For example, a .05-point increase in polarization on the DW-Nominate scale (roughly the difference between the 103rd and 104th Congresses) is expected, within the two-year gap between observations, to increase the polarization between Republican and Democratic identifiers by roughly 2.5 percent (.05 \* 50.76). In sum, changing elite positions with respect to the “scope-of-government” dimension of conflict produce both short-and long-term changes in the preferences of mass parties. A good deal of this change happens very quickly (at least within the biennial gap between observations). Further, elite and mass polarization are linked in the long-term, and events that disrupt this long-term relationship are corrected over time.

As expected, a model which excludes Southern respondents (the second column of Table I) produces nearly identical results. Mass party polarization on scope of government issues is similar inside and outside the South, and the pattern of mass-elite dynamics are similar whether Southern respondents are included or not. Changes in the South have made no

unique contribution to mass party polarization on scope of government issues or the dynamic mass-elite relationship on these issues. This makes sense in the context of mass-elite equilibrium: elite alignment on “new” racial and cultural issues has played a pivotal and largely unique role in transforming the party system in the South. But on the scope of government dimension—issues on which parties were already divided— elite party movement has affected mass party preferences similarly both inside and outside the South. In sum, there is evidence of both a short- and long-term (equilibrium) relationship between aggregate mass and elite party positions.

### **Education, awareness, and mass party change**

The idea of mass-elite equilibrium draws heavily from the micro-level insights of issue evolution. In issue evolution, micro-level awareness of changing party positions is a requisite for mass party alignment. In this case, the changing elite party behavior that results from polarization performs the same substantive function as elite divergence on an important new issue: it changes the partisan signal sent to mass parties, changing mass perceptions of elite party positions and, as a result, the affective commitment to parties at the mass level. These changing perceptions, in turn, drive changes in mass party preferences—and, in the aggregate, drive the party system to “resolve disequilibrium.”

As with new issue alignments, not all citizens are aware of changes in elite party behavior on the existing dimension, nor do all citizens understand the changing nature of elite conflict brought about by polarization. But if awareness of changes in elite behavior is driving aggregate mass-elite equilibration, then the subset of the population least likely to have the political engagement or resources necessary to become aware of changing party cues should *not* be polarizing, nor should the mass party preferences of this subset of the

population be systematically linked to changes in elite party behavior. It is only among citizens who are *aware* that elite behavior is changing that a systematic mass-elite relationship—and evidence of long-term equilibrium behavior—should exist. Mass parties have polarized, in other words, but this polarization should be driven disproportionately by—and the mass-elite relationship should be strongest for—the subset of citizens most likely to perceive and react to elite changes.

The General Social Survey has no long-term measures of awareness of party differences or political engagement more broadly defined. But the GSS does offer measures of respondents' formal education, which can provide some insight to citizens' capacity to be aware of changes in elite behavior. Obviously, the proximate interest here is political engagement, not education, and the important dichotomy is “aware” and “not aware” of changing elite behavior, not “high” and “low” education. But education plays a key (if not the only) role in providing the resources necessary for political engagement (Verba et. al 1995). Further, it is the general capacity to be engaged in and aware of political discourse—often operationalized through formal education—that is central to citizen response to elite messages (Zaller 1992). As a result, formal education can serve as a reasonable (if flawed) proxy for political engagement and political awareness. I expect that mass polarization will be less pronounced—and the elite-mass relationship weaker—for the subset of citizens least likely to be aware of changes in elite positions.

To examine the role of mass awareness to mass-elite party dynamics, I stratify respondents into two categories based on levels of formal education. I estimate measures of mass party polarization for two groups: those whose levels of formal education are *at or above* the median for those of similar age (operationalized here as those born in the same



decade as the respondents) and those *below* the median education level. I stratify respondents by *birth* year as opposed to simply by *survey* year because many of the important functions of education in facilitating political engagement and awareness are relative, a function of one's education when compared to one's *peers* (Nie et. al 1996). In the (survey) year 2000, for example, a college degree likely signifies a more exceptional level of educational attainment—and the benefits that accrue to someone with such a degree—for a respondent born in 1940 than for one born in 1970. This measure is thus designed to best serve as a proxy for political awareness while acknowledging that the importance of education level varies not only across time, but across birth cohorts.<sup>10</sup> This is especially important given that the average level of educational attainment has increased greatly over the past 30 years, and stratifying respondents simply by their “highest degree earned” will produce classifications whose size and meaning changes greatly over the time period analyzed here. Citizens with “college degrees” in 1970, for example will reflect a more elite group of citizens than the same classification in survey year 2002.

Time-series of the overall party polarization of “low” and “high” education citizens are in Figure 5. As expected, there are considerable differences in attitude change among the two groups. In the early 1970's, the differences between Democrats and Republicans of both of “high education” and “low education” were nearly identical. But as elite behavior has changed, it appears that only those with higher levels of formal education have followed suit.

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<sup>10</sup> Increased party polarization has certainly made it easier for all citizens of *all* levels of education to perceive party differences, and thus we might expect to see some polarization among low-education citizens, simply because a growing number of them are aware of elite party positions. But Hetherington (2001) finds that polarization has had the greatest effects on the ability to understand and perceive as important party differences for those with higher levels of formal education. As a result, the strongest mass-elite relationship should occur among more highly-educated citizens.

The average degree of party polarization for low-education citizens is marginally greater in the 1990's than it was in the 1970's, but the difference is very modest—roughly two percentage points—and not statistically significant. Higher-education citizens, by contrast, have become considerably more polarized: differences between high-education Republicans and Democrats reached a high of 16 percentage points (in 1998), and has been 11 percentage points or greater since 1993. Simple descriptive analysis suggests, in other words, that only the more educated citizens—those with a greater likelihood of being aware of party differences—have systematically responded to changes in elite behavior.

Table 2 replicates the error-correction analyses from Table 1, but separates the “mass public” into high and low-education groups. This more formal analysis confirms the descriptive statistics above: only for better-educated respondents is there a systematic link between elite and mass party preferences. Among higher-educated citizens, there are both powerful short-term effects of elite polarization on mass polarization, and evidence of a long-term equilibrium relationship.<sup>11</sup> But among lower-educated citizens, no such connection exists: coefficients for both a short-term impact and long-term equilibrating effect are not significantly different from zero. Elite polarization matters to mass behavior because it changes the partisan signals sent to the mass public from policymaking elites. Mass parties resolve the disequilibrium in the party system caused by elite polarization because citizens

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<sup>11</sup> In the “high education” equation, the ECM coefficient is greater than 1.0, possibly implying an unstable time series in which the magnitudes of “shocks” to the series grow, not decay, over time. Because there is no theoretical reason to assume that the relationship between Mass and Elite Polarization is “explosive” in the technical sense, and because neither of these estimates are reliably greater than 1.0 ( $p > .10$ ), I assume that these estimates simply result from the use of a small sample of imperfectly-measured variables. I therefore make no claims about the exact rate at which disruptions are corrected, except to say that they are resolved very quickly (which is what is implied by an error-correction coefficient near 1.0).

perceive and react to changes in party signals, updating their own policy preferences or partisanship accordingly. But among the strata of citizens least likely to have perceived these changes, elite polarization has done little to change structure of mass party attitudes.<sup>12</sup> Mass polarization has not occurred solely because of the divergence of a small group of highly-committed political activists.<sup>13</sup> But neither has it occurred uniformly. Rather, polarization has occurred disproportionately among the citizens most likely to be aware of polarizing elite behavior.

### **Conclusions and implications**

This paper provides evidence of a dynamic link between elite and mass party polarization on the existing dimension of issue conflict over the size and scope of the federal government. Mass parties have responded to elite polarization on this dimension by becoming more polarized themselves. Further, the dynamics of mass and elite polarization are consistent with mass-elite party equilibrium. This relationship, however, is concentrated largely among those likely to be aware of changes in elite behavior. It is this awareness that is central to “resolving disequilibrium” in both the polarization and new issue cases. These findings suggest that the idea of mass-elite party system equilibrium and the process that underlie mass response to elite alignment on newly-salient issues are useful in explaining not only how the party system responds to relatively rare equilibrium-disrupting events—such as realignments—but can help in understanding mass-elite linkages more generally.

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<sup>12</sup> The error-correction coefficient in the “low education” model is nonzero, but this alone is not sufficient evidence of a long-term relationship: the equilibrium *effect* is not significantly different from zero.

<sup>13</sup> Stratifying higher-education respondents further suggests that mass polarization has occurred among more than a small “elite” subset of the population. Citizens with slightly above average education, for example, have polarized nearly as much as the most-educated strata.

Realignments and new issue alignments begin with “punctuations” to party system equilibrium. These punctuations, which change the positions of major party elites, precipitate dynamic changes in mass parties, leading to a party system whose new equilibrium—defined as the relative size of major party coalitions and the issues that comprise party conflict—is different than it was before (Key 1955, Sundquist 1983). For a variety of reasons, the positions of major party elites on the *existing* dimension are in constant, if gradual, change. As a result, party system equilibrium is also constantly changing. In both the new issue case and the more “usual” (Aldrich 2003), day-to-day party movement on the existing dimension, the disruption of equilibrium caused by changes in elite context precipitates a dynamic response from mass parties. In the current context, an equilibrium model suggests that the strengthening of parties-in-the-electorate is a natural consequence of the strengthening of parties at the elite level. More generally, it suggests that any change in elite party conflict will, through a dynamic and systematic process, be reflected in the nature of mass party conflict.

The analysis here focuses on the aspect of the mass-elite relationship on the existing dimension with the strongest parallels to the new alignment literature: the dynamics of mass response to changes in elite party signals. But the equilibrium framework advanced in this paper can be developed further. In particular, the idea that changing activist demands (Aldrich 1995) and changing mass demographic patterns (Stonecash et. al 2003) have contributed to elite polarization hints at a more systematic, institutional equilibrium story of mass-elite party linkages, where a disruption to equilibrium is “corrected” through a dynamic process that affects many aspects of the party system.

A round of decennial redistricting that increases the ideological homogeneity of some Congressional districts, for example, may produce more extreme Congress members and contribute to the polarization of Congressional party coalitions. This polarization strengthens the power of Congressional leaders, allowing them to exert increased control over the Congressional agenda and the behavior of their members (e.g., Aldrich and Rohde 2000), thus polarizing party coalitions beyond what would be expected from electoral change alone (Rohde 1991; Jacobsen 2004). The resultant changes in party elite discourse then, through the processes described in this paper, has systematic effects on the issue attitudes of mass parties. Mass party polarization may then exert additional effects on elite behavior, as the divergence of the partisan bases of the major parties forces elites to focus their campaign messages (and Congressional voting habits) more toward their primary constituencies and less toward the general electorate and “median voter” (Jacobsen 2003). Future work should expand the idea of mass-elite equilibrium, focusing on the dynamics of how disruptions to equilibrium work their way through the party system more generally, in a way that has consequences for mass preferences, party strength, and policy outcomes.

Finally, this paper’s focus on size-and-scope-of-government issues, issues on which parties have not realigned, but have taken increasingly polarized positions, suggests a growing—and possibly changing—importance of “New Deal” type preferences to the American party system. The increasing relevance of religious traditionalism to party conflict (Layman 2001) and the emergence of “realigning” issues such as abortion and gay rights (Adams 1997) has led some to suggest that the American parties are becoming organized primarily along social and cultural, not economic, lines (Hunter 1991).

But the role of income and socioeconomic status in predicting mass partisan attachments is growing (Stonecash 2001), and the idea of a widespread “cultural realignment” has met considerable criticism in many contexts (see, e.g., Williams 1997). Further, opinions on size-and-scope of government issues still comprise the vast majority of explicable variance in dynamic public opinion. Most importantly, aggregate public opinion on this dimension is still strongly linked to the policymaking activities of elected officials (Erikson et. al 2002, Stimson 2004).

We know that polarization on “new” issues, such as race, abortion, or gay rights, does not necessarily preclude continued polarization on social welfare issues (Stimson 1991, Layman and Carsey 2002). This analysis suggests that even amidst cultural change, the mass party system is more strongly defined by preferences for the size and scope of the federal government and its role in providing social services than at any time in recent history. This paper suggests a new measure for analyzing dynamics of public opinion on this dimension at a level below the aggregate. Understanding the changing ways in which different groups of citizens use preferences on these issues (and preferences on “social” or “cultural” issues) to make political decisions—and the implications of these changes for political representation—is a fruitful topic for future research. In the next chapter, I undertake one such analysis, using an examination of the changing role of “scope of government” preferences in party identification to explain changes in the relative size of major party coalitions over the past 30 years.

## CHAPTER 2

### MACRO-MICRO LINKAGES IN AMERICAN PARTY COALITIONS

The American mass party system is transforming. The relative size of major parties-in-the-electorate have change over the past few decades (both inside and outside the South), as the Democratic Party's dominance over electoral politics—and over partisan attachments in the electorate—has waned. But although the implications of these changes are recognized by students of elections (e.g., Abramson et al.2001, Beck 2003, Saunders and Abramowitz 2004) and policy (e.g., Aldrich and Rohde 2000, Carson et al. 2002, Heberlig et al 2004), research into the reasons for the change has reached diverse and often conflicting conclusions.

The decline in Democratic party attachments has usually been attributed to either changes in the dimensionality of issue conflict among American party organizations (Miller and Schofeld 2002) or broad-based changes in the political worldviews of the electorate as a whole (Meffert et. al 2001). In particular, many point to the idea that “cultural” concerns over issues of religion and traditional morality have become the defining cleavages in American political discourse—and changed the electoral bases of major parties as a result. In this view, the “New Deal” basis of American politics—conflict over issues related to the size and scope of the federal government and its role in redistributing wealth and providing social services—has eroded, and the party system has changed because of the declining importance of these issues and the resultant decline in Democratic attachments of social groups

associated with the “New Deal Coalition.” The idea of a near-universal “culture war” has met some resistance (see, e.g., Davis and Robinson 1997, Layman and Green 2006), but the basic premises—a party system both changed and defined largely by cultural conflict—remains prominent in both popular and scholarly literature.

Underlying these changes is increasing elite party polarization that has made party positions on a wide variety of issues clear and more salient to the electorate. But analysis of the effects of party polarization on the structure of mass attitudes have reached no consensus (see, e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, Putz 2002, Layman and Carsey 2002), and polarization’s effects on the relative size and scope of major party coalitions have been largely ignored.

In this paper, I integrate changes in elite- and mass-party behavior in a way that sheds light on why American mass parties have changed—and on what types of issues define mass party conflict. I argue that much of the explanation the change in the relative size of party coalitions lies in a more explicit understanding of the effects of changes in elite party behavior—in this case, elite party polarization—on individual-level citizen attitudes. More specifically, the changing nature of mass parties can be best understood through a more explicit consideration of the reciprocal linkages between changes in the *macro political context* and the nature of *micro-level mass partisanship*. I develop a theory of macro-micro linkages that explains how macro-political conditions and individual-level behavior can interact in substantively important ways. I use this theory to show that scope of government issues have actually become *more* important to mass party conflict over the past 30 years and, further, that the increasing importance in scope of government issues can explain—better than an argument grounded in cultural concerns—changes in the mass party system.



Party identification is thought to be a function of many different factors: socialization, social groups and group identity, economic and political conditions, social class, and one's own political worldviews, for example. I will show that elite polarization has changed the relative importance of these factors to citizen choice, in particular increasing the importance of policy preferences—particularly on the size-and-scope of government dimension—and decreasing the importance of socialization.

Over time, these changes in the nature of micro-partisan attachments can aggregate in a way that has important implications for the relative size and strength of macro-party coalitions in the electorate. If the changing relative importance of these factors benefits one party over the other, mass party coalitions can change markedly—even in the absence of a “realigning” event or a change in the aggregate distribution of policy preferences—if the nature of elite conflict changes in a way that impacts how individual citizens think about political parties.

Using new measures of individual-level policy preferences on “moral” and “scope of government” issues, I analyze dynamic changes in “micro” and “macro” partisanship in the electorate, first examining the impact of changes in macro-context on micro-level party identification, and then exploring the implications of these changes for the size and scope of major party coalitions. This paper has implications for understanding change in the issue bases of major party coalitions and the dimensionality of issue conflict at the mass and elite levels. It provides new insight into the reasons for the oft-noted decay of the Democratic “New Deal Coalition.” Finally, it represents a first step in the effort to more explicitly understand and model the important and subtle linkages between macro-context and micro-behavior.

### **Changes in the macro-level party system**

Perhaps the most important development in mass party politics over the past 30 years is the increased electoral competitiveness of the major parties at the national level. Figure 6 shows time-series of major party attachments since 1972, and illustrates a long-term move away from the Democratic Party, and, to a lesser extent, a growth in the number of people who consider themselves Republicans (see also Beck 2003).

The broadest explanation for the decline in Democratic dominance is the decay in Democratic attachments of social groups commonly associated with the “New Deal Coalition.” The “coalition,” a loose association of diverse social groups united around support for redistributive policies and a greater role of government in providing social services, structured American political conflict—and drove Democratic dominance at the electoral level—for much of the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century (see Stonecash 2001). While the traditional Democratic attachments of certain groups commonly associated with the “New Deal Coalition” (Catholics, southern whites, rural residents and the like) have not vanished, they have certainly weakened considerably (e.g., Stanley and Niemi 1995, Legee et. al 2002, Beck 2003).

But while the notion that the New Deal coalition structure has fractured to some degree is no longer controversial, scholars have had a more difficult time explaining what phenomena have driven its decline, and what, if any, group- or issue-conflict structure has taken its place. More to the point, most explanations of why the parties have grown more competitive have been largely incomplete. The increased macro-level electoral competitiveness, for example, is at least a part a result of the “realignment” of party loyalties of Southern whites. The divergence of major part elites on civil rights and other “cultural” issues fractured traditional

Democratic loyalties in the South (Black and Black 1987, Carmines and Stimson 1989). But the magnitude of the move away from the Democratic Party has been similar inside and outside the South.

Others suggest that the 1980's—and the 1980 re-election of Ronald Reagan in particular—signified a “critical moment” in American political debate, precipitating a rise in ideological conservatism, widespread support for a popular conservative President's agenda, and a move toward the Republican party (Norpoth 1987, Meffert et. al 2001). Reagan was a popular President, but there is very little evidence that mass policy preferences on any dimension of conflict have become systematically more conservative over the past 20 years in a way that would lead to greater Republican identification.

The most recent—and arguably most popular—reason for the decline of the New Deal coalition and the resulting electoral competitiveness is the perceived growing importance of “cultural” issues to political conflict (Hunter 1994). “Cultural” issues, broadly defined, relate to support for traditional social norms and the role of religion in private and public life (Guth 1996, Davis and Robinson 1997), and is exemplified through recent conflicts over abortion (Adams 1997) and gay rights (Haider-Markel and Meier 1996, Sharp 2002). Preferences for these issues, because of their explicit ties to religion, family life, tradition, and the like, are often more important to citizens' identities than purely political or economic concerns (Layman 2001, Wilcox 2003). As a result, the recent “politicization” of these issues is thought to loosen ties to and lessen the significance of social class and preferences for government distribution and redistribution that defined the New Deal party system. These issues push New-Deal type economic issues out of the public consciousness and erode the importance of traditional class- and group- based attachments to party identification (Petrocik

1981, Layman 2001). Even those who do not see a “culture war” in the broadest sense note that Republicans and Democrats are polarizing on these issues at both the elite and mass levels (Fiorina 2004).

The implication of the cultural alignment argument is that concerns of religion and traditional morality have displaced scope-of-government concerns as the defining cleavage in American party politics (Miller and Schofeld 2003). Given that Americans are generally more conservative on cultural issues than on scope-of-government ones (Shafer and Clagett 1996), the growing import of these issues—and the degree to which they affect what party a citizen chooses to identify with—is leading to a widespread move away from the Democratic party. The change in mass party coalitions, in other words, is driven by culturally conservative citizens becoming Republicans. The result is a party system divided more by abortion rights, gay marriage and the like than on preferences for the scope of the federal government and income redistribution.

But the culture war idea is not without critics (see Smith et. al 1997, Stonecash 2001), and some natural implications of it seem to be untrue. For example, some conservative citizens and social groups (African-Americans, for example) have remained reliably Democratic over the past 30 years, while others (Catholics, for example), have not. Cultural issues are relevant, but it is not at all clear that the movement away from the Democrats can be attributed largely to citizens changing parties based on preferences for cultural issues.

### **Micro-level partisan attachments**

Party identification is perhaps the most studied subject in American political behavior. There is an enormous body of research that discusses the nuances of how citizens approach party identification, how individual circumstances or events affect citizen choice of what

party to identify with, and what factors lead citizens to change political parties. My objective here is not to add to this list of causes: rather, it is to summarize them in a way that provides some leverage in understanding the role of context in shaping how citizens approach party identification. In general terms, what factors influence citizen choice of what party to identify with?

**Socialization: partisanship as “affective commitment.”** Most early research on mass partisanship was not optimistic about the electorate’s ability to connect partisanship with the broader political context. For most people in most circumstances, partisan attachments are formed early in life, often as a simple affective attachment to a label largely devoid of substantive political meaning (Campbell et. al 1960, Niemi and Jennings 1991). Partisanship is inherited either directly from one’s parents or as a function of a citizen’s own socioeconomic circumstances while he or she was a child, and remains relatively stable and enduring, even as individuals age, move, and encounter “life experiences” different than those faced by their parents (e.g., Converse 1963, Sears and Funk 1999). In this view, partisan attachments are formed quite independently of issue preferences, ideology, or any other political attitudes: partisanship is an attitude “all its own,” a socialized *affective* label that an individual attaches to him- or herself that is not caused by (or even necessarily associated with) an individual’s other political beliefs or the political context in which he or she is embedded. Although there remain few holdouts to the view of a purely affective, perfectly stable partisanship (but see Green et. al 2003), the idea that partisanship is to some degree “inherited” from one’s parents or formed as a result of one’s upbringing remains well-supported.

***Political and economic events.*** Despite the importance of socialization, many believe that partisanship is malleable in certain contexts and as a result of changes in political and economic circumstances. Citizens can decide to change parties, for example, in response to changes in the real economy (Fiorina 1977), popular political figures (Johnston 1992, Rapoport 1997), or important political events (Norrande and Wilcox 1993).

***Socioeconomic status and social class.*** Although relatively centrist in comparative perspective, major parties in the United States obviously have economic worldviews targeted to benefit either “richer” or “poorer” citizens both in rhetoric (Stonecash 2001) and in practice (Hibbs 1977, Kelly 2005). In many cases, citizens thus choose their partisanship based on an understanding of their own socioeconomic circumstances and an evaluation of which party’s economic proposals are better for them (Abramson 1975, Stonecash et al. 2003). Social class was the driving force behind the New-Deal era realignment (e.g., Lubell 1965, Carmines and Berkman 1994), and many believe that a steady decline in the importance of class is the reason why the Democratic Party has become weaker at the mass level (Campbell 2002, Legee et al. 2003).

***Social groups and social identity.*** Because of economic or social circumstances, members of many social or ethnic groups share similar political worldviews, and experienced similar childhoods. But beyond these factors, there is some evidence that group identity itself affects the choice of what party to identify with. The “linked fate” that individuals share with those in similar groups—and the degree to which one party or another supports the preferences of those groups—underlies party attachments in many cases (Jelen 1991, Stanley and Niemi 1995, Zinni et. al 1997). In part, the story of the New Deal Coalition is based on the idea that citizens in many ethnic, religious, or demographic groups (Catholics, rural

whites, etc.) associated with the New Deal coalition shared a common fate with others in that group and identified with the Democratic party as a result.<sup>14</sup> Citizens may thus choose a party in part based on group identity—and a calculation of which party is thought to most closely support the preferences of that group.

***Policy Preferences.*** Finally, citizens can update their own policy preferences—and break with an attachment to the party into which they were “socialized”—as a result of consideration of their own policy preferences.(Franklin 1984, 1992, Page and Jones 1979). For certain people, in other words, partisanship is based on a rational evaluation of one’s own political attitudes and the ways in which these attitudes fit into the scope of issue conflict defined by political party elites. A citizen may decide to identify as a Democrat—even if they were socialized as something else—for example, because of an understanding of their own “liberal” views on the dominant dimensions of policy conflict and a realization that the Democratic party best represents these liberal interests. In this view, the link between partisanship and policy preferences is not as weak or transient as a purely “affective” partisanship, based on socialization or group identity, would suggest: for some, identification with a party is more than identification with the party label: it is an identification with—and a partisanship based on—the issue positions of the party itself.

#### **From macro to micro: elite context and individual level attachments**

For any individual citizen, of course, the idea that party identification is associated solely with only one of these factors is a caricature. Socialization, for example, matters for nearly all citizens, while the association between socioeconomic status, group identity, and policy

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<sup>14</sup> Consistent with this view, the decline of the New Deal Coalition is often framed as a movement by particular *social groups* away from the Democratic Party (Stanley and Niemi 1995, Beck 2003).

preferences is often so correlated and intertwined it is difficult to say that one factor is the proximate “cause” of an individual’s party identification.

More importantly, there are considerable and systematic differences in the balance of factors most closely associated with partisanship across different types of citizens. The impact of group identity, for example, varies widely based on the social group involved and the context in which citizens are embedded (e.g., Dennis 1987, Welch and Legee 1991, Sniderman et al. 1991).

In addition, factors such as education and political sophistication, are critical in determining how able citizens are to adapt to changes in the political context or their own life circumstances and connect partisanship to a broader political worldview (Zaller 1992, Hetherington 2001). The likelihood that a citizen can connect partisanship with policy preferences depends largely on the degree to which citizens can accurately recognize the policy positions of party elites (and thus understand the belief systems that each party represents), and the degree to which they perceive important and meaningful differences between party elites (and thus believe that the “stakes” of party identification are high enough that it is important to bring one’s own policy preferences in line with one another). Educated and sophisticated citizens are more likely to pay attention to and receive messages sent by party elites, understand party positions, and perceive party conflict to be important. As a result, they are more likely to bring policy preferences and partisanship in line with one another—often, by changing their partisanship to reflect their broader political worldview.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, this alignment of attitudes can occur in two ways: either through updating one’s partisanship in response to their preferences (Franklin 1984, Abramowitz and Saunders 1998), or by updating policy preferences in response to party identification (Green et al 2003, Layman and Carsey 2005). Change in the relative size of party coalitions can only occur if at least some of the former occurs—and we thus see evidence over a move toward



For the less educated and interested, elite signals are not as likely to be perceived—or perceived to be important—so they are more likely to adopt and keep the partisanship of their parents, regardless of their own views.

Individual characteristics such as education and interest thus play a large role in determining how closely aligned partisanship and policy preferences are because they affect the ability of citizens to both perceive, and perceive as important, elite party cues. But while the relative association between party identification and the factors described above varies based on attributes of the individual, there is also reason to think that they vary as a function of the broader *elite-level context*. In particular, the associations—particularly between partisanship and policy preferences and partisanship and socialization—should be mediated by the nature of party issue conflict at the elite level. The strength and clarity of elite party cues should affect the degree to which citizens of all levels of sophistication and engagement can understand the relationship between policy preferences and partisanship and bring their own attitudes in line with one another.

Over the past 30 years, elite parties have polarized in a way that has led to meaningful changes in the ways in which citizens perceive and understand elite party conflict. (see Figure 1 and Chapter 1). As parties have moved to the ideological poles, elite discourse has become sharper, clearer, and more combative (Jamieson and Falk 2000). Citizens have responded to this increased clarity by updating their own perceptions of party conflict, becoming more likely to understand where parties are located in ideological space, more likely to hold an affective preference for one party over the other, and more likely to perceive party conflict as important (Hetherington 2001, Weisberg 2003, Pomper and Weiner

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one party or the other without a change in the underlying distribution of policy preferences in the aggregate. I return to this point later.

2003). Polarization, much like increased levels of education or sophistication, increases the clarity and perceived importance of elite party cues, and increases the likelihood that citizens understand the policy implications of choosing to identify with one party over the other.

The critical point is that the degree to which partisanship is connected to one's own policy preferences should vary as a direct function of the degree of elite party polarization. The more polarized that party elites are, the greater the number of citizens that will be able to understand the relationship between (elite-level) partisanship and policy preferences and update their own attitudes accordingly. In addition, characteristics of one's upbringing and parents should be less relevant, as individuals increasingly realize the policy implications of partisanship and become less likely to simply adopt a socialized partisanship without an understanding of its implications for one's own political worldview. *Elite polarization should thus increase the association between policy preferences and partisanship, and decrease the association between socialization (and group identification) and partisanship.* Elite polarization, in other words, should alter the balance of considerations that citizens have when choosing a party, increasing the importance of issues, and decreasing the importance of socialization.

Proponents of the culture wars thesis suggest that elite party polarization over the past 30 years has been driven largely by polarization on matters of religion, culture, and morality, and that elite conflict on these issues has "displaced" conflict over scope-of-government issues. Democratic and Republican elites do hold increasingly divergent positions on these issues (Layman 2001). But polarization on these newly-salient issues does not necessarily preclude growing polarization on the *existing* dimension of conflict (Layman and Carsey 2002). The vast majority of roll-call votes —and the majority of national-level policy

outputs—deal with issues of spending, redistribution, and the scope of the federal government (Stonecash 2001). Most standard measures of elite party polarization seem to be defined largely by economic, not moral or cultural preferences (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, Snyder and Groseclose 2000). Elite party polarization, in other words, is largely a function of polarization on scope-of-government issues. So while polarization on moral issues should increase the relevance of moral concerns to party identification, these issues should not displace scope-of-government issues in mass party conflict and mass issue attitudes: *polarization should increase, not decrease, the relevance of scope-of-government issues to mass partisanship. Further, scope-of-government issues, more so than moral or cultural issues, should continue to define mass party issue conflict.*

#### **From micro to macro: the nature of partisanship and mass party change**

In sum, I expect that elite party polarization will change the *nature* of individual-level partisan attachments, increasing the relevance of policy preferences—particularly on scope-of-government issues—and decreasing the relevance of socialization and group identification. This, in turn, suggests that many individuals may change parties as a result of changes in the elite context, not because they have become more liberal (or conservative) on existing issues, or because their social or economic circumstances have changed, or because of the emergence of new dimensions of conflict, but rather because the *balance of considerations* that they have when deciding which party to identify with has been altered by changes in the elite context. The factors that combine to predict an individual's party identification may remain the same. But as the *relative weights* of these factors change, the individual may change parties as a result. A citizen who was socialized as a Democrat but holds predominantly conservative policy preferences, for example, may remain a Democrat

when party signals are weak and the perceived importance of them is low. But as parties polarize—and he comes to better recognize the implications of conservative policy preferences for party conflict—he may “switch” parties.

The fact that individuals may change parties as the balance of considerations that go into partisanship changes is an important consequence of party polarization, as the implication is that party polarization at the mass level is due, at least in part, to citizens updating their partisanship to correspond with their own policy worldviews (see also chapter 1, Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 2002). But why would these changes lead to *aggregate* changes in the relative size of mass party coalitions? In broad terms, if the “old” (pre-polarization) balance of considerations in the electorate advantaged one party over another, then a change in context that changes the relative weight of considerations would result in a decline in the number of people that identify with that party.<sup>16</sup> In this case, if there were more citizens with

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<sup>16</sup> The idea that in certain contexts, the relationship between policy preferences and partisanship can change in a way that has considerable consequences for the party system underlies much research on American party realignment and new issue alignment (e.g., Campbell 1966, Sundquist 1983, Chubb et. al 1990). In most circumstances, partisan attachments are formed early in life and are relatively stable, affected at the margins by the state of the economy or the “nature of the times.” For those without the political sophistication or awareness to structure political beliefs in a manner consistent with partisan predispositions (or update their partisan attachments in response to their beliefs), partisanship’s connection to other beliefs is weak. Periods of “realignment,” by contrast, are characterized by the emergence of a new issue cleavage or national political or economic crisis on which the parties stake out clear and distinct positions (Nardulli 1995). The unusually high level of partisan conflict during these times, combined with the increased salience of a previously-muted or non-existent dimension of political conflict, make it easier for people to understand the issue positions of policy elites and recognize how their own positions on these “new” cleavages are represented by the major parties. Many individuals thus break with their socialized attachments and change parties as a result, aligning themselves along the lines of (new) issue conflict defined by party elites. New divisions caused by realignment takes place, in other words, because elite party conflict has become more salient and thus more citizens are able to perceive and react to elite policy discourse, changing their partisanship to more closely correspond with their policy preferences.

relatively conservative preferences who were socialized as Democrats than there were liberal citizens socialized as Republicans, then a disproportionate number of citizens would move away from the Democratic party not because the public became more conservative, but because the impact of policy preferences on partisanship for citizens who were already conservative increased.

The broad argument is that polarization has increased the relative importance of policy-preferences—particularly on the dominant scope-of-government dimension—to partisanship. As a result, the electorate should become less Democratic not because it has become considerably more conservative (it has not), or because certain social or ethnic groups have been “captured” (DeSantis 2004) by the Republican Party, or because new dimensions of political conflict have emerged. Rather, it should be because conservative citizens are increasingly likely to move away from the Democratic Party.

More specifically, the expectation is that *policy preferences on the scope-of-government dimension have become an increasingly powerful discriminator of Democrats and Republicans in the electorate*: knowing how conservative a citizen is relative to his or her peers on this dimension should provide more purchase in predicting the likelihood that he or she is a Republican as parties polarize. Some of this movement, of course, will be the result of citizens updating their policy preferences to correspond with their party identification (Layman and Carsey 2002). But for the purposes of mass party change, we expect that *the movement toward the Republican Party should come almost exclusively from citizens who hold conservative policy preferences on the existing dimension*. Those who are liberal on this dimension should remain reliably Democratic. As a result, the move toward the Republican party should be driven primarily by citizens who are conservative on this dimension

becoming Republicans, not because of the emergence of a new, cross-cutting dimension of conflict or a decline in the importance of class-based concerns.

So in sum, the increased electoral competitiveness in the American electorate can be explained in large part by an understanding of the linkages between elite party context, individual-level partisan attachments, and macro-level mass party coalitions. Changes in the macro-level context should alter the nature of micro-level partisan attachments, and these changes will then aggregate back to changes in the party system. But while the relative weight of various factors that determine partisanship will change, it will still be scope-of-government issues—those on which elites have polarized and on which government business is still largely conducted—that will still define mass party conflict. The important substantive point is that party change has not occurred because scope-of-government issues become *less* important to mass party attitudes, but rather because they have become *more* important.

I will examine the idea of micro-macro linkages in mass partisanship in two stages. First, I will explore the context-dependent relationship between party identification and various predictors of party attachments, testing the idea that polarization has made policy preferences more relevant—and socialization less relevant—to party identification. Second, I will examine the implications of changing micro-attachments for the issue bases of mass party coalitions, expecting to find evidence that the move away from the Democratic party has been driven primarily by those conservative on the existing dimension of conflict.

### **Operationalizing predictors of partisanship**

The main focus of this paper is the nature and implications of the context-dependent relationship between partisanship and its predictors. I thus need to create individual-level measures of the relevant predictors of partisanship that are valid enough to allow me to

understand their association with identification at any given point in time, and also included in surveys for a long enough period of time to understand how their relative association has changed as a function of elite context.

I begin by developing measures of policy preferences on the dimensions of political conflict of relevance here: preferences for “scope of government” and “moral issues.” The General Social Survey has asked 11 questions related to government spending on various government programs (education, aid to the poor, helping the conditions of blacks, health care, and the like) consistently over the time period 1974-2002. Exploratory factor analysis suggests that aggregate preferences 10 of these 11 issues load on a single dominant dimension.<sup>17</sup> I code responses to these questions as either “liberal,” “conservative,” “or “moderate” (with the exception of national defense, the liberal option is always “more spending”), and create a simple additive scale of preferences on this dimensions—which I define as preferences on the “*size and scope of the government*” dimension. A respondent who gives 10 liberal responses receives a 10 on the scale, while a respondent who gives 10 conservative responses receives a -10. One who gives 10 “moderate” responses receives a “score” of 0. There are 20 discrete points on the scale onto which respondents could fall.

This measure of preferences on this dimension is not perfect. Not all social programs are represented by these 10 issues, and there is certainly more to the “size and scope of

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<sup>17</sup> Preferences for spending on space exploration do not load on this dimension. In the aggregate, these 10 issues load strongly on a single dimension with accounts for most of the explicable variable in longitudinal opinion. At the individual level, however, there is some evidence that this dimension actually has two components: loosely categorized as preferences for “distributive” (e.g., the environment, education) and “redistributive” (e.g., helping blacks, aid to the poor). I use only one dimension here to be consistent with the aggregate dimensionality of public opinion (on which this analysis is based) and to keep the focus on “scope of government” preferences broadly defined. When the analyses are run using two separate “spending” dimensions, there is evidence that both matter, but redistributive preferences are more powerful in explaining the changes described below.

government” dimensions than spending on social services and programs. Perhaps more importantly, the issues that comprise this dimension tap sentiments for more than just “government spending” (see Jacoby 2000). Preferences for education or environmental protection, for example, likely also reflect views of the worth of the social program itself, while preferences for things like “welfare” and “aid to blacks” likely tap race-based attitudes as well.<sup>18</sup> But the 10 issues used here do represent preferences for a broad range of distributive and redistributive programs commonly associated with the “New Deal” and with the government’s role in providing for citizens more generally. It deals primarily with issues that are enduring—not “new” issues on which parties have realigned or taken newly-divergent stands. More practically, aggregates of this measure correlates with Stimson’s (1999) Policy Mood—the most widely-used indicator of aggregate preferences for the role of the federal government as commonly conceived—at .92.

I operationalize “*moral preferences*” using a battery of seven questions asked over the same time period. Six of these questions relate to the legality of abortion in various circumstances (rape and incest, if the mother is poor, etc.), and the seventh asks respondents for their views on homosexual relations (asking whether they are “always,” “almost always,” “sometimes,” or “never” morally wrong (coding available in Appendix A). I collapse responses to the six abortion questions into a single -1 – 1 scale so as to weight the abortion and homosexuality issues equally. The result is a -2 – 2 “conservative→liberal” scale, on

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<sup>18</sup> Empirically, however, all of these issues—including those that may be racially charged—load on a single, dominant dimension. This suggests that whatever racial component exists to attitudes on this dimension, there is also a considerable “scope of government” component to them as well. What is missing from this analysis—and unfortunately not available with the GSS data—is a measure of symbolic racism. These feelings are obviously thought to drive the move away from the Democratic party to some degree, at least in the south. I cannot directly address this possibility, but it is worth noting that the results to come change remarkably little if Southern respondents are excluded from the analysis.



which respondents can take 16 response options (reflecting the 6 different “yes” or “no” abortion questions and the four response options to the homosexuality question. A respondent who opposed abortion regardless of circumstances and thought homosexuality was always wrong was given a score of -2, while a respondent who consistently supported abortion and felt homosexual relations were never wrong was assigned a score of 2.

Unlike with scope-of-government preferences, there is no commonly-accepted benchmark from which to gauge the validity of this measure. And unlike the scope-of-government scale, this measure essentially taps preferences for only two issues. Yet abortion and gay rights are two of the most visible policy issues that represent “culture war” idea (Loftus 2001, Fiorina 2004), and it is these elite party divergence on issues that is thought to underlie the movement by religiously and morally conservative citizens to the Republican Party (Miller and Schofeld 2003, Layman 2001).<sup>19</sup> Although there have been other controversies (school prayer or public displays of religious symbols, for example), these issues have most strongly exemplified this “lifestyle” divide, conflict over these issues have been the most salient, the most enduring, and the most polarizing at the elite level.<sup>20</sup>

Operationalizing *socialization* is also difficult. The best measure of parental socialization, of course, is a measure of parental party identification. Unfortunately, this measure is not consistently available in GSS data. Similarly, there exists no consistent measure of parents’ socioeconomic status (SES). What we do have is a measure of a respondent’s father’s level

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<sup>19</sup> Empirically, preferences for these issues correlate strongly with other measures of “cultural” attitudes (e.g., gay rights, biblical orthodoxy, gay marriage), when preferences are available.

<sup>20</sup> The “moral” and scope of government dimensions are not highly correlated. There is some evidence that the preferences on these dimensions are *becoming* more strongly associated over time (see Stimson 2004), but even so, the highest level of individual-level correlation between the moral and scope of government dimensions is .16, in 2000.

of formal education. While this measure is fairly far removed from explicitly political socialization, it does have some desirable properties. It correlates strongly with measures of parental SES in years when both are available. It is relatively free from the problems of “projection” that plague respondent-reported measures of parental partisanship. More importantly, it still reflects, albeit imperfectly, the economic and political circumstances into which a respondent was born.<sup>21</sup>

The working assumption here is that respondents who had more educated fathers—given that education level is a proxy for family affluence—would be more likely to be socialized as Republicans. So we would expect that, if socialization matters, the more educated a respondent’s father is, the more likely he or she is to be a Republican. Obviously, a great deal of nuance is left out. But if the theory here is correct, a measure of socialization based on father’s educational attainment should behave similarly to a measure based more directly on parents’ partisanship: its impact on party identification should decrease as parties become more polarized.<sup>22</sup>

Operationalizing socioeconomic and group characteristics are more straightforward. I include measures of a respondent’s *real income* (expecting that wealthier respondents are more likely to be Republicans, and further expecting that the impact of income should *not* diminish over time), and dummy variables for respondents who are *Black*, *Female*, *Urban*, *Rural*, *Catholic*, *Jewish*, *Secular* (no religious affiliation), and *Religious Fundamentalists*. I

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<sup>21</sup> Because average educational attainment has increased over the past 30 years, and because education’s role is in large part though to be a function of relative, not absolute education (Nie et al. 1996), I operationalize father’s education here as his education relative to his peers—that is, relative to citizens who were born in the same 5-year period as was he.

<sup>22</sup> It is clear that this measure of socialization is far from perfect. It is worth noting that the inclusion of this measure into the models to come does not meaningfully affect the coefficients for the other variables of importance.

also include a dummy for *Southern White* Respondents, in reflection of the particularly strong role that they may have played in changing party alignment. Although not a comprehensive list of all of the socio-demographic relevant to party attachment, these measures capture a good deal of religious, ethnic, and geographical conflict thought to matter to partisanship. Taken together, these measures represent a broad list of the types of factors associated with party identification: policy preferences (on both the “existing” and “new” dimensions), socialization, socioeconomic status (operationalized here as real income), and group attachments.<sup>23</sup>

### **Elite context and micro-partisan attachments**

The first step is to explore the linkages between macro-context and micro-partisan attachments: the degree to which context mediates the relative importance of each of the relevant predictors of party identification. The baseline for this analysis is a simple regression model in which the dependent variable is the standard 7-point measure of party identification included in each GSS survey year, and the independent variables are the predictors described above (with all continuous predictors recalibrated to a 0-1 scale).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This model does not include measures impact of objective political and economic events (the economy, for example.). This is a problem for a fully-specified model of party identification, but it should have little effect on the focus here: the relative impact of individual-level characteristics such as socialization and policy preferences. See Bafumi 2004 for a more explicit examination of macro-micro linkages between partisanship and economic evaluations.

<sup>24</sup> The measures here are rescaled to be measures of relative preferences: the degree to which a respondent is more conservative or liberal than other respondents in his or her survey years. This is done because the government spending questions measure relative preferences (e.g., “more” or “less” spending), and the location of the “status quo” policy point changes over time (see Chapter 1). This is especially important for moral issues (principally homosexual relations), as preferences at both the mass and elite levels have moved in a liberal direction over time.

To test the mediating impact of changes in elite context, each predictor is also interacted with a measure of elite party polarization for the year in which a particular respondent's survey was conducted. *Elite Polarization* here is operationalized as the difference between the mean Republican and Democratic DW-Nominate scores in the House of Representatives (see Hetherington 2001). The DW-Nominate scores are rescaled such that "0" signifies the lowest level of polarization for the time period studied here.<sup>25</sup> A survey respondent from 1980, for example, would be assigned, the mean DW-Nominate score for the 96th Congress (1979-1980). For the analyses to come, I pool survey data from all GSS respondents from 1974-2002 who were asked all of the relevant policy preference questions.<sup>26</sup>

Each predictor, then, has two coefficients associated with it: one which estimates the effect of the predictor in the period of lowest polarization (1975-1976), and another which measures the *context-dependent* effect: the degree to which the impact of that predictor changes as elite parties become more polarized. A significant coefficient for the direct impact of a variable will indicate that it was a relevant predictor of party attachments in 1975-76, while a significant interaction effect will indicate that its impact *changes* as a result of changes in the elite context. My main concern here is with the interaction effects: the degree

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<sup>25</sup> This measure of polarization is unidimensional. It would be useful to have separate, valid measures of scope-of-government and cultural polarization, but none are readily available. At least with respect to key votes and policy platforms, polarization on both dimension have happened more or less concurrently (Layman 2001).

<sup>26</sup> The GSS asks experimental versions of nearly all issue-related to randomly-selected samples of respondents, and many respondents received the standard question wording for one set of issues and the experimental wording for another. This analysis is restricted to those who received the "consistent" wording for *all* of the 13 issue questions. This results in a substantial loss of cases, but the deletion of these randomly-selected respondents has no bearing on the analysis

to which certain factors become more (or less) relevant to party identification as elites polarize.<sup>27</sup>

Estimates are presented in Table 3. The first thing to note is that, as expected, elite party polarization increases the expected association between both moral and scope-of-government preferences and party identification. In the mid 1970's, more conservative scope-of-government preferences were associated with Republicanism, while conservative moral preferences had no effect. As polarization increases, policy preferences on both dimensions become more strongly associated with party attachments in the expected direction (with more conservative preferences leading to more "Republicanism)." Polarization clearly has increased the ability of citizens to make connections between their own policy beliefs and partisanship.

Importantly, though, the mediating impact of polarization on scope-of-government preferences is significantly *greater* than that of moral preferences. Scope-of-government preferences are not only becoming more closely associated with partisanship, but their impact is increasing *relative to that of moral issues*. New Deal preferences were far more important than moral issues in predicting party attachments in the 1970's, and their impact is increasing not only in absolute terms, but also relative to that of issues of traditional morality. Figure 7 graphs the expected impact of "scope of government" and "moral" preferences as a function of elite context. The message of the figure is clear: the principal division in mass party conflict is still the role of the federal government in providing social services.

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<sup>27</sup> The language to follow speaks of association, not causality, because at least for the policy preference variable, some of the increased connection to partisanship is endogenous. I therefore make no claims about which variable is the most important cause of party identification, only that certain variables are more powerful predictors of identification than others.

The association of father's education level and partisanship is significant and in the expected direction: more educated fathers lead to more Republican children. But the expected impact of father's education level *decreases* as parties polarize: knowing a relevant characteristic of a respondent's parents has become progressively less relevant to understanding a citizen's own party identification. The relative association of father's education is also shown in Figure 7: in a time of relatively low-polarization, the association of father's education with partisanship was nearly as great as those of scope of government preferences. But polarization has altered the balance of considerations: in 2002, the expected impact of scope-of-government preferences is nearly five times as large as that of father's education level.

In addition, the association of income with partisanship has actually *increased* marginally (but significantly) as parties have polarized (see Figure 7). The independent impact of income still remains relatively small. But, contrary to the culture wars thesis, the growing emphasis on cultural and moral concerns has not minimized the impact of social class: parties have polarized on scope of government issues, and the implications of major party platforms for economic inequality are becoming more differentiated and more lucid to citizens (Stonecash 2001). The impact of income on partisanship is growing—or at least not diminishing—as a result.

Finally, the remaining coefficients in Table 3 represent the independent impact of belonging to a particular social or demographic group on partisanship (graphs of the effects of social grouping for all groups with a significant context-dependent effects are shown in Figure 8). The most important context-dependent effect shown here is that of Catholics. At the beginning of the time period analyzed here, the effect of being Catholic—net of

preferences for both moral and scope of government issues—on party identification was sizable: more than two-thirds of a point on the seven-point partisanship scale. Catholics are still marginally more Democratic than their other economic and political characteristics would imply, but as parties have polarized, the independent effect of being Catholic has diminished substantially.

This result in part confirms previous research suggesting that Catholics, in the 1970s and 1980s, had been considerably more likely to identify as Democrats than their policy preferences would suggest (Corbett and Corbett 1999). But it also shows that as party positions on issues have become clearer, Catholics—a group that was an integral part of the New Deal Coalition, but one that was more successful, more quickly than most at becoming economically and politically integrated in American life (Kenski and Lockwood 1991, Wald 2003)—have become less likely to identify as Democrats simply for being Catholic. Catholic Democrats still outnumber Catholic Republicans in the electorate, in other words, but the “group identity” aspect of Catholic Democratic identification has all but vanished.

Other groups show relevant and generally expected effects. Southern whites were more likely in the 1970’s to identify as Democrats regardless of policy liberalism—a function largely of the one-party south at the elite level (Black and Black 2003) and the number of elite conservative Democrats in the south, but this effect has largely gone away.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, religious fundamentalists were slightly more Democratic than would be expected from other characteristics, but are now slightly more Republican. There is also some evidence of an

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<sup>28</sup> In fact, Southern whites are actually marginally less likely now to identify as Democrats than their preferences would suggest. The Democratic party in the South throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was so dominant that it was difficult for some citizens to identify with (or register as) Republicans, even if they wanted to (Black and Black 2002): the one-party South, in other words, was reinforced by social norms. This suggests that a similar effect—in the opposite direction—may be occurring today.

emerging “gender gap,” as women are increasingly likely to identify as Democrats—even controlling for preferences—relative to men. Blacks and Jews are disproportionately likely to identify as Democrats, but these effects appear to remain constant over time.

In sum, the results here suggest that changes in the elite context have had systematic effects on the nature of individual-level partisan attachments. Polarization—and the resultant increase in citizens’ abilities to understand and perceive to be important elite policy cues—has increased the relevance of policy concerns to partisanship. But the greatest increase in importance—and by far the best predictor of partisanship in the electorate—are scope-of-government, not moral preferences. Further, the association of (this measure of) socialization and partisanship has decreased, and, while not consistent across all groups, the independent impact of group identification on partisanship for certain social groups commonly associated with the “New Deal” coalition has gone away. The macro-context, in other words, systematically affects the balance of considerations in the minds of citizens when choosing a party identification.

### **Party alignment and the changing issue bases of party coalitions**

So far, we have seen that party polarization makes it more likely that citizens can align their own partisanship and policy preferences—especially on issues related to the size and scope of the federal government. Scope of government issues have become more relevant to party attachments. But does their growing importance explain the changes in the size of mass parties?

Some of the increase in policy preference-partisanship association is undoubtedly due to people adapting policy preferences to more closely correspond with their prior party commitments (Layman and Carsey 2002). But there is also some evidence of issue-based



change in partisanship: that is, citizens updating their own partisanship to more closely fit their own policy beliefs (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, Goren 2005). The implication of this is that the distribution of partisanship in the electorate can change if a shift in the balance of considerations that go into party identification—here, the increased importance of scope-of-government preferences—advantages one party relative to the other. In this case, if there are enough operationally conservative citizens socialized as Democrats, the increasing importance of scope-of-government issues will advantage the Republican Party.

The GSS interviews different citizens in each survey year, so it is impossible for me to track the party attachments of individual people across time. But I can examine changes in the issue bases of party coalitions over time, and I can examine the likelihood of identifying as a “Democrat” or “Republican” given a certain level of policy liberalism. If the move toward the Republican party has been driven by operationally conservative citizens changing parties as a result of the increased importance of policy preferences, then there should be evidence that the move away from the Democratic party has occurred *only among those with conservative preferences*—not as a result of a broad-based move toward the party among all types of citizens. Further, the biggest move away from the Democrats (and toward the Republicans) should come among those with conservative *scope-of-government*—not moral—preferences. What we expect to see, in other words, is not evidence of a cultural realignment in which morally conservative citizens move away from the Democratic Party, but instead one where the largest move comes among those who hold conservative preferences on the scope-of-government dimension.

The goal is thus to examine the changing ability of issues to predict party identification. To accomplish this task, I estimate year-specific models that examine the likelihood that

citizens with certain levels of policy “liberalism” on these two dimensions identify with one or the other major parties. The intuition here is to examine the likelihood that the “most conservative,” “most liberal,” and other groups of citizens on these issue dimensions identify with the Republican and Democratic parties. If the likelihood of Democratic identification for a person with a certain combination of policy preferences has changed over time, and if this likelihood has changed relative to citizens with other combinations of policy preferences (i.e., if conservatives are becoming more likely to be Republicans, but moderates and liberals are not), then we can infer evidence that issues are becoming more important to policy preferences in a way that has consequences for the relative size of the major parties.

At any given point in time, it will certainly be the case that citizens more liberal on this dimension will be more likely to identify as Democrats than citizens who are Republicans. But as the Democratic Party has grown smaller, it could be the case that all types of citizens are contributing more or less equally to that move: i.e., the slopes of predicted probability lines for each levels of policy liberalism will be roughly equal over time. Conversely, I expect that the slopes will not be equal: policy preferences will be an increasingly powerful discriminator, and major decreases in the likelihood of identifying with the Democratic party will occur only among citizens who hold relatively conservative preferences on the scope of government dimension.

For each survey year, I estimate a basic multinomial logit model of party identification (0: Democrat, 1: Independent, 2: Republican) with two predictors: preferences on moral and scope of government issues. Then for each survey year, I compute predicted probabilities of Democratic and Republican identification for hypothetical citizens with 10 different relative levels of operational liberalism. In survey year 1974, for example, I compute the probability

that a citizens who are more liberal than 95%, 85%, 75%, 65%, 55%, 45%, 35%, 25%, 15%, and 5% of his peers on the scope-of-government dimension will identify with the Democratic party. I compute similar probabilities for identifying with the Republican Party, and for the same liberalism “percentiles” on the moral dimension. This is repeated for each survey year in an effort to understand changes over time. How likely is it, for example that a citizen, in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of scope-of-government liberalism in 1974, identifies with the Democratic party? How does this compare with the likelihood of a similar hypothetical citizen in 1976? In 2002?

Four figures (figures 9, 10, 11, and 12) show time-series of the probability of identifying with the Democratic or Republican party for citizens with various levels of liberalism over time. Figure 9 illustrates the probability of Republican identification given various levels of scope-of-government liberalism. There are two things to note in this graph. The first is the “fan effect”: as parties have polarized, policy preferences have become an increasingly powerful predictor of Republican identification in the electorate. In 1974, for example, the difference in the predicted probability of Republican identification for the most liberal and most conservative citizens in this analysis was about 20 percentage points. But 2002, however, the difference was nearly 50 percentage points. Knowing one’s scope of government preferences clearly goes a much longer way in predicting partisanship now than it did in the 1970’s.

The second important aspect of this graph speaks more directly to the role of scope-of-government issues in party system change. The move toward increased Republican identification in the electorate has come disproportionately among this with conservative preferences on the scope-of-government dimension. In 1974, for example, the most

conservative citizen in this analysis had only a 40 percent likelihood of identifying as a Republican. By 2002, however, this likelihood was nearly 65 percent. Similarly, among liberals, there has been very little increase in the probability of Republican identifications: for the most liberal citizens, in fact, there is a slight trend toward *decreased* likelihood of Republican identification. Given that the electorate has not become any more conservative as a whole on this dimension, this graph provides evidence that the electorate is becoming marginally more Republican because people who were already conservative are becoming Republicans, not because the party is becoming more attractive for citizens with all types of preferences for the role of the federal government.

Figure 10 is a similar graph of the likelihood of identifying with the Democratic Party. The “fan” is obviously reversed (with liberal citizens more likely to be Democrats), but the pattern is similar. In 1974, for example, scope-of-government preferences did little to predict Democratic identification: the most conservative citizen had a roughly equal chance of identifying as a Democrat as a Republican.<sup>29</sup> But by 2002, the likelihood of identifying with the Democratic party among citizens who are more conservative than average decreased considerably—for the most conservative citizens, by nearly 30 percentage points. The likelihood of identifying with the Democrats among liberals, by contrast, has remained nearly constant. Elite context has changed in a way that makes policy preferences on this dimension matter more, and conservatives have responded by moving away from the Democratic Party.

Figures 11 and 12 show the results of a similar analysis for moral issues. The over-time changes here are important: throughout much of the 1970’s and 1980’s, moral issues

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<sup>29</sup> This relationship is similar both inside and outside of the south.

provided no leverage in predicting party attachments, and now they provide some.<sup>30</sup> But in absolute terms, their ability to predict both Democratic and Republican identification in the electorate is *far weaker* than the ability of scope-of-government preferences. Even in 2002, for example, the difference in predicted probability of Democratic identification for the most liberal and conservative citizens on this dimension is just 25 points—barely half that for scope of government preferences. Moral issues matter, and there is at least a bit of evidence that culturally conservative citizens are becoming Republicans. But even knowing that a citizen is more conservative than 95% of his peers on moral issues still tells you very little about his partisanship—this citizen has less than a 50% chance of identifying with the Republican party. Only through knowing his other characteristics—including and especially his scope-of-government preferences—can one obtain considerable predictive leverage on party identification. Party coalitions have changed as the relationship between policy preferences and partisanship has grown. But the movement toward the Republican party has been driven by those with *conservative preferences* on the *scope of government dimension*.

### **Polarization and the New Deal party system**

This paper has developed a theory of macro-micro linkages in the American party system, and used this theory to explain, at least in large part, why the relative size of the Democratic and Republican parties in the electorate has changed over the past 30 years. Changes in the macro-level context have changed the relative importance of socialization and “scope of government” policy preferences on the existing dimension over the size and scope of the federal government to party attachments. These changes then aggregate back to

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<sup>30</sup> In years where the moral dimension is not a significant predictor of partisanship, predicted probabilities for all percentiles are simply set to the mean probability of identifying as a Democrat or Republican in that year.

meaningful changes in the mass party system, as conservative citizens have moved away from the Democratic Party. This explanation thus ascribes change in the mass party system to the linkages between changes in the macro context and micro-level political attitudes.

In this view, there is little need to explain the crux of party change through a “cultural” argument grounded in the changing dimensionality of mass conflict. Just as importantly, there is no need to ascribe changes in the party system to changes in the *levels* of various predictors of partisanship (i.e., greater mass conservatism, a decrease in the number of citizens that belong to “Democratic” social groups). Rather, it is the change in the *relative importance* of these predictors that matters. Party coalitions have changed because scope-of-government preferences have become more, not less, important to micro-level party identification.

The substantive implication of this is that even amidst the decline of the Democratic New Deal Coalition, preference on the dimension of issue conflict that defined it have grown in importance. How can these two phenomena be squared with one another? A full explanation of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but the results presented here can help to shed light on why the social-group bases of the party system have changed as they have. The “New Deal coalition” is commonly conceived of in terms of social groups associated with it (e.g., Zinni et al. 1997), and the decline of the New Deal coalition is often explained as a function of the decline in the Democratic party attachments of these groups (e.g., Stanley and Niemi 1995). But at its core, the “Coalition” was formed from a group of citizens whose life circumstances and policy preferences dictated that they support similar policies and candidates (Stonecash et. al 2001).

The *policy preference* basis for the New Deal coalition, however, began to wane in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as many of its key social groups became more economically integrated into society. The gap in socioeconomic status between Catholics and the general population, for example, decreased markedly over the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Prendergast 1999).<sup>31</sup> The economic policies that many citizens within these groups would benefit from changed in ways that affected attitudes toward government intervention on economic matters. But because of the relative stability of partisanship, citizens who were socialized during this era (or were socialized by parents of this era) were unlikely to change parties in response to changes in their own life circumstances and policy preferences. It is only as parties have become more polarized and homogenous that citizens began to understand and perceive as important differences between parties, be able to relate their own preferences to party debate on these dimensions of conflict and adjust their own attitudes accordingly.

In this view, the idea that the “New Deal Party System”—in the sense that it is a party system driven primarily by conflict over redistributive economic policies and the role of government in providing social services—has eroded is false. But the importance of groups as groups has declined, a function of polarization’s role in increasing the policy-preference basis—and decreasing the social group and socialization basis—of partisan attachments.

The ideas advanced in this paper also have implications for understanding macro-micro linkages more broadly defined. We have excellent macro-level explanations for many broad macro phenomena, and we have developed useful ways to use micro theory to explain these

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<sup>31</sup> Scholars of religion and politics have pointed to the importance of this decreasing economic distinctiveness—and the conservative social welfare attitudes that result—as a key reason for the declining Democratic attachments of Catholics (Corbett and Corbett 1999, Mockabee 2004). But this increased economic conservatism largely preceded movement to the Republicans.

macro ideas. Macropartisanship moves in response to the real economy (Erikson et. al 2002), for example, in large part because many individual citizens view partisanship as a “running tally” (Fiorina 1977) of economic and political evaluations, and poor economic management by the President of a particular party may cause those citizens to change parties. But the relationship between macro and micro theories is about more than simply developing micro-explanations for macro phenomena. It is also about understanding the important, and perhaps, non-obvious, ways in which the macro and micro *interact* to produce interesting political outcomes (see MacKuen 2002). This paper has taken a first step toward developing such an understanding by focusing on how context and individual citizen behavior interact to produce aggregate level change.

Finally, these results have implications for understanding the role of party identification in electoral choices. Political parties are becoming increasingly structured along policy preference lines. The likely result is that many citizens are identifying with a party because of a belief in the party’s policy proposals: the explicit policy implications of party identification. Citizens who identify with a party because of policy concerns—or, at the least, structure their own policy attitudes accordingly—may evaluate the importance of candidates’ partisanship differently when making choices than those who identify with a party for non-policy reasons. Understanding this relationship between policy attitudes, party identification, and voting behavior is the topic to which I now turn.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE POLICY BASIS OF PARTISAN CHOICE: ISSUE CONSISTENCY AND PARTY VOTING IN AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

There are many ideas that are controversial in the study of American political behavior. The power of partisanship in explaining vote choice is not one of them. Partisanship's ability to predict the vote is so strong that *defections* from party-line voting are often taken as anomalies in need of explanation (e.g., Wright 1978, Eubank 1985, Lawrence 1994, Beck 2002). Party attachments are taken for granted as a citizen's "baseline" political decision—and the basis for the electorate's "normal vote." But even in the current climate of party polarization, a substantively meaningful number of partisans—roughly 10% in 2004—vote for the Presidential candidates of other parties: individual-level decisions to cast a party-line vote are not to be taken for granted: they are critical to understanding electoral outcomes (DeNardo 1980, 1986, Weisberg 2002, Hillygus and Shields 2005).

The powerful relationship between party and vote stands in contrast to the much weaker relationship between party and policy attitudes: large numbers of citizens hold policy preferences that are considerably more moderate, less stable, and more ambivalent, than those of party elites (see Fiorina 2004). The fact that many citizens do not necessarily agree with their party on policy matters may provide some leverage in understanding who is most likely to cast a party-line vote, and why they are likely to do so. I explore the *interplay* of policy preferences and partisanship in the decision-making calculus of American partisans.

Specifically, I develop and test a theory that relates partisanship-policy preference *consistency* to the decision to cast a party-line vote.

Identification with a particular party is largely an affective orientation (e.g., Campbell et. al 1960, Miller and Shanks 1996), an identification with the party label itself. Even if it is not connected at all to the broader political environment or one's own beliefs, the power of this affective orientation means that partisanship serves as a powerful guide to vote. For some, this purely *affective* connection to party—a connection to the party label, borne of socialization or some other factor, without any real understanding of its implications for policy outcomes—is the only connection that they have. But for others, the affective commitment is reinforced by a more proximate *cognitive* connection to partisanship—the congruence between one's own political beliefs and those of the party.

The “cognitive” reinforcement of partisanship provided by holding policy preferences broadly consistent with those of one's party elites should provide a powerful supplement to the purely “affective” connection to party. A partisanship grounded in the belief—reflected though one's own policy preferences—that one party is right and the other wrong about policy should serve as a more relevant guide to vote choice than one based on affective considerations alone. Partisans with policy preferences *consistent* with those of their party's elites should thus be more likely to cast a party-line vote than those with *inconsistent* preferences across all types of electoral contexts (see Hillygus and Shields 2005). The impact of partisanship-policy preference consistency to party-line voting should be greatest when attributes of the citizen or the political context suggest that the purely affective commitment to party is weak or when the ability to understand and act upon the policy implications of

partisanship are strong. Further, consistency should matter most for the issue dimensions most strongly emphasized in elite discourse.

This paper presents the beginnings of a research program into the pervasiveness of policy consistency in the American electorate and the impact of consistency on party-line voting. Using data from the General Social Survey, I examine the impact of consistency on Presidential-level voting from 1972-2000. I find that there is considerable heterogeneity in partisanship-policy preference consistency among American mass partisans, and that policy consistency does matter to the decision to cast a party-line vote. Further, the impact of consistency to party-line voting varies systematically as a function of the individual and the elite party context.

The results provide a new way of examining the relationship between party, issues, and electoral choice by focusing on the mediating effect of policy preferences to the decision to cast a party-line vote. The considerable heterogeneity among American partisans with respect to partisanship-policy preference consistency provides a more general framework for explaining “defections” from party in political choice. Further, the results can help to explain recent trends in party voting at the Presidential level. Even in a polarized environment, policy consistency is far from universal. But in the aggregate, the increased policy consistency over the past 30 years brought about by elite polarization can explain, in large part, the three-decade trend toward increased party-line voting.

### **Partisanship, affect, and the vote**

It is not an overstatement to say that partisanship is the most studied—and most powerful—variable in electoral research. Party identification is the most relevant predictor of vote choice in nearly any context, and its impact, high even during the relatively “weak-

partied” 1960s, has increased markedly in recent elections (Bartels 2000). But even now, a large number of citizens from both parties—around 10% of partisans in 2004 and 15% in 2000—“defect” (DeNardo 1980) from their party’s candidates at the Presidential level. The large number of defections cannot simply be attributed to measurement error, random noise, or election-specific factors (e.g., incumbency) that make one candidate or party more appealing than the other. The purpose of this paper is to explain why many citizens decide to defect from their party’s candidates while others do not. To do so, however, I begin with a short review of why partisanship is considered to be such a powerful guide to political choice.

The power of partisanship stems in large part from the fact that, for many individuals, it provides a strong—and, often, the only—psychological connection to the political world. Party identification represents an *affective*, psychological attachment, often formed early in life, before any real understanding of politics, to the label of the political party itself: the ‘classic’ definition of partisanship is as “an individual’s affective orientation to an important group object in his environment (Campbell 1960, 121).” Unlike many other political attitudes, partisanship is relatively stable over time (Converse 1964, Miller 2002, Green et al. 2002), largely because of the “feeling of personal identity” (Miller and Shanks 1996) that individuals have in their party identification. It is because of this strong, enduring affective commitment that the distribution of party attachments is thought to underlie the “normal vote” (Converse 1966, Miller 1979).

This definition of partisanship as affective commitment, however, makes little mention of partisanship as an explicitly *political* attitude—one based on information about one’s own policy preferences and the ideological locations of major party elites (Gant and Luttbeg 1987,

Burden and Klobstad 2005). The earliest studies of partisanship recognized the disconnect for large segments of the population between stable, powerful partisanship, and transient, weakly-held policy attitudes (e.g., Campbell et al 1960, Converse and Markus 1979), and many others have demonstrated inconsistencies between citizens' partisanship and their operational or ideological worldviews (e.g., Converse 1964, Sharp and Lodge 1985). Citizens choose a party identification for a number of systematic reasons, but a substantive analysis of the policy platforms of major parties is not always prominent among them (Carmines and Berkman 1994, Zinni et al 1997).

In this conception, partisanship is an extraordinarily powerful predictor of political choices because of the power of affective commitment to the party label itself, not because of any connection between partisanship and real political circumstances. A vote for a party's candidate is a vote that reflects the affective commitment to one's party—whether or not that vote implies support for the party's policy proposals.

### **Affect and cognition in party voting**

For many, this affective commitment to party is the only connection that there is: a strong connection to a label with only a tangential tie to real political circumstances. Even many self-described strong partisans cannot place parties correctly in ideological space or identify which party is “liberal” or “conservative” on specific issues (Wattenberg 1998, Hetherington 2000).

But for many others, partisanship reflects more than just identification with a label: it represents a statement of support for that party's policy worldview. Some citizens form their party identification explicitly as a result of consideration of their own policy positions and

those of party elites (Franklin 1992, Abramowitz and Saunders 1998).<sup>32</sup> Many others adjust their own positions on issues explicitly to correspond to their party's elites (Layman and Carsey 2002, Carsey and Layman 2006). Although the relative pervasiveness of these two processes is still the subject of debate, the result is that for many citizens, partisanship does reflect—or is reflected by—a citizen's views about what should and should not be done with respect to public policy.

For some, in other words, partisanship contains a strong “*cognitive*” (Fiorina 1977, Gant and Luttbeg 1985, Pomper and Weiner 2002) component: a connection not just to the label, but to the label's *implications for policy outcomes*. This is not to say, of course, that individuals cannot hold both strong affective and cognitive commitments to party: the strongest partisans are often (but not always) the most likely to support most or all of their party's issue positions. But the point is that, for some, party attachments are more than just affect alone: they are statements of support—implicit or explicit—for a party's platform and policy proposals.

There are many reasons that individuals would not connect their own partisanship and policy preferences: they may not be interested in doing so, may not have the awareness to do so (Zaller 1992), may be ambivalent about their party's positions on issues, or may simply identify with the symbols of one party and the policy positions of another (Carmines and Berkman 1994). There are equally compelling reasons why citizens would like to bring partisanship and policy preferences in line (see Festinger 1958, Layman and Carsey 2002). But the end result is that many citizens seek out *consistency* between policy preferences and partisanship, while many others do not.

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<sup>32</sup> Still others may update their partisanship based on evaluations of the economic and political performance of major party elites (Fiorina 1977).

For the citizens whose affective commitment to party is reinforced by a more proximate “cognitive” connection between one’s own policy preferences and the policy positions of one’s party elites, the impact of party on electoral choice is likely to be stronger than for those with just an affective commitment (even if that commitment is a strong one) to one’s own party. Put simply, individuals who not only identify with and support a party for purely affective reasons, but also because of a belief that one party is right and the other wrong about public policy, are more likely to use party as a guide to electoral decision-making.

As campaigns evolve, major party candidates send cues to voters about what they stand for and what they will do once in office. A citizen who holds policy preferences consistent with her party’s elites will be more likely to respond not only to these cues not only by being more predisposed to accept the messages of her party’s candidate, but also by viewing those messages as a statement of support for her own preferences. The messages of ‘party’ and ‘policy’ will reinforce one another in a way that has implications for that citizen approaches electoral choice. For citizens whose policy preferences and partisanship are inconsistent with one another, the dynamic will be different. These citizens will still be more likely to approve of the messages sent by their party’s candidate, but the reinforcement provided by policy will be absent, and the messages of one’s own party elites—while providing an affective connection between one’s own political identity and the broader political world—will not be as strongly accepted as if they would be if they were connected to policy. The key point is that citizens who have aligned their policy preferences and party identification—and thus hold preferences and partisanship that are broadly *consistent* with one another—will be less

likely to defect from their party's candidates when making political choices.<sup>33</sup> Given that elite discourse emphasizing particular types of issues varies—both across issues and over time—consistency on the issues most strongly emphasized in elite discourse should matter most to the decision to cast a party-line vote.<sup>34</sup>

We have reason to expect considerable heterogeneity in the degree to which citizens hold consistent policy preferences and party identification. This heterogeneity may be able to explain why some citizens choose to vote for candidates of their party while others do not: those who have made the connection will be least likely to “defect” from their party's candidates. Even after controlling for strength of partisanship, education, and other factors, partisanship-policy preference consistency should be important: *citizens who hold issue preferences broadly consistent with their party's elites should be more likely to cast a party-line vote. Further, the impact of policy consistency on the decision to cast a party-line vote should be greatest for the dimensions of political conflict most strongly emphasized in elite discourse.*

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<sup>33</sup> This also may imply that partisanship serves a more reliable—and more powerful—heuristic (Popkin 1991) for those who know what partisanship implies for policy (see Lau and Redlawsk 2001 for an examination of the heterogeneity in the ‘correct’ use of partisan heuristics).

<sup>34</sup> In survey data, of course, we cannot tell whether citizens have made a conscious decision to align partisanship and policy preferences with one another. But we can infer evidence of it by examining the relationship between party identification and policy preferences. Citizens that hold policy preferences broadly consistent with those of their party's elites are more likely to have made an effort to align the two, and thus, have a “cognitive”—policy—reinforcement to the affective commitment of party identification. Given the nature of survey data, citizens can still appear to have consistent preferences, even if they answer issue questions randomly. For any particular citizen, there is no direct way to tell whether consistency is the result of a meaningful connection or random chance. It should be the case, however, that consistency should matter far more for those whose connection is most likely to be meaningful, than for those whose connection is most likely to be random. I return to this below.



The first and most direct hypothesis, then, is that policy consistency matters: after controlling for individual and contextual characteristics, citizens with policy preferences broadly consistent with those of party elites will be more likely to cast a party line vote. But if the reason that policy consistency matters to party voting is that it provides a cognitive reinforcement to affective party commitment, the relative *impact* of policy consistency should vary across different types of citizens. For some citizens—and in some contexts—a strong affective commitment is that is needed to drive party-line voting. But in other circumstances and for other individuals, the reinforcement provided by policy consistency may be particularly powerful, and will be particularly important to the decision to cast a party-line vote. The broad idea is that attributes of the individual and context affect the relative importance that policy consistency should have on party-line voting. Individual or contextual factors that make affective commitment to party particularly strong should *lessen* the impact of policy consistency, while factors that make the ability to understand and act on the more proximate “cognitive” policy implications of partisanship easier should *strengthen* its impact.

### **Policy consistency, party voting and individual attributes**

***Individual level factors: Education and sophistication:*** The heterogeneity in the ability of citizens to understanding policy-related information is well documented (e.g., Knight 1985, Sniderman et al 1991). Not all citizens are equal in their ability or desire to understand political issues and the platforms of party elites, nor are they equal in their ability to perceive—or perceive as important—the relationship between policy preferences and partisanship. Nevertheless, even those with limited political knowledge, interest, or sophistication can show evidence of connecting policy preferences with partisanship. Many

citizens may have a connection without considering it to be meaningful to their own lives and without being able to relate this connection to the preferences of party elites. Given the error inherent in closed-ended survey questions, it is likely that some respondents will *reveal* policy preferences and partisanship that happen to appear consistent with one other, even if they are answering questions randomly.

But this type of consistency—an artifact of random chance or the survey context—is unlikely to be meaningful to political choice. Only for those citizens who are predisposed to understand policy related information will policy consistency matter to party voting: consistency will matter more as a cognitive reinforcement to the decision to vote with one's party for those with the ability to make the connection between policy preferences and partisanship.

A common—if crude—way to measure the ability to understand and process political information is formal education (Zaller 1992): educated citizens are more likely to understand political issues and more likely to incorporate an analysis of policy information into their own decision-making. It is certainly more likely (though by no means guaranteed) that educated citizens will align their own policy preferences and partisanship. But the highly educated are also more likely to *understand* the policy implications of casting a party-line vote and take these implications into account when deciding whether how to vote. For others, the connections between policy preferences and partisanship will either be less meaningful, or a result of random chance. I thus expect that *the impact of policy consistency on party-line voting will vary directly with level of education*, as consistency will matter more to those with the ability to understand and act on the connection—or lack thereof—between policy preferences and partisanship.

*Affective commitment to party*: All citizens who identify with a particular party have—to some degree—some type of affective preference for that party over the other (e.g., Miller and Shanks 1996). But the strength of that affective commitment varies considerably. Those whose affective commitment is stronger have a deeper connection to party that will predispose them to more strongly support their party’s candidates regardless of circumstances and irrespective of policy preferences. Strongly-committed partisans are less likely to need support for their party’s candidates “reinforced” by analysis of their own policy positions relative to their party’s candidates: for these citizens the affective commitment to party alone is likely enough to make them vote with party a the vast majority of the time. For those with a weaker affective commitment to party, however, the inverse should be true. These citizens have less of an affective bond with party, and thus holding policy preferences consistent with party’s elites should matter a great deal—it is for these citizens that the “cognitive” component of partisanship may be the deciding factor in determining whether to supports one’s own party’s candidates.

The easiest and most direct way to measure affective commitment to party is through strength of partisanship: all else equal, stronger partisans can be presumed to have a greater affective commitment to their party than weak partisans or partisan “leaners.”<sup>35</sup> We would expect, of course, that strong partisans, for a number of reasons, will be more likely to hold policy preferences consistent with their party. But the expectation is that the direct impact of

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<sup>35</sup> Consistent with this idea, the “classic” party identification question (Campbell et. al 1960) was intended to measure the strength of one’s affective commitment to party. Burden and Klostad (2005) argue that the “classic” party identification question actually mismeasures the conception of partisanship-as-affect on which it is based, asking respondents to “think” rather than “feel.” Although the distribution of responses for citizens asked about party identification in a “feel” rather than “think” frame are modest (and likely not damaging to the results here), they are meaningful.

policy consistency on party voting will diminish as one's strength of partisanship—and affective commitment to party—grows. It is for weak partisans that the cognitive reinforcement of policy consistency will be the most powerful discriminator of party-line voting. *The impact of policy consistency on party voting, in other words, should vary inversely with strength of partisanship.*

### **Policy consistency, party voting and contextual attributes**

*Electoral context and candidate strength.* Circumstances in the macro-political environment may also affect the relative importance of one's affective commitment to party, and as a result, affect the impact of policy consistency on party voting. Holding the electoral context constant, citizens are likely to simply follow their predispositions and vote for the candidate of the party with which they identify: this is why the distribution of partisan attachments in the electorate forms the baseline for the “normal vote.” But the electoral context is not constant: attributes of the political environment may serve to either strengthen or weaken individuals' predispositions to vote for their own party's candidates. When attributes of the environment makes the “normal” affective connection between citizen and party weaker, the reinforcement provided by policy consistency will matter more.

The relative success of Democratic and Republican parties in national elections is, of course, affected considerably by context. The state of the economy (e.g., Erikson 1979, Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001), the ideological direction of policy (Erikson et al 2002), or even attributes of candidates themselves (Miller and Shanks 1996, Kilburn 2005) all matter to candidate success. For similar reasons, attributes of the electoral context that combine to make one party's candidate more attractive will affect the relative importance of policy consistency. When one's “own” candidate is strong, the affective connection that one has to

party—and with it, the reinforcement that citizens need to simply follow their affective predispositions and vote for that candidate of their party—is strong. A consideration of policy preferences will be relatively unimportant because it is less likely to be necessary. But when the economy or other factors combine to make one’s candidate weaker, the motivation to simply follow one’s predispositions and vote for his or her own party’s candidate also weakens. It is in these circumstances that citizens are likely to need reasons beyond purely affective commitment to party to vote for the candidates of one’s party.<sup>36</sup> When deciding whether to cast a party-line vote, the consistency between the policy preferences of one’s party and his or her candidates is necessary to override the fact that the elite-level political context negatively impacts the desirability of one own party’s candidate. I thus expect that *the impact of policy consistency will be stronger when a citizens’ own party’s candidate is electorally weak.*

***Third party-candidate.*** Third-party candidates do not often present viable alternatives at the national level. The ones that have been successful at earning significant shares of the popular vote have been successful, in large part, because they are thought to be candidates with the ideas, personality—and money—to weaken citizens’ connections to their own party and get them to consider a third-party alternative (Jelen 2001).<sup>37</sup> When a viable third party candidate exists, in other words, the context provides an alternative that makes voting for one’s own party candidate based on predispositions and purely “affective” concerns alone

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<sup>36</sup> The idea of abandoning predispositions—and increasing the importance of policy concerns to decision-making—when the electoral context is not favorable to one’s own party has parallels to the idea of “affective intelligence” (Marcus et al. 2000).

<sup>37</sup> Even citizens that would never consider a vote for the “other” party’s candidate because of a strong affective dislike for that party, for example, may be receptive to messages of more affectively “neutral” third party candidates in certain contexts.

more difficult. Here, again, a connection between policy preferences and partisanship is likely to be more important: it is those who have the “cognitive” reinforcement of consistent policy preferences and partisanship that are more likely to resist the third-party alternative and cast a party-line vote. Thus, *the impact of policy consistency should be greater when a viable third-party candidate exists.*

### **Defining policy consistency**

In sum, the expectation is that partisanship-policy consistency on relevant dimensions of conflict will matter to party voting, and the influence of consistency will be mediated by individual and contextual characteristics. I thus begin by defining policy consistency and measuring its pervasiveness among American partisans. To accomplish this, I turn to data from the General Social Survey. The GSS is well-suited to this task in that it has asked respondents for their preferences on 14 different political issues in each survey since 1974, allowing me to explore the impact of contextual characteristics on policy consistency over a reasonably long time span. The 14 issues by no means represent all possible issues on which party elites conflict, but do cover a wide range of topics—distributive programs, welfare, the military, the death penalty, and abortion, for example—that represent the essence of American policy conflict over the past 30 years.

I code responses to each of these questions as “liberal” or “conservative” based on the position that corresponds most closely to the broad ideological position of the party’s elites. Although there are certainly variations in the degree of emphasis party elites place on issues, and even (given that the policy status quo changes over time), variations in the degree to which parties support one ideological position over the another, the general strategy is to assume that Republican elites generally support positions that favor less government

intervention in solving social problems, less government spending, and a greater role for government in preserving traditional and religious morality, while Democratic elites prefer the reverse.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the basic “liberal” and “conservative” options, most questions offer additional options to respondents, and the “middle ground” options are coded accordingly (see Appendix A for question wording and coding).

It is, of course, rare, for citizens—even highly sophisticated ones—to hold consistently “liberal” or “conservative” preferences *every* issue: there are many competing considerations that would lead citizens to defect from the party’s position on a few concerns. Even many party elites face similar competing pressures and values. Although the degree to which citizens agree with their party is important (and will be addressed below) the “first-pass” task is to understand how many citizens, *on balance*, hold policy preferences consistent with those of “their party’s elites.

I create a simple additive scale of preferences for each respondent, coding all “liberal” responses as “1,” all “conservative” responses as -1, and all “moderate” responses as “0.”<sup>39</sup> I consider individuals to hold policy preferences that are consistent with their partisanship on if they hold preferences that are, on balance, more *liberal than the mean* for their survey

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<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that although on most issues, the basic “Democratic” and “Republican” positions on issues—e.g., ‘more’ or ‘less’ spending—have not changed in recent decades, parties at the elite level have become more internally homogenous with respect to these positions. As a result, the elite signals that allow citizens to understand the relative ideological locations of the major parties have become sharper (Hetherington 2000), and more citizens should thus hold consistent positions as a result. I return to this point below.

<sup>39</sup> The abortion and homosexuality questions have more than three response options and are coded to reflect this. A complete list of question wordings and coding is available in Appendix A.

year if they are a Democrat, or *more conservative than the mean* if they are Republican.<sup>40</sup>

Citizens are considered “inconsistent” if they hold preferences that are on balance opposite the ideological direction of their party.

How pervasive is partisanship-policy consistency in the electorate? Figure 1 graphs the percentage of citizens that hold consistent preferences for each election year since 1972.<sup>41</sup>

The first and most important thing to note is that partisanship-policy preference consistency is far from universal. Even given this broad definition of consistency, barely half of all citizens in the early 1970’s held policy preferences consistent with their party identification and never in this time period are 75% of partisans consistent with their party on issues. Party is powerful, but the relationship between partisanship and policy preferences is tenuous at best.

It is also clear that the number of citizens who hold consistent preferences has increased markedly as parties at the elite level have polarized and become more internally homogenous. Even in the current polarized climate, however, consistency is still not to be

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<sup>40</sup> I choose to operationalize respondents’ liberalism and conservatism *relative* to the mean for their survey year, rather than in *absolute* terms, for two reasons. First and most importantly, the policy status quo changes from year to year in a way that has implications for both the meaning of the survey questions and the positions of party elites. Most questions here ask respondents whether more or less government intervention is need relative to some reference point—usually, the status quo. As a result, the distribution of responses—and the meaning of the question itself—changes from year to year. Desiring “more spending” on defense in 1983, for example, implies a higher level of conservatism (for both party elites and survey respondents) than would desiring more spending in 1978. Secondly, the platforms of elite parties themselves over time. Both parties have moved to the left over the past 30 years on homosexuality, for example, while party positions on spending issues vacillate slightly based on political and economic events. Given the nature of the survey data, comparing citizens to the mean of their survey year gives a more reliable—though by no means perfect—reflection of where citizens stand relative to party elites than does relying on simple absolute scales.

<sup>41</sup> Respondents are assigned to the election year most recent to the year in which their survey was completed.



taken for granted—in 2000, for example, more than 35% were, on balance, inconsistent with their party on issues. But polarization has made elite party issue positions clearer and, as a result, has made it easier for citizens to align their own attitudes to match.

We can break down these aggregate results into consistency on various *dimensions* of preference. Although the dimensionality of policy preferences in the electorate is the subject of considerable and conflicting debate, I take a broad look at the structure of policy preferences on these GSS questions by conducting a simple factor analysis of individual-level preferences. The purpose of this exploratory exercise is to understand what, in broad terms, citizens can hold “liberal” or “conservative” policy preferences on. Although there is some evidence that, in the aggregate, policy conflict can be collapsed to a single dimension (and that it is this single dimension that strongly predicts electoral and policy outcomes), for individual citizens at individual points in time, policy preferences can be organized differently.

The factor analysis reveals 3 distinct dimensions of preference (see Table 4).<sup>42</sup> Two of these dimensions are easily interpretable. One, which I label preferences for *distributive* issues, includes 6 social programs—education and environmental protection, for example—in which benefits accrue to all segments of society. They are issues of the role of the federal government in providing services and spending money—and, as such, have a clear “liberal/Democrat,” “conservative/Republican” position—but are program in which nearly all citizens receive some societal benefit, regardless of income. A second dimension contains just two issues: preferences for “abortion” and “homosexual relations.” This *moral*

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<sup>42</sup> While individual-level factor analysis reveals three distinct dimensions of preferences, aggregate analysis reveals only two—a “moral” dimension, and a broader “scope of government” dimension onto which both redistributive and distributive issues fall.

dimension has been growing in prominence in recent years, reflecting preferences for two of the most prominent issues in the growing “cultural” conflict between the two parties.

The third dimension is more difficult to categorize. It contains five issues: spending on foreign aid, the military, blacks and welfare, and the death penalty. The dimension contains three issues—welfare, foreign aid, and helping blacks—that are more proximately redistributive: they deal with the role of the federal government in providing for the disadvantaged and in spending money on programs targeted to benefit specific social groups. But the dimension contains two other issues—the death penalty and military spending—that have a punitive component to them. While dealing proximately with redistribution, preferences for spending on blacks and welfare have a racial component to them as well. I loosely label this dimension as “*redistributive*,” with the understanding that it contains racial- and crime-and-punishment connotations as well. Perhaps more to the point, this dimension contains most of the issues related to the ongoing conflict between rich and poor, and advantaged and disadvantaged: they comprise the core of what parties have argued over for the past 50 (or more) years (Stimson 2004). Although some have argued that the importance of these issues have been surpassed by that of moral or cultural issues (Hunter 1994, Davis and Robinson 1997), the issues on this dimension still figure prominently in elite party discourse (e.g., Stonecash 2001).

Figure 14 examines partisanship-policy preference consistency for each of the three dimensions. As would be expected given their increased role in elite party discourse, consistency on moral issues has increased considerably over the past 30 years. But even so, citizens are still less likely to hold consistent preferences on this dimension than on any others. Instead, the dimension with the largest degree of partisanship-policy preference

consistency is the redistributive dimension: the number of citizens with consistent “redistributive” preferences has also increased considerably over the past 30 years. Only for “distributive” issues has there not been a significant increase in the number of citizens who hold consistent preferences as parties have polarized, although there are still more citizens consistent with their party on this dimension than on the moral dimension.

The broad message is that there remains considerable heterogeneity in policy preferences among partisans: a large portion of American partisans do not hold issue preferences consistent with their party’s elites. For a great number of citizens, in other words, partisanship seems to be largely an affective attachment—to the symbols or label of the party itself—rather than a partisanship grounded in approval of preferences for that party’s policy positions.

What are the correlates of partisanship-policy preference consistency? Table 5 presents the results of simple analyses predicting aggregate consistency for Democrats and Republicans from a standard battery of individual and contextual variables. Consistency in these tables is operationalized in two ways: first, by using the simple “dummy” measure as described above (coded “1” for citizens with consistent preferences and “0” for citizens with inconsistent preferences). Secondly, through a continuous measure, where preferences for the mean-centered additive scale of 14 issues are recoded such that positive scores represent preferences more liberal than the mean in a given year for Democratic respondents and more conservative than the mean for Republican respondents (and vice-versa for negative scores).<sup>43</sup> Higher (positive) values represent a greater degree of consistency (i.e., Democrats

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<sup>43</sup> Although the consistent/inconsistent dichotomy is illustrative, I operationalize consistency as a continuous measure in this and the remaining analyses for two reasons. First, although it is reasonable to expect that many partisans will be “cross-pressured” (Hillygus and Shields

that are more liberal or Republicans more conservative than the mean), while larger negative values represent a greater degree of *inconsistency*.

Elite party polarization (operationalized here as differences between mean DW-Nominate scores in the House of Representatives) has increased the pervasiveness of consistency for both Democrats and Republicans. Stronger partisans of both parties are also more likely to be consistent, although the effect is relatively modest: holding other variables constant at their mean or modal values, strong Republicans are 12 percentage points more likely to hold consistent preferences than “leaning” Republicans, and the difference between strong and leaning Democrats is only 4%. Black, female, and younger Democrats are more likely to be consistent with their party on issues, while the inverse is true for black, female, and young Republicans. This finding is not particularly surprising, given the operationally liberal tendencies of these groups, but does reinforce the notion that citizens can identify with parties for many reasons not related to policy preferences. Interestingly, increased education has differential effects for the two parties, considerably increasing the degree of consistency for Democrats but marginally *decreasing* it for Republicans.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, only for Republicans is *voting* a significant predictor of policy-partisanship consistency. Republican voters are more likely to hold policy preferences consistent with

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2004) by non-party concerns on one issue or another, the fewer cross-pressures citizens have, the more consistency should matter. Second, given the fact that these 14 issues are not a perfectly random sample of the whole of issue conflict, and given the measurement error emblematic in any measure of preferences drawn from survey questions, it is likely that many individuals are misclassified using the simple dichotomous measure, simply because of the way that consistency is operationalized. Looking at consistency as a continuous measure can help to mitigate—though by no means eliminate—these concerns.

<sup>44</sup> There is some evidence that this relationship is changing over time: the relationship between education and liberalism among Republicans is weakening (and perhaps, even reversing) over time. I leave this (and other contextual changes) out in this descriptive analysis, although it is an interesting finding that deserves further explanation.

party, but no such relationship exists for Democrats. Understanding why these differences exist is beyond the scope of this paper, but the finding does suggest that if policy consistency does indeed matter to party-line voting, the fact that “consistent” Republicans are more likely to vote may help to explain why Republicans are less likely than Democrats to “defect” (Denardo 1980, 1986) from their party attachment in Presidential elections.

### **Policy consistency and party-line voting**

I now turn to understanding the impact of policy consistency on the decision to cast a party-line vote. The first step is to examine the baseline prediction: does partisanship-policy consistency matter to party-line voting?

Although the end goal of this analysis is to understand Presidential-level voting, the theoretical interest is not vote choice explicitly, but rather *party-line voting*: the decision to either vote for candidates of one’s own party or “defect” and vote for the candidate of the opposing party (or a third party). I thus estimate a simple binary-choice model of party-line voting in Presidential elections from 1972-2000.<sup>45</sup> The dependent variable is simply “1” for those who voted for their party’s candidate for president and “0” for those who voted for the other major party-candidate or a minor-party candidate. The key independent variable is policy consistency. All GSS respondents who were asked all 14 policy preference questions and reported voting for President in the election year most proximate to their survey are included in this pooled analysis.

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<sup>45</sup> All estimates to come will be logit estimates. Since the dependent variable—party-line voting—is considerably skewed, I also estimated all of the models using complementary log-log analysis. There are some slight differences in the results, but in no case does the significance of any of the variables of theoretical interest change as a result of technique. For sake of simplicity, I report logit results here.

The other independent variables in the model control for standard (and important) correlates of party-line voting. Demographic variables (*race*, *gender*, and *age*) are included, as are the individual characteristics *strength of partisanship* and *education*, as both matter to party-line voting (Denardo 1980). The presence of a viable *third party candidate* should obviously decrease party voting.<sup>46</sup> In addition, since party-line voting has been steadily rising since 1972, I also include a time counter of the *year of election* (rescaled such that respondents who voted in the 1972 election receive a value of 0, those who voted in 1976 receive a value of 4, and so on): if party polarization has increased the tendency for citizens to vote for their party independent of other factors (e.g., changes in the number of citizens who hold consistent policy preferences), this variable should be significant and positive. Finally, since the GSS does not include measures of economic conditions, candidate traits, or any other election-specific factors that would affect the degree to which Democrats and Republicans would vote for their own party's candidates, I include a measure of the *Republican percentage of the two-party vote among independent voters* as a way to (crudely) control for all other external factors that might influence the decision to vote with or against one's party.<sup>47</sup> Because of the important differences in predicting policy consistency for Democrats and Republicans—and the fact that there may be important differences between Democrats and Republicans in the relationship between partisanship and the vote (Denardo 1980)—I estimate separate models for Democratic and Republican identifiers.

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<sup>46</sup> The years with viable third party candidates are 1980, 1992, and 1996.

<sup>47</sup> This variable is somewhat confounding: it is derived using data from the same election years for which I am trying to predict party-line votes. I include it as a crude way to proxy for all other factors that affect electoral outcomes, but for which I do not have measures. It is worth noting that excluding this variable from this and subsequent analyses matters little to overall results.

Results are presented in Table 6. The implication of this baseline analysis is clear: issue consistency matters. Higher levels of policy lead to an increased likelihood of party-line voting. The importance of consistency is larger for Democrats than it is for Republicans—perhaps a function of the fact that a greater proportion of “inconsistent” Democrats are likely to vote—but for both parties, policy consistency is an important factor. Most controls matter in the expected way: stronger partisans are more likely to be party-line voters, as are older respondents (those whose affective commitment to partisanship has solidified over time) and (at least among Democrats) the more educated, but the impact of consistency holds up in a multivariate context.

Interestingly, after controlling for consistency and other individual-level characteristics, there is no significant time trend in party-line voting. As parties have polarized, a greater proportion of citizens are holding policy preferences consistent with their partisanship. Given that consistent citizens are more likely to cast party-line votes, increased consistency seems to explain the aggregate-level increase in party voting. Increased levels of policy consistency in the electorate, in other words, may be the reason behind increased party voting in recent elections.

Figure 15 provides a gauge of the substantive importance of policy consistency to party-line voting: this figure shows the predicted probabilities of party-line voting for a hypothetical respondent at various levels of consistency (holding other variables constant). The “maximum effects” of consistency are very large: moving from the minimum to maximum levels of consistency increases the probability of a party-line vote by 47 percentage points (from 45 percent to 92 percent) for Democrats, and 18 percentage points (from 78 to 96 percentage points) for Republicans. Since respondents at the very far extremes

of consistency tend to be outliers—with consistency scores far higher or lower than the regular range of responses—perhaps a more realistic gauge of the impact of the “real world” impact of consistency is to look at the expected impact as respondents move from the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile of consistency—meaning that they are less consistent with their party than 95 percent of other partisans—to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile. Even by this measure, policy consistency matters a great deal, increasing the likelihood of party voting by 24 percentage points for Democrats and 10 percentage points for Republicans.

For Democrats, this 24 percent difference is comparable to the expected 27-percentage-point difference between strong and “leaning” partisans, and is considerably greater than the 10-point difference between the youngest and oldest survey respondents. The results for Republicans are muted (as Republicans with all combinations of characteristics are more likely to vote with their party), but tell a similar story—the 10 point “maximum effect” of policy consistency is comparable to the 14-point difference between strong and weak partisans, and the 5-point difference between young and old. The key point is that while the affective attachment to party is powerful—even the most highly inconsistent partisans will still vote with party a majority of the time—the reinforcement of policy consistency plays a powerful role in the decision to cast a party-line vote.

### **Party voting and the dimensionality of policy conflict**

Although the percentage of citizens who hold consistent preferences has grown over time, the aggregate impact of issue consistency on party-line voting appears to have remained constant.<sup>48</sup> But despite this aggregate stability, the relative importance of various *dimensions* of policy conflict to electoral choice may have changed in recent years. In particular, many

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<sup>48</sup> An estimate of interaction between consistency and election year is not significantly different from zero when entered into the models above.



suggest that “scope-of-government” concerns have been usurped as the defining issues in elite discourse by abortion, gay rights, and other issues of traditional morality. If this is true, we should expect to find that consistency on these dimensions will play a greater role in determining whether partisans cast a party-line vote. We have already seen that partisans are actually less likely to *be* consistent with their party’s ideological position on moral issues than on either of the other dimensions: in terms of party alignment, preferences for moral issues do not divide the party system (see Chapter 2). But it may still be possible that these new dimensions may be differentially *important* to the decision to cast a vote among those who are consistent with their party. The questions raised are twofold: first, what is the relative importance of these dimensions to the decision to cast a party-line vote? Second, how might the relative impact of the dimensions be changing over time?

To explore these questions, I estimate logit models of party-line voting similar to those above, with continuous scales for each of the three dimensions of policy consistency included separately. I interact scales for each of the three dimensions with the election-year time counter to get a sense of how their impact has grown or diminished over time. For each dimension of policy consistency, there will be two coefficients: the first which estimates the “baseline” impact of that dimension in election year 1972 (the first election year in the analysis), and an interaction coefficient, which shows how the impact of the issue dimension has changed.<sup>49</sup> A significant interaction coefficient suggests that the impact of consistency on that dimension on the decision to cast a party-line vote has changed over time.

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<sup>49</sup> Estimating contextual effects using a time counter assumes constant, linear changes in elite context over time. This is an heroic assumption to be sure, but not particularly inconsistent with empirical findings on the nature of elite party change over the past year years (see e.g., Adams 1997, Poole and Rosenthal 1997, Jacobsen 2004). More research needs done to

Results for both Democrats and Republicans are presented in Table 7. As would be expected given the increasing homogeneity on these issues among party elites, moral issues are becoming increasingly important to party-line voting for both Democrats and Republicans in the electorate. It is not surprising that as a greater number of citizens hold moral issues consistent with partisanship—their impact on the decision to cast a party-line vote grows.

An interesting and different trend is occurring, however, for redistributive issues. Despite the fact that the number of partisans who hold redistributive preferences consistent with their party is growing, the impact of consistency on this dimension to party choice is actually declining. This dimension was by far the most powerful dimension in predicting party-line voting in the 1970's, but its importance has decreased over time to the point where it is roughly as important to party-line voting as moral issues. Trends in party *alignment* on this dimension and its *impact* on partisan choice, in other words, are disconnected from one another.

Similarly interesting findings exist for distributive issues distributive issue consistency is never a significant predictor of party-line voting for Democrats, and has only a marginal impact on party voting—distinguishable from zero only in 2000—for Republicans. Although mass partisans are as likely to hold consistent preferences on distributive issues as on any other dimension, this dimension appears to be nearly irrelevant to partisans' decisions to cast a party-line vote. There is no ready explanation to square the finding that distributive issues are important to mass party alignment, but not party-line voting. Perhaps when answering questions for distributive issues, citizens react by expressing a preference for the broad

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explicitly ground changes in how citizens use consistency on various dimensions with better measures of elite context change.

platform of their party—e.g., ‘more’ or ‘less’ spending, no matter what the issue—but do not consider these issues to be as important to that platform as issues of spending that are proximately redistributive.

A gauge of the substantive importance of each of these dimensions to the decision to cast a party-line vote is in Figure 16. The two charts in Figure 16 graph the expected increase in the probability of party voting as respondents move from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of consistency on a given dimension on (holding other variables constant at their mean or modal values). For both Democrats and Republicans, the redistributive dimension was essentially the only dimension on which consistency mattered to party voting in the 1970’s, and it mattered a great deal: moving from near the minimum to maximum level of consistency on this dimension in 1972, for example, was expected to increase the likelihood of a party-line vote by nearly 30 percentage points for Democrats and nearly 20 points for Republicans. The impact of redistributive consistency has steadily declined for both parties, however, and by 2000, its expected impact on party-line voting was expected to be slightly less than for that of moral issues.

These findings illustrate the dimension-specific changes in impact of policy consistency on party-line voting. More needs done to explain the interesting disparities between the *pervasiveness* of consistency for the distributive and redistributive dimensions and their importance to party-line voting, and to more firmly ground these results explicitly in changes in the elite context. But the results do suggest that there have been systematic changes in the relative importance of consistency –changes that correspond, at least in broad terms, to changes in elite party discourse over the past 30 years.

### Attributes of individual and context

The final goal of this paper is to evaluate how individual and contextual characteristics mediate the relationship between policy consistency and party voting. If consistency matters because it provides a cognitive reinforcement to the affective commitment that drives party-line voting in “normal” circumstances, then it should matter more for individuals and in contexts where the baseline affective connection to party is weakened, or the ability to process the information necessary for this “cognitive” reinforcement is strengthened.

To evaluate these ideas, I return to the logit models from Table 6, and introduce interactions between policy consistency and measures of the individual and contextual factors described above. To keep the focus on these mediating effects, and to avoid presenting models with unwieldy numbers of coefficients, I return to the aggregate measure of consistency, moving away from the three-dimensional operationalization in Table 7. By and large, results that are significant in the aggregate are also significant in models estimated with interactions for each of the individual dimensions.<sup>50</sup>

I interact policy consistency with two individual and two contextual variables derived from the theory. The first, *formal education*, serves as a proxy for the ability to process and act upon policy-related material when deciding to cast a party-line vote. The expectation is that the impact of policy consistency will be greater for respondents with higher levels of

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<sup>50</sup> Specifically, all interaction coefficients that are significant for aggregate consistency are also significant for both the *moral* and *redistributive* dimensions. Consistent with the results above, most interactions involving *distributive* issues are non-significant. Only the interaction between formal education and distributive issues (for both Democrats and Republicans) is significant, suggesting that although distributive issue consistency may not be particularly relevant to party choice in general, it does matter a bit for the more highly educated.

formal education. *Strength of partisanship* is also relevant, as weaker partisans—those with a weaker affective commitment to party—should place a greater weight on issue consistency.

We know that consistency should matter more when the relative attractiveness of one's own party candidate decreases, but finding an objective measure of the attractiveness of the major party candidates is difficult. There are a broad number of factors—candidate personality, economic conditions, and the state of policy—that affect whether the Democratic or Republican candidate is more appealing to voters. To find a very rough and simple proxy for all of these factors, I use the electoral outcomes metric introduced above: *Republican percentage of the two-party vote among independents*. This measure is limited in many ways. But the measure does provide at least a broad indicator of how *non-partisans* saw the choice between the two candidates (taking into account the myriad factors that affected this choice), and can serve as at least an indirect measure of how popular the candidates were in relative terms. The expectation is that a higher Republican percentage of the vote will increase the importance of consistency for Democrats (as the broader electoral environment makes the standing decision to vote for the Democratic party's candidate less appealing) while decreasing its importance for Republicans. Finally, the presence of a viable *third party candidate* should increase the importance of consistency for both parties.

Results for both Democrats and Republicans are in Table 8. The pattern of results is broadly similar across parties, and generally supportive of the idea that individual and contextual factors mediate the importance of consistency. Education serves as a mediator for both parties: educated citizens weight policy consistency more heavily when determining whether to cast a party-line vote. Moving from “low” (5<sup>th</sup> percentile) to “high” (95<sup>th</sup> percentile) consistency for Democrats, for example, increases the expected probability of

party-line voting 16 percentage points for respondents with less than a high school education, but by more than 35 points for respondents with a graduate degree (see Figure 17). The mediating effect is similar for Republicans: for Republicans with low levels of education, policy consistency is almost meaningless. But the effect increases with education, and for Republicans with graduate degree, the expected impact of moving from “low” to “high” policy consistency on party voting is nearly 17 percentage points.

Strength of partisanship matters as well. For Democrats, the mediating impact of strength of partisanship is significant and substantively important, as moving from low to high policy consistency increases the probability of a party-line vote 36 percentage points for “leaning” Democrats, but only 21 percentage points for strong Democrats. For Democrats, at least, weaker partisans rely more on the cognitive reinforcement of policy consistency than those whose affective commitment to party is stronger. The mediating impact of strength of partisanship for Republicans is in the expected direction with an expected impact similar to that for Democrats, but is only marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ).

There is also evidence that context matters to the importance of policy consistency. Strong third party candidates increase the importance of consistency for both Democrats and Republicans—when a viable candidate from outside the major party system enters the electoral context, citizens must reconsider their commitment to party in a way that they are not normally asked to do. In these circumstances, those who have the reinforcement of policy preferences consistent with their party’s elites are more likely to remain loyal to their party’s candidate. The impact of moving from low to high consistency increases the likelihood of a party-line vote 37% for Democrats and 14% for Republicans when a viable third party

candidate is involved in the race, and 18% for Democrats and 6% for Republicans when one does not.

Finally (and at least for Democrats) the relative attractiveness of the major party candidates is a powerful mediating influence. As the Democratic candidate becomes less popular, policy consistency becomes more important to the decision to cast a party-line vote. Democrats are not only less likely to vote for their party's candidate when he is perceived as weak, in other words, but are also more likely to need the reinforcement of policy consistency to remain with "their" party's candidates. When the Democratic candidate is strong, consistency is less relevant: all types of partisans are more likely to stay with "their" candidate, regardless of policy. Policy consistency is expected to be irrelevant to party-line voting during the strongest Democratic context (1992) in this time period—the expected impact of moving from "low" to "high" policy consistency to party is essentially zero when the Democratic vote share is this high—but increases the expected probability of a party-line vote by roughly 37 percentage points during the weakest Democrat context (1972). Again, the mediating effects of candidate attractiveness are in the expected direction for Republicans, but not statistically significant.

### **Conclusions and future research**

This paper has advanced a different way to look at the often-studied relationship between partisanship, issues, and the vote, examining the impact of partisanship-policy preference *consistency* on the decision to cast a party-line vote. The models show that although partisanship's role is paramount for all partisans, partisanship-policy preference *consistency* strongly affects the decision to cast a party-line vote. Further, the expected impact of consistency on party voting is dependent on attributes of the individual or political context

that makes one's affective commitment to party weaker, one's ability to understand the relationship between partisanship and policy strong, or one's own candidate less attractive. Those whose affective commitment to partisanship is reinforced by support for their party's broad policy worldview are more likely to vote with their party's candidate.

The paper suggests a general framework to explain “defections” from party identification in vote choice and a way to better understand the role of issues in electoral choice more generally. The impact of party identification on vote choice is not uniform, not does it vary simply with depth of affective commitment to party: instead, the interplay between partisanship and policy positions matters considerably. Despite the fact that many citizens have taken steps to align their partisanship and policy preferences with one another, many others hold policy preferences largely inconsistent with those of party elites. It is only for the former group that a party vote is a vote not only for one's standing predispositions, but also a statement of support for the type of public policy that an individual would like to see. In this view, issue positions are important to vote choice not simply because a subset of voters can use issues to orient themselves in ideological space and make political decisions accordingly, but because issue positions can provide a reinforcement—grounded in proximate policy considerations—of one's own affective orientation to the political world. It is this ‘cognitive’ reinforcement that can often be the difference in deciding whether to cast a party line vote.

The results also shed at least indirect light on important changes in electoral behavior in the United States. First, this paper provides a simple and direct explanation of why party-line voting has increased in recent elections. This increase is sometimes attributed to the sharpening rhetoric from party elites and activists and the resulting “resurgence” (Cohen et.



al 2001) of partisan commitment in the electorate. But at least as measured by strength of partisanship, the strength of the public's affective commitments to party have not increased over the past 30 years—there are actually fewer “strong” partisans now than in the 1950's and 60's (see Bartels 2002). But recent increases—brought about, in all likelihood by elite polarization—in the percentage of all partisans (“strong,” “weak,” and “leaning”) who hold consistent preferences on issues means that more citizens view partisanship not only as affective commitment, but as support for a party's policy beliefs. Given that these citizens—especially weak partisans—are more likely to vote for their party's candidates, an increase in the number of “consistent” citizens will lead to an increase in the number of party-line votes cast.<sup>51</sup> In the aggregate, increases in partisanship-policy preference consistency can explain, at least in large part, increases in party voting over the past 30 years.

Further, this analysis implies that increases in *individual-level* policy consistency—combined with the polarization of party platforms—are making for considerable changes in how the *aggregate* electorate updates beliefs and makes political decisions. The electorate is increasingly comprised of citizens with a strong propensity to vote with their party—who are evaluating increasingly stark, clear choices. This means that partisans in the electorate should be less likely to abandon their party when deciding how to vote, even if the electoral context makes one's own party candidate less attractive. The implications of this are that as partisanship-policy preference consistency in the electorate increases, other factors thought to

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<sup>51</sup> Similarly, even after controlling for education and other socioeconomic characteristics, Democrats are less likely to cast a party-line vote than are Republicans. The fact that Republican voters—unlike Democratic voters—are more likely than nonvoters to hold policy preferences consistent with their party's elites suggests that Republican voters are a self-selected “pool” of voters that are more predisposed—for reasons relating to policy consistency—to vote for their party's candidates regardless of circumstances. Explaining the differential relationship between consistency, electoral participation, and party-line voting is a subject for future research.

influence electoral choice in the aggregate—the state of the economy, for example—should be less important, and the public’s choices should vacillate less over the course of the electoral cycle.. Among other things, we should see less variability in pre-election polling, less impact of economic and contextual factors on the vote, and smaller discrepancies between the distribution of partisanship in the electorate and the distribution of the major party vote. The growing number of “consistent” citizens, in other words, may make deviations from the “normal vote” increasingly smaller. There is at least some evidence that this is the case (Bafumi 2005).

To be sure, this analysis presents a broad-brush picture of the relevance of policy consistency to electoral choices. More nuanced research into the effects of changes in elite context are needed, as the impact of elite context on the importance—and mediators—of policy consistency is certainly more complex than the simple time trends noted here. Also, more needs to be done to explain the curious findings across parties and issue domains, explaining, for example, why Democrats and Republicans (at least in the aggregate) seem to evaluate the impact of policy consistency differently when making electoral decisions. Perhaps segmenting the results further—by region, for example—may help to explain these differences.

In addition, understanding the reasons behind differences in the *pervasiveness* of “moral issue-“partisanship consistency and the relative *impact* of moral issues to party-line voting may help to shed light on the degree to which the oft-suggested American “cultural” alignment is actually occurring. With respect to mass party alignment, there is little evidence that moral and cultural issues play any special role in defining the mass party system—at least when compared to “scope of government” concerns. But these issues do play a disproportionate

role in shaping the electoral decisions of mass partisans. A great deal of work—including Chapter 2 here—has tried to explain the relationship between moral issues, social welfare issues, and partisanship—in particular, the relative importance of these two types of issues to the mass party system. These findings suggest that the relationship between different dimensions of preference and mass party behavior may be more complex than is often assumed.

As with the first two chapters, this paper explores the reciprocal linkages (both theoretical and empirical) commonplace individual-level political characteristics—policy preferences, party identification, and the vote—and the macro-political context. The general finding is that context matters—not only in affecting individual-level attitudes and behaviors, but in affecting the *relationship* between different individual-level behaviors and attitudes in a way that has complex implications for macro-political outcomes. It is hoped that these chapters provide a basis for a broader research program into the interesting and complex interactions between the micro- and macro- aspects of American political behavior.

## APPENDIX A: VARIABLES AND CODING

1-11) **Government Spending:** We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much money, too little money, or about the right amount on...

- 1) The military, armaments and defense?
- 2) Foreign aid?
- 3) Solving the problems of big cities?
- 4) Halting the rising crime rate?
- 5) Dealing with drug addiction?
- 6) Improving the Nation's education system?
- 7) Improving and protecting the environment?
- 8) Welfare?
- 9) Improving and protecting the nation's health?
- 10) Improving the conditions of Blacks?
- 11) Space exploration?

All government spending questions with the exception of the "military, armaments, and defense" question were coded as 1 for "too little spending" and -1 for "too much spending." The military armaments, and defense question was coded 1 for "too much spending" and -1 for "too little spending." "Don't know," "About the right amount of spending," and "refused to answer" responses were coded as "0" for all questions.

- 12) **Death Penalty:** Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? Coded 1 for “favor,” -1 for “oppose,” and 0 for “don’t know.”
- 13) **Homosexual Relations:** What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex--do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all? Coded 1 for “not wrong at all,” 0 for “almost always wrong” or “wrong only sometimes,” and -1 for “always wrong.”
- 14) **Abortion scale:** Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if...
- A) there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?
  - B) the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?
  - C) she is married and does not want any more children?
  - D) if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?
  - E) she became pregnant as a result of rape?
  - F) if she is not married and does not want to marry the man?

All questions were coded 1 for “yes,” -1 for “no,” and 0 for “don’t know” or “Refused to answer.” Each respondent’s answers to the six questions were summed and divided by six to give a summary measure of their feelings toward abortion.

*Table 1. Changes in Mass Party Polarization, 1973-2002.*

	Changes in Mass Party Polarization (including partisan leaners)	Changes in Mass Party Polarization (including partisan leaners, Southern respondents excluded)
Changes in Elite Polarization	50.76 * (15.55)	56.15 * (13.53)
Mass Polarization $_{(t-1)}$	-.89 * (.26)	-.93 * (.22)
Elite Polarization $_{(t-1)}$	9.76 * (4.60)	9.42 * (3.93)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.49	.62
SEE	1.07	0.95
Lyung-Box Q	4.66 (p<.46)	4.05 (p<.54)
LM Test for first-order ARCH	.11 (p<.75)	1.61 (p<.21)
N	14	14

\*  $p < .05$

Source: General Social Surveys, Cumulative File.

Standard Errors of coefficients are in parentheses.

The non-significant Q-statistics show that the models' residuals have been reduced to white noise.

The non-significant ARCH test statistics indicate that the models produce no clustering of large or small residuals.

**Table 2. Changes in Mass Party Polarization among High- and Low- Education Citizens, 1973-2002.**

	Changes in Mass Party Polarization, at or above median education	Changes in Mass Party Polarization, below median education
Changes in Elite Polarization	73.80 * (16.40)	19.92 (15.73)
Mass Polarization <sub>(t-1)</sub>	-1.22 * (.24)	-.83 * (.29)
Elite Polarization <sub>(t-1)</sub>	15.72 * (4.82)	5.55 (3.96)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.69	.31
SEE	1.09	1.20
Lyung-Box Q	3.33 (p<.65)	1.09 (p<.30)
LM Test for first-order ARCH	.06 (p<.82)	12.53 * (p<.03)
N	14	14

\* p < .05

Source: General Social Surveys, Cumulative File.  
Standard Errors of coefficients are in parentheses.

**Table 3. Context-dependent predictors of partisanship.**

	Baseline impact (when NOMINATE=.542, 1973-74)	Variable * NOMINATE
New Deal Issues	-1.88 * (.173)	-5.44 * (1.22)
Moral Issues	-.11 (.10)	-3.71 * (.66)
Real Income (logged)	.82 * (.17)	1.94 + (1.12)
Father's Education	1.14 * (.11)	-1.42 * (.68)
Urban	-.14 * (.06)	.19 (.42)
Rural	.05 (.06)	-1.11 * (.54)
Catholic	-.70 * (.06)	1.82 * (.43)
Jewish	-1.01 * (.13)	.13 (1.04)
Religious Fundamentalist	-.23 * (.06)	1.37 * (.44)
Black	-1.17 * (.08)	-.95 (.61)
Female	.09 + (.05)	-1.15 * (.34)
Southern White	-.11 + (.06)	.88 * (.45)
DW-Nominate	5.28 * (1.16)	
Constant	3.26 * (.17)	
R <sup>2</sup>	.14	
N	12677	

Notes: Table entries are OLS Coefficients (Robust standard errors in parentheses). All predictors have been scaled to 0-1 range. \* p<.05 + = p<.10



**Table 4. Individual-level factor analysis of policy preferences.**

	Factor 1: “Distributive”	Factor 2: “Distributive and Crime”	Factor 3: “Moral”
Environmental Protection	<b>.30</b>	.22	.26
Health Care	<b>.40</b>	.21	.14
Problems of Cities	<b>.31</b>	.28	.14
Crime	<b>.55</b>	-.02	-.04
Drug Addiction	<b>.53</b>	-.07	-.08
Education	<b>.37</b>	.21	.21
Foreign Aid	-.03	<b>.29</b>	-.03
Welfare	.11	<b>.46</b>	-.00
Helping the Conditions of Blacks	.29	<b>.49</b>	.08
Death Penalty	-.04	<b>.39</b>	-.03
Military and Defense	-.02	<b>.27</b>	.17
Abortion	.02	-.08	<b>.45</b>
Homosexual Relations	-.01	.13	<b>.47</b>
Space Exploration	-.06	-.11	.21

Notes: entries are principal-axis factor loadings (varimax rotation).  
 Eigenvalues: Factor 1: 1.23; Factor 2: 1.02; Factor 3; 0.66  
 N= 16379.

Correlation matrix of factor scores:			
	<u>Factor 1</u>	<u>Factor 2</u>	<u>Factor 3</u>
Factor 1	1.0		
Factor 2	.37	1.0	
Factor 3	.11	.07	1.0

*Table 5. Predicting issue consistency in the electorate.*

	Democrats		Republicans	
	Dummy for “consistency”	Continuous Scale	Dummy for “consistency”	Continuous Scale
Education (Highest Degree Obtained)	.39 * (.03)	.81 * (.04)	-.12 * (.03)	-.23 * (.05)
Elite Polarization	.89 * (.28)	1.05 * (.40)	.76 * (.33)	2.67 * (.51)
Strength of Partisanship	.09 * (.03)	.10 * (.05)	.26 * (.04)	.53 * (.06)
Black	1.29 * (.08)	2.03 * (.10)	-1.13 * (.08)	-2.23 * (.27)
Female	.29 * (.05)	.54 * (.08)	-.30 * (.06)	-.71 * (.10)
Real Income	.002 (.001)	.001 (.002)	.002 * (.001)	.004 * (.002)
Age	-.022 * (.002)	-.040 * (.002)	.008 * (.002)	.040 * (.003)
Southern White	-.34 * (.07)	-.68 * (.10)	.11 (.07)	.22 (.12)
Voter	.04 (.06)	.12 (.09)	.26 * (.07)	.47 * (.13)
N	7633	7633	4900	4900
Log-likelihood	-4561.91		-3091.06	
R <sup>2</sup>		.19		.10

Notes: \* p<.05 Standard errors are in parentheses.

*Table 6. Predicting Party-Line Presidential Votes.*

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	Democrats	Republicans
Strength of Partisanship	.75 * (.05)	.70 * (.07)
Education (Highest Degree Obtained)	.05 (.03)	.05 (.04)
Black	1.25 * (.12)	-1.64 * (.25)
Female	-.10 (.07)	-.16 (.09)
Age	.007 * (.002)	.007 * (.002)
Election Year (1972 = 0)	.006 (.005)	-.009 (.007)
Viable third-party candidate	-.56 * (.10)	-.48 * (.14)
Republican percentage of vote	-6.82 * (.59)	6.15 * (.87)
Issue consistency (continuous scale)	.11 * (.01)	.08 * (.01)
N	5433	3854
Log-Likelihood	-2666.19	-1496.84

Notes: \*  $p < .05$  Standard errors in parentheses.

*Table 7. The impact of issue consistency on party-line voting, by dimension results.*

	Democrats	Republicans
Strength of Partisanship	.77 * (.05)	.69 * (.07)
Education (Highest Degree Obtained)	.02 (.03)	.06 (.04)
Black	1.17 * (.12)	-1.50 * (.26)
Female	-.10 (.07)	-.18 (.10)
Age	.006 * (.002)	.008 * (.003)
Election Year (1972 = 0)	.02 (.02)	-.06 (.03)
Viable third-party candidate	-.59 * (.11)	-.51 (.15)
Republican percentage of vote	-7.00 * (.60)	6.13 * (.87)
Moral issues (0-1 scale)	.36 (.24)	-.51 (.42)
Moral issues * election year	.04 * (.02)	.09 * (.02)
Distributive issues (0-1 scale)	.14 (.47)	-.83 * (.75)
Distributive issues * election year	.01 (.04)	.09 * (.05)
Redistributive issues (0-1 scale)	3.41 * (.36)	2.89 * (.65)
Redistributive issues * election year	-.07 * (.03)	-.08 * (.04)
N	5433	3854
Log-Likelihood	-2632.95	-1479.71

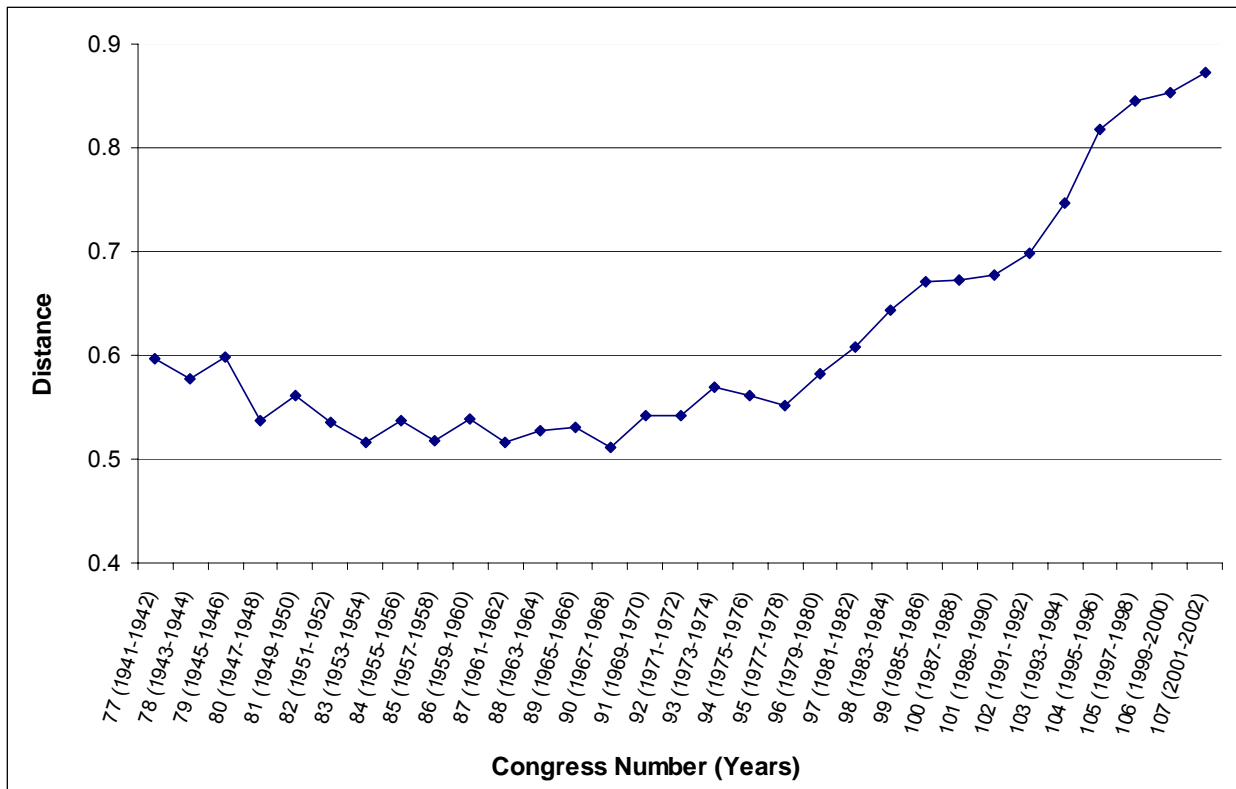
Notes: \* p<.05 Standard Errors in Parentheses.

**Table 8. The impact of issue consistency on party-line voting, mediated by individual and contextual characteristics.**

	Democrats	Republicans
Strength of Partisanship	.76 * (.05)	.68 * (.07)
Education (Highest Degree Obtained)	-.01 (.04)	.03 (.04)
Black	1.17 * (.13)	-1.54 * (.26)
Female	-.10 (.07)	-.18 (.09)
Age	.006 * (.002)	.008 * (.003)
Election Year (1972 = 0)	.01 (.01)	-.010 (.007)
Viable third-party candidate	-.56 * (.10)	-.51 (.14)
Republican percentage of vote	-7.08 * (.60)	6.17 * (.89)
Issue consistency	-.01 (.04)	-.07 * (.06)
Education * Issue Consistency	.04 * (.01)	.03 * (.01)
Strength of Partisanship * Issue Consistency	-.04 * (.01)	.03 (.02)
Republican Percentage of Vote * Issue Consistency	.20 * (.04)	.06 (.06)
Third Party Candidate * Issue Consistency	.06 * (.03)	.06 * (.03)
N	5433	3854
Log-Likelihood	-2666.19	-1496.84

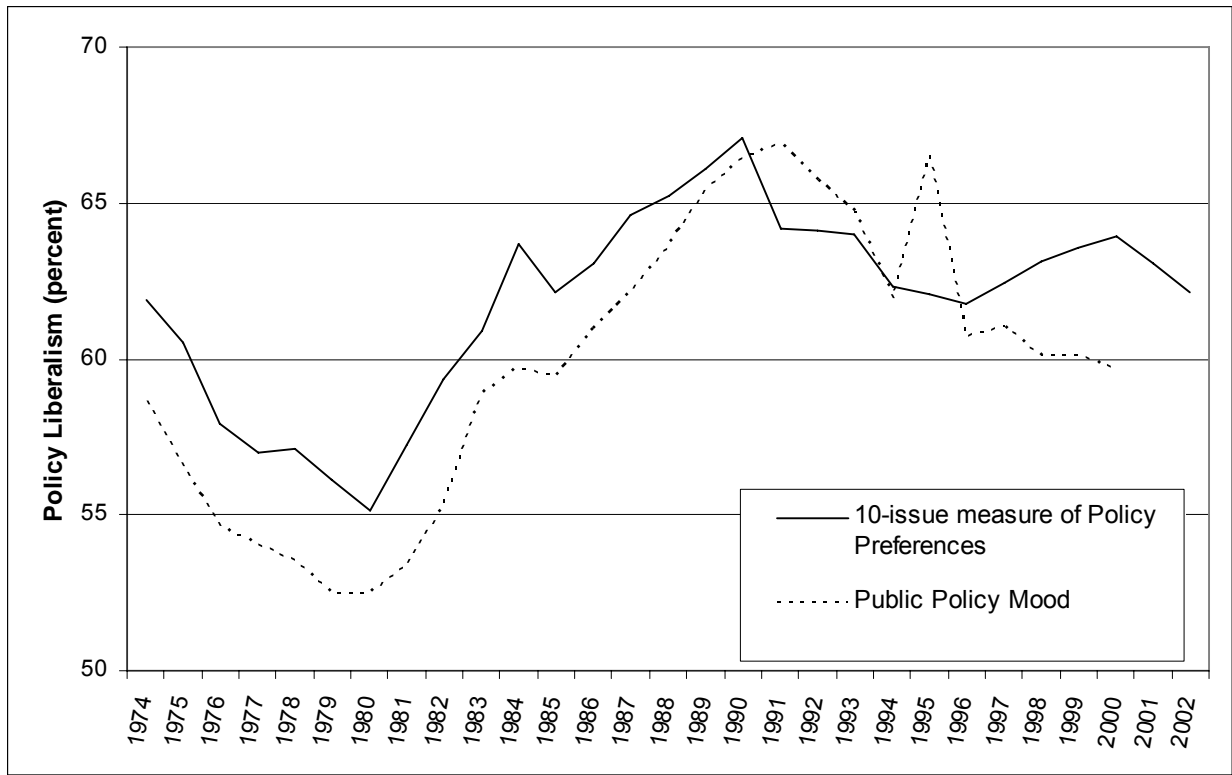
Notes: \* p<.05 Standard Errors in Parentheses.

**Figure 1. Distances between mean Democratic and Republican DW-Nominate Scores in the House of Representatives (First Dimension Estimates)**



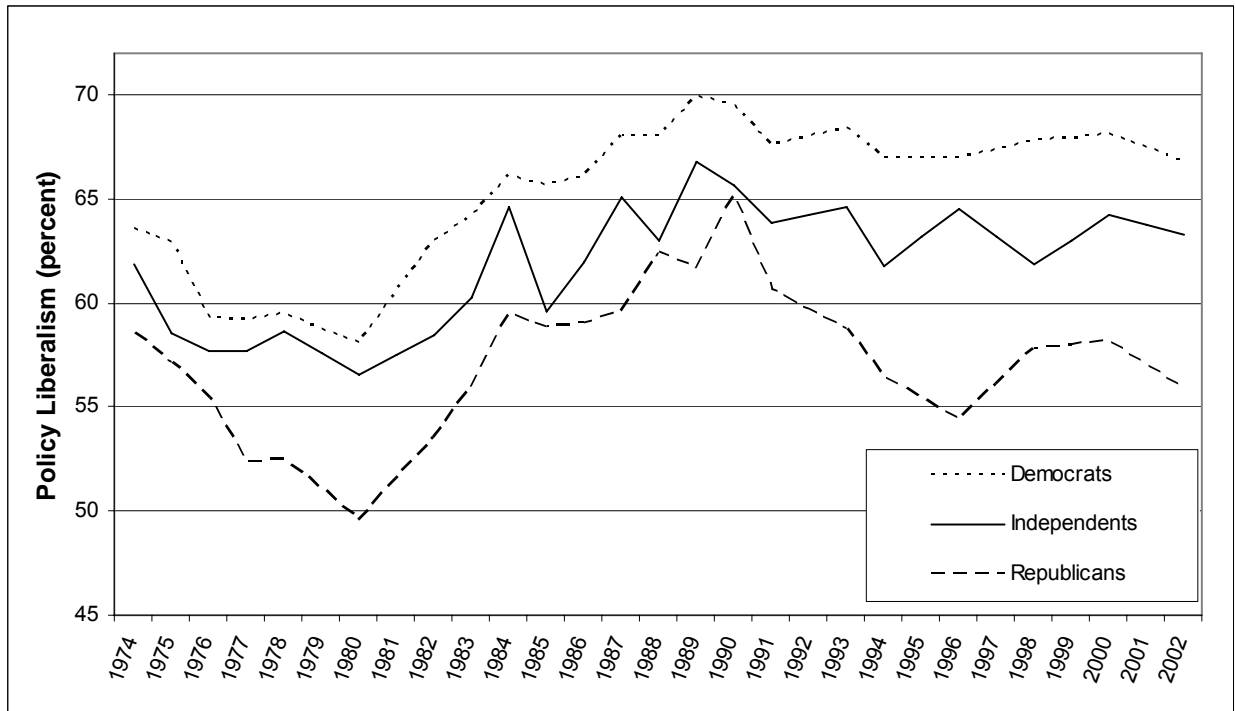
Source: Website of Keith Poole, University of California-San Diego: [voteview.com](http://voteview.com)

**Figure 2. Comparison of 10-issue measure of Liberalism with Public Policy Mood, 1973-2002.**



Source: General Social Surveys Cumulative File, 1974-2002, and the website of James A. Stimson: [www.unc.edu/~jstimson](http://www.unc.edu/~jstimson)

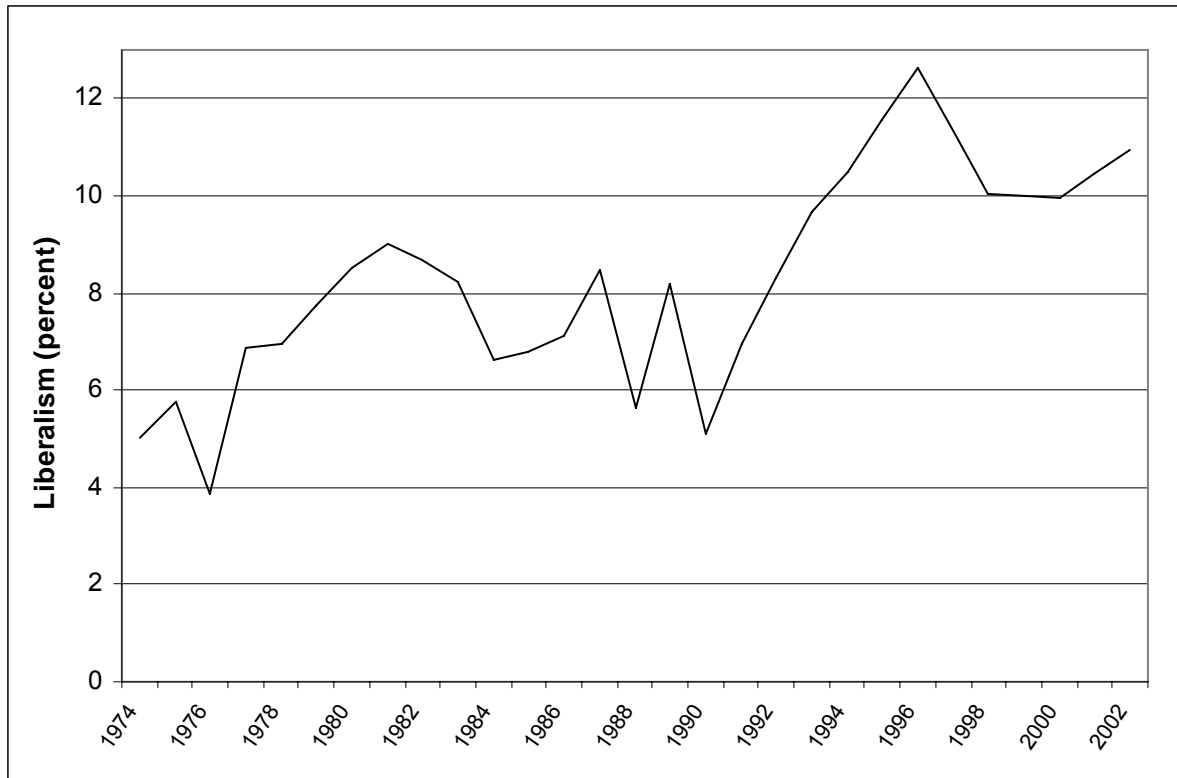
*Figure 3. Policy Preferences of Democrats, Republicans, and Pure Independents.*



Source: General Social Surveys Cumulative File.

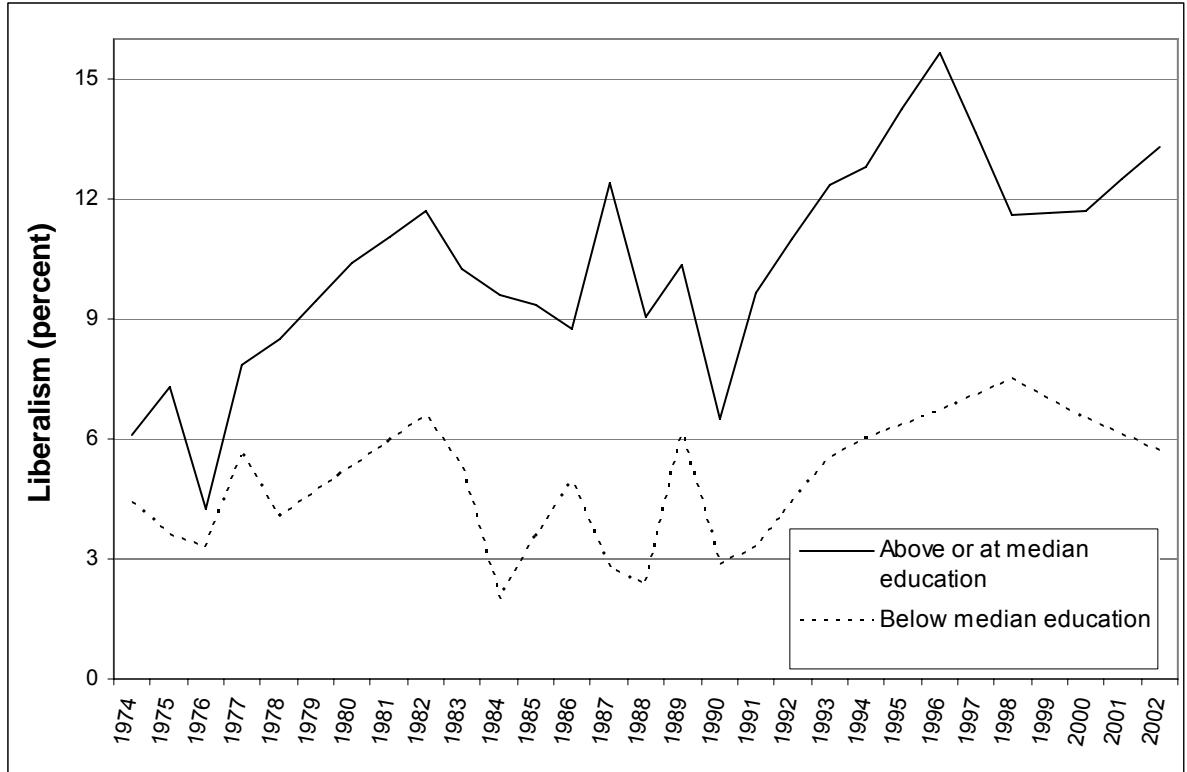


*Figure 4. Distance between policy preferences of Republicans and Democrats.*



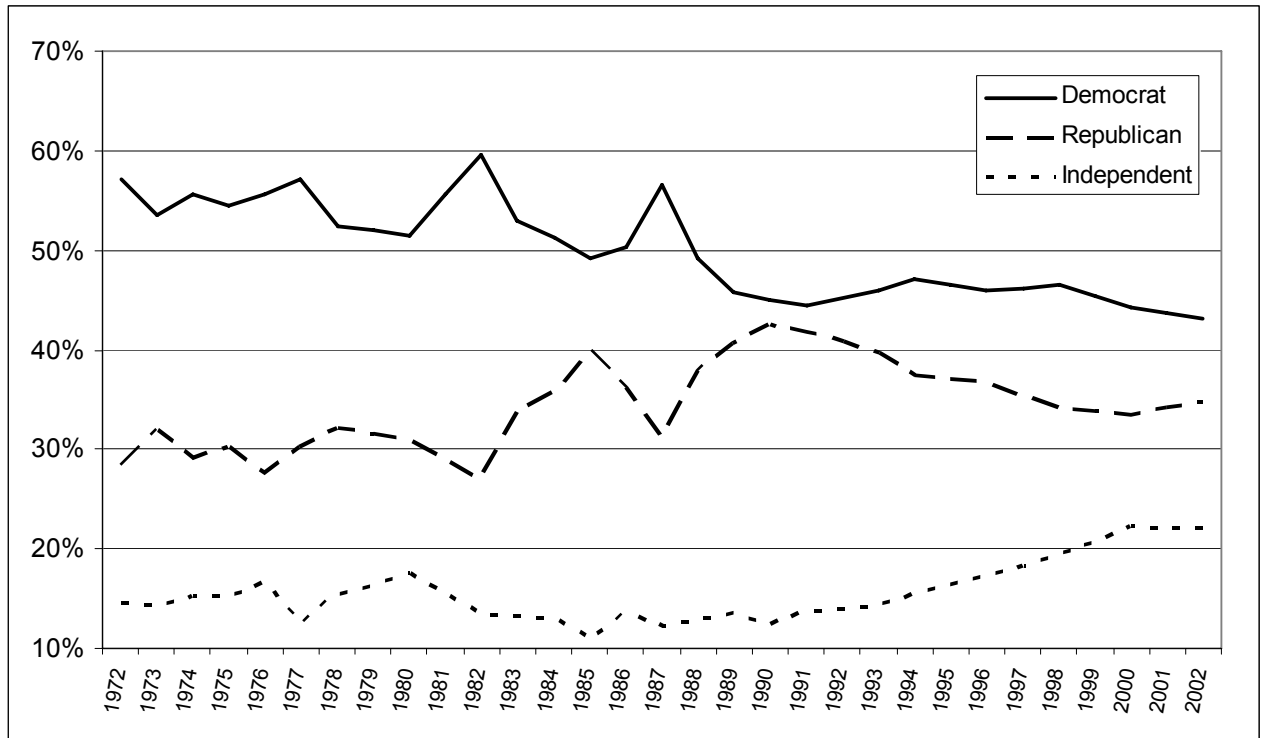
Source: General Social Surveys Cumulative File.

**Figure 5. Distance between policy preferences of high- and low-education Republicans and Democrats)**

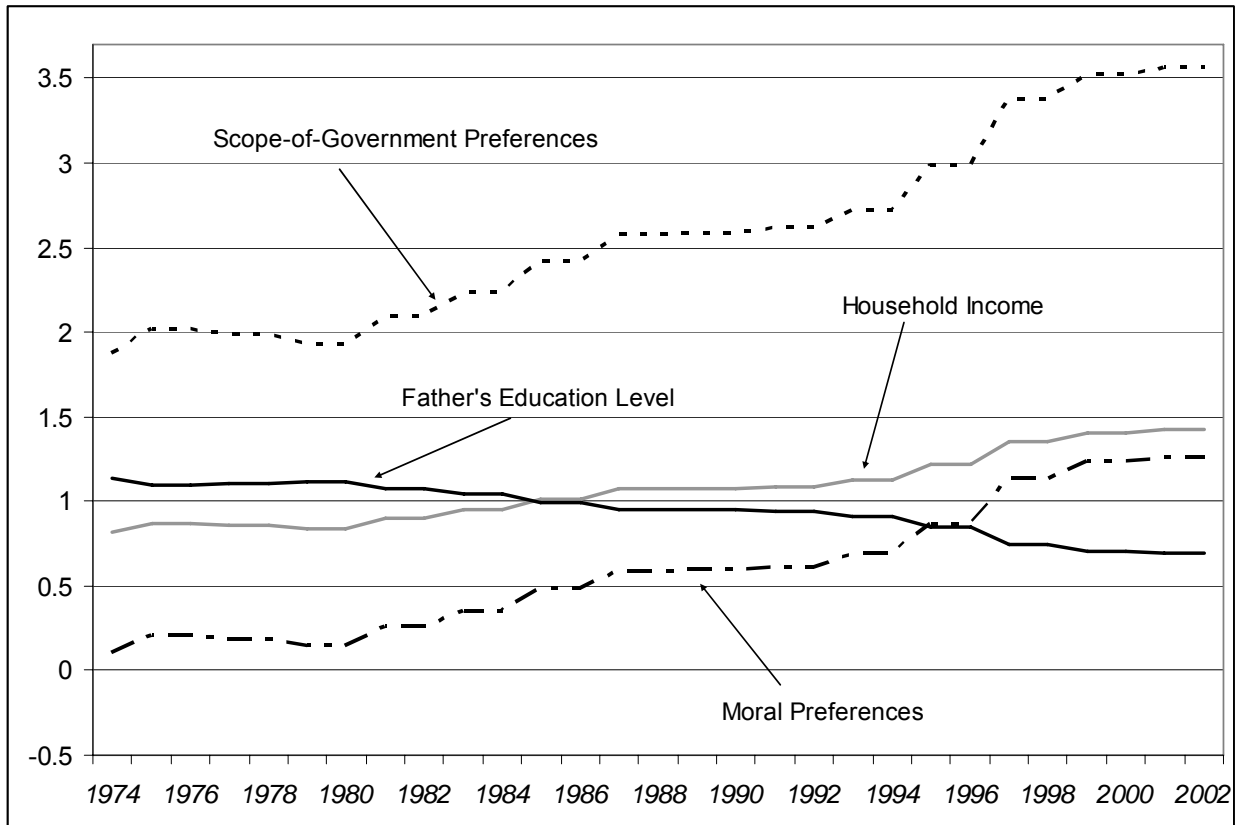


Source: General Social Surveys Cumulative File

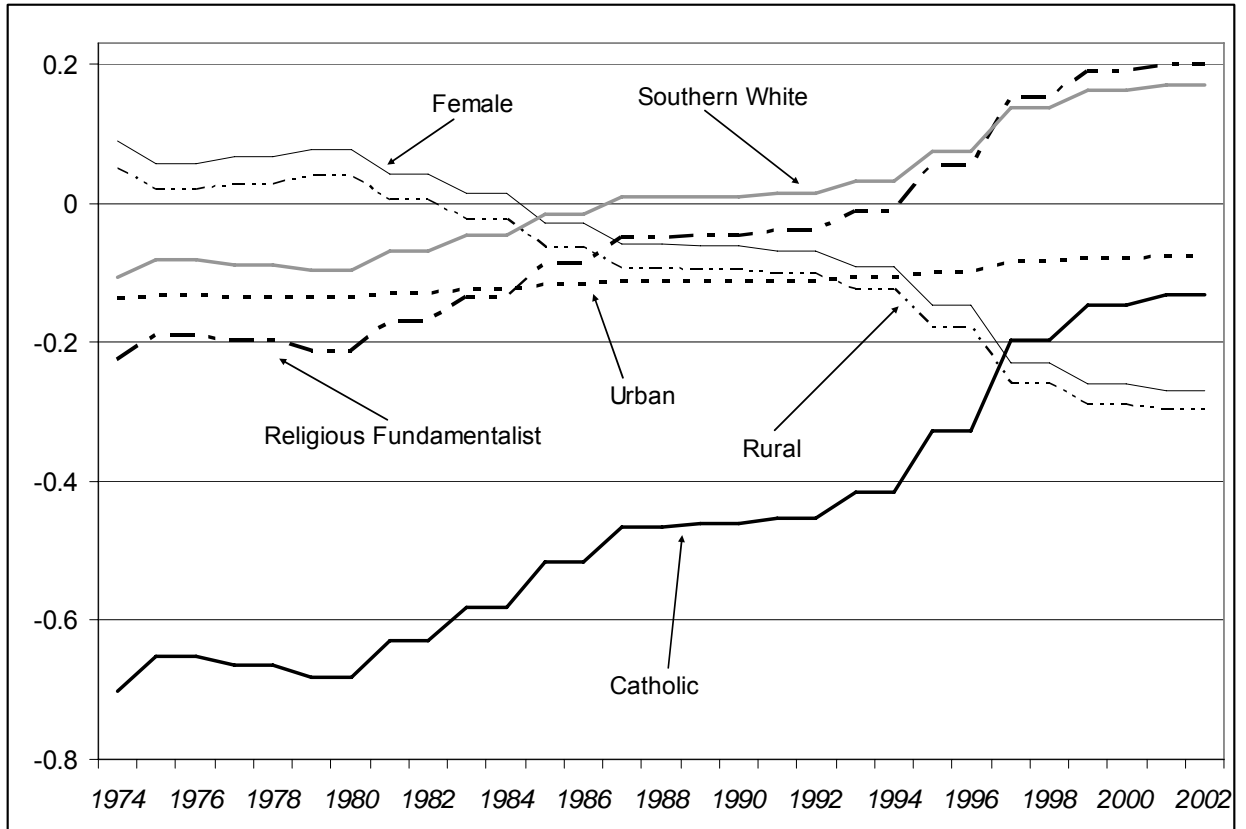
*Figure 6. The Distribution of Partisan Attachments in the Electorate.*



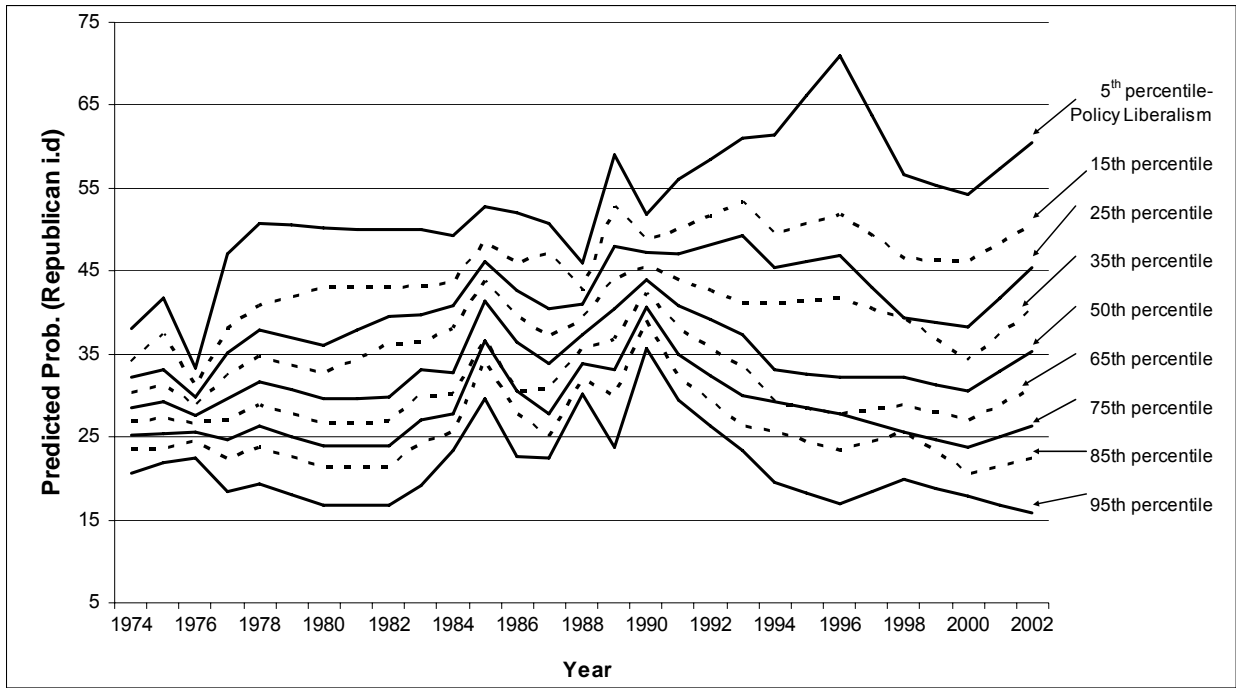
**Figure 7. Expected Impact on 7-point Partisanship scale for policy preferences, socialization, and income.**



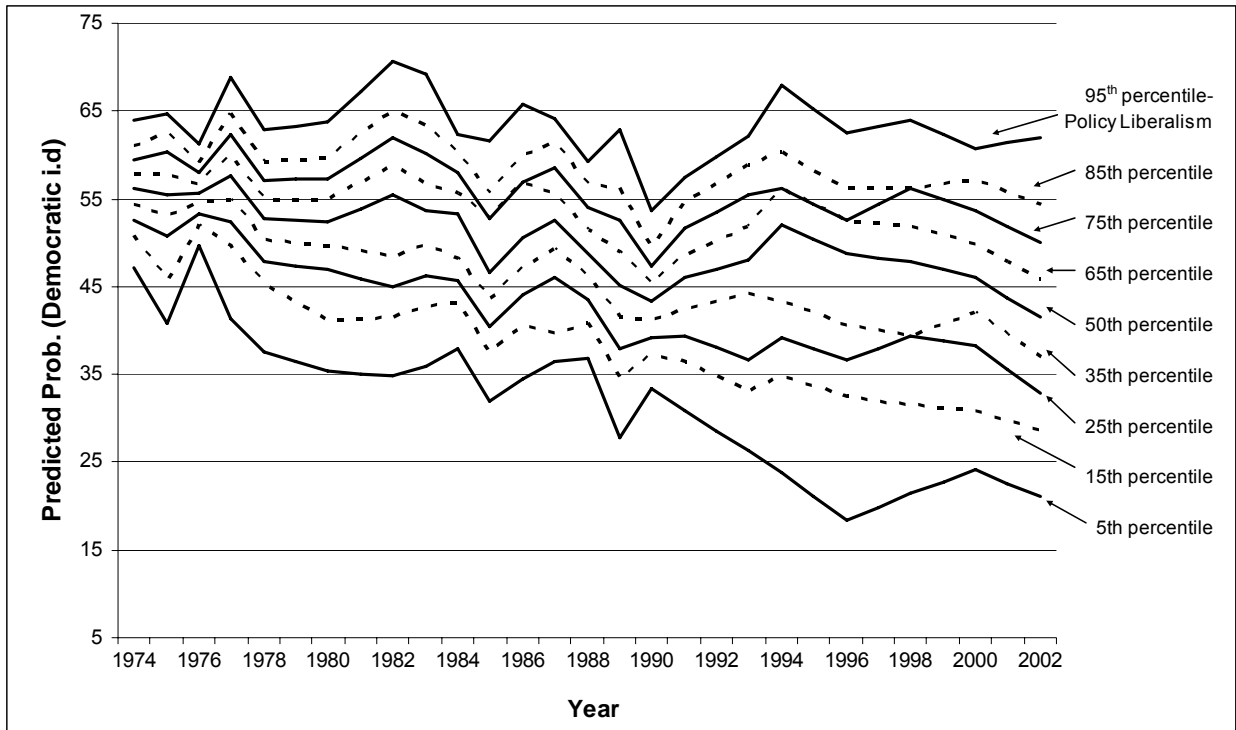
*Figure 8. Absolute expected impact on 7-point partisanship scale for “dummy” social and demographic variables.*



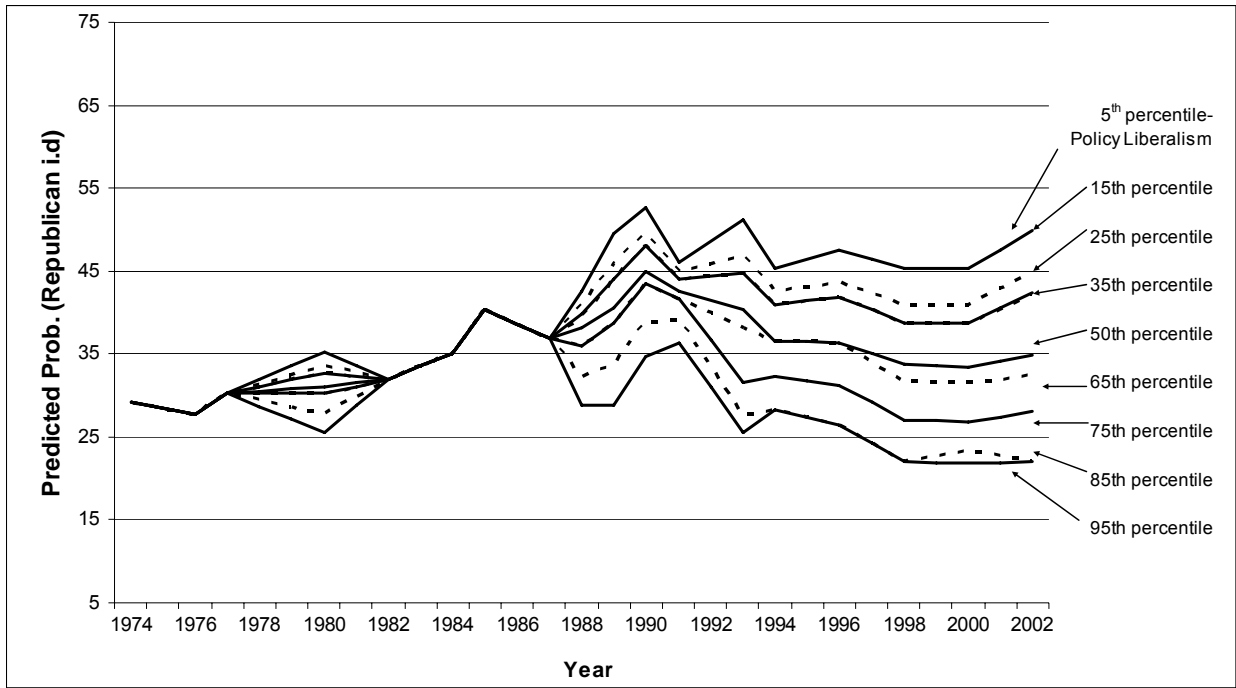
**Figure 9. Predicted Probabilities of Republican Identification for various levels of Scope-of-Government Liberalism.**



**Figure 10. Predicted Probabilities of Democratic Identification for various levels of Scope-of-Government Liberalism.**

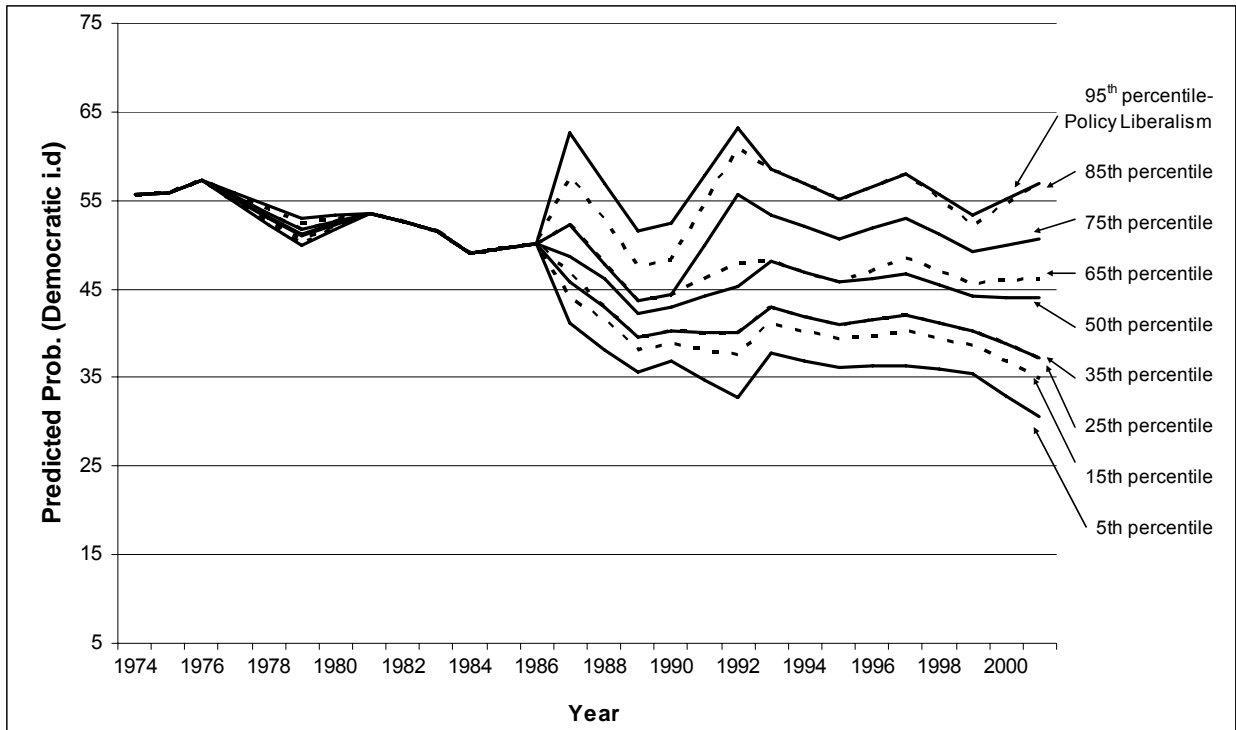


**Figure 11. Predicted Probabilities of Republican Identification for various levels of Moral Liberalism.**



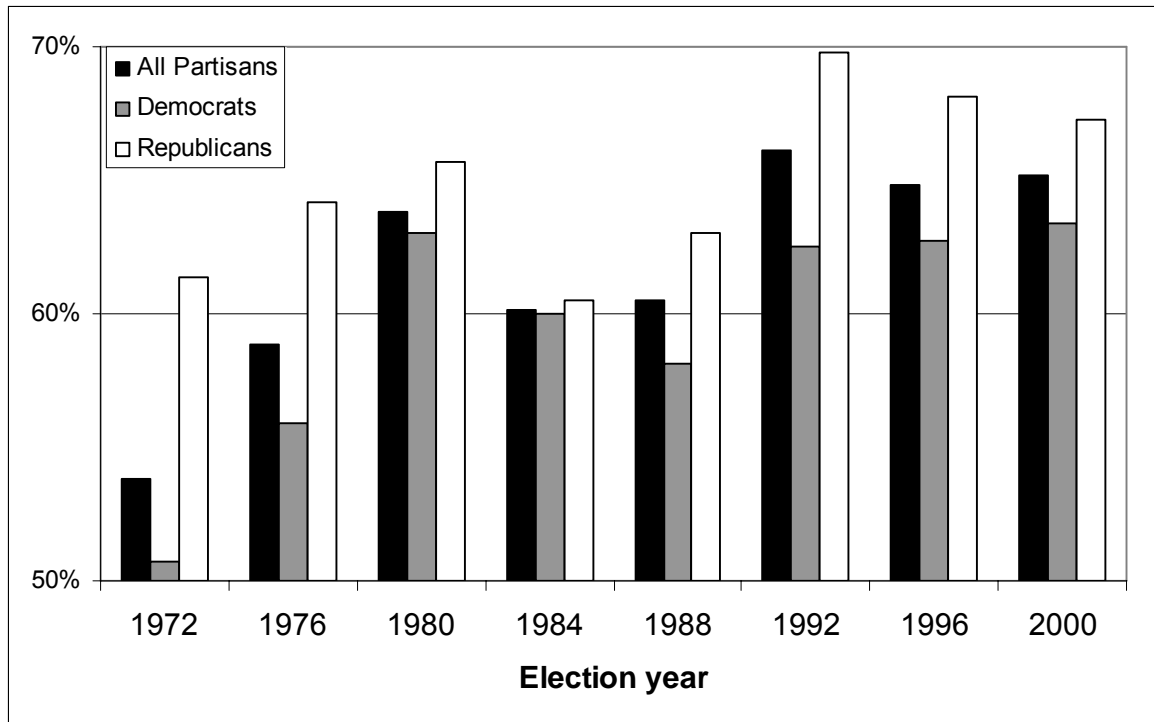


**Figure 12. Predicted Probabilities of Democratic Identification for various levels of Moral Liberalism.**



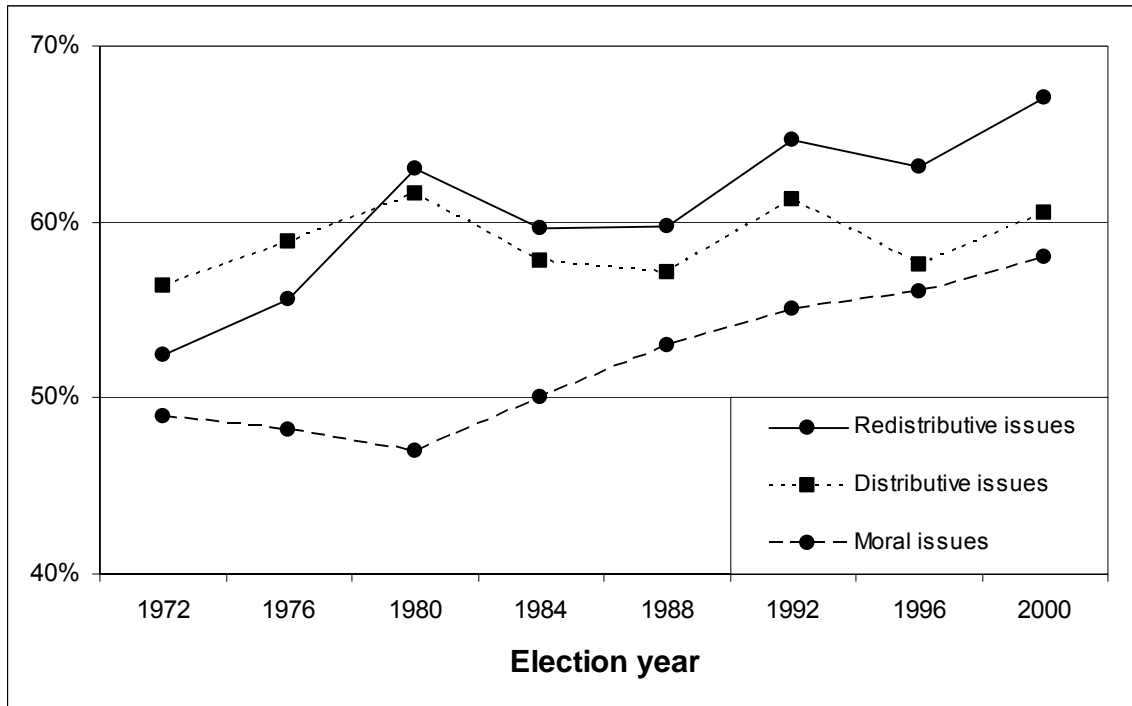
*Figure 13. Percentage of citizens consistent with party on issues.*

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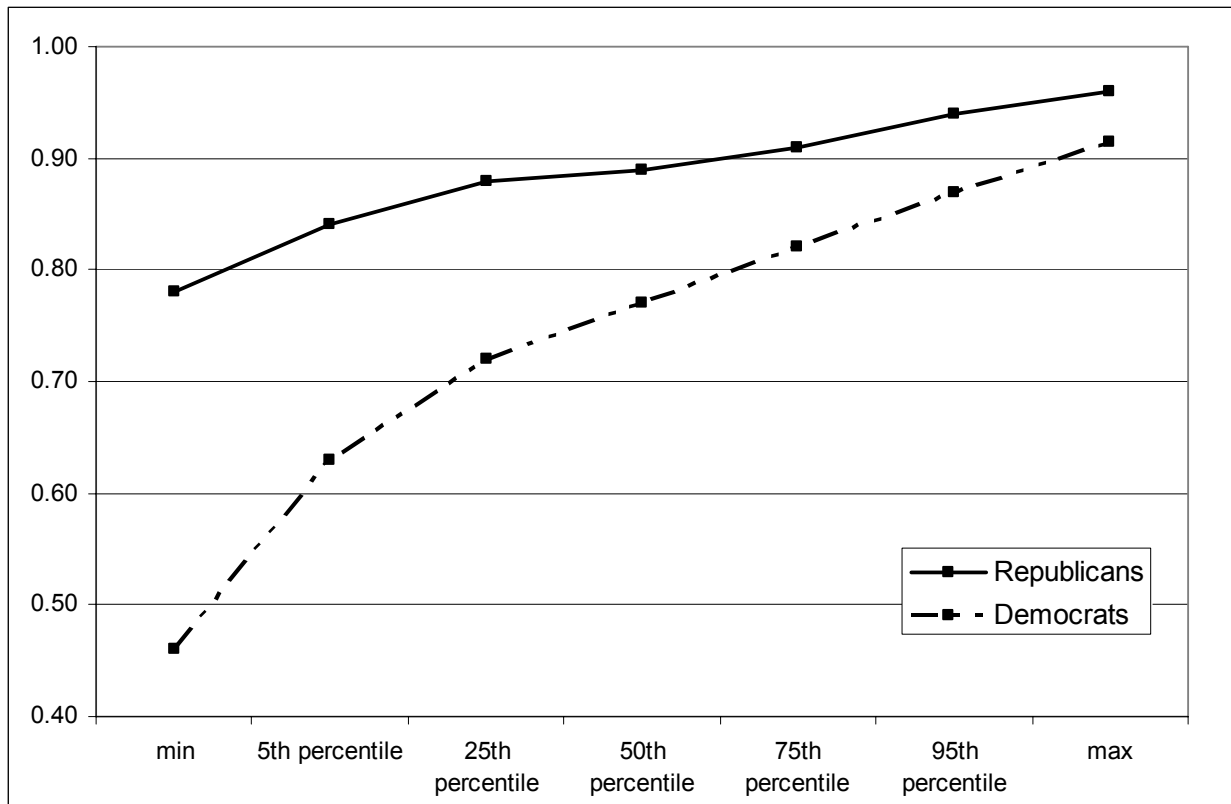
Source: GSS Cumulative File, 1974-2002.

*Figure 14. Percentage of “Consistent” Partisans by Policy Dimension.*



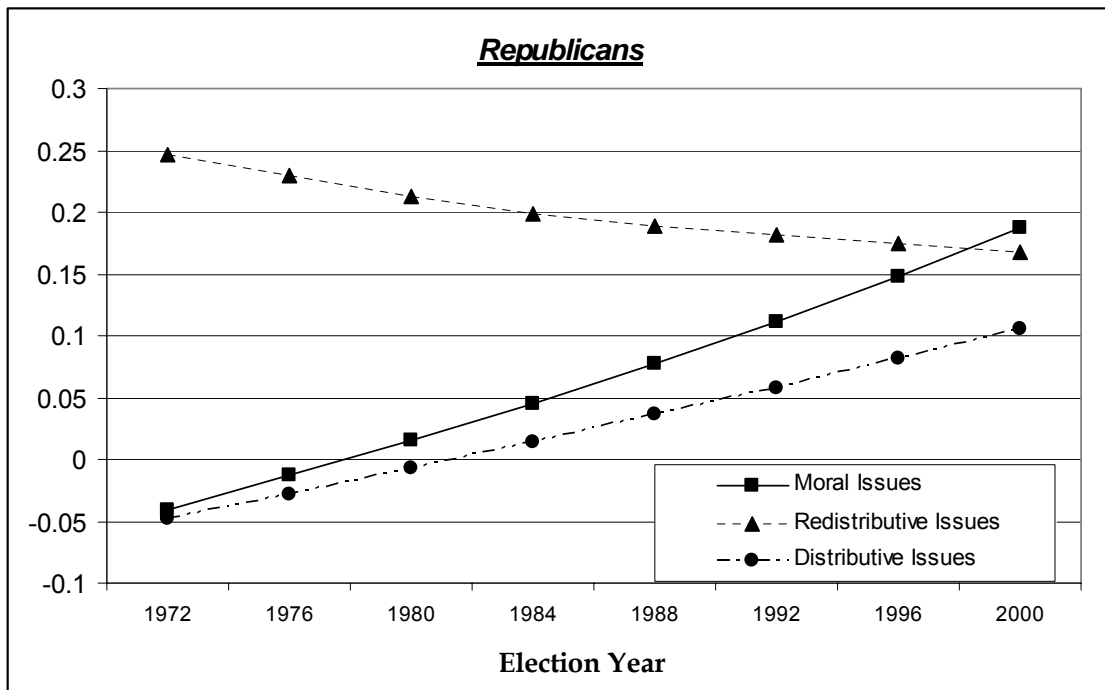
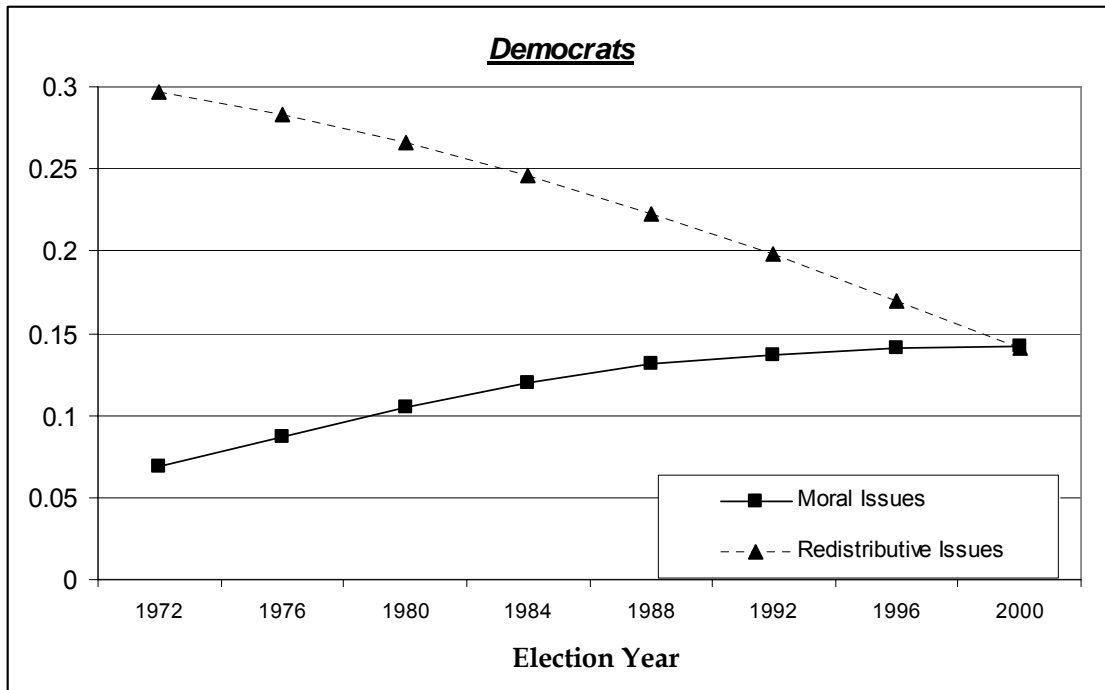
Source: GSS Cumulative File, 1974-2002.

*Figure 15. Expected probabilities of party-line voting for various levels of policy consistency.*



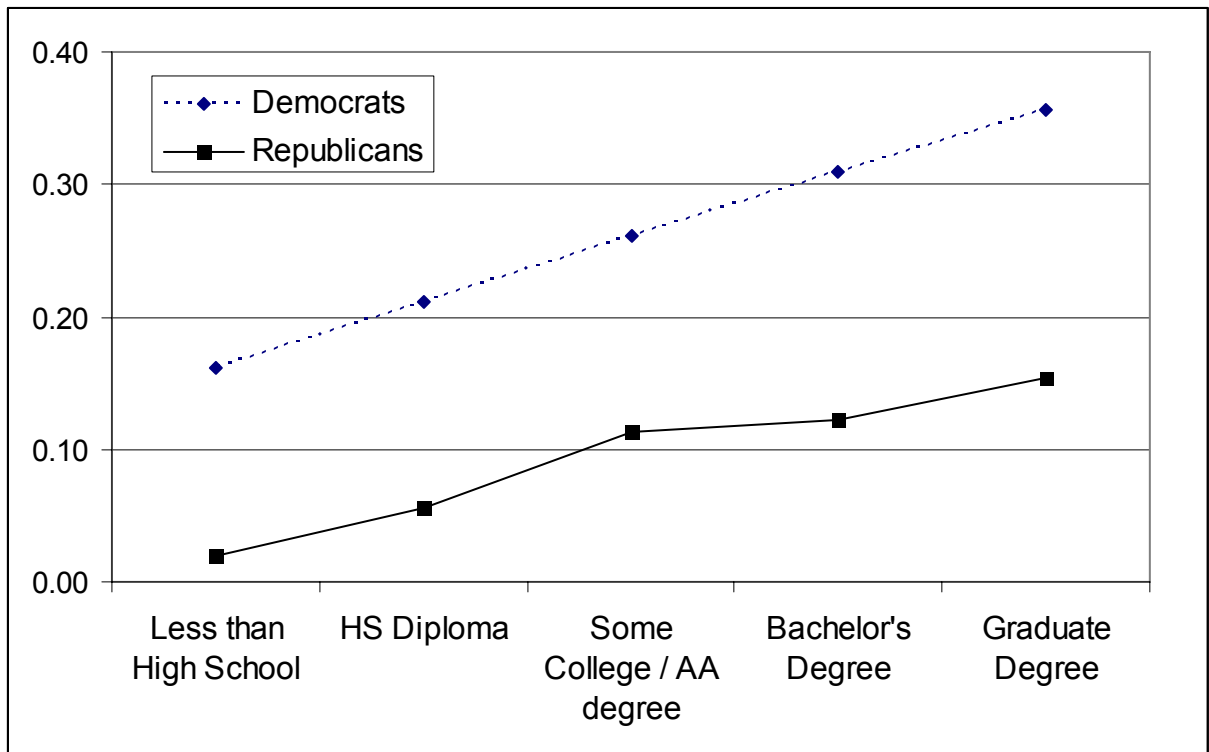
Note: figure entries represent the probability of casting a party-line vote for hypothetical respondents at a given level of issue consistency, holding all other variables constant at mean or median values.

**Figure 16. Expected Impact of Issue Consistency on the Probability of Casting a Party-Line Vote.**



Note: figure entries represent the difference in the probability of casting a party-line vote as respondents move from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of issue consistency on a particular dimension (holding all other variables constant at mean or median values).

*Figure 17. Expected impact of issue consistency on the probability of casting a party-line vote, by level of education.*



Note: figure entries represent the difference in the probability of casting a party-line vote as respondents move from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile of issue consistency (holding all other variables constant at mean or median values, and holding other interaction terms constant at their appropriate values).

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