

Electoral system and voter behavior

Government and Politics of the USA,
Week 3

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What do we mean by polarization in legislatures?

Mostly, partisan voting patterns on roll call votes:

- Tendency of Rs and Ds to get divergent ratings from interest groups (e.g. Americans for Democratic Action, U.S. Chamber of Commerce) [*voting scorecards*]
- Tendency of Rs to vote with other Rs, and not with Ds (and vice versa) [*agreement rates*]
- Tendency for dimensionality-reducing algorithms (e.g. DW-NOMINATE) to place Ds and Rs far apart [*ideal points*]

Could also think about:

- Inter-partisan co-sponsorship, friendships, etc
- Difference in term usage (Monroe, Colaresi, Quinn 2008, “Fightin’ Words”)

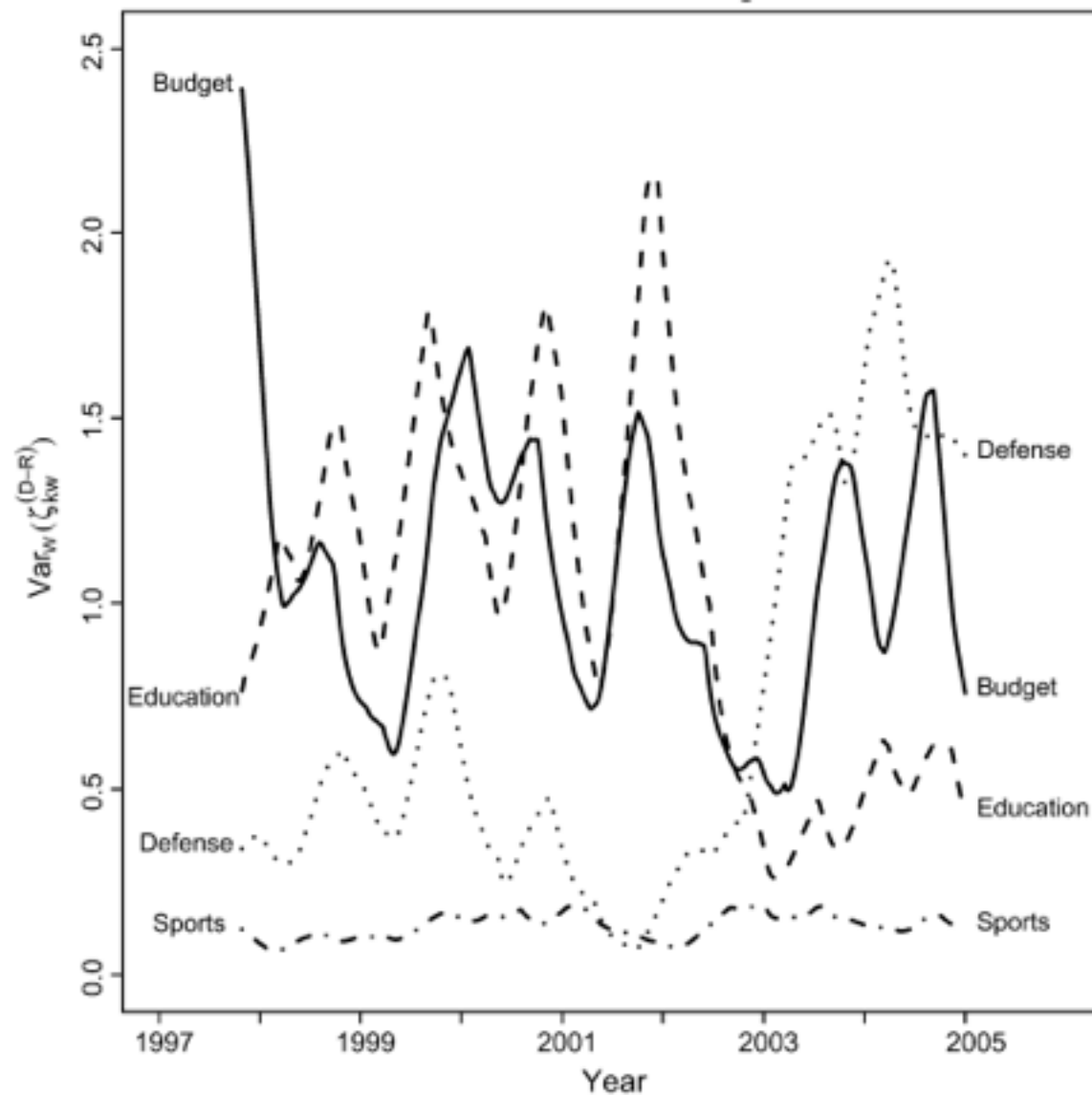
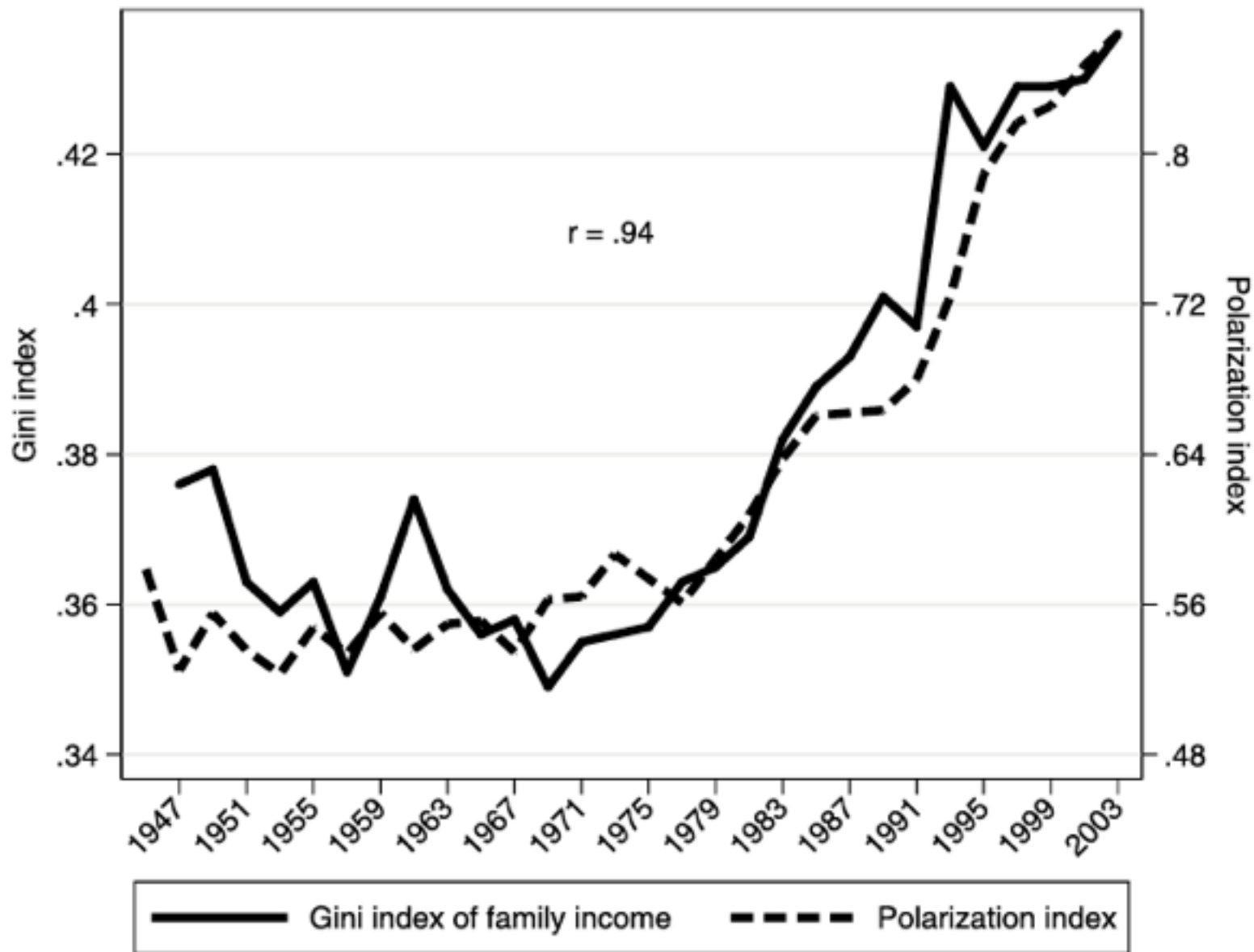
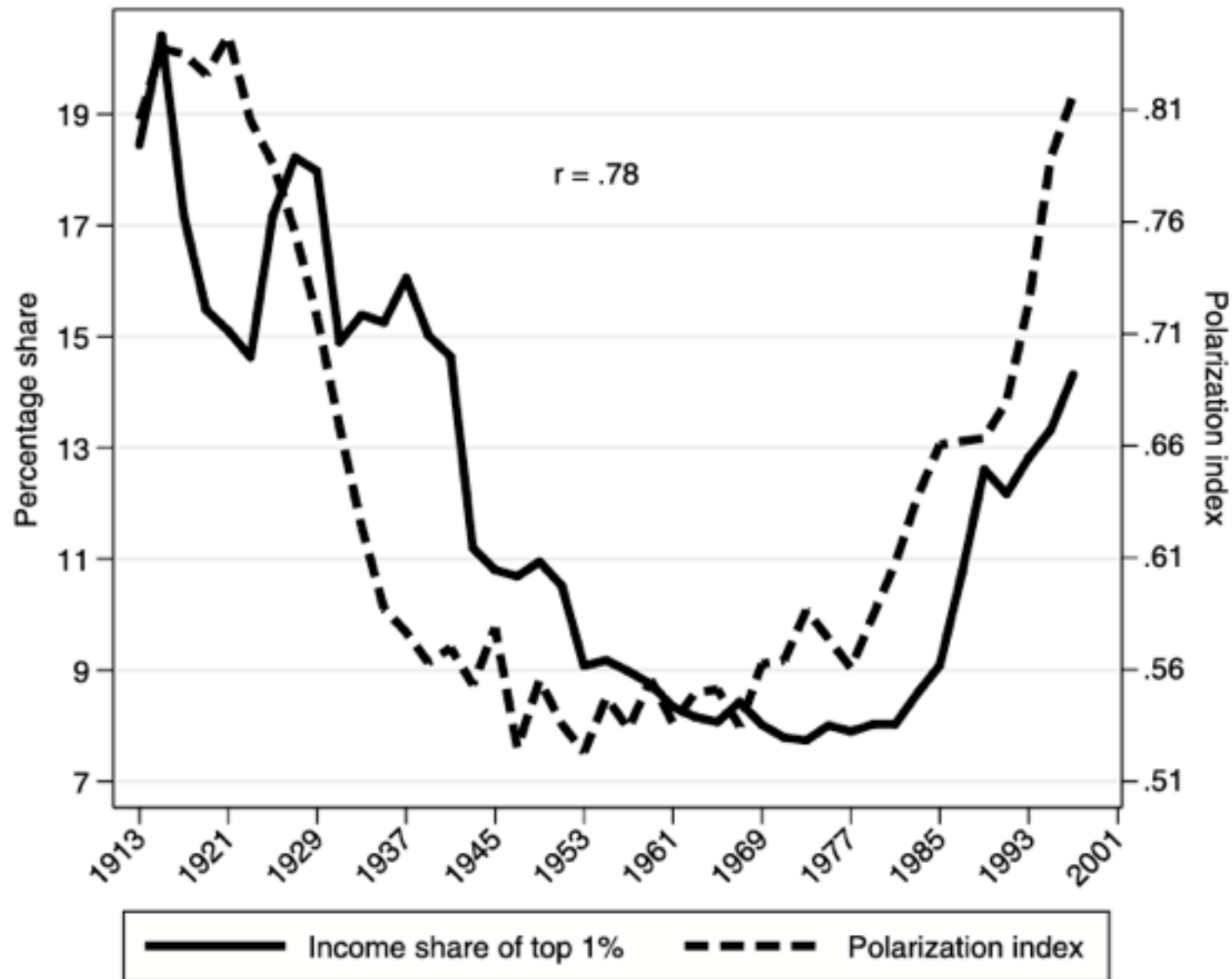


Fig. 11 The dynamics of language polarization.

Monroe, Colaresi, Quinn 2008, “Fightin’ Words”



McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America*, p. 6



McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America*, p. 8 (Piketty & Saez income shares from top tax returns rather than Gini coefficients from full distribution)

Some key aspects of elections in the United States

- Frequency:
 - Members of House of Representatives (# proportion to state pop) elected every two years
 - Senators (two per state) elected every six years (previously by state leg; now directly)
 - Presidential elected every four years, with max two terms (indirectly, by Electoral College: # of electors per state = $2 + \# \text{ MCs}$)
- States determine how MCs are elected; 20th century court decisions restrict this to universal suffrage in equal-sized SMDs (gerrymandering)
- Basically all offices: partisan FPTP with primaries (of various kinds: closed, open, top-two etc.)

Does gerrymandering explain polarization in Congress?

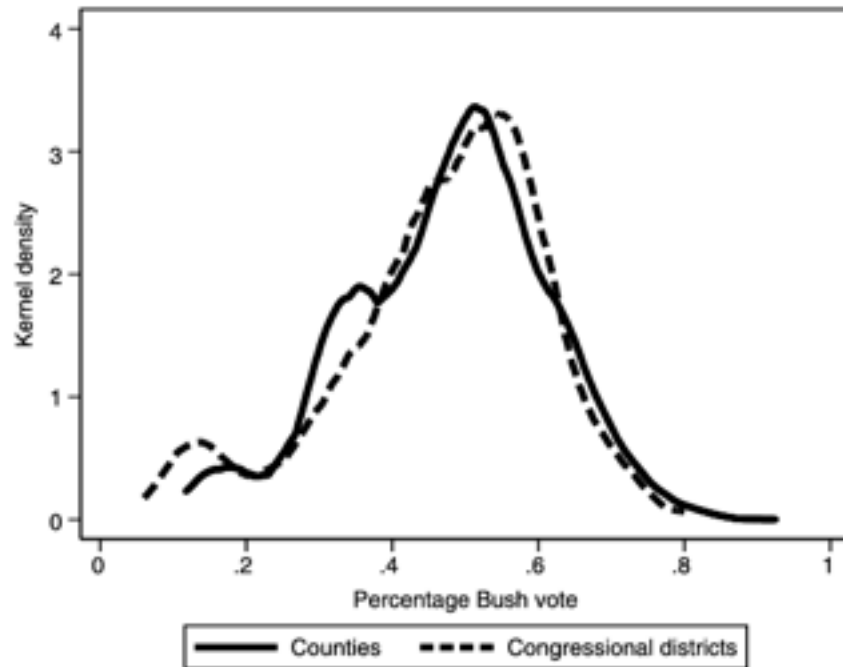


Figure 2.22a
Distribution of the 2000 Bush Two-Party Vote by Counties and Districts
Note: Counties are weighted by population. Both densities estimated using bandwidth = .025.

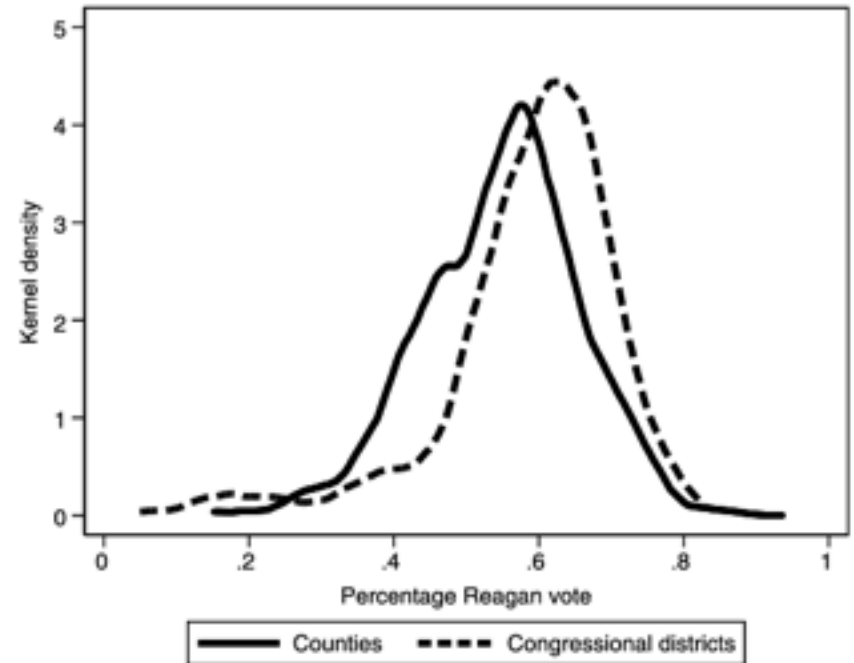


Figure 2.22c
Distribution of the 1980 Reagan Two-Party Vote by Counties and Districts
Note: Counties are weighted by population. Both densities estimated using bandwidth = .025.

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America*, p. 63 and 65

Also consider: the Senate.

Does Southern realignment explain polarization in Congress?



Figure 2.18

Southern Effect on Polarization in U.S. House, 1879–2001

Note: Measures of distance between two parties with and without southern members.

1930's-1990's,
polarization lower if
we exclude the
South!

But also, recent rise
is smaller w/o South.

What explains
disappearance of
northern liberal
Republicans?

Do primary elections explain polarization in Congress?

McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (2006):

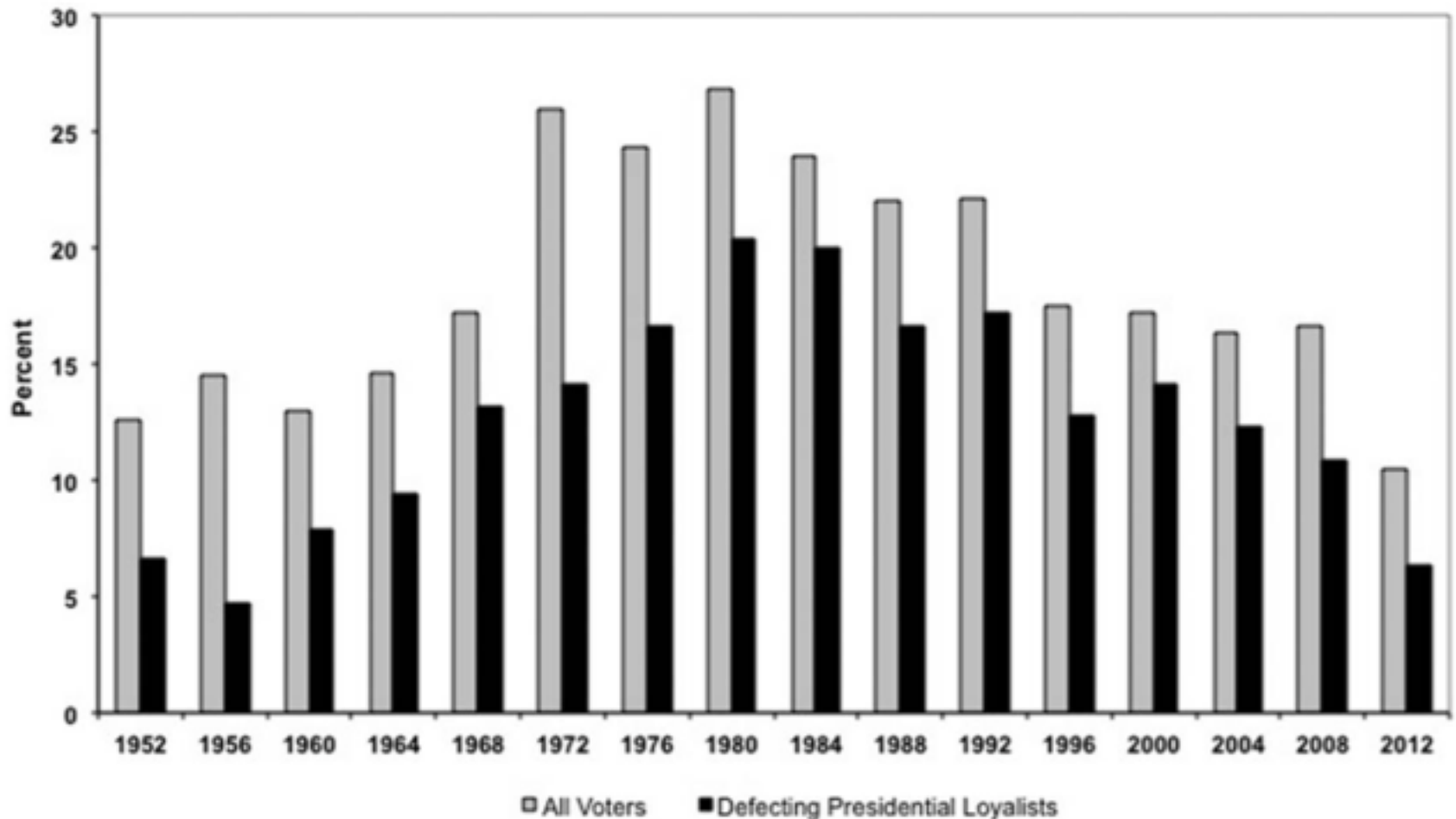
- Existence or nature of primary elections causes it? **Timing problems:**
 - Primaries introduced mainly in Progressive era (around turn of 20th century)
 - Slightly more polarization in closed-primary states, but closed primaries not becoming more common
- Reduction in participation in primaries causes it? **No direct evidence:** polarization not lower following presidential elections (when participation is higher)

So maybe it's polarization in the electorate!
(See also Abramowitz 2010.)

What do we mean by mass polarization?

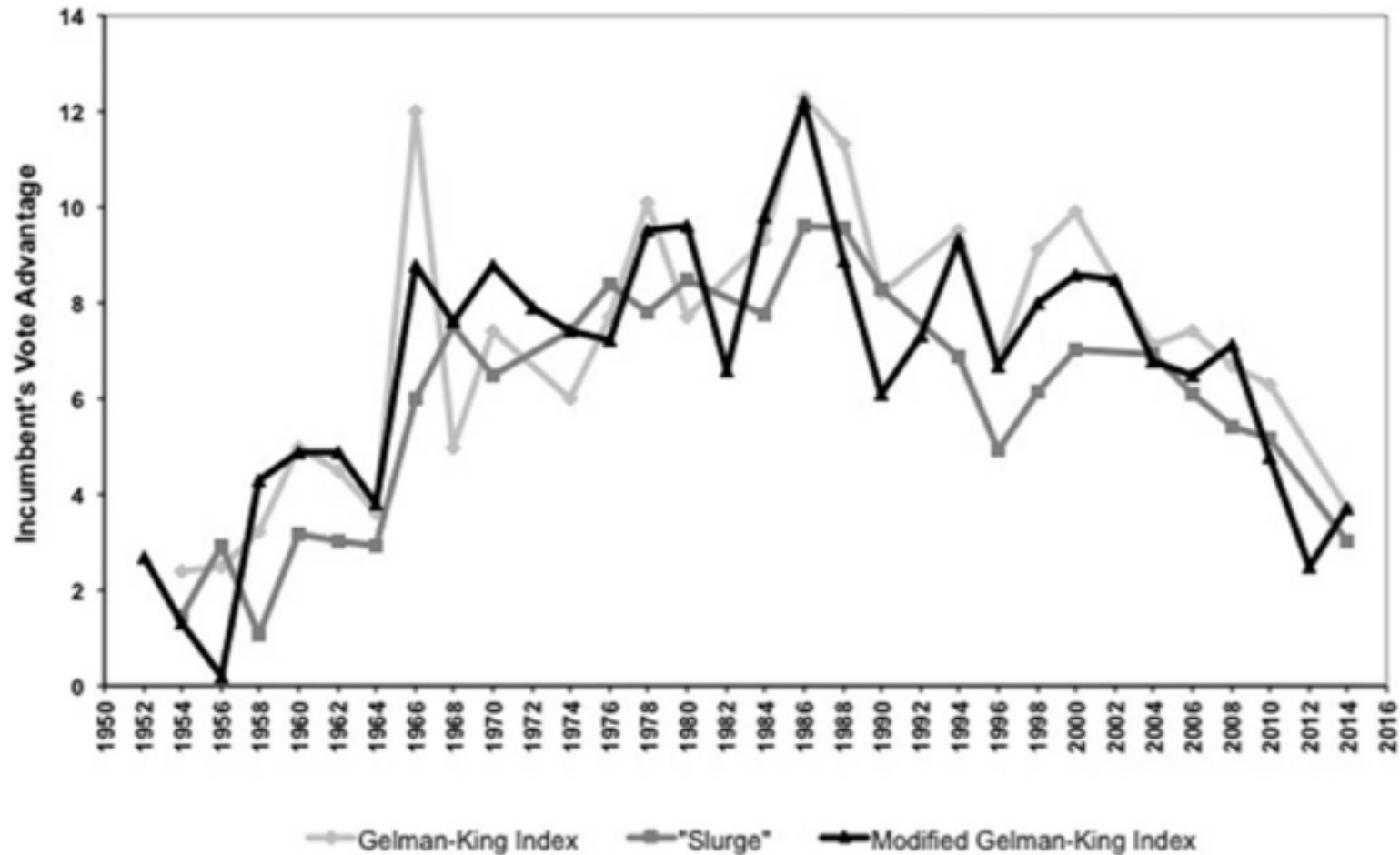
- How strong people say their party attachment is
- Tendency of individuals to vote for same party in different elections or different offices [*cf. split-ticket voting*]
- Tendency of voters to have views consistent with those of elites in their party (e.g. anti-abortion goes with pro-gun)
- Intensity of feelings toward people of the other party, e.g. degree of animus

Some evidence on split-ticket voting



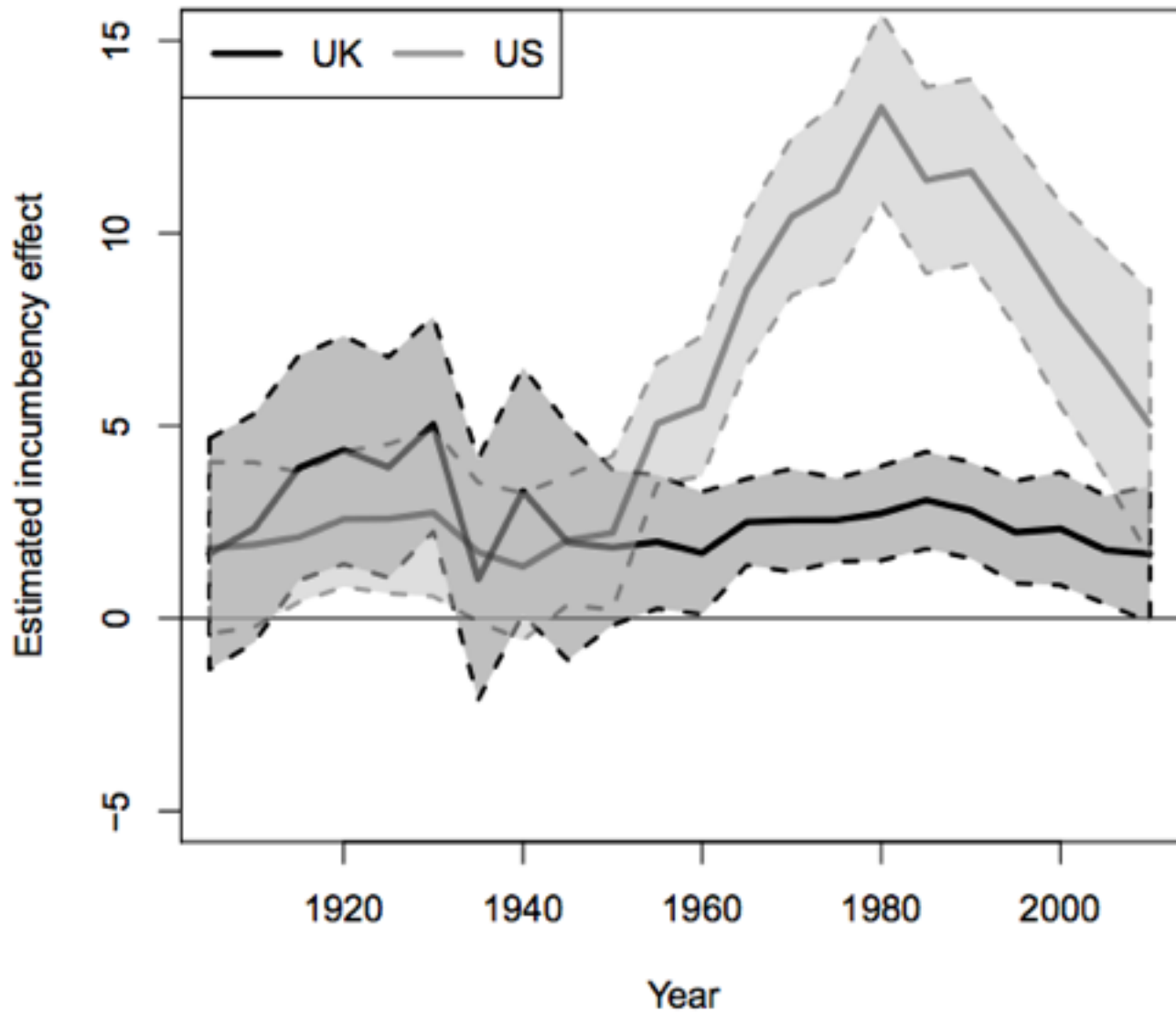
From Jacobson (2015) “It’s Nothing Personal”: Gray bars indicate voting for president and MC of different party; black indicates president of own party and incumbent MC of different party

Evidence from incumbency advantage



From Jacobson (2015) “It’s Nothing Personal”: Electoral advantage to incumbents inversely related to split-ticket voting, legislative polarization, inequality, etc...

Evidence from incumbency advantage



Eggers and Spirling (2015, working paper)

Some perspectives on mass polarization: partisanship & social identification (I)

Conventional view of voters as dispassionately choosing the party they prefer, and partisanship as a “running tally” (Fiorina 1981) of performance evaluations.



Some perspectives on mass polarization: partisanship & social identification (2)

Green, Palmquist, Schickler (2002) *Partisan Hearts and Minds* argue party identification is a kind of social identification.

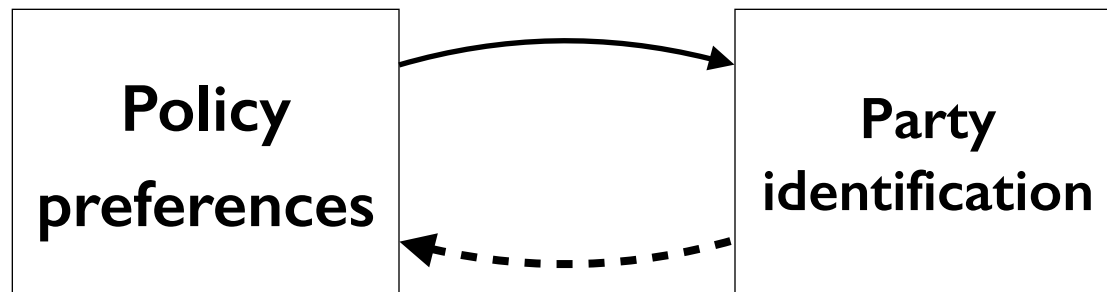


Some perspectives on mass polarization: partisanship & social identification (3)

As with religion, football, social class (?), style:

- some element of deliberate choice (esp. in early adulthood), but many simply born into it
- identification shapes preferences

Attachments remain firm even as evaluations and voting preferences shift.

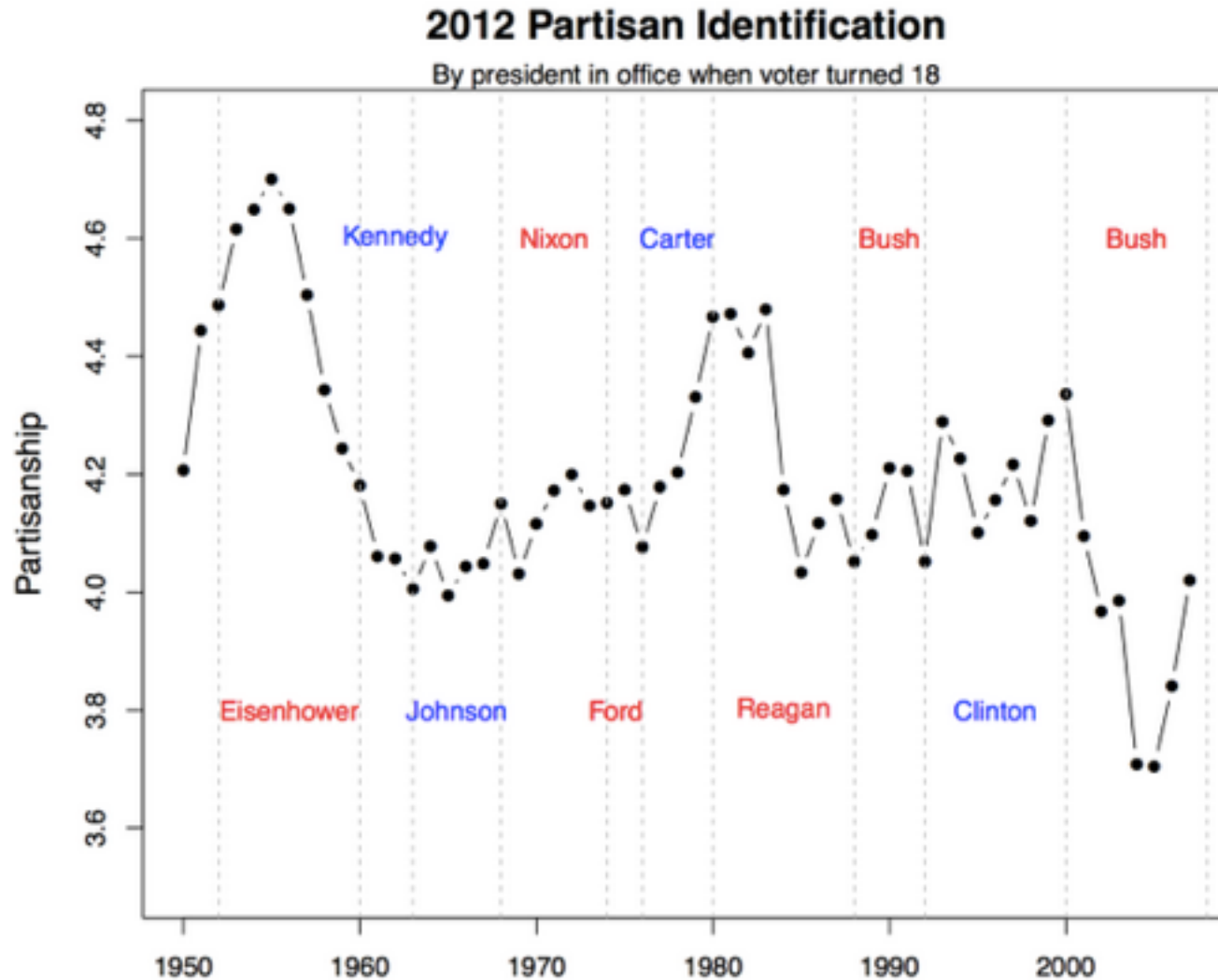


Some perspectives on mass polarization: partisanship & social identification (4)

Is there a strengthening of social identification through party?
Why?

“Big sort” dynamics — mobility, educational patterns,
personalized media consumption?

Some interesting evidence of social identification...



(Higher is more Republican.)

Dan Hopkins: <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/partisan-loyalty-begins-at-age-18/>

Electoral college background

- Original constitutional debate: popular election of President, vs. election by Congress?
- Electoral College as compromise through indirect election
“A small number of persons, selected by their fellow-citizens from the general mass, will be most likely to possess the information and discernment requisite to such complicated investigations.” (Federalist No. 68)
- Initial format (II.1.3): Each Elector votes for two candidates, one of whom must not be from own state; majority winner is President (second place is VP); if no majority winner Congress chooses among top 5.
- Twelfth Amendment (1803): Each elector casts separate ballots for Pres and VP
- Early 19C: Electors are partisan actors, thus *pledged* for a ticket; now electors no longer listed on the ballot

OFFICIAL BALLOT, GENERAL ELECTION
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
NOVEMBER 7, 2000

ELECTORS FOR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT (A vote for the candidates will actually be a vote for their electors.) (Vote for Group)	(REPUBLICAN)	
	GEORGE W. BUSH - PRESIDENT	3 ➡
	DICK CHENEY - VICE PRESIDENT	
	(DEMOCRATIC)	
	AL GORE - PRESIDENT	5 ➡
	JOE LIEBERMAN - VICE PRESIDENT	
	(LIBERTARIAN)	
HARRY BROWNE - PRESIDENT	7 ➡	
ART OLIVIER - VICE PRESIDENT		
(GREEN)		
RALPH NADER - PRESIDENT	9 ➡	
WINONA LaDUKE - VICE PRESIDENT		
(SOCIALIST WORKER)		
JAMES HARRIS - PRESIDENT	11 ➡	
MARGARET TROWE - VICE PRESIDENT		
(NATURAL LAW)		
JOHN HAGELIN - PRESIDENT	13 ➡	
NAT GOLDBABER - VICE PRESIDENT		

OFFICIAL BALLOT, GENERAL ELECTION
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA
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4 ➡	(REFORM)	
	PAT BUCHANAN - PRESIDENT	
	EZOLA FOSTER - VICE PRESIDENT	
6 ➡	(SOCIALIST)	
	DAVID McREYNOLDS - PRESIDENT	
	MARY CAL HOLLIS - VICE PRESIDENT	
8 ➡	(CONSTITUTION)	
	HOWARD PHILLIPS - PRESIDENT	
	J. CURTIS FRAZIER - VICE PRESIDENT	
10 ➡	(WORKERS WORLD)	
	MONICA MOOREHEAD - PRESIDENT	
	GLORIA La RIVA - VICE PRESIDENT	
	WRITE-IN CANDIDATE	
	To vote for a write-in candidate, follow the directions on the long stub of your ballot card.	

TURN PAGE TO CONTINUE VOTING ➡

Electoral college reform?

- In 1824, 1876, 1888, & 2000, winner of electoral college loses national popular vote. How does this happen?
- Following 1968 election, Constitutional amendment introduced for runoff system (40% majority threshold); passed House; stalled in Senate.

1968 election results

	Share of popular vote	Share of electoral votes
Richard Nixon	43.5%	56%
Hubert Humphrey	42.9%	35.5%

Why so hard to change?

National Popular Vote Interstate Compact

"Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress..." (US Constitution, II.1.2)

Currently: All states use winner-take-all except Maine & Nebraska, which use the "district system".

NPVIC: Signatory states agree to give all electors to national popular vote winner, once sufficient number of states have signed.

