

Polarization in US politics

Government and Politics of the USA,
Weeks 5&6

HT 2018

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Overview and plan

Briefly, elite polarization — polarized Congress.

Mass polarization:

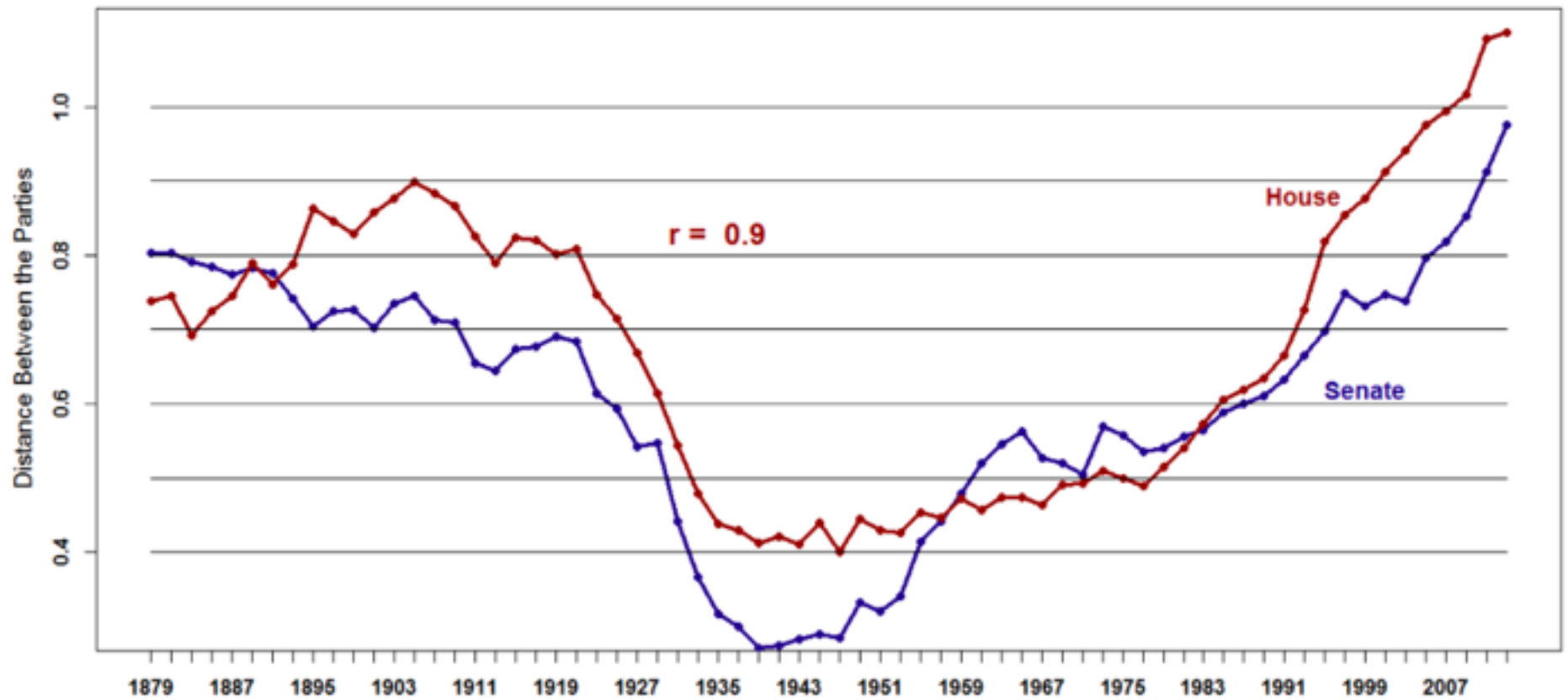
- Ideological polarization?
- Affective polarization
 - Evidence
 - Causes

Briefly on electoral system

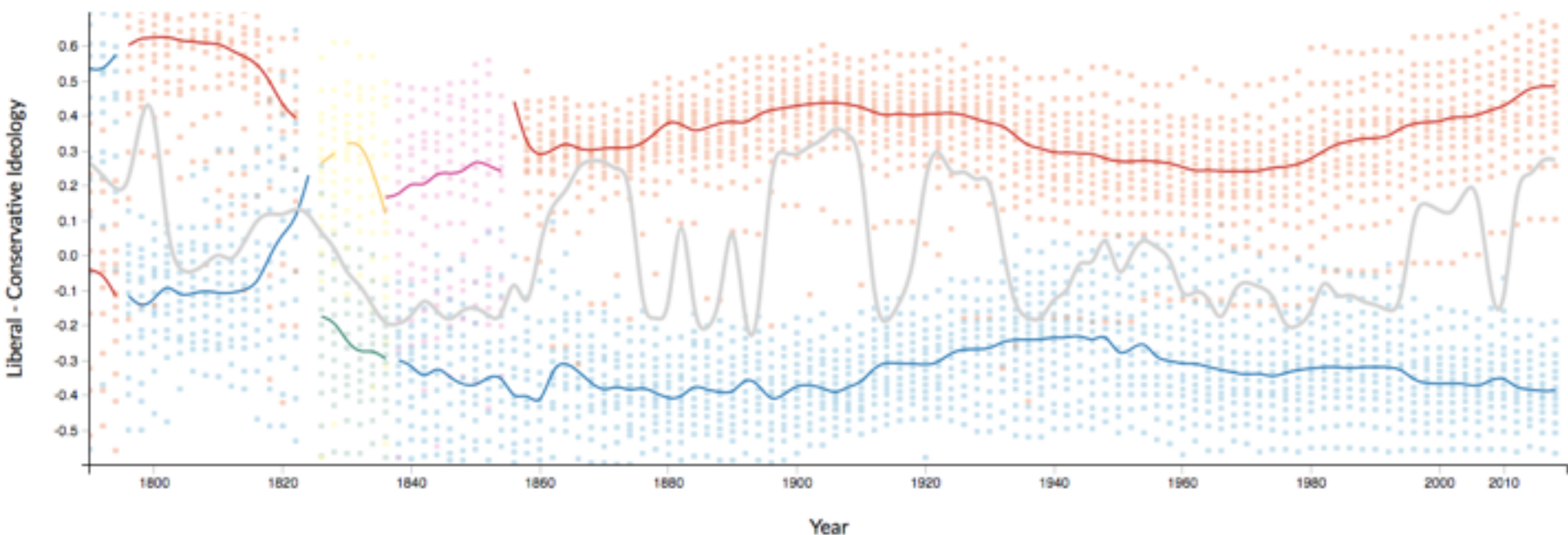
“How democracies die” (2018)

“The weakening of our democratic norms is rooted in extreme partisan polarization — one that extends beyond policy differences into an existential conflict over race and culture. America’s efforts to achieve racial equality as our society grows increasingly diverse have fueled an insidious reaction and intensifying polarization. And if one thing is clear from studying breakdowns throughout history, it’s that extreme polarization can kill democracies.” (p. 9)

Party Polarization 1879-2014
Distance Between the Parties on the First (Liberal-Conservative) Dimension



Polarized America / voteview.com



Parties Throughout History

Today's Parties



Democratic Party
Active from the 25th
Congress (1837) onwards



Republican Party
Active from the 34th
Congress (1856) onwards

Historical Major Parties

Democratic-Republican Party
Active from the 4th Congress (1796) until
the 18th Congress (1825).

Anti-Jackson Party
Active from the 21st Congress (1829) until
the 24th Congress (1837).

Whig Party
Active from the 24th Congress (1836) until
the 33rd Congress (1855).

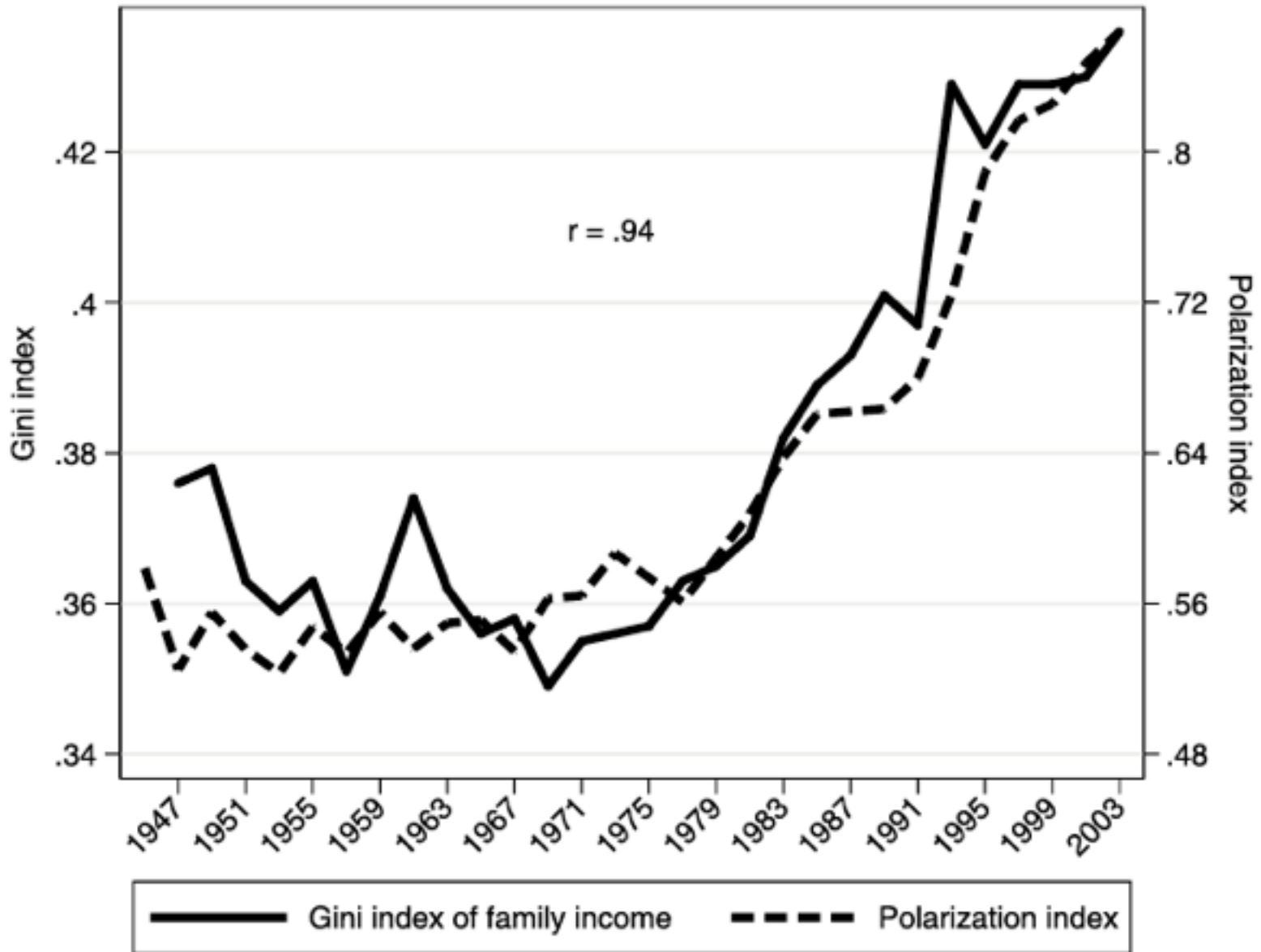
Adams Party
Active from the 19th Congress (1826) until
the 20th Congress (1829).

Jackson Party
Active from the 19th Congress (1826) until
the 24th Congress (1837).

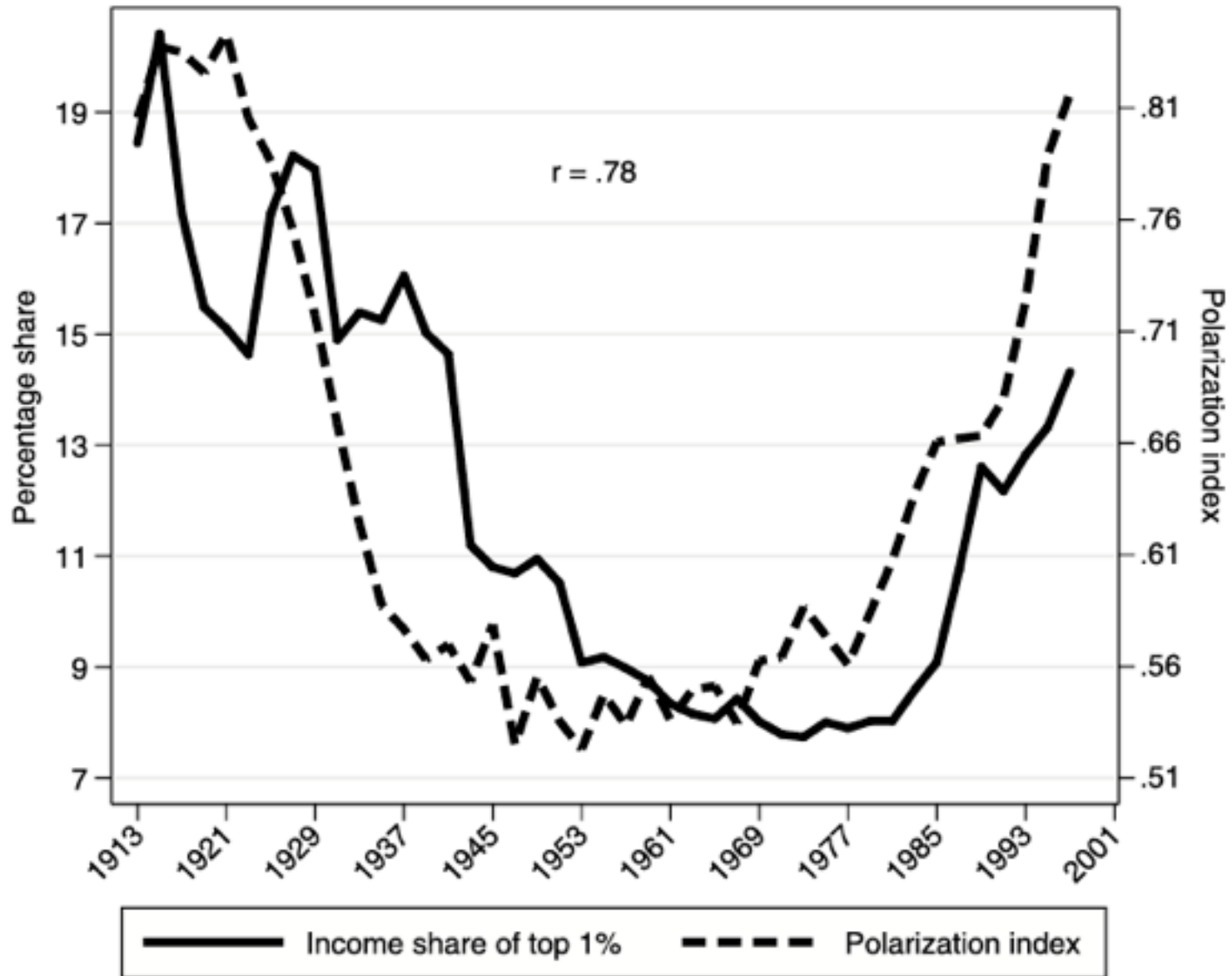
Pro-Administration Party
Active from the 1st Congress (1789) until
the 3rd Congress (1795).

Federalist Party
Active from the 4th Congress (1796) until
the 17th Congress (1823).

Anti-Administration Party
Active from the 1st Congress (1789) until
the 3rd Congress (1795).



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)

Does Southern realignment explain polarization in Congress?



Partly.

The U shape is indeed less striking when we exclude the South.

What explains disappearance of northern liberal Republicans?

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.

Does gerrymandering explain polarization in Congress?

Is there evidence that the distribution of partisanship in counties (fixed) vs districts (changing) diverged?

Not much 1980-2000.

But note *flattening* of both distributions. What does that indicate?

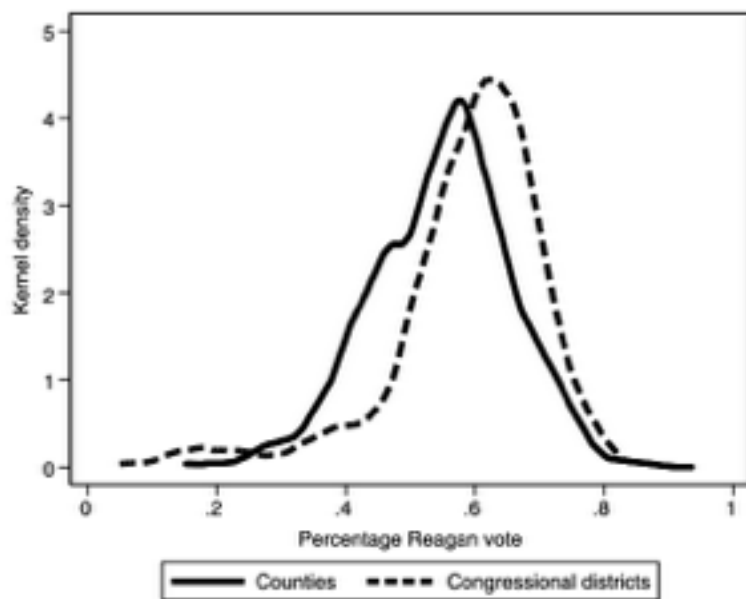


Figure 2.22c
Distribution of the 1980 Reagan Two-Party Vote by Counties and Districts
Note: Counties are weighted by population. Both densities estimated using bandwidth $-.025$.

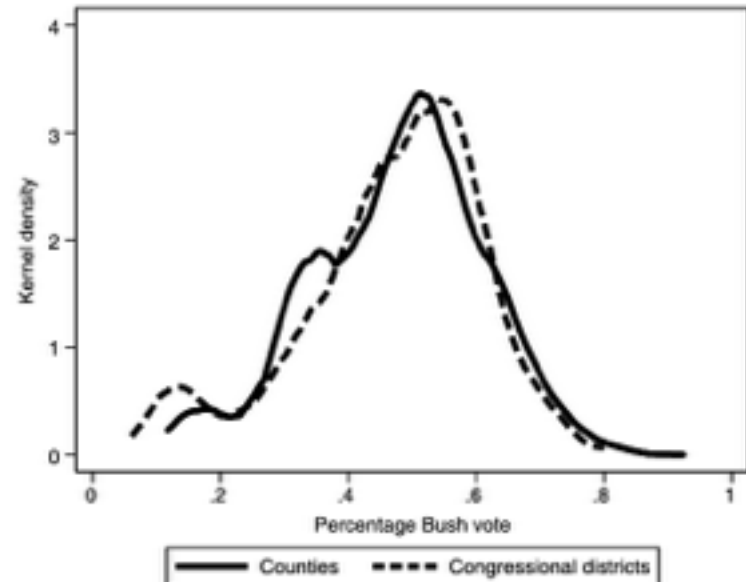


Figure 2.22a
Distribution of the 2000 Bush Two-Party Vote by Counties and Districts
Note: Counties are weighted by population. Both densities estimated using bandwidth $-.025$.

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

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)

Globalization and Polarization: Autor et al (2016) on the electoral consequences of rising trade exposure

Autor et al show that congressional districts that were more affected by import competition from China in the 2000s were more likely to elect MCs with polarized voting records in 2010 (especially more conservative Republicans), controlling for 2002 conditions.

This is mainly through replacement rather than shifts in ideology of existing MC.

Is this just elite polarization, or also mass polarization?

Mass polarization

Do Rs and Ds have more distinct **political preferences** on average in the population?

Disagreement in the literature. For example:

- Fiorina and Abrams (2008): *Culture war?*; Abramowitz (2010) *Disappearing Center*: Americans are moderate; activists and politicians are not
- Levendusky (2009): *The Partisan Sort*: distribution of preferences hasn't changed, but party identities have

Levendusky & Malhotra (POQ, 2015) find that Americans exaggerate the extent of ideological polarization: on e.g. capital gains taxation, R's have more moderate prefs than D's think, and vice versa (*false polarization*)

My focus: **affective polarization** (how people feel about other side), where there is consensus about phenomenon (but not its causes).

Some perspectives on mass polarization: partisanship & social identification

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

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



“Affective polarization” (Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes 2012)

American National Election Studies (ANES) ask respondents how they feel about various groups, with 100 meaning “warm”, 0 meaning “cold”. (Thermometer scores.)

In 2008, Republicans’ ratings of:

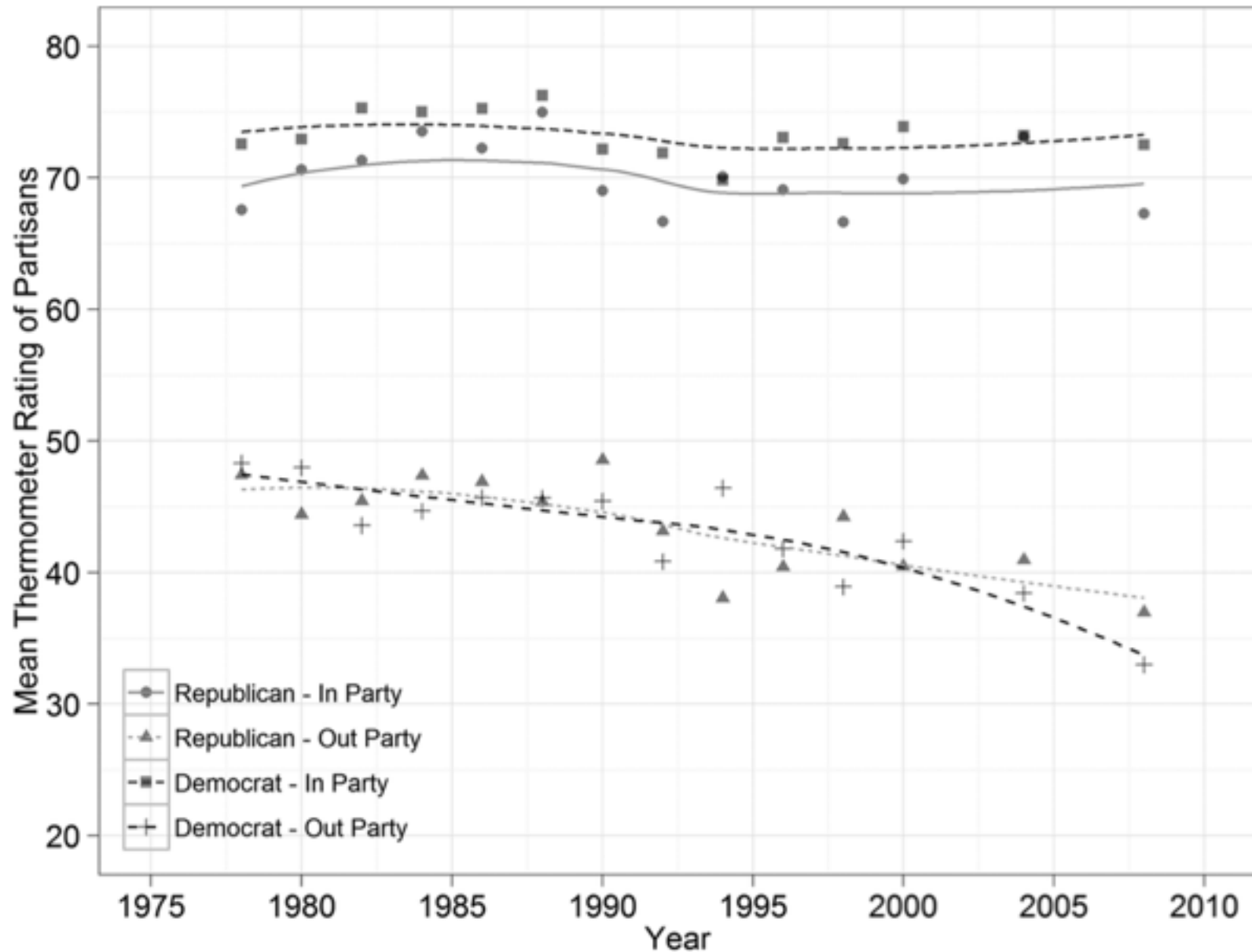
- “people on welfare”: 50
- “homosexuals”: 42
- Democratic Party: 37

In 2008, Democrats’ ratings of:

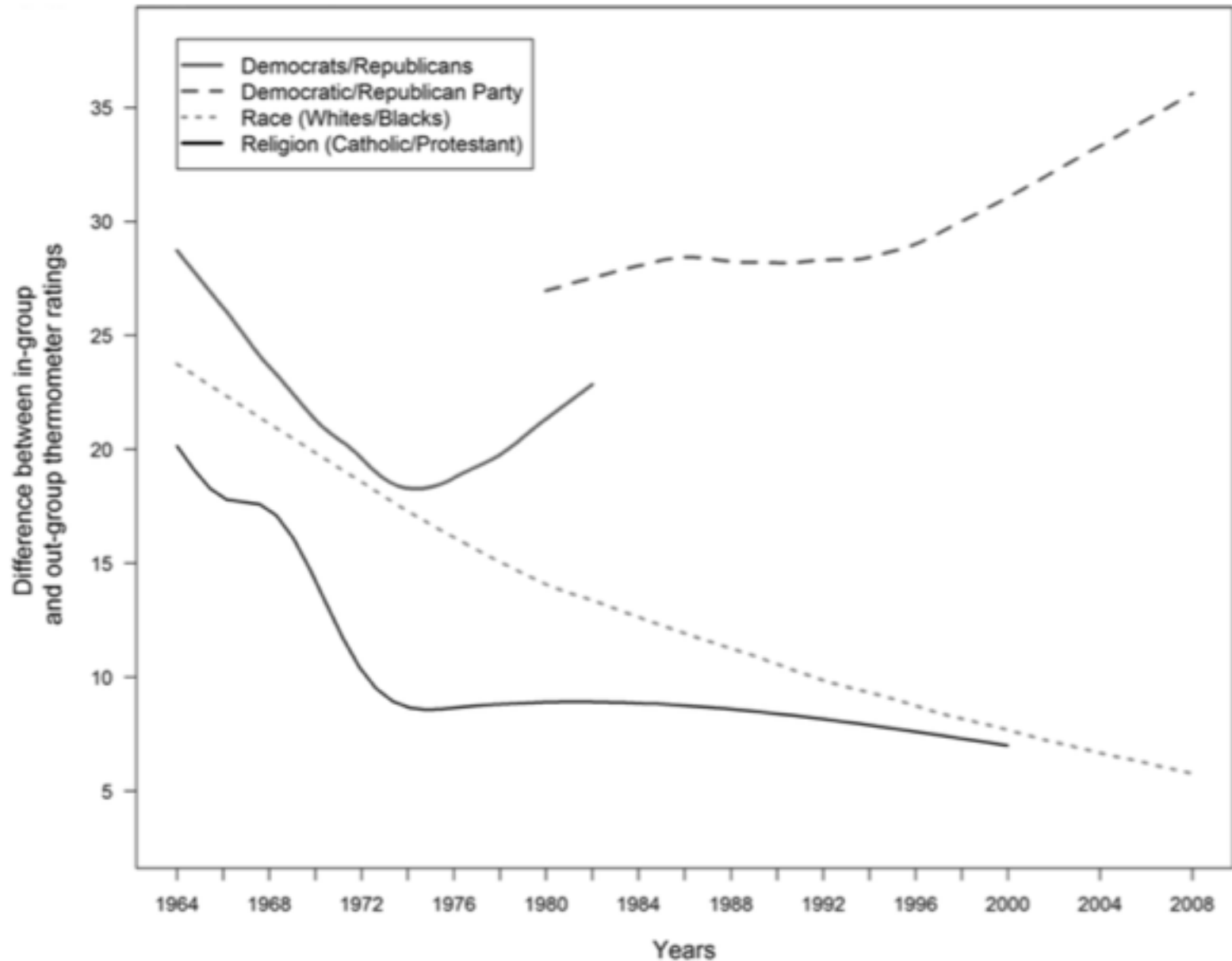
- “Big Business”: 51
- Republican Party: 33

And partisan animus has gotten worse over time: “we demonstrate that both Republicans and Democrats increasingly dislike, even loathe, their opponents”

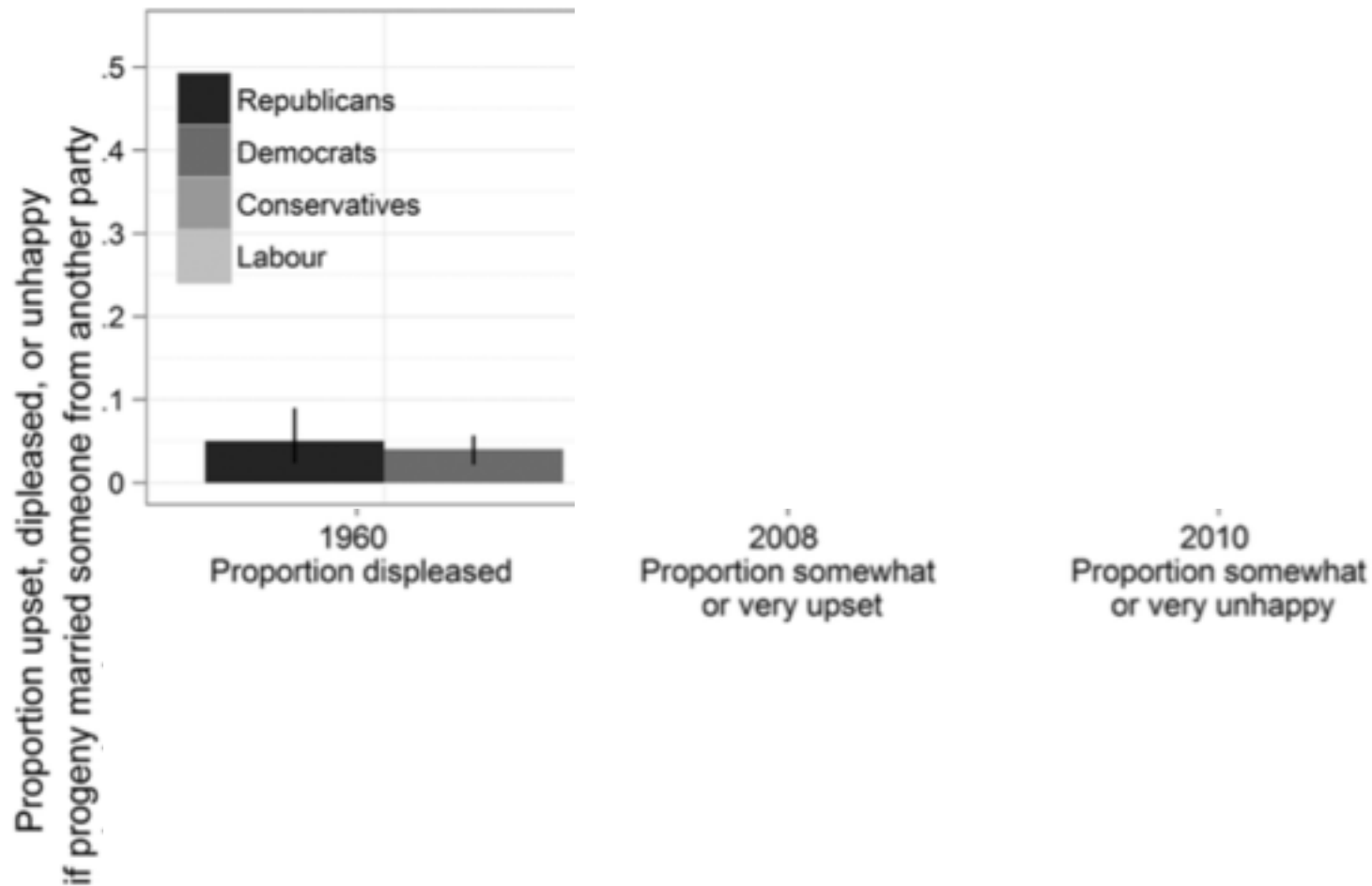
Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus



Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (2)



Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (3)



Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): partisan animus (4)

Year	Items	United States		
		In-party	Out-party	In – Out
1960	Selected traits ^a			
	Intelligent			
	Selfish			
	Average number			
	Positive traits			
	Negative traits			
	Positive – Negative			
	<i>N</i>			
2008	Selected Traits ^a			
	Intelligent			
	Selfish			
	Closed-minded			
	Average number			
	Positive traits			
	Negative traits			
	Positive – Negative			
	<i>N</i>			

Iyengar, Sood, Lelkes (2012): the role of exposure to campaigns

- Slightly higher partisan animus in battleground states
- During 2008 election campaign, animus rose over time but especially in battleground states

Iyengar & Westwood (2015): “Fear and loathing across party lines”

Main goal: benchmark partisan animus against racial hostility, accounting for social desirability bias.

They find partisan animus is larger than racial animus.

One technique: **brief implicit association test**. How does response time differ when asked to link Democrats/blacks with positive word vs. when asked to link with negative word?

Iyengar & Westwood (2015): Brief implicit association test, briefly



Basic task is linking symbol to party.

But “or good” makes it easier if you think that party is good,
harder if you think that party is bad.

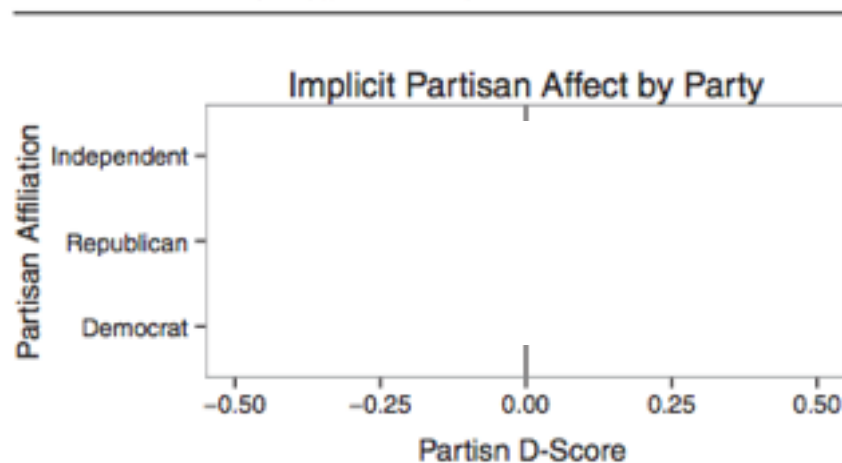
Iyengar & Westwood (2015): “Fear and loathing across party lines”

Partisan D-score: how much longer do you take when asked to identify **Democrat symbol/“good”** than when asked to identify **Republican symbol/“good”**?

Race D-score: how much longer do you take when asked to identify **European-American face/“good”** than when asked to identify **African-American face/“good”**?

Note: the two scores are uncorrelated in their sample (7).

FIGURE 4 D-Scores for the Partisan and African American/European American BIATs



Note: This figure shows the distributions of implicit partisan affect (top) and implicit racial affect (bottom) with 95% confidence intervals.

Iyengar & Westwood (2015): “Fear and loathing across party lines” (2)

Study 2: participants shown two student CVs, asked to award a scholarship. CVs are either a Rep. and a Dem., or a black student and a white student.

FIGURE 6 Predicted Probabilities for Partisan Winner Selection

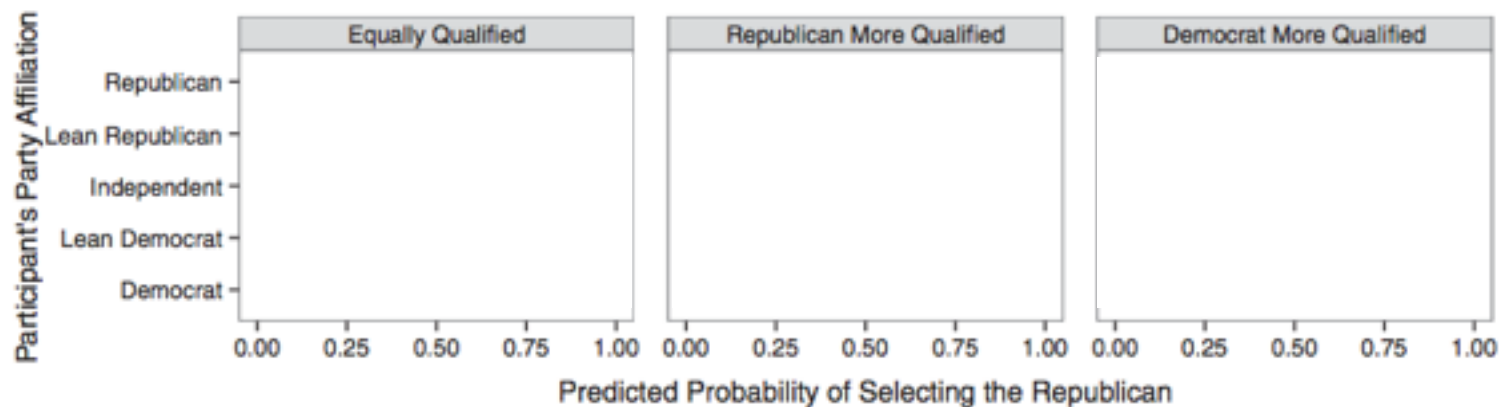
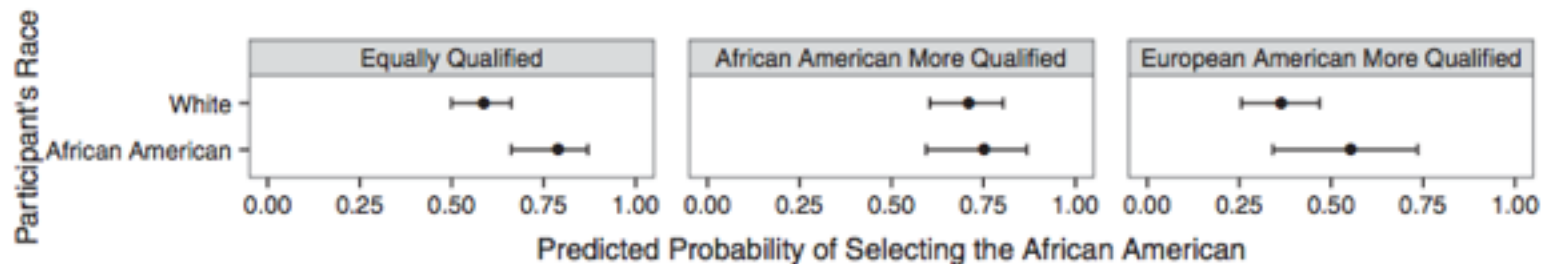


FIGURE 7 Predicted Probabilities for Racial Winner Selection



Iyengar & Westwood (2015): the role of social norms

“Unlike race, gender, and other social divides where group-related attitudes and behaviors are constrained by social norms, there are no corresponding pressures to temper disapproval of political opponents. If anything, the rhetoric and actions of political leaders demonstrate that hostility directed at the opposition is acceptable, even appropriate. Partisans therefore feel free to express animus and engage in discriminatory behavior toward opposing partisans.”

The role of nationalism

Levendusky (2017): Can we reduce partisan animus by emphasizing national identity?

Survey experiment: *Treated subjects* asked to read article about how great US is, write short essay about “what they like best about being American and why they are proud to identify as American”. *Control subjects* read & write something apolitical. Then both asked to

- rate Democratic & Republican Party, President Obama
- assess how well 9 traits describe opposing party (“American”, “intelligent”, “hypocritical”, etc)
- list likes and dislikes about opposing party

Natural experiment: Annenberg Nat’l Election Study interviewed subjects in 2008 April-August (with random interview date); do those interviewed closer to July 4 show less partisan animus?

The role of nationalism (2)

Levendusky (2017): Yes, we can reduce partisan animus by emphasizing national identity.

Survey experiment: *Treated subjects* rate other party more favorably; do not rate own party more favorably.

Natural experiment: Subjects interviewed closer to July 4 rate other party's nominee (Obama, McCain) more favorably.

Polling (e.g. Gallup) indicates declining proportion saying “extremely proud” to be American since 2000; rate lower in younger generation.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018)'s explanation

Partisan identity lines up more now with other highly salient forms of identity

- race
- religion
- region

fueling animus.

“Norm erosion” at the elite level contributes too.

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)
 - President elected every four years, with max two terms (indirectly, by Electoral College: # of electors per state = 2 + # Reps)
- 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, blanket etc). Exceptions at municipal level.

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 usually no longer listed on the ballot

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

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

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

<p>4➔</p> <p>(REFORM)</p> <p>PAT BUCHANAN - PRESIDENT</p> <p>EZOLA FOSTER - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>6➔</p> <p>(SOCIALIST)</p> <p>DAVID McREYNOLDS - PRESIDENT</p> <p>MARY CAL HOLLIS - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>8➔</p> <p>(CONSTITUTION)</p> <p>HOWARD PHILLIPS - PRESIDENT</p> <p>J. CURTIS FRAZIER - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>10➔</p> <p>(WORKERS WORLD)</p> <p>MONICA MOOREHEAD - PRESIDENT</p> <p>GLORIA La RIVA - VICE PRESIDENT</p>	
<p>WRITE-IN CANDIDATE</p> <p>To vote for a write-in candidate, follow the directions on the long stub of your ballot card.</p>	

TURN PAGE TO CONTINUE VOTING



Electoral college reform?

- In 1824, 1876, 1888, 2000, & 2016, winner of electoral college loses national popular vote. How does this happen?
- Following 1968 election, Constitutional amendment for direct election (with top-two runoff if none receives 40%) passed House; stalled in Senate.

1968 election results

	Pop. vote	Elec. vote
Richard Nixon	43.5%	56%
Hubert Humphrey	42.9%	35.5%

Why so hard to change?

NYT Sept 30 1970



