

Extreme Politics: Polarization in the United States

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The Need:

Pundits – and a few Political Scientists – have noted trends toward polarization in American Politics, but to date, no sustained argument has been made about the causes and consequences of polarization. Jon Bond and Richard Fleisher edited *Polarized Politics: Congress and the Presidency in a Partisan Era* (1990). That work focused on the balance of powers. Keith Poole has written provocatively about polarization, linking economic inequality in society with polarization among the parties – but Poole’s excellent analysis is largely unpublished. The best book about polarization has just come out, written by Jeff Stonecash and Mark Mariani. In *Diverging Parties* (Westview 2002), Stonecash and Mariani link polarization with constituency characteristics. Their central argument echoes my chapter, “The Polarization of American Political Parties” in *Why People Don’t Trust Government* (1997). None of these works (including my previous chapter) present a theory of polarization that can account for the “core observations” below. *Extreme Politics* will maintain a consistent theme linking self-selection into politics with polarization. The book will be written for a general audience (say, readers of *Atlantic Monthly*) rather than for a narrow set of Political Scientists. The book would be read in American Politics courses as a commentary on Congress, Electoral Behavior, and Political Parties.

Core Observations:

- “Average Americans” have grown ever more disengaged from politics. They vote less. They are less likely to call themselves “partisans.” They give less money and time to political campaigns, and they are less driven by traditional left-right ideologies. The trends are striking, demographically across-the-board, and may be most starkly seen in turnout statistics for primary elections.
- “Elected Officials” as all levels of government have, over the same period, become more partisan and more purely ideological in their voting behaviors. The parties in Congress have clearly “polarized,” which makes it more difficult to build coalitions that bridge partisan divides.
- There is, therefore, a growing gap between the partisanship and ideological predispositions of “Average Americans” and of “Elected Officials.”
- Governors and Presidents tend to be more moderate than the cadre of same-party partisans in their own legislatures, so executives tend to be moderating influences.
- However, and at odds with the prevailing theoretical literature, legislative leaders tend to be far more extreme than their own party caucuses would have us expect. Party leaders within legislatures are, decidedly, extremists within their own parties.

Extreme Politics

- The book will present a theory about selective-participation in politics that accounts for the five core observations above. The basic insight is that people (be they “Average Americans” or “Elected Officials”) who have the greatest desire to change public policy will be the most active participants in trying to change it. Voters self-select, deciding whether to participate in primaries. Candidates for public office self-select. But political decisions are made in a competitive environment, with participants on the opposite side of an issue more likely to become active when “extremists” on the other side become active.
- The Causes of polarization will be explored by looking at self-selective participation within (a) the electorate and (b) the U.S. Congress.
- The Consequences of polarization within the electorate will highlight how “extremism” tends to demobilize moderates, alienates voters, and heightens mistrust of politicians.
- The Solutions to polarization will focus on (a) institutional “fixes” such as (1) changing how and when primaries are conducted and (2) what kinds of voting mechanisms can reduce polarization. Also (b) non-institutional “fixes” aimed at increasing political participation are explored.

Chapters

1. The Puzzle of Political Polarization.
 - a. Trends and Effects of Polarization
 - b. A Theory of Polarization
 - c. Outline of the Book and the Argument
2. The Public’s Disengagement from Politics
 - a. Trends in Participation
 - b. Trends in Partisanship
 - c. Consequences: Effects on Voters of Disengagement from Politics
3. Polarization in Congressional Districts and Congress
 - a. Congressional Elections and “see saw” districts
 - b. Policymaking in a Polarized Congress
 - c. Consequences: The Quality of Representation in Congress
4. Polarization Among Political Leaders
 - a. Executives as Moderating Influences
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Chapter 2

The Public's Disengagement from Politics¹

By most appearances in the early 1990s, the United States seemed in the midst of a conservative shift. On the national stage liberalism was an opprobrium, the dreaded "L" word. Bill Clinton prevailed in the 1992 presidential campaign while running to the middle and claiming to have abandoned "old-style liberal solutions." When his first two years in office betrayed that promise, the president's popularity plummeted. Republicans seized both houses of the U.S. Congress in the 1994 elections -- for the first time in forty years -- and made great gains in governors' offices and state legislatures as well. These victories were widely interpreted as further repudiations of traditional liberal policies. With Republicans picking up more congressional seats than any election since 1942, a modern record number of Democratic legislators announced they would not run again. Republicans say they heard the country giving them a conservative mandate. Yet in the mid-1990s, the most conservative plans were repeatedly dashed as a fickle public turned against Republican party leaders. By the summer of 1996, House Speaker Newt Gingrich's political fortunes could hardly have been worse, and President Clinton's reelection was assured.

One lesson that Democratic and Republican party leaders claim to have learned in the mid-1990s is that there are great political rewards for being "centrists." While extremists may be praised within wings of their own parties, they do less well in general elections and find it more difficult to build bipartisan coalitions in Congress and the White House. Following

¹ Note: This chapter is in its original form – based on the 1997 "Why People Don't Trust Government Chapter." In revisions, will bring the data up to date and draw on the Institute of Politics studies of young people.

acrimony in the 104th Congress (1995-1997), President Clinton predictably called for a new era of bipartisanship. “Today,” said the president in December 1996, “the clamor of political conflict has subsided. A new landscape is taking shape. The answer is clear: the center can hold, the center has held and the American people are demanding that it continue to do so.”² Republican leaders on Capitol Hill quickly agreed. Anthony Downs, the progenitor of median voter theories in economics and political science, could not have scripted a finer exchange.³

In theory, at least, a move to the center -- the “sensible center” to use Richard Darman’s phrase -- makes perfect sense.⁴ That is where the votes are, and that is where compromises are forged. In practice, however, both political parties have been growing more extreme over the past three decades, and it is unlikely that post-election promises of bipartisanship will quickly reverse historic trends. Furthermore, the public’s mistrust of government is unlikely to be reversed unless and until politicians and their parties stage a concerted return to the sensible center. The politics of polarization *is* the politics of mistrust.

This chapter’s thesis is that the American electorate has been relatively stable in its policy and ideological preferences, while the political parties have become more extreme. Americans have not been shifting their basic preferences wildly. Rather, political elites have grown more ideologically distant – widening the gap between citizens and government. That growing gap, documented below, has been filled in with mistrust and with a new-found habit of splitting tickets between the increasingly polarized parties.

² “Clinton Promises to Govern from the Center,” Reuter Wire Service, December 11, 1996.

³ Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy, (New York: Harper & Row, 1957).

⁴ Richard Darman, Who’s in Control: Polar Politics and the Sensible Center, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). E.J. Dionne, Jr., Why Americans Hate Politics, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), Chapter 13.

My argument is built around a series of questions. First, however, I will assert – and later demonstrate – that both parties have grown more extreme since the early 1960s and the breakdown of the New Deal Democratic coalition. Before exploring that evidence in detail, I ask and answer two questions: Have Americans become appreciably more liberal or conservative? Have Americans appreciably changed their partisan allegiances? The answers will prove to instructive in deciphering an important cause of growing mistrust toward government: namely that the parties have been polarizing, making the preferences of parties and political elites more distant from the concerns of most Americans.

Trends in Political Ideology Since the 1960s

A person's political ideology is a shorthand way of categorizing what one knows about politics, and it is used for speedily assessing new political observations. People with highly refined ideological antennae have an especially well structured way of thinking about politics, and these ideologues judge political propositions based on how liberal or conservative they seem. Although most Americans are not highly ideological, most have preferences one way or the other. As noted, by the early 1990s, the United States seemed in the midst of a conservative shift, only to reject the most conservative proposals in Congress by the mid-1990s.

Evidence from public opinion polls consistently shows that the country's basic balance between liberals and conservatives changes only gradually, not all at once. The National Election Studies, conducted every two years by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, is our best snapshot of political attitudes.⁵ The decade of the 1970s began with a

⁵ Beginning with their 1972 survey, the NES staff has asked Americans to place themselves on a seven-point ideological scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative NES Cumulative Dataset, variable #803. Question: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and Extreme Politics, *Draft*, December 9, 2002

politically moderate president in Richard Nixon. President Jimmy Carter was considered more centrist than most nationally known Democrats, and he gave way to a Barry Goldwater conservative in President Ronald Reagan. Given these hints about the national mood, one would expect that Americans' underlying ideologies were shifting to the right. Evidence on this is shown in Table 1, which tracks voters' self-placements along the left-right dimension.

(Table 1 About Here)

At least in terms of what Americans call themselves, the nation became gradually more conservative throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but without any wild swings one way or the other. "Extreme" conservatives and "extreme" liberals have fluctuated between one and three percent of the population over the last quarter century. The combined percentage of self-identified conservatives and extreme conservatives stood at 11 in 1972 and 16 in 1992. Self-identified conservatives peaked in 1994, which may indeed indicate a lasting change, but it is too early to say. Notice, however, that in virtually every year the modal response was "don't know" or "haven't thought much about this." A plurality of Americans cannot identify themselves along an ideological spectrum, and we should suspect that these voters may grow more restive if and when the political parties portray their positions in highly ideological terms.⁶

conservatives. Here is (1972, 1974: I'm going to show you) a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" (7-point scale shown to respondents.)

⁶ Another way of viewing Table 1 is by examining the ratio of self-identified conservatives to liberals, which stood at 1.44 in 1972, increased gradually over the next twenty years and spiked at 2.57 in 1994. In 1972, with most of the Great Society initiatives in full operation and with President Nixon proposing liberal-sounding social programs, three of five Americans leaned more to the conservative side than to the liberal side. By 1984, the ratio had grown to 1.61, and it was at 1.63 in 1990. This is *gradual* change in the ratio of self-identifying conservatives, but an upward trend is unmistakable, culminating in the 1994 figure. Ratios of self-identifying

The American trend toward a slightly more conservative electorate is similar to what one finds in Western Europe over the same period.⁷ However, political scientists would warn us against reading too much into Table 1. While three quarters of Americans can place themselves along the ideological spectrum, an overwhelming majority of voters are not true ideologues in that their political ideologies do not highly constrain or structure the ways they behave.⁸ On the high end of estimates by political scientists, no more than a quarter of Americans show consistent signs of ideological thinking. Furthermore, half of the jump in self-identified 1994 conservatives came from the "don't know, haven't thought much about it" category. For many Americans, calling themselves liberals or conservatives is a momentary fashion statement without much depth. Today the "L" word and leisure suits are equally out of style.

Instead of depending on self-identification, we might find additional evidence of preference changes by looking at public opinion on policies that can be termed generally liberal or conservative. We briefly explore six such issues:⁹ (1) support for the proposition that there

conservatives to liberals: 1972-1.44, 1974-1.24, 1976-1.56, 1978-1.35, 1980-1.65, 1982-1.80, 1984-1.61, 1986-1.67, 1988-1.88, 1990-1.63, 1992-1.55, 1994-2.57.

⁷ Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Party Positions and Voter Orientations," in Hans-Dieter Klingemann & Dieter Fuchs, eds., Citizens and the State, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Table 6.4.

⁸ Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, The American Voter *op. cit.* Chapter 9; Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Measuring Ideological Conceptualizations," in Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase, et al., eds., Political Action (Beverly Hills, Sage, 1979).

⁹ The proposition that most Americans might hold stable issue positions (as opposed to stable partisan and ideological positions) was once hotly debated, but has now been largely reserved in the favor of stability. In other words, it is unlikely that respondents are making up different answers year after year, and their opinions are likely based on assessments of relatively stable underlying preferences. John E. Jackson, "The Systematic Beliefs of the Mass Public: Estimating Policy Preferences with Survey Data," Journal of Politics (1983) 45:840-65; Jon Krosnick, "The Stability of Political Preferences," American Journal of Political Science (1991) 35:547-76; For an assessment of the apparent stability of opinions within a framework that

should be a government guaranteed standard of living; (2) feelings that the federal government is too powerful; (3) support for cutting government spending; (4) opposition to government directed health insurance programs; and (5) opposition to abortion (6) opposition to federally-mandated affirmative action programs.

An increasingly conservative nation is likely to be ever more supportive of laissez-faire economic policies. The National Election Studies respondents have been asked the following question since 1972: "Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his/their own. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"¹⁰ Forty percent of the respondents in 1972 gave conservative responses, saying that folks should get ahead on their own without any government guarantees. The percentage varied slightly over the next two decades before peaking at 44 percent in 1994, up just four points in 22 years. Despite extensive debate over the nature and scope of welfare policies, the country's fundamental orientation on the role of government in guaranteeing a standard of living has hardly changed at all. Of course there is bound to be fuzziness in how people have interpreted this NES question over the years, but the lack of erosion is noteworthy. See Figure 1 for a summary of the survey results.¹¹

allows voters to have few stable preferences, see John R. Zaller, The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ As usual, respondents placed their opinions on a seven-point scale, with the three highest categories indicating a more conservative position.

¹¹ Not all of the questions were asked in each of the years. For missing years, response estimated were made by a two-year moving average. For example, the abortion question was not asked in 1974. The 1972 and 1976 responses were both 11 percent, so for the purpose of establishing a trend line, the figure 11 percent was assumed for 1974 as well.

Likewise, the percentage of Americans saying that the "government is getting too powerful" has changed very little since the mid-1960s, when Great Society programs were conceived.¹² Thirty-nine percent of Americans thought the federal government too powerful in 1966, and after fluctuating modestly throughout the 1970s, the number was 40 percent in 1994.¹³ Forty percent may seem high, but it is not the modal response in most years. Rather, a plurality of Americans profess no opinion on the subject, which is hardly what one expects if there is a widespread revolt brewing against basic governmental powers. Not surprisingly, in every year since 1968, more Americans have considered the federal government too strong than considered it too weak, but I interpret this as a robust sign of a Lockean nation.

Even if Americans have not changed their ideas about the appropriate scope of government, we might expect tax payers to want to see government services and spending cut. Since 1982, the NES has asked whether the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. The responses have been virtually identical every two years since, with about 20 percent strongly favoring cuts, 15 percent strongly opposing cuts, and the rest somewhere in between. Americans simultaneously demand lower taxes and higher spending, which leaves government officials having to balance the

¹² NES Cumulative Dataset, variable #829. Question: "Some people are afraid the government in Washington is getting too powerful for the good of the country and the individual person. Others feel that the government in Washington is not getting too strong. Do you have an opinion on this or not? (IF YES:) What is your feeling, do you think the government is getting too powerful or do you think the government is not getting too strong?"

¹³ The ratio of "too strong" to "not too strong" increased markedly in 1976 because of a change in the filtering question, which made it more acceptable for respondents to say that they do not have an opinion on the subject.

peoples' desires for public goods and for private consumption.¹⁴ Spending cuts sound good as long as one's own cherished programs are preserved, and this has contributed to stable support for government spending throughout the last twenty-five years.

Perhaps these first three questions were too general -- too philosophical -- to capture a conservative shift in public opinion. The early Clinton administration focused on national health insurance, so we will too. Since 1970, the NES has asked about the desirability of a national health plan.¹⁵ Here too public opinion appears to have been stable, with about 33 percent of

Americans

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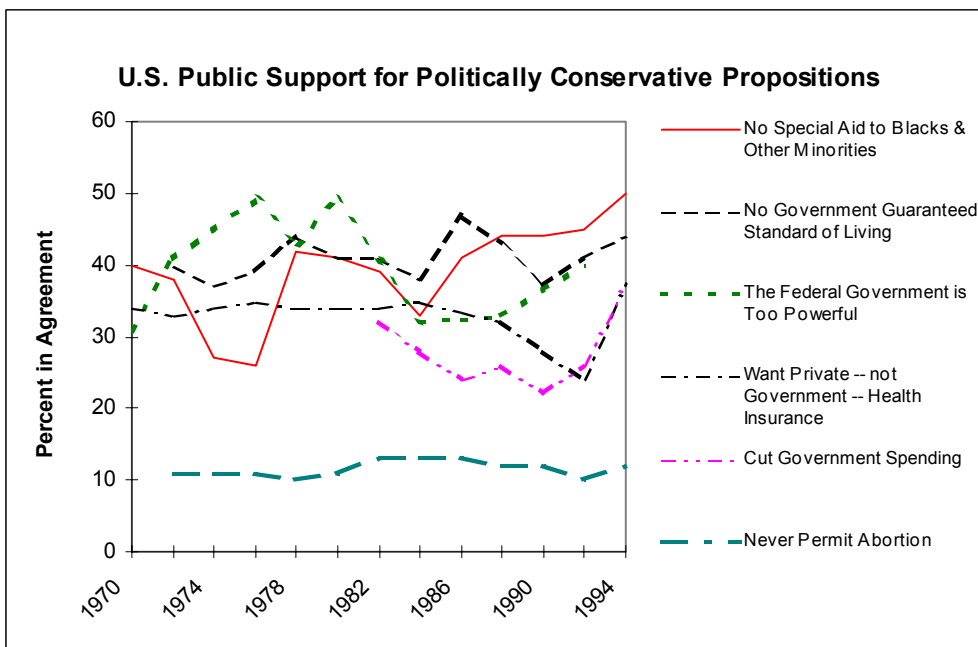
insurance

plans. The

number

reached 37

percent in



1994, just as President Clinton's health proposal was being debated. So while there have been

¹⁴ John E. Jackson & David C. King, "Public Goods, Private Interests, and Representation," *American Political Science Review* (1989) 83:1143-64.

¹⁵ "There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses. Others feel that medical expenses should be paid by individuals, and through private insurance companies like Blue Cross. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" NES Cumulative Dataset, variable #806. There was a minor 1984 change in question wording, which should not have affected the results.

some fluctuations in opinion about national health insurance over the last twenty-five years, there has been no general conservative trend here either. At least that is what the poll results seem to show, but it is likely that these numbers understate conservative trends. When people were asked about national health care in early 1970s, they likely had a big government solution in mind, possibly patterned on the British model. By the early 1990s, the whole debate had shifted to the right, and national health insurance was more likely to mean "managed competition" among "health maintenance organizations," two concepts not widely discussed twenty years earlier. This is a classic problem with public opinion data, because underlying frames of reference may change over time.

Abortion, however, is an altogether different type of issue. An abortion in the mid-1990s is fundamentally the same procedure that it was in the mid-1970s. The politics of abortion, however, have changed dramatically. Partisan cleavages on abortion cut across various factions of both parties in the mid-1970s, but today the cleavages reinforce party lines. The NES has asked about abortion since 1972. Consistently, a little more than 10 percent of Americans have held that "abortion should never be permitted."¹⁶ Among the general public, that figure has barely budged, even as both political parties have become more extreme in their platforms and their rhetoric. At least with respect to this highly visible measure of moral conservatism, the country's basic preferences have changed very little.

¹⁶ NES Cumulative Dataset, variable #837. Question: "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose. (1) Abortion should never be permitted. (after 1980, By law, abortion should never be permitted.)" Three other response options were given, and those options changed in 1982, so they are not comparable. Response option 1, however, was unchanged, giving us data to 1972.

In one area, government aid to blacks and minorities, the country has indeed become more conservative since the mid-1980s. Half of the NES respondents now agree that "the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves." That percentage is up from a third of the population in 1984.¹⁷ In the current environment, anti-affirmative action proposals, like California's 1996 "Prop 209," have wide support, though they would have been scarcely imaginable only a decade ago.

In summary, the evidence from various conceptions of political ideology shows a gradual, slight, and recent trend toward conservatism. Looking at how Americans describe themselves, the country has been growing more conservative, with the greatest change coming between 1992 and 1994. We saw no evidence of rapid swings in the self-identification of voters between the political extremes, and it could be that these labels are -- for many people -- just fashion statements with little real meaning. Moreover, when we examined public opinion on six conservative issues, we found no marked trend, except for a recent appetite for cutting spending and rolling back affirmative action programs. Americans are becoming more conservative, gradually, but on core issues -- like the role and powers of the federal government -- Americans are about as conservative today as they were twenty-five years ago.

Changes in Party Allegiances Since the 1960s

The United States is more Republican today than at any other time in my (and, if you were born after 1930, your) lifetime. This is unquestionably true when we look at the percentage of all elected offices (local, state, and federal) held by Republicans. And while Democrats are still a majority among party loyalists in the electorate, Republicans have made substantial gains

¹⁷ NES Cumulative Dataset, variable #830.

since the mid-1980s. Witness Table 2. From 1952 through 1982, the Democratic party advantage was about 22 percent. Since then, the average has been closer to 10 percent. Moreover, the Republican party's gains have been noticeable among younger voters, particularly suburban whites socialized during the Reagan years. This may have a lasting impact on the balance of loyalties between the parties, because party preferences are established early and change slowly.¹⁸

(Table 2 About Here)

Notice three things about the trends in partisan identification. First, Republican gains came at the expense of Democratic losses, not simply from any sizable decrease in the percentage of independents.¹⁹ Second, the percentage of independents has been fairly stable for thirty years. It is true that Americans proclaim weaker partisan loyalties today than they did in the early 1960s, but most still say they favor one party over the other. Third, Republican gains were most noticeable in the early 1980s when Ronald Reagan was the party's figure head and father figure.

Depending on whom one listens to, the parties are in either grave danger or they are surprisingly healthy. The answer largely depends on which definition of party one uses, and

¹⁸ M. Kent Jennings & Richard G. Niemi, Generations and Politics: A Panel Study of Young Adults and Their Parents (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); William Claggett, "Partisan Acquisition Versus Partisan Intensity," American Journal of Political Science (1981) 25:193-214.

¹⁹ Only the "pure independent" category is used in Table 2, and with good reason. Independent-leaning Democrats and independent-leaning Republicans are partisans, and there is good evidence that they behave like partisans. While the percentage of independent leaners has grown over this period, I do not consider this to be good evidence of greatly weakening party loyalties. See William G. Mayer, "Changes in Mass Partisanship, 1946-1996," Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, September 1, 1996; Bruce E. Keith, David G. Magleby, Candice J. Nelson, Elizabeth Orr, Mark C. Westlye & Raymond E. Wolfinger, The Myth of the Independent Voter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

political scientists, following V. O. Key, distinguish among three senses of the word party: There are partisan attachments in the *electorate*, parties as political *organizations* and parties in *government*.²⁰ The prevailing wisdom is that parties are in some trouble among the electorate, especially so with the rise in split ticket voting and a gradual decline in the number of self-identified "strong partisans." Meanwhile, parties as organizations are doing well both on the national level (with infusions of special interest money) and on the state and local levels (with Republican clubs gaining a foothold in the once solidly Democratic south). As for parties in government, the evidence is mixed. Party influence and discipline are not particularly strong in executive branch bureaucracies, and parties are generally absent from the judicial branch. However, partisanship in American legislatures is alive, well, and getting stronger.²¹ Parties in the government may play an important role in solving our puzzle of voter volatility, but we should save that discussion of legislative partisanship until after we review what has happened to party loyalists among voters.

Partisanship is usually measured on a seven-point scale, with strong partisans at the extremes and pure independents in the middle category. Independent-leaning partisans are "almost" independent, or at least claim that they are, but they tend to align fairly closely with one of the parties. On average from 1952 through 1960, 36 percent of Americans described

²⁰ V.O.Key, Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1942); For an excellent overview of parties, organized in this tradition, see Paul Allen Beck, Party Politics in America, eighth edition (New York: Longman, 1997).

²¹ Wattenberg, *op cit.*, James L. Gibson, Cornelius P. Cotter, John F. Bibby, & Robert J. Huckshorn, "Whither the Local Parties?" American Journal of Political Science (1985) 29:139-60; John F. Bibby, "Partisan Organizations," Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1996; David W. Rohde, "Electoral Forces, Political Agendas, and Partisanship in the House and Senate," in Roger H. Davidson, ed., The Postreform Congress (New York: St. Martin's, 1992).

themselves as strong partisans. This declined six points to 30 percent for the 1984-1992 average. Over the same period, the percentage of independent-leaning partisans jumped from 15 to 25, and the number of pure independents rose four points. Over the same two periods, loyalty to party labels among partisans in the voting booth declined roughly two points in presidential elections, six points in Senate elections, and nine points in House elections. Split-party outcomes in presidential and congressional elections rose from 25 percent of the congressional districts to 34 percent, and straight-ticket voting decreased about 15 points.²²

Although partisanship in the electorate is weakening, there remains a cadre of strong partisans, numbering near 30 percent. The preferences and motivations of strong partisans deserve special attention because *almost all of our politicians are drawn from their ranks*. The day-in and day-out drudgery of maintaining political organizations is performed almost exclusively by strong partisans. These people are also much more likely than the rest of us to belong to political interest groups, work to get a candidate elected, go to public meetings, give money to a candidate, write letters to public officials, and follow politics in the media.²³ Cross-national studies consistently find the strength of a person's partisan attachments to be the best predictor of political participation, and a recent analysis of partisanship in state governments

²² All figures derived from William Mayer, "Changes in Mass Partisanship, 1946-1996" *op. cit.*, Table 6. Notice that the decreases described in the text are differences in percentages, not percentage changes. For example, presidential-congressional straight ticket voting decreased from 86% to 71%, a 15 point decline, or a decline of more than 17 percent.

²³ The NES records whether respondents claim to have done any of the following six political activities: talk to others and try to influence them how to vote, attend political meetings, work for a party or candidate, wear a campaign button or use a bumper sticker, donate money, or write letters. Among the set of respondents who do five of these activities, 5.19 percent are political independents and 56.29 percent strong partisans. In the full sample, 11.12 percent are independents and 30.69 percent are strong partisans. So strong partisans are about twice as likely to be activists.

found the same thing. Strong partisans are the "worker bees" of political parties.²⁴ If we want a good sense for what the parties are doing and what issues the parties are likely to pursue, we should look to the activists for clues.

Party activists are, on average, more extreme in their ideological and policy views than most voters, and for good reason. Potential activists have to become *activated*, and this is more likely to happen when the "other" party's positions seems especially onerous. From the perspective of a potential activist, the more extreme your own political views are, the more distasteful the opposition's alternatives appear. As choices between the parties become more compelling, it is easier for potential activists to overcome inertia. There is good empirical evidence of this effect throughout the United States and in Western Europe.²⁵ For example, James McCann has compared the policy and ideology preferences of four groups of American voters: mass-level partisans, partisans who attended a political caucus, caucuses attendees who also were campaign activists, and state-level party delegates. The percentages of Democrats who called themselves liberals in these four categories were 38, 50, 62 and 68, respectively.

²⁴ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman & Henry E. Brady, Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Russell J. Dalton, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3.

²⁵ John H. Aldrich, "A Downsian Spatial Model with Party Activism," American Political Science Review (1983) 77:974-90. John H. Aldrich, Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Chapter 6; Robert S. Erikson, Gerald C. Wright, John P. McIver, Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Chapter 5. Austin Ranney, "Representativeness of Primary Electorates," Midwest Journal of Political Science (1972) 12:224-38.

Activist Democrats are far more liberal than run-of-the-mill Democrats. Likewise, the conservatism measures for the four categories of Republicans were 65, 80, 87, and 91.²⁶

Party activists are not merely more extreme than average Americans, they are significantly less likely to compromise (they might say "betray") core beliefs. They are ideological purists, making them less likely to shift policy positions to attract the median voter. This has been documented by political scientists at every national party convention since 1956. To the extent that parties are dominated by these purists, it makes working with political opponents especially difficult.²⁷

Parties as organizations are the creations of strategic political actors. I will argue later that the parties are becoming more extreme, that they are increasingly distant in their policies from what the average voter would like. If so, the change is almost certainly being driven by the preferences and activities of strong partisans. Since the mid-1970s, some of the strongest partisans have been showing up in the United States Congress. Bills that read more like ideological litmus tests have been increasingly common – both among Democratic leadership throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and now under Republican leadership in the mid-1990s.

That the parties have been getting stronger in Congress deserves close notice.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s political scientists were commenting on their decline in

²⁶ James A. McCann, "Presidential Nomination Activists and Political Representation: A View from the Active Minority Studies," in William G. Mayer, (ed.) In Pursuit of the White House: How We Choose Our Presidential Nominees (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996). Pgs. 79, 80.

²⁷ Herbert McClosky, "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," American Political Science Review (1964) 58:361-82; Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, The New Presidential Elite (New York: Russell Sage, 1976); Nelson W. Polsby, Consequences of Party Reform (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Walter J. Stone & Alan I. Abramowitz, "Winning May Not Be Everything, but It's More Than We Thought," American Political Science Review (1983) 77:945-56; Warren E. Miller & M. Kent Jennings, Parties in Transition (New York: Russell Sage, 1986);

legislatures, especially in the U.S. House of Representatives.²⁸ The House Speaker's powers ebbed, and individual politicians gained more autonomy as their staff budgets increased and the committee system decentralized. Party voting on the House floor, and presumably in committees as well, dropped steadily throughout the mid-century among persistent calls for "responsible parties" to stem the tide of parochial interests and individualism. That analysis was essentially correct in its time, but the parties were never dead, and as House and Senate leaders began reasserting their powers in the mid-1970s, the parties reemerged.²⁹ A clear example of this is shown in Figure 2, which tracks the rise in "party unity" voting in Congress. A Republican legislator is now more likely to vote in agreement with a majority of the Republican Congress than at any time in the last five decades. Likewise, Democratic legislators are setting modern records for party unity. The trend in Figure 2 toward stronger congressional parties is almost a mirror image of the decline in party loyalties that we found in the electorate³⁰

While party unity has been increasing in Congress, the percentage of centrist members has been decreasing in both parties. Sarah Binder, a Congress scholar at the Brookings Institution has charted the recent disappearance of centrists. She defines "centrists" as those members whose ideology positions are closer to the mid-point between the two parties than to

²⁸ David W. Brady, Joseph Cooper & Patricia A. Hurley, "The Decline of Party in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1887-1968," Legislative Studies Quarterly (1979) 4:381-407; Melissa P. Collie, "Electoral Patterns and Voting Alignments in the U.S. House, 1886-1986," Legislative Studies Quarterly (1989) 14:107-28.

²⁹ Gary W. Cox & Mathew D. McCubbins, Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); David W. Rohde, Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

³⁰ For a similar observation, see Jon Bond & Richard Fleisher, "Why has Party Conflict among Elites Increased if the Electorate is Dealigning?" Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, April 1996.

the median member of their own party. As we see in Figure 3, adapted from her work, the percentage of centrists declined from about a quarter of all members in 1980 to 10 percent in 1996. The evidence on congressional partisanship suggests two things: that each party is more internally cohesive when voting on the floor, and that there are fewer bipartisan coalitions today than just fifteen years ago. Rules and procedures are increasingly used to benefit the majority party at the expense of the minority.

George Wallace used to say that there isn't "a dime's worth of difference" between the two parties. No longer. Today, perhaps, there may be fifteen cents worth of a difference – and the gap is growing. How did these developments in party allegiances happen, and how do these trends help us think about the public's disaffection for government?

An important part of the answer is the demise of the New Deal coalition, which struck a grand bargain in the Democratic party between socially conservative southern whites and northern liberals. Over the first half of the century, Republicans had no significant presence in the old confederacy, and southern politicians gained national strength by joining in a partisan coalition with northern liberals.³¹ Their alliance kept race off the agenda for several decades until it burst on the national scene in the early 1960s. Only then did party differences on race come into a sharp focus.³² In addition to the white southerners and northern liberals, the New Deal coalition included Midwestern anti-Communists, ethnic Catholics, and radical social

³¹ V.O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in States and Nation (New York: Knopf, 1949); Nicol C. Rae, Southern Democrats (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

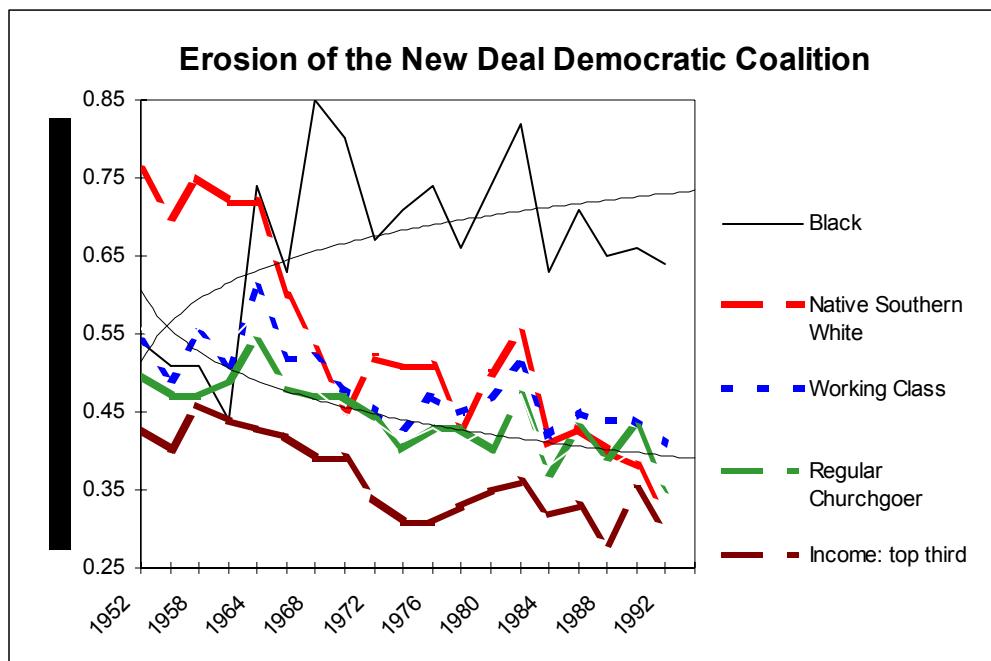
³² Edward G. Carmines & James A. Stimson, Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), Chapter 2.

democrats located in the plains states and in the urban northeast.³³ It was a strange-bedfellows coalition, but despite the factions, it persisted for more than thirty years. Putting the issue of race aside -- and this is not an easy thing to do -- umbrella coalitions are more likely to spawn centrist policies because extreme factions within the parties have to work out their differences before supporting national legislation.

The New Deal coalition is dead. For evidence we turn to Harold Stanley and Richard Neimi's compelling analysis.³⁴ Using NES data from 1952 through 1992 to explore the demographic characteristics of Democrats, they show a steady erosion of the New Deal coalition beginning in the early 1960s. A portion of their results is summarized in Figure 4. The figure reflects coefficient estimates from logistic equations predicting partisanship as a function of demographic variables. As such, each coefficient estimate controls for the other independent variables. We are left with relatively pure indicators of the impact on one's partisanship of being black, a native southern white, working class, wealthy, and so on. The results are telling.

³³ Nicol C. Rae, "Intra-Party Conflict in an Evolving Electoral Order: American Party Factionalism 1946-52 and 1990-96," Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1996.

³⁴ Harold W. Stanley & Richard G. Niemi, "The Demise of the New Deal Coalition: Partisanship and Group Support, 1952-92," in Herbert F. Weisberg, ed., Democracy's Feast: Elections in America (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1995). Additional demographic that are included in their analysis but not present in Figure 3 include: Catholic, Jewish, Female, Union Household, White Protestant Fundamentalist, Hispanic (non-Cuban), Born 1959-70, and Born 1943-58.



In the early 1950s, native southern whites were overwhelmingly identified with the Democratic party. They were the Democrats also most likely to support conservative public policies. Contemporary with the civil rights movement (and long before Ronald Reagan's successful southern strategy), many southern whites abandoned the Democratic party. That most critical element of the "grand bargain" over race disappeared. Not even two native southern whites, Bill Clinton and Al Gore, could reverse the trend in 1992.

While the Democratic party was becoming less southern, it was also growing more secular. The mean probability of a regular churchgoer self-identifying as a Democrat was about 0.50 until the late 1960s. By 1994 the probability dropped to 0.35 (again, controlling for all other voter attributes in the model). That is a 30 percent decline in the probability of regular churchgoers calling themselves Democrats. Many of today's Christian Coalition members would have been in the Democratic party thirty years ago. They would have been consulted on issues like abortion, school prayer, and welfare reform. By the 1990s, a large portion of the Democratic party's activist base wanted nothing to do with the Christian right, and opportunities for productive policy coalitions were being lost.

The economic base of the New Deal coalition has also been transformed. In the late 1950s, Americans with family incomes in the top third had a 0.45 probability of being Democrats. That support eroded in the late 1960s and is about 0.30 today, for a 33 percent drop. At the same time that some relatively wealthy Americans were leaving the New Deal Coalition, so was an important slice of the working class.

The old Democratic party was a big tent. Although the new Democratic party is a place that traditional liberals may find more comfortable, the tent is not so big anymore. Of course, it was not race alone that eroded the old coalition. As E.J. Dionne contends in Why Americans Hate Politics, the old political order "could not withstand the storms over the Vietnam War, race, feminism, and the counterculture. American politics has never fully recovered from the implosion of the Vital Center."³⁵ The Democratic party still has considerable ideological diversity, and William Mayer has recently shown that the party's faithful consistently reflect a broader ideological and policy range than Republicans.³⁶ That range, however, may well have diminished over the last three decades.

Meanwhile, the Republican party has been transformed by an infusion of southern whites and upper-class reinforcements. Adding to the party ranks were regular churchgoers and a smattering of the working classes, who are more likely than "Rockefeller Republicans" to push a conservative social agenda. Also in the 1960s, a cohort of young Republicans, many of them

³⁵ E.J.Dionne, Jr., Why Americans Hate Politics (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), pg. 116.

³⁶ William G. Mayer, The Divided Democrats: Ideological Unity, Party Reform, and Presidential Elections (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1996), Chapter 4.

active in the Goldwater presidential campaign, became a strong force in the party.³⁷ The Republican party's base has headed south, and the party's proposals have become more conservative as a result. A generation ago, all of the Republican party leaders in Congress came from the north. Today the leadership is dominated by the likes of Trent Lott (Mississippi), Newt Gingrich (Georgia), and Dick Armey (Texas).³⁸

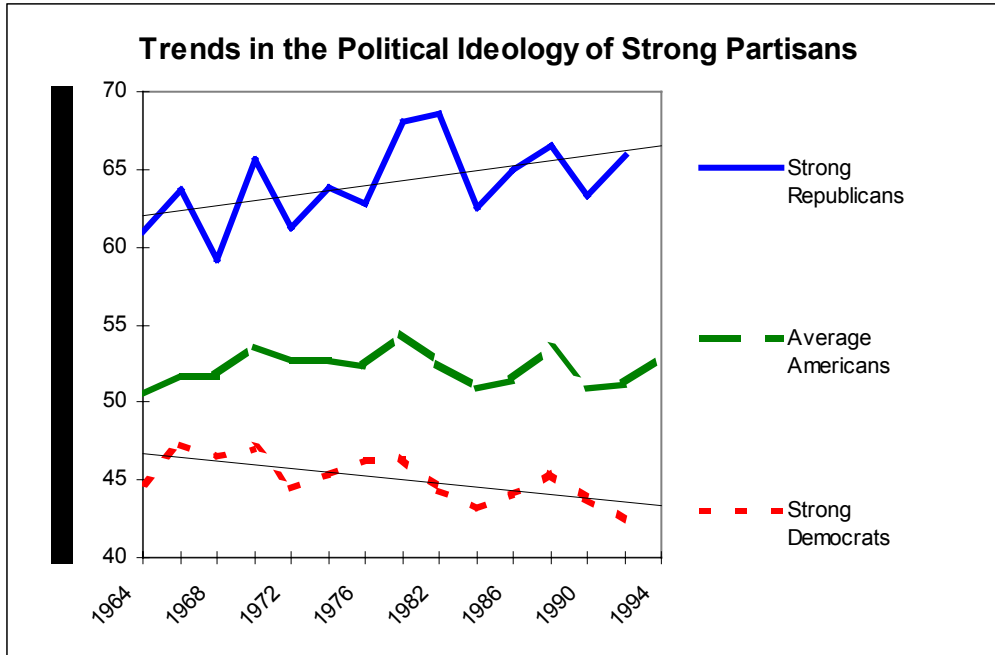
With the demise of the New Deal coalition, the electoral bases of both parties changed in ways that have made the parties both more ideologically cohesive and more ideologically extreme. That the parties are polarizing has been a recurring theme in recent journalistic critiques of modern elections. Political scientists, however, may instinctively suspect that polarization is an irrational strategy for party elites running the parties. The party locating its policy positions closest to the preferences of the median voter is supposed to get the most votes, or so we have been taught.³⁹ With that model in mind, it makes little sense to allow one's own party to become extreme, but that is precisely what has been happening since the decline of the New Deal coalition.

³⁷ Nicol C. Rae, The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans: From 1952 to the Present (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Mary C. Brennan, Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

³⁸ Ironically, increased party competition in the South may have made the parties more extreme. When the Democratic party dominated the South, congressional and state-office primaries were essentially equivalent to general elections, and the position of the median *primary* voter was likely to be close to that of the media *general election* voter. This is because the primary electorate was more likely to draw participants from across the ideological and policy landscapes. Competitive two-party primaries may have changed this completely. Conservatives are less likely to vote in the Democratic primary than they used to, so the expected difference between the median positions of the primary and general election voters have almost certainly increased over time. If this is true, then competitive two-party primaries are not unambiguously good institutions, though I am not comfortable calling for a return to one-party dominance.

³⁹ Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper & Row, 1957)

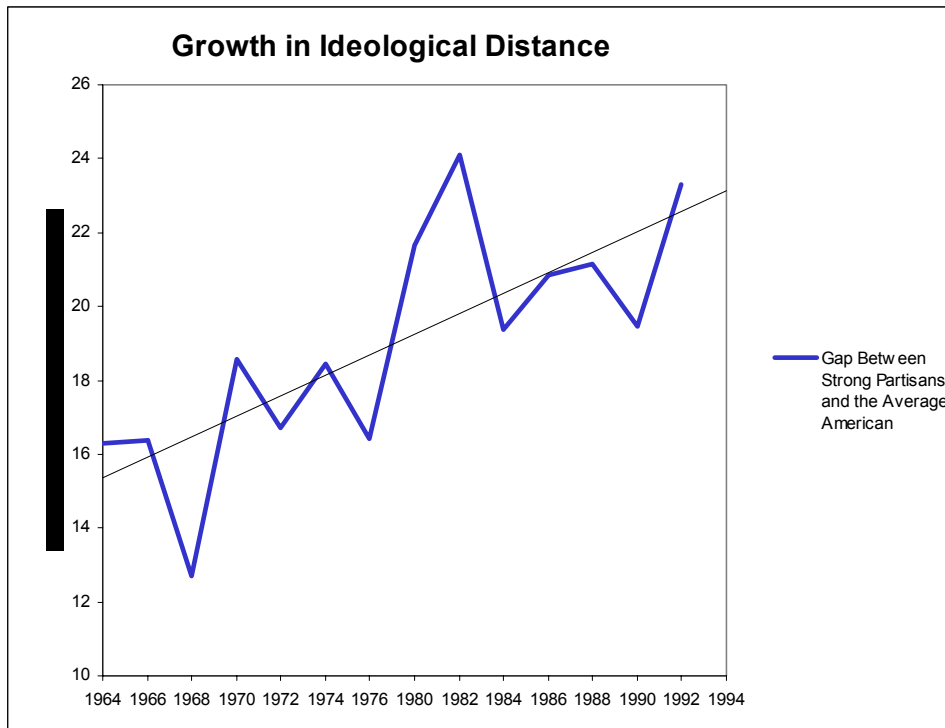
As evidence, we return to the National Election Studies and a measure of political ideology. Beginning in 1964, the NES staff has asked respondents to rate liberals and



conservatives on a "feeling thermometer," ranging from 1 (very cold feelings for the group) to 97 (very warm feelings). An individual's ideology can be measured by the difference between the feeling thermometer ratings for the two groups.⁴⁰ In the analysis that follows, low scores indicate strong preferences for liberals. Preferences for conservatives get high scores.

⁴⁰ NES Cumulative File, variable #801. This index is constructed from the thermometer score for liberals (V211) and the thermometer score for conservatives (V212). First, the value of V211 is subtracted from 97, and that difference is added to the value of V212. This sum is then divided by 2, and .5 is added to the result. Finally, the solution is truncated to obtain an integer value. These questions were not asked in 1978.

At least among average Americans, conservatism has been very stable, with no statistically significant trend in either direction.⁴¹ Americans are slightly more conservative (with an average thermometer score of 53) than they are liberal. Just as we saw earlier with respect to public support for politically conservative propositions (Figure 1), there has been no marked conservative trend over the last couple decades. The same cannot be said, however, for strong



Republicans, as shown in Figure 5.⁴² Strong Republicans have become more conservative, and this is significant in that Republican party activists are drawn almost entirely from their ranks. Likewise, Strong Democrats have become more liberal, though the ideological shift has not been as steep.

⁴¹ The "average Americans" category includes all respondents *including* strong partisans.

⁴¹ I have replicated the analysis for campaign activists, and the results are even more striking. However, to maximize the number of observations available for estimating the model later in this chapter, I am using the more modest figures from strong partisans.

The pattern in Figure 5 — showing that the parties have been polarizing — is repeated when we examine the preferences of campaign activists. Accordingly, the data at hand are likely biased toward *understating* the amount of polarization.⁴³ From the average American's perspective, the two parties have indeed been growing more distant, as shown in Figure 6, which is strictly derived from the data in Figure 5. If we use the linear trend line as a guide, the gap was around 15 thermometer points in the early 1960s and is more than 22 points today -- a 47 percent increase in thirty years.

The basic evidence for polarization of the two parties seems unmistakable in Figures 5 and 6. However, polarization is unlikely to continue forever, because the basic Downsian logic of spatial policy locations cannot be ignored. For politicians, nothing focuses the mind as effectively as an electoral defeat like the one congressional Democrats suffered in 1994. President Clinton's recently successful "triangulation" strategy is Downsian in almost every respect. He staked out policy issues near the median voter on issues such as welfare reform and gay marriages, much to the consternation of Democratic party activists.⁴⁴ Of course, if a triangulation strategy made so much sense in 1995 and 1996, it presumably should have been attractive in 1993 and 1994 as well. But at that time the Democratic party seemed seized by its own extremes.

⁴³ It is interesting that the party positions are not equidistant from the average respondent. The Democrats are closer. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the Democratic party has remained a majority in the electorate even though the average American is slightly more conservative than liberal.

⁴⁴ Aldrich and McGinnis analyze an equilibrium with party activists in two parties and across multiple issue dimensions. The equilibrium amounts to a "stopping point" in polarization. See John H. Aldrich & Michael McGinnis, "A Model of Party Constraints on Optimal Candidate Positions," Mathematical and Computer Modeling (1989) 12:437-50.

It is worth repeating the evidence presented here, because much of it may help us understand how the parties have been complicit in the public's mistrust of government.

- **Polarization.** Citizens who most closely identify with political parties have grown, on average, more ideologically extreme over the last three decades.
- **Alienation.** Meanwhile the average American has become only slightly more conservative, creating a growing gap between the preferences of political elites and average citizens.
- **Frustration with Partisanship in Congress.** Within the U.S. Congress, the parties have become both more extreme and more cohesive, while average Americans are likely slightly less partisan than they were in the 1960s.

Inflexible partisanship is corrosive within electorates and legislatures. Of course parties play a crucial role in democracies as political intermediaries, and we want them to be responsible by announcing proposals and then delivering on them. However, the art of politics is the art of compromise, and strange bedfellows coalitions tend to make better laws (easier to implement, more widely supported, and more likely to stand constitutional tests) than strict and homogeneous party coalitions. This is especially important in policy areas with highly heterogeneous constituents and interests. Partisanship is too often a barrier to strange bedfellows coalitions, and bipartisan alliances have dwindled in Congress since the mid-1970s.⁴⁵ With our legislatures increasingly dominated by party loyalists drawn from extreme elements in their own parties, legislators are inclined to inveigh against rivals. Is it any wonder why survey respondents accord politicians less respect when politicians are showing less respect among themselves?

⁴⁵ Eric Uslaner makes an interesting argument that the decline in bipartisanship and civility in Congress reflects growing intemperance and activism society. Eric M. Uslaner, The Decline of Comity in Congress (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

How Mistrust Flows from Polarization of the Parties

Quite naturally, citizens are more trusting of politicians who share their concerns, and citizens are more accepting of political institutions that advance citizen interests. Indeed, the singular accomplishment of a democracy is that public officials have strong incentives to be beholden to their constituents' wishes. Imagine yourself in the position of an average American over the last three decades witnessing the political parties staking out positions ever more distant from where you want your representatives to be. Frustration and alienation would grow. It is not simply a question of which politicians are *closer* to you as much as *how far away they are* from your basic concerns.⁴⁶

Is there any evidence that the distance one is from the parties has an impact on how much one trusts the government? From the presented thus far, perhaps. The widening gap between the parties shown in Figure 6 covers the same period during which mistrust grew. Compare the slope in Figure 6 with the trust in government data presented in Gary Orren's chapter. The trend lines seem related; they pass the eyeball test. But eyeball tests are rarely convincing.

A second test of the relationship between polarization and mistrust is to see whether people who say they mistrust government are, on average, more distant from the parties. Accordingly, I explored survey responses to the National Elections Studies for every two years since 1964, when the ideology thermometer ratings were first taken. An ideology score for each

⁴⁶ It is well known that voters like their own Congress members better than they like the institution of Congress. Among scholars this is usually attributed to incumbency advantages and self-promotion by re-election oriented legislators. That must certainly be part of the story, but a natural inference from my thesis is that citizens show more respect for their own legislators because those politicians are, on average, going to be closer to the survey respondent's policy positions than to the median position in Congress. Thomas E. Mann, Unsafe at Any Margin: Interpreting Congressional Elections (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978).

party and each year was generated, as reflected in Figure 5. For example, strong Republicans in 1970 scored, on average, about 65 on the (1 to 97) ideology rating. Strong Democrats scored close to 47, and the national average was 54. If an individual's ideological distance from the parties is related to mistrust, then citizens at the national mean should be more distrustful than citizens "closer" to one of the parties. By implication, as the parties move further from the average citizen, mistrust should rise.

That is precisely what the survey evidence shows. Using data from 11,756 respondents whose ideological preferences fell somewhere between the two party extremes, citizens who say they trust the federal government to do the right thing "never" and "only some of the time" were statistically more likely to be further from the parties. The closest party cadre was 4.56 thermometer points away for citizens trusting government and 4.98 thermometer points for mistrustful citizens ($p > 0.000$). At least in this bivariate way, mistrust seems to flow from polarization.

The basic argument of this book is that mistrust in government is a multi-causal phenomenon, while much of the argument in this chapter has necessarily been uni-causal. It is not my task to evaluate all of the competing hypotheses in one place. However, an appropriate test of the polarization hypotheses should be multivariate. That analysis is presented in Table 3, which shows probit estimates for a model of distrust.⁴⁷

(Table 3 About Here)

The results in Table 3 reflect the independent contributions that each of the variables makes to explaining mistrust. For our purposes, the actual sizes of the coefficient estimates is

⁴⁷ The dependent variable is bimodal, with "0" corresponding to the two survey response categories associated with trust and "1" corresponding to the two categories associated with mistrust.

less important than whether we find statistically discernible results. Several of the results are illuminating beyond the issues raised in this chapter.

Recalling Robert Lawrence's provocative findings about the role of the economy in public evaluations of government, it is clear that being unemployed is related with mistrust ($p > 0.000$). We should, of course, be careful about generalizing from the probit estimates because the model does not test for national economic trends. Still, it seems that personal economic crises make citizens more willing to blame Washington for their problems, and less willing to extend politicians their trust. Furthermore, white Americans are less trusting of government than are minorities ($p > 0.000$). This may be a reaction among minorities to the civil rights movement, when the government shifted from prosecutor to protector of minority interests. Mistrust of government also falls with education ($p > 0.000$), but rises with age ($p > 0.000$).

Trust in government is related to partisanship in two ways: the strength of a person's partisanship and that person's ideological distance from the polarizing parties. As expected, trust is highest among strong partisans ($p > 0.000$). The more professed affinity one has for the parties, the more likely one is to trust the government – even when the government is run by the *other* party. Strong Democrats, for example, were more likely than weak Democrats to trust the government during the height of the Reagan administration. This may be partly due to the sense among strong partisans that their *own* party is ready to “fight the good fight.”

To test the central proposition in this chapter, for every NES survey respondent I calculated the ideological distance to the closest group of strong partisans. The prediction is that the smaller the distance, the greater the trust. As the parties have polarized, more and more Americans have seen the parties drift away from their centrist preferences. The results in Table

3 are unambiguous on this point. The more distant the parties are from respondents, the more likely respondents are to say they mistrust government ($p > 0.000$), even controlling for the effects of unemployment, education, age, year, partisan strength, and so on.

In elections with politicians making policy stands relatively close to average (or median) Americans, the vote choice is fairly well understood. Most of us begin with a bias in favor of the candidates matching our partisan identification, but this is tempered by issue positions, character, and retrospective evaluations of how the incumbents have been performing.⁴⁸ When evaluating issue positions, voters presumably seek to minimize the differences between their preferences and what a candidate is (strategically) offering. This logic works well when the parties are relatively close to the median voter, but we do not yet have a good sense for what happens to the vote calculus when the parties are extreme. One option is always to vote for the closest candidate no matter how far away that might be, but depending on what one's preferences are for the status quo, this might prove disastrous. Instead, it may make sense for voters to play a mixed strategy, splitting their votes between the parties to balance the extremes. Indeed, Mo Fiorina makes this argument noting that along with transformations in the coalitions supporting the parties, "activists tried to impose programmatic government; voters responded with divided government."⁴⁹

The style of analysis presented in Table 3 – demonstrating that polarization is related to mistrust – was applied as well to split-ticket voting. The results there also indicate that the farther one is from the parties, the more likely one is to split their tickets -- even controlling for

⁴⁸ Warren E. Miller & J. Merrill Shanks, The New American Voter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) Chapter 8; Morris P. Fiorina, Retrospective Voting in American National Elections (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁴⁹ Morris Fiorina, Divided Government 2nd edition (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1996), pg. 77.

partisan strength.⁵⁰ Political scientists are nowhere near a consensus on the causes of split-ticket voting, and professor Fiorina's balancing hypothesis has met with considerable resistance.⁵¹ In exploring the causes of mistrust, however, both mistrust and declining fidelity to parties appear driven by thirty years of polarization.

Conclusion

The Spring of President Clinton's second term is replete with promises of moderation and bipartisanship. Indeed, the president's reelection owes much to his willingness to act more like a centrist and less like the liberal who voters came to know in 1993 and 1994. However, while the Downsian logic of moderation seems compelling, both parties continue to be most influenced by their extremes. There is nothing new in this, and we have seen that both parties have become more extreme over the last three decades – not just the last three years. It is unlikely that a couple months of moderation by the president will return the parties to the broader-based coalitions that grew out of the New Deal.

Fundamental political orientations change gradually. We have seen that the country has indeed grown more conservative since the mid-1960s, but the changes have been modest.

⁵⁰ I ran a probit estimate of a model with the same independent variables shown in Table 3 and with an independent variable of self-professed ticket-splitting from the NES (n=9,214). The critical independent variable was distance to the closest strong partisans, which was statistically significant at $p > 0.000$ with the expected sign. The propensity to split tickets was also related to partisan strength (strong partisans are much less likely to split tickets), race (whites are more likely to split tickets) and region (southern Democrats are much more likely to vote Republican than non-southern Democrats). I do not have a sense yet for how substantively significant the polarization findings are, but in this first form, these results are consistent with a story that split ticket voting has increased *because* the parties have polarized.

⁵¹ Michael Alvarez & Matthew Soberg-Shousen, "Policy Moderation or Conflicting Expectations. Testing the Intentional Models of Split Ticket Voting," American Politics Quarterly (1993) 21:410-38; Richard Born, "Split Ticket Voters, Divided Government, and Fiorina's Policy-Balancing Model," Legislative Studies Quarterly (1994) 19:95-115.

Americans have been remarkably consistent with respect to opinions on abortion, national health insurance, the powers of the federal government, and social safety-net issues. It now seems clear that the Republicans in 1995 and 1996 claimed a conservative mandate that most Americans were unready to give. Democrats, however, committed similar sins in the 1970s and 1980s – culminating in President Clinton’s national health care proposals in 1993.

Mistrust of government was on the rise long before President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich began their personal and political battles of the 1990s. Indeed, both men – as leaders of their respective political parties – are creatures of the polarizing trends documented in this chapter. Both men are born of political primaries that amplify the demands of the extreme wings. Both men rely on campaign resources drawn disproportionately from activists and strong partisans. And both men have to try holding together voting coalitions within the Congress, though their legislators are also subject to polarizing forces back home.

The demise of the New Deal coalition, the rise of the Republican party in the South, the declining fidelity to party labels, the rising partisanship among political elites in Congress, all point to a growing gap between the interests of political elites and the preferences of average Americans. That growing gap is being filled not by third parties -- because our electoral system is profoundly hostile to third parties. The growing gap between elites and the rest of us is being filled with cynicism, mistrust, and frustration that our leaders do not care about "our" problems.

One way out of this downward spiral may be for candidates, chasten by the prospect of electoral defeats, to adopt more centrist policies. This is especially difficult, however, when the parties are dominated by activists who are too often willing to sacrifice votes for the sake of ideological purity. From the voters' perspective, faced with stark choices, mistrust may be a perfectly reasonable response.

Table 1
Liberal-Conservative Self-Identification, 1972-1994

| Percent | '72 | '74 | '76 | '78 | '80 | '82 | '84 | '86 | '88 | '90 | '92 | '94 |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Extremely Liberal | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Liberal | 7 | 11 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 6 |
| Slightly Liberal | 10 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| Middle of the Road | 27 | 26 | 25 | 27 | 20 | 22 | 23 | 28 | 22 | 24 | 23 | 27 |
| Slightly Conservative | 15 | 12 | 12 | 14 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 15 |
| Conservative | 10 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 13 | 12 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 10 | 13 | 18 |
| Extremely Conservative | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| DK, Haven't Thought | 28 | 27 | 33 | 27 | 36 | 36 | 30 | 25 | 30 | 33 | 27 | 22 |

Source: American National Election Studies, 1972-1994.

Table 2
Party Identification, 1952-1994

| Percent | '52 | '54 | '56 | '58 | '60 | '62 | '64 | '66 | '68 | '70 | '72 | '74 | '76 | '78 | '80 | '82 | '84 | '86 | '88 | '90 | '92 | '94 |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Democrat (incl leaners) | 57 | 56 | 50 | 56 | 52 | 54 | 61 | 55 | 55 | 54 | 52 | 52 | 52 | 54 | 52 | 55 | 48 | 51 | 47 | 52 | 50 | 47 |
| Independent | 6 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 8 | 12 | 11 | 13 | 13 | 15 | 15 | 14 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 12 | 10 |
| Republican (incl leaners) | 34 | 33 | 37 | 33 | 36 | 35 | 30 | 32 | 33 | 32 | 34 | 31 | 33 | 30 | 33 | 32 | 39 | 36 | 41 | 36 | 38 | 42 |
| %Dem. Minus % Repub. | 23 | 23 | 13 | 23 | 16 | 19 | 31 | 23 | 22 | 22 | 18 | 21 | 19 | 24 | 19 | 23 | 9 | 15 | 6 | 16 | 12 | 5 |

Source: American National Election Studies, 1952-1994. Percentages do not sum to 100 because "apolitical" and "don't know" responses are excluded.

Table 3
Probit Estimates for Model Predicting Mistrust of Government in Washington

| Independent Variable | Coefficient. (std. error) | P > z |
|---|------------------------------|--------|
| Distance to Closest Strong Partisans | 0.014 (0.001) | 0.000 |
| Partisan Strength (1 - low to 4 - high) | -0.089 (0.011) | 0.000 |
| Year of Survey | 0.034 (0.001) | 0.000 |
| Age of Respondent (years) | 0.003 (0.001) | 0.000 |
| Gender of Respondent (1 - male) | -0.030 (0.020) | 0.139 |
| Race of Respondent (1 - white) | -0.302 (0.035) | 0.000 |
| Respondent from the South? (1 - yes) | -0.052 (0.022) | 0.016 |
| Respondent's Income (1 st to 5 th percentile) | -0.015 (0.010) | 0.122 |
| Respondent's Education (1 - low to 8 - high) | -0.027 (0.007) | 0.000 |
| Is Respondent Unemployed? (1 - yes) | 0.174 (0.042) | 0.000 |
| Number of Observations = 17,090 Pseudo R ² = 0.0548 | | |

Chapter 3 Polarization in Congressional Districts and Congress⁵²

Many think about politics as happening in one of two venues: a *market* where services are bought and sold (with policy awarded to the highest bidder), or an *arena* (in which politics is a sport, with a few teams competing and most of us in the audience rooting or booing). Both perspectives have a powerful idea in common: Competition is good. In the United States, two-party competition is fiercest in politically centrist districts where the odds of either party's candidates winning are essentially the same.

Competition makes the political market more efficient and rewards superior political teams. Among scholars, few things are more revered than strong *party* competition. Elections hold lawmakers accountable to constituents, and – if the Downsian framework is essentially right – competition yields parties and policies reflecting the median voter's preferences (Downs 1957). Competition brings about more media attention, which heightens voter interest and encourages candidates to be clearer about their issue positions (Kahn & Kenney 1999). Competition leads to higher turnout in elections and makes the spectacle more fun to watch (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Competitive elections help legitimize the political process and are important for socializing new citizens (Dennis 1987:323-73; Carmines 1994). Competition is good, and there is an overwhelming consensus that policies thwarting political competition

⁵² An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the MIT Conference on Parties and Congress, and at the Yale University American Politics Seminar. I thank John Aldrich, Steve Ansolabehere, Barry Burden, Cary Coglianese, Mo Fiorina, David Lazer, and Richard Zeckhauser for comments.

should be dismantled (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes 1960; Dahl 1965, 1971; Ranney 1975; Ceaser 1982).

Amid the chorus of praise for vigorous two-party competition, this paper sounds a discordant note. There are tradeoffs between a member's fidelity to district interests and polarization in the Congress at large, and I argue that polarization has risen with the increase of centrist (or competitive) congressional districts. That polarization continues apace is beyond doubt (Poole & Rosenthal 2001; Ansolabehere, Snyder & Stewart 1999a, Fiorina 1999), and I have shown elsewhere that polarization is strongly related to decreased trust in the federal government over the past generation (King 1997).

Elections in the U.S. happen in two stages. First candidates need to win party primaries, yet primaries tend to attract very few voters (less than 17 percent of eligible voters in the 2002 primaries, for example). Primary voters are, on average, more ideologically extreme than their counterparts in the general election. Second, candidates seek majorities in general elections, which can be done by "bringing out the base" as effectively as possible or by "moving to the center," which risks alienating primary election supporters (Burden 2001).

The more extreme the primary voters are in a district, the more extreme (or off-median) the candidates in the general election will be. Yet when an electoral district is closely contested, the probability of a change in party control is greatest, which creates a strong incentive for previously non-mobilized potential activists have to become involved in primary elections. Competitive two-party districts, when subjected to two-tiered elections and the selective participation of political extremists, tend to bring about extremist candidates. The irony is -- and the evidence in this paper shows -- that political

extremists in Congress are more likely to arise out of centrist and two-party competitive districts, rather than out of districts dominated by one party or the other.

To track the relationship between a district's two-party competition and a member's fidelity to voter interests, I begin with a review of the Downsian framework. In theory, legislators should represent the median voters in their districts, regardless the degree of party competition. Second, I outline a story linking a district's level of political competition with the fidelity that members of Congress may have to their district's ideological interests. Third, I examine how faithfully members of Congress represented the ideological preferences of their districts from 1993 – 2000. Finally, I put competition and polarization within a broader framework, exploring how various primary election rules might improve representation in Congress.

2. The Power of the Median Voter

If one views politics as a marketplace in which voters shop for parties and candidates offering policies that are “closest” to voters desires, then rational vote-maximizing candidates offer voters policies closest to the preferences of the median voter. Drawing on work by Harold Hotelling (1929), Anthony Downs (1957) formalized long-held suspicions about how and why candidates in two-party systems tend to be fairly moderate in their issue positions. There is a strong pull, Downs argued, to the median voter, as both parties vie for the affection of that pivotal voter. Successful parties and successful candidates will be those that locate at the median and remain faithful to the median voter's wishes. The apparent stability of the median voter result was comforting to a generation of political scientists trained in the wake of World War II. In

the post-war period, the dominant question among election scholars was why the United States remained so centrist while our European counterparts swung wildly to the political left and right. The answer: rational vote-maximizing parties, utility-maximizing voters, and strong two-party competition.

The Downsian formulation reduces politics to two dimensions, left and right, and while politics is certainly more complicated than that, this basic ideological continuum strongly underlies contemporary politics. Citizen preferences on an overwhelming majority of policy issues flow from citizen ideological frameworks and from cues about affiliated party positions on those issues (Converse 1964, Carmines 1994, Bartels 2000). In Congress, votes tend to be highly consistent with a member's basic ideological preferences, and a member's ideology (which may, of course, reflect his or her constituents' ideology) is by far the best predictor for how legislators vote (Poole & Rosenthal 1997). So while the left-right continuum is a simplification, it is a very powerful one, and it captures reality fairly well.

In practice, parties fail to converge precisely at the position of the median voter because parties are uncertain about voter preferences and because partisan primaries entice candidates to commit to policies in the primary that do not reflect the wishes of likely voters in the general election. Voters also do not simply vote by minimizing the policy distance between their ideal points and a party. Character matters, and a multiple dimension of issues matter (Plott 1967; Davis, Hinich & Ordeshook 1970). Voters weigh what a candidate says he or she will do and an incumbent's track record (Fiorina 1981). These, and other forces, help spread the parties apart, but the general pull remains toward the median.

In the simplest Downsian models, voters will select among parties no matter how far away the party's positions may be. Extremists, far to the left or far to the right, will not abstain from voting. "As long as there is even the most infinitesimal difference [between the parties], extremist voters would be forced to vote for the one closest to them, no matter how distasteful its policies seemed in comparison with those of their ideal government" (Downs 1957: 119). In political systems with unimodal preference distributions skewed far to the right or to the left, party and candidate positions will still converge on the position of the median voter. We know from experience, though, that extremists do abstain when their own party seems "too far" away. If extremist voters become alienated, then parties will not converge at the median when the ideological distribution is skewed to the left or the right (Hinich, Ledyard & Ordeshook 1972). The outcome from alienation of extremists is clear as it applies to congressional districts. In overwhelmingly left-leaning districts, candidates will appeal to the median of the likely voters, which will not include abstaining extremists from the right. The candidate will naturally be to the left of the median citizen. The opposite outcome is expected in right-leaning congressional districts, where extremists from the left are more likely to become alienated and abstain from voting.

We are left with two strong predictions linking the strength of two-party competition with politicians' fidelity to the median voter. If extremists do not become alienated, politicians will be faithful. If extremists become alienated and do not vote, then fidelity will be worse in one-party dominant congressional districts. Politicians from politically competitive districts, where either party has roughly the same chance of winning, will be the most faithful to the ideological wishes of the median voter.

3. Motivating Examples

If Anthony Downs were looking for the median voter in the United States, he would do well to begin his search in southern Ohio, where rolling green hills give way in the east to a more rugged terrain at the West Virginia border. Democrats and Republicans fight hard for each office in Ohio's largest congressional district, the 6th, which runs "from Marietta down the Ohio River to the gritty industrial towns of Ironton and Portsmouth," skirting the Dayton and Cincinnati suburbs (Barone & Ujifusa, 1997:1118). In national votes, the Ohio 6th leans slightly Republican (Bush defeated Clinton 40 percent to 39 percent in 1992, and Clinton nipped Dole 43 percent to 42 percent in 1996), but the local parties contest every position, from city councils to county commissions.

The Ohio 6th is middle America, short on minorities and inner cities, but centrist in most respects. Procter & Gamble – the Cincinnati-based maker of diapers, tissues, toothpaste and soap – market-tests its products in the region. So does Burger King. In the minds of marketers, Portsmouth, Ohio has replaced Peoria, Illinois. Political marketers know the 6th district, too. Following his presidential nomination in August 1992, candidate Bill Clinton took to the road in a bus caravan. A route was drawn to take Clinton the length of Ohio 6th, with camera crews in tow. A year later as president, Clinton made a highly visible trip to the district, selling middle-America his 1993 economic stimulus plan, again with television cameras rolling.

From 1981 through 1992, Republican Bob McEwen represented southeastern Ohio in the U.S. House of Representatives. McEwen was a stalwart Reaganite,

consistently rated among the most conservative House members by the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and the American Conservative Union (ACU).⁵³ As a simple measure of ideology, consider the average interest group ratings from three organizations: the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL), and the ADA. McEwen's average for the 102nd Congress (1991-1992) was 4.3 out of 100 – an unmistakably conservative record. Despite apparently being to the right of his constituency, McEwen's electoral grip seemed secure throughout the 1980s. Then in 1992 McEwen faced a difficult challenge in the Republican primary election, was found to have bounced 166 checks in the House Bank scandal, and was accused of “missing 25 roll call votes on days he received honoraria for speeches” (Barone & Ujifusa 1993: 1002). McEwen lost to a political newcomer, Democrat Ted Strickland, who garnered 50.72 percent of the vote to McEwen's 49.28 percent.

Ted Strickland had never before held elective office, but he was well-known in the district as a liberal activist, a Methodist minister, the former director of a children's home, and an advocate for the homeless. He won the 1992 Democratic primary by a 2 to 1 margin while touting firmly pro-choice views to the party faithful. Once in Washington, Strickland quickly made a name as a political liberal. The average of his ACLU, NARAL and ADA scores was 87.8 out of 100, a remarkable change from McEwen's pattern. Along with a majority of Democrats, Strickland voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement, but bucked his party by opposing President Clinton's crime bill and its assault-gun weapons ban. Nonetheless, Strickland's vocal

⁵³ In 1991, for example, McEwen's ADA score was 5 out of 100, and his ACU score was

pro-choice position gave him prominence, and “more important, he voted federal funding for the procedure,” leaving him “vulnerable to an assault from a well-organized constituency,” – the Christian Coalition (Kaplan 1994: 3044). Strickland’s liberalism got him noticed in the White House. When Hillary Clinton put together her healthcare task force, members of Congress were systematically excluded, with Strickland a notable exception. He was called to serve on the executive branch task force despite having been assigned to no health-related committees in the House. To Clinton, he possessed a more important credential: Strickland was an outspoken and liberal proponent of overhauling the healthcare system.

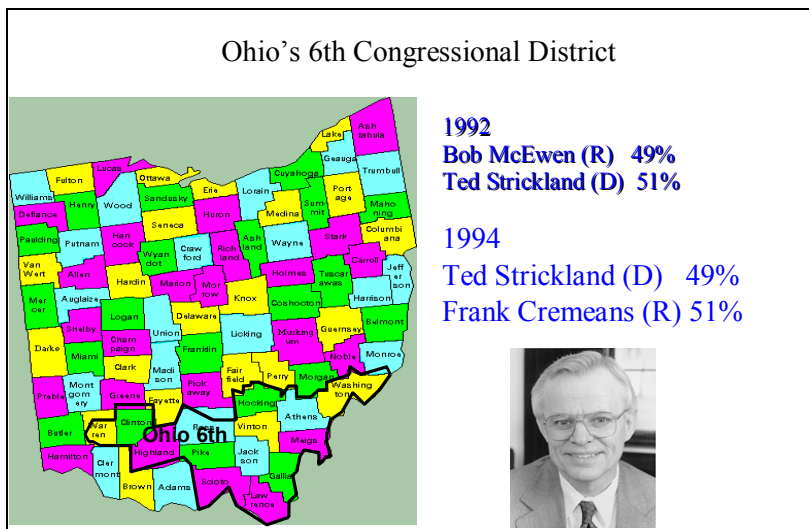
Strickland took some stands marking him as an occasional moderate. He was frugal with the House’s own money, voting against the addition of new elevators in the Longworth House Office Building, for example. On big-ticket items, however, such as health care and education, Strickland was out front calling for new and improved government programs (Merida 1994:A1). His liberalism did not set him apart from the party faithful back in Portsmouth, Chillicothe, and Athens. Easily renominated in the 1994 Democratic primary, Ted Strickland faced a political newcomer, Republican Frank Cremeans, in the November 1994 general election.

Frank Cremeans ran as a no-nonsense businessman who successfully grew a small company into a major enterprise. The founder and manager of Cremeans Concrete, Frank Cremeans was southern Ohio’s cement magnate. He spent over \$600,000 of his own money on the 1994 election, and he promised to bring business principles to Congress. Cremeans was also motivated by conservative social causes, most notably his

opposition to homosexuality. He considered AIDS to be a judgment by God against homosexuals, and when asked whether homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the armed forces, Cremeans replied, “The Greeks and Romans were homosexuals. Their civilizations did not stand” (Kaplan 1994:3044). Strickland, in contrast, fought for gay rights, and on this and many other policy dimensions, the choices presented to voters in the Ohio 6th district were polar opposites.

The tag line for Cremeans’ 1994 television ads posed a fundamental question in the minds of many voters: “Ted Strickland and Bill Clinton: Are they too liberal for

southern Ohio?”



General election voters

apparently answered

“yes,” with Cremeans

just barely beating

Strickland, 50.95

percent to 49.05 percent.

On his first day in

Congress, January 4,

1995, Cremeans showed himself a strong Newt Gingrich supporter by offering an amendment to the House Rules – promised in the Contract with America – mandating public access to committee proceedings (Congressional Record, January 4, 1995: H60).

So supportive of Speaker Gingrich was Cremeans (he sided with him more than 98 percent of the time in 1995 and 1996) that Cremeans was featured on an Internet site displaying the biggest “Newt Toadies.” In quick order, Cremeans voted for a balanced

budget amendment (H J Res. 1), for overhauling welfare (HR 4), and for term limits on members of Congress (H J Res. 73). The average of Cremeans’ ACLU, NARAL, and ADA scores during his first term: 2.5 out of 100.

Imagine what it must have been like to be a political centrist in one of America’s most “average” districts, switching representation from McEwen (4.3 out of 100 on the ideology scale) to Strickland (87.8) to Cremeans (2.5). One might get whiplash from the wild ideological swings. These are see-saw districts.

A generation ago, Mo Fiorina wrote about this phenomenon under the heading “the myth of the moderate marginal representative.” Looking at House races in the

Top Ten “See Saw” Congressional Districts 1993 - 2000

| | District | 103 rd to 104 th Congress | 104 th to 105 th Congress | 105 th to 106 th Congress |
|----|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| 1 | WA - 3 rd | Unsoeld (D) to Smith (R) Right 251 | Smith (R) reelected | Smith (R) to Baird (D) Left 146 |
| 2 | CA - 1 st | Hamburg (D) to Riggs (R) Right 216 | Riggs (R) reelected | Riggs (R) to Thompson (D) Left 167 |
| 3 | MI - 8 th | Carr (D) to Chrysler (R) Right 185 | Chrysler (R) to Stabenow (D) Left 206 | Stabenow (D) reelected |
| 4 | WA - 9 th | Kriedler (D) to Tate (R) Right 195 | Tate (R) to Smith (D) Left 187 | Smith (D) reelected |
| 5 | WI - 8 th | Roth (R) reelected | Roth (R) to Johnson (D) Left 167 | Johnson (D) to Green (R) Right 157 |
| 6 | NM - 3 rd | Richardson (D) reelected | Richardson (D) to Redmond (R) Right 153 | Redmond (R) to Udall (D) Left 187 |
| 7 | CA - 22 nd | Huffington (R) to Seastrand (R) Right 64 | Seastrand (R) to Capps (D) Left 253 | Capps (D) reelected |
| 8 | NC - 6 th | Valentine (D) to Funderburk (R) Right 133 | Funderburk (R) to Etheridge (D) Left 199 | Etheridge (D) reelected |
| 9 | OH - 6 th | Strickland (D) to Cremeans (R) Right 168 | Cremeans (R) to Strickland (D) Left 164 | Strickland (D) reelected |
| 10 | NJ - 12 th | Zimmer (R) reelected | Zimmer (R) to Pappas (R) Right 50 | Pappas (R) to Holt (D) Left 138 |

Table shows moves to the left or right on D-Nominate ideology rankings for the district’s representative, out of 398 districts.

1960s, Fiorina asked whether the data

“support the contention that representatives from marginal districts vote in [a] moderate, middle-of-the-road fashion? Hardly. Instead we see a picture of ‘flip-flopping’ representation. The representatives from these districts represent their part of the constituency and the devil take the other. Extremes replace extremes” (Fiorina 1974:102-3, cf. Fiorina 1973).

Fiorina's insight has been overlooked by scholars, but what he found then remains true (though Fiorina's measure of marginality was endogenous to his results). Over the last decade, several districts have swung wildly, year-by-year.

Looking at ideology based on DW-Nominate scores, I ranked legislators in 1990s from most to least liberal (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 2001). For reasons explained later, the sample size was 398 per two-year Congress, meaning that – at the extreme – a district's representative might move, between elections, 397 places to the left or to the right. The table shows the top ten “see-saw” districts in the 1990s.

Flip-flopping districts, like the Ohio 6th, are common, yet even if there were only one or two examples they would present an interesting puzzle for political scientists. Sometime in 1995 or early 1996, careful, rational political scientists might have advised the Democratic and Republican parties in Ohio's 6th district to nominate more centrist candidates. The 1992 and 1994 elections were squeakers, decided by less than a percentage point. A more moderate candidate from either party would presumably eat into the other candidate's general election vote.

This logic, impressed upon anyone reading Anthony Downs, is compelling. Rational parties and rational candidates should select positions near the median of their relevant voting constituencies. In the general election, this usually calls for staking out centrist positions. This formula is especially appealing in districts, such as the Ohio 6th, that have had a series of narrow wins and losses. Duncan MacRae, in Dimensions of Congressional Voting, wrote about candidates in such districts, concluding, “By taking a middle-of-the-road position on many matters, including his roll-call votes, he may be able to increase his security in the district” (MacRae 1958:282 in Fiorina 1974:20).

In his classic 1950 “Revised Theory of American Party Politics,” Sam Huntington predicted an opposite strategic approach in close elections. Candidates, he surmised, would not try to mobilize centrist voters, choosing – instead – to mobilize “a high degree of support from a small number of interests” rather than “a relatively low degree of support from a large number of interests.” (Huntington 1950:671 in Fiorina 1974:21). The battle, thought Huntington, would be over turnout. As one long-time Washington staffer explained to me, candidates should “sing to the wings, not center stage.” Among political practitioners, this is “getting out the base,” or “preaching to the choir,” and in 1994 that strategy by the Christian Coalition was widely credited with helping the Republican Party take control of the House for the first time in 40 years (Rozell and Wilcox 1995; Wilcox 1996; Carney 1998).

Implications of Huntington’s thesis have not been widely discussed among younger political scientists, and it is rarely cited any longer. While much analysis has explored the strategic issue-positioning of presidential candidates (Shepsle 1972:555-68; Aldrich 1980; Bianco 1984:351-64; Bartels 1988; Brady and Ansolabehere 1989:143-63; Erikson and Romero 1990:1103; Alvarez 1997), congressional scholars have tended to write about the strategic decision of whether or not to run for office – not what positions to take once a campaign is underway (Jacobson and Kernell 1983; Kazee 1994; Jacobson 1997).

The theoretical simplicity of playing to the median voter is complicated in the practical world by several obstacles (or realities). Primary elections precede general elections. Voters who show up for primary elections are more ideologically extreme than their general election counterparts, and candidates are limited as to how much they can

credibly change their positions between the primary and general elections (or which issues they can emphasize) (Schlesinger 1991:162-84).

Recall the importance of primary elections in the old Democratic South. V.O.Key explicitly warned against thinking of the South as a monolithic “one-party system,” noting differences from state-to-state. (Key 1949). Party factionalism was high in states without organized Republican opposition, but when small opposition formed (as in North Carolina and Tennessee after World War II), the Democratic party became all the more unified. Regardless the state variance in factionalism, however, one “fact” of the old South was constant everywhere and every year: *Primaries were tantamount to the general election.*

As Key described,

The Democratic primary in the South is in reality the election. The Democratic “nominees” not only usually win the general election but in an overwhelming majority of instances, if one includes local officials in the calculations, are unopposed. Not uncommonly Democratic nominees for the governorship, the United States Senate, and the national House of Representatives meet no opposition in the general election. (Key 1949:407)

Consider the old South in Downsian terms. Since there was only one election that “really” mattered, conservatives and liberals battled each other within the Democratic primary. It was no coincidence that southern Democrats in Congress were far more conservative than their northern counterparts. They were drawn from a different ideological distribution because of the lack of southern two-party competition. Moderately conservative politicians, who would today be in the Republican party, wisely chose to compete within the Democratic party – reinforcing one-party dominance and making it especially difficult for Republicans to gain a strong-hold in the South.

Facing essentially the same distribution of voter preferences in the primary and general elections, Downsian candidates would locate their policies at the median primary voter – which would be very close to the preferences of the median general election voter. The less the preference distributions of primary and general elections diverge, one from the other, the more median – and representative – a party’s nominee will be. This, I will argue in the next section, is a function of how competitive the parties are with each other.

Across the country, and especially in the South, political parties are far more competitive than was the case ten, twenty, and thirty years ago. One-party political machines – such as Tammany Hall in New York, the Pendergasts in Kansas City, Frank Hague’s machine in Jersey City, and the Curley organization in Boston – have been replaced by networks of grassroots activists from both parties. Surveys of party strength by Beck and by Dalton & Huckfeldt show considerable growth in staffing and budgets for local party organizations during the 1980s and early 1990s (Beck 1997: Table 3.2; Gibson, *et al* 1985). The number of states with divided governments grew by 20 percent from 1964 through 1998, and the number of individuals actually running for elections – at all levels of government – has increased nearly every two-year cycle for a generation.

As I mentioned, party activists in the Ohio 6th might have been well advised to seek more centrist candidates in 1996, hoping to gain that critical extra one percent of the vote from centrist swing voters. Instead, the Democrats renominated Ted Strickland, *unopposed* in the party primary, and the Republicans renominated incumbent Frank Cremeans. The 1996 campaign played out like the one two years earlier, with the challenger (Strickland, this time) attacking the incumbent (Cremeans, this time) for being

“too extreme.” Cremeans held to his pro-life, anti-gay, flat-tax stands, and Strickland pressed for pro-choice, pro-gay, pro-healthcare positions. Strickland attacked Cremeans as too close to Gingrich, but Strickland also pledged to be more of a moderate in his second term, emphasizing his stand against President Clinton’s gun-control legislation. In October 1996, Strickland was endorsed by the Dayton Daily News, which credited him for serving “honorably, capably and moderately,” whereas Cremeans ran “a re-election campaign so outrageous that his opponent campaigns in some quarters by distributing Rep. Cremeans’ own literature” (Dayton Daily News, October 16, 1996).

As with the 1992 and 1994 elections, the 1996 outcome in southern Ohio was not announced until early in the morning. The result: Strickland by 6,096 votes, or 51.3 percent to 48.7 percent. When I spoke with Congressman Strickland at a “New Members of Congress” gathering hosted by the Kennedy School, he credited his victory to getting out the steelworkers in larger numbers than in 1994, and to the relative weakness of the Christian Coalition in 1996. Strickland’s responses are perfectly consistent with Huntington’s 1950 perspective. Strickland was given a seat on the House Commerce committee, pledging to bring “good pork” back to the district. In the 1998 elections, a divisive Republican primary nominated the moderate female lieutenant governor of Ohio (who was pro-choice and defined herself as a “commonsense conservative”). Her base within the Republican party, however, was fractured, as a majority of the primary vote was split between Cremeans and some to *his* right. Ted Strickland then ran as the “true fiscal conservative” in the general election, ironically painting the Republican moderate female as “too liberal” for Southern Ohio. Strickland won, 57 percent to 43 percent.

4. How Two-Party Competition May Undermine Fidelity to the Median Voter

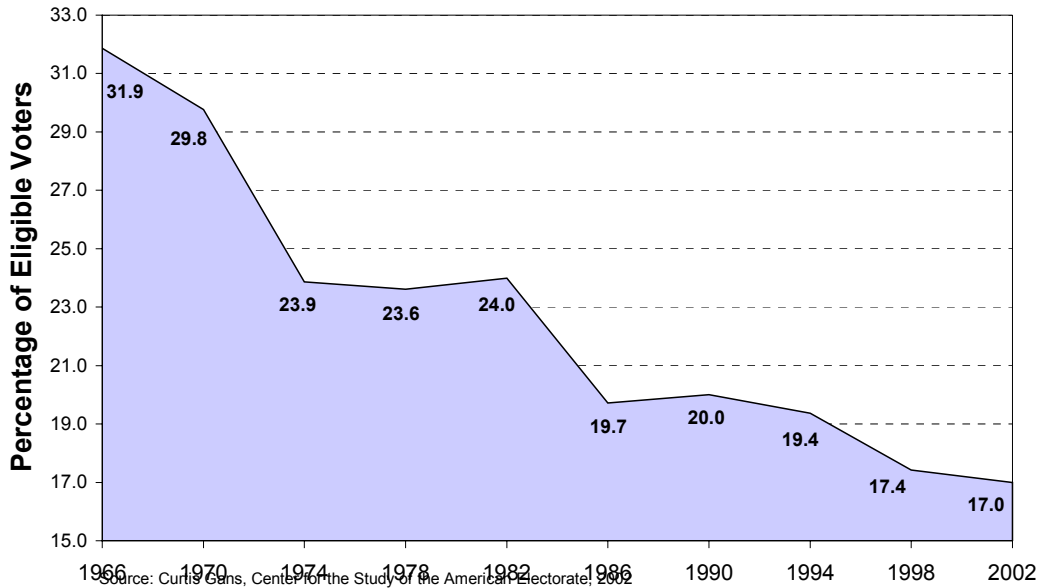
Elections are a two-stage game. First candidates have to attract the attention of primary election voters, then – if they survive the primary (and most do not⁵⁴) – they turn their attention to the general election (Brams 1978; Aldrich 1980; Enelow and Hinich 1984; King & Matland 1999). As Key argued, in the old South both sets of voters – and their preference distributions – were essentially the same. Accordingly, candidates who staked positions near the general election median were likely to win the primaries as well.

With few exceptions (Aranson and Ordeshook 1972; Aldrich 1983; Wittman 1991, Cooper & Munger 2000), political scientists have not focused their formal modeling skills on the dynamics of two-stage elections (primary then general) and the related impact on candidate position-taking. Empirical evidence on candidate positions in the primary and general elections is just now being gathered (Gerber & Morton 1998; Kanthak & Morton 2000; Burden 2001). Candidates, however, devote a great deal of attention to how different the two stages of the game are. Campaigns and Elections magazine, the leading publication for campaign managers, routinely emphasizes differences in the primary and general election voters. Campaign managers often call for strategies that bring out a candidate's primary election base of voters, intentionally suppressing turnout in the general election (Fauchux 1998:24-32).

⁵⁴ Ohio, for example, has 19 congressional districts. In the March 19, 1996 primaries, 63 Democrats and Republicans received at least 10 percent of the primary vote in their districts.

That the kinds of people who vote in primary elections are different from the

Turnout in Congressional Midterm Primaries
1966 - 2002



kinds of people who vote in general elections (or abstain altogether) is well known.

Primary election voters are far more likely to be ideological purists, more likely to have contributed to a political party, more likely to have tried convincing someone how to vote, and more likely to be upper-middle class (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Neuman 1986; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; McCann 1996). For the most part – and as turnout in primary elections continues declining – primary elections have been dominated by the preferences of party activists.

Primary election turnout percentages are difficult to calculate since voter registration requirements and reporting systems vary state-by-state, and often county-by-county. Still, we know that participation is very low. Consider the 1996 party primaries in Ohio's 15th district, which includes Columbus. Both parties had contested primaries -

- and a related surge in turnout – with a total of 54,591 voting. Assuming 75 percent of the district’s population was eligible to vote, the primary election turnout was 12.7 percent. In contrast, 237,454 – or 55.46 percent – of the eligible voters turned out for the general election. Nation-wide, turnout in congressional midterm primaries has dropped from 31.6 percent of eligible voters in 1966 to 17.4 percent in 1998. As I show elsewhere (King 1997), the voters who remain active in primaries are far more likely to be ideological extremists than was the case just a generation ago. (Also see Mayer 1996a).

Party activists are, on average, more extreme in their ideological and policy views than most voters, and for good reason (King 1997). Potential activists have to become *activated*, and this is more likely to happen when the “other” party's positions seem especially onerous. From the perspective of a potential activist, the more extreme one’s own political views are, the more distasteful the opposition's alternatives appear. As choices between the parties become more compelling, it is easier for potential activists to overcome inertia. Potential activists fear the *other* side will win, so they essentially minimize their maximum regret. By trying to tug the status quo in their direction, potential participants on the other side of the issue see their potential loss in utility and become activated as well. Policy debates often become battles of “good” against “evil” – adjectives used to describe opponents on issues ranging from abortion to sex education, and from trade policy to education standards. Because of selective participation and the anticipation of large utility losses if the “other side” wins, political battle lines are sharply drawn and potential activists are called to the barricades. Centrists are more likely to watch from the sidelines.

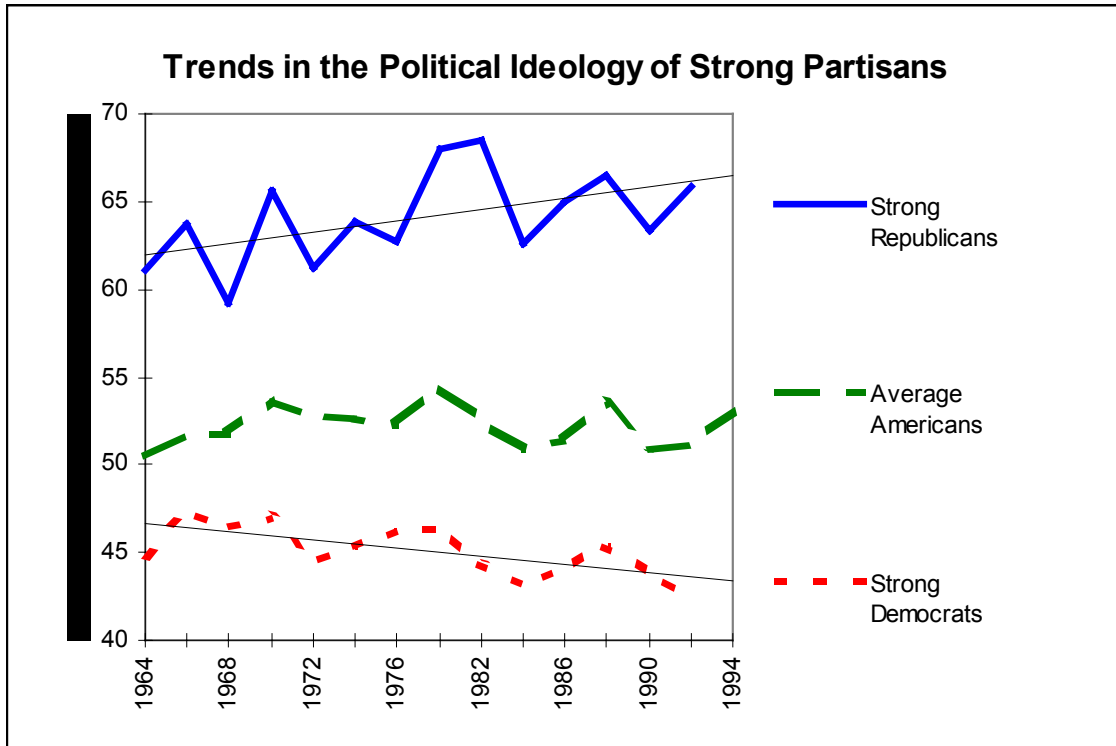
There is good empirical evidence of this effect throughout the United States and in Western Europe (Aldrich 1983:974-90; Aldrich 1995; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Ranney 1972, 224:38). For example, James McCann has compared the policy and ideology preferences of four groups of American voters: mass-level partisans, partisans who attended a political caucus, caucuses attendees who also were campaign activists, and state-level party delegates. The percentages of Democrats who called themselves liberals in these four categories were 38, 50, 62 and 68, respectively. Activist Democrats are far more liberal than run-of-the-mill Democrats. Likewise, the conservatism measures for the four categories of Republicans were 65, 80, 87, and 91 (McCann 1996:79-80, in Mayer 1996b).

Party activists are not merely more extreme than average Americans, *they are also less likely to compromise* (they might say "betray") core beliefs. Primary election voters are far more likely than general election voters to say that it is more important to "be right" than to "win." A version of this has been documented by political scientists at every national party convention since 1956. To the extent that parties are dominated by these purists, it makes working with political opponents especially difficult (McClosky 1964:361-82; Kirkpatrick 1976; Polsby 1983; Stone and Abromowitz 1983:945-56; Miller and Jennings 1986; Bibby 1996:118-121). It also means that the most intense ideological fights happen within primaries, among the true believers – or "wingnuts" – and not necessarily in general elections (King & Matland 1999).

One 1996 House primary is a poignant example. Karen L. Martynick ran for the Republican nomination in Pennsylvania's 16th congressional district to replace Bob Walker (R), who was retiring. A long-serving Republican activist and county

commissioner in suburban Chester County, Martynick faced off against Joseph Pitts, a state legislator and vocal advocate of “traditional family values.” Martynick was pro-choice, Pitts pro-life. When Martynick’s “two sons turned out to help her at polling places,” they were confronted by Pitts supporters. The children walked a gauntlet of Martynick haters, who screamed “Your mother’s a baby-killer. She has blood on her hands”(Germond 1996:1A). Local party politics can be a long way removed from Lee Atwater’s “big tent.” For now, Martynick has sworn off electoral politics, worried that there is no place in the Republican party for traditional moderates.

Consider the old South – or similar one-party dominant districts like the Massachusetts 8th – at one extreme of a continuum marked “two-party competition.” Place Ohio’s 6th congressional district – and others, like some of the traditional swing districts mentioned above – at the “highly competitive” pole. Because of the two-stage nature of elections, general election candidates from low-competition districts will more faithfully represent the interests of the median voter than candidates from highly competitive districts. Why? (1) primary election voters tend to be more ideologically extreme than general election voters (because they have the most utility to lose if the *other* party wins), and (2) as parties become more competitive with each other in local areas, political moderates are forced either to choose sides within polarizing parties or drop out of the political process entirely.



It is a fact that the political parties have been polarizing over the last thirty years, partly because of the decline of the New Deal coalition. The source for the Figure below is the National Election Studies Cumulative Index File, Question 801 (not asked in 1978). It shows a growing gap between the ideology of strong partisans and average Americans (King 1997, Fiorina 1999). The picture is one of polarization. On average, strong Republicans – those most likely to run for office and contribute to candidates – have grown more conservative. Likewise, strong Democrats – those most likely to vocally oppose the Republicans – have grown more liberal. Data on campaign activists is strikingly similar and continues through the most recent polls (Fiorina 1999). Polarization is happening both within legislatures and within the mass public.

Perhaps the most important cause of polarization is electoral realignment associated with the demise of the New Deal Democratic and the coeval shift of

Republican support from the Nelson Rockefeller wing in the Northeast to the South and West, personified in Barry Goldwater's surprise 1964 nomination and culminating in Ronald Reagan's presidency. The demise of the New Deal Coalition has gained scholarly acceptance and is nicely documented in Ronald Radosh's Divided They Fell (Radosh 1996; also see Brennan 1995). Of course, electoral realignment may be partly endogenous, since moderates are more likely to call themselves independents as they see the party faithful moving to extremes, which in the end reinforces polarization.

Since party realignment is widely discussed elsewhere, this paper focuses on two-party competition and the selective participation of extremists in primaries. My strong sense from examples such as the Ohio 6th district is that vigorous two-party competition, coupled with highly selective participation by ideological extremists in party primaries, *creates* polarization. It creates polarization by bringing to the general election two candidates more likely to diverge from the median voter's wishes. This leads to a specific testable hypothesis with respect to representation in the U.S. Congress: *The more competitive parties are in congressional districts, the less well Members will represent interests in those districts.* Call this the "competition and polarization" hypothesis, because the more party competition there is, the more divergence one expects from delegate-type representation.

5. Evidence on Party Competition and Polarization

Operationalizing a test of the "competition and polarization" hypothesis requires three kinds of information: (1) constituency preferences along some policy or ideology dimension in congressional districts, (2) observations of Member behavior on the same

policy or ideology dimensions, and (3) exogenous indicators of the degree of party competition in each congressional district.

It is inherently difficult to measure constituency preferences for any large fraction of the 435 congressional districts, though many have tried. Some, beginning with Miller and Stokes, have used public opinion surveys, but these suffer from small sample sizes and associated large error bands. More typically, scholars have inferred constituency opinion from demographic indicators, such as the number of elderly, the number of cows, or the education level in a district. Unfortunately, this precludes analysis of the vast majority of congressional issues – those having little direct connection to demographic indicators. Several years ago, John Jackson and I used a national public opinion poll to create a model generating district-level estimates of constituency opinion, but that approach, too, relies on available demographic data (Miller and Stokes 1962:45-56; Clausen 1973; Fiorina 1974:249-66; Jackson 1974; Jackson and King 1989; Hall 1996).

Likewise, it is difficult to measure member preferences. Some scholars have simply asked Members (or their staffers) where they stand on a set of issues. Response rates tend to be low, and it is impossible to disentangle a Member's true preferences from the indirect influence of constituency preferences on that Member's responses. It also may not be enough just to watch how Members vote on the floor of the House or Senate, since much legislative work happens in committees, caucuses, and informal meetings away from the probing glare of political scientists and television cameras. Worse still, when Members vote for the record, on most issues – low in visibility and salience – they tend to follow the lead of a few critical cue-givers, such as committee chairs or members

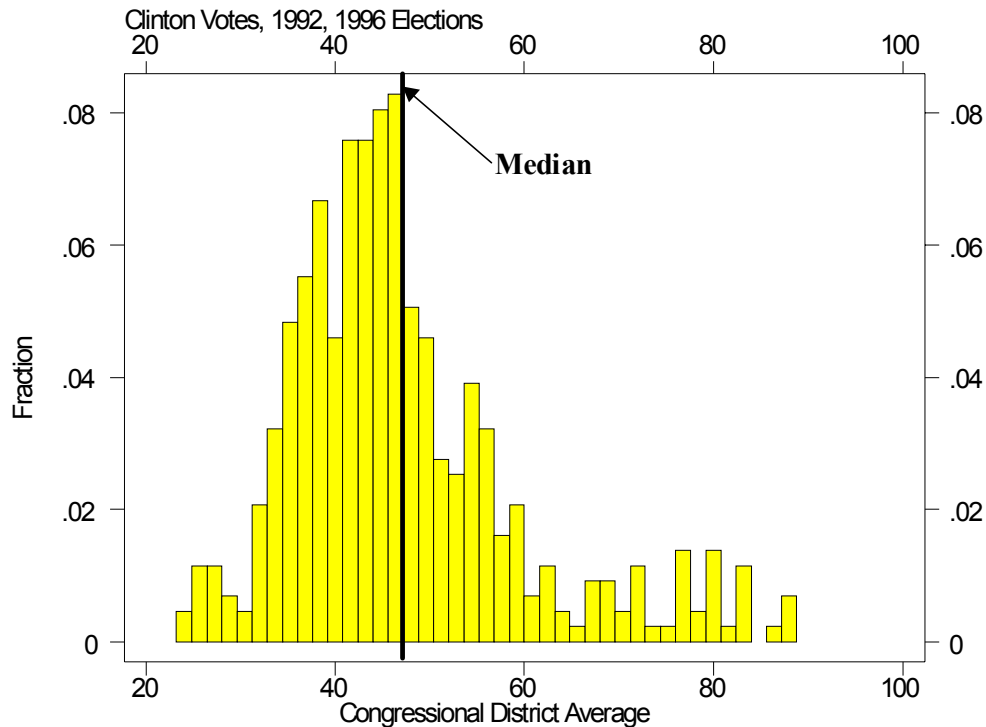
from similar constituencies (Davidson, Kovenock, and O'Leary 1966; Matthews and Stimson 1975; Kingdon 1989).

My approach does not control for all of the multiple inadequacies of various approaches, but it significantly improves on previous measures of divergence. I am constrained by a need to use measures of Member and district preferences that can cross several years and multiple constituencies. For reasons that will soon become clear, I also limit our present analysis to one dimension – which is the blend of ideology and partisanship reflected in Poole and Rosenthal's DW-NOMINATE scores (Poole & Rosenthal 1997, 2001; Ansolabehere, Snyder & Stewart 1999b).

4.1. District Preferences

Congressional elections were held in 1992 for the 103rd Congress, 1994 (104th) and 1996 (105th). Presidential elections fell in 1992 (Bill Clinton 43%, George Bush 37%, Ross Perot 19%) and 1996 (Bill Clinton 49%, Bob Dole 41%, Ross Perot 9%). Following the 1990 Census, most 1992 House district boundaries were redrawn, making it impossible to track district preferences precisely in a single timeseries spanning the 1990 Census. After the 1992 reapportionments, a number of state plans were challenged in the federal courts as racially discriminatory, leading to a series of 1994 and 1996 modifications in district boundaries – notably in Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida. Redistricting makes establishing a reliable measure of district preferences problematic.

Of the 435 congressional districts, 26 were significantly redistricted under court



order, by which I mean at least one percent of the land mass in the district changed. In most cases, such as the districts surrounding Florida's unconstitutional 3rd district, post-1992 reapportionments only affected a handful of bordering districts.⁵⁵ If we include all congressional districts that changed not at all, or changed by less than one percent of their land mass, we are left with 409 stable House districts for the 1992, 1994 and 1996 elections. Furthermore, I remove from the analysis eleven congressional districts in which the major party presidential candidates in 1992 and 1996 lived for some period of their lives, thereby lowering the sample to 398.

⁵⁵ Of Florida's 23 districts, only the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th, were affected by court ordered reapportionment for the 1996 elections. Six of the 11 Georgia districts were affected by court ordered reapportionment, and therefore fall out of our timeseries. Likewise 5 of 7 in Louisiana and 11 of 30 in Texas.

Measuring ideology in states and districts has been done in various ways, from aggregates of Gallup polls, to state-level survey responses in the National Election

Studies, to analyses of the composition of state legislatures (Erikson,

| District Ideology, Based on Clinton's Vote Averages | | | | | |
|---|-------|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| Most Liberal Districts | | | Most Conservative Districts | | |
| 1 | NY 11 | Flatbush | 1 | TX 19 | Lubbock, Amarillo |
| 2 | NY 15 | Harlem | 2 | UT 1 | Ogden |
| 3 | NY 16 | Bronx | 3 | IN 6 | Indianapolis Suburbs |
| 4 | NY 10 | Bedford-Stuyvesant | 4 | NE 3 | Grand Island, N. Platte |
| 5 | MI 14 | Harper Woods | 5 | UT 3 | Provo |

Wright, & McIver, 1993). Our unit of analysis, however, is often finer than states. Alaska and Wyoming may have just one congressional district per state, but California alone has 52, Illinois 20, Indiana 10, and so on. To measure district-level preferences – in this case defined as “ideology” – I use the average 1992 and 1996 percentage vote for Bill Clinton. Then I rank order the districts from 1 (the most liberal) to 409 (the most conservative).

Nationwide, Clinton’s average vote over the last two elections was 47.16 percent, though his support varied widely across congressional districts, from 88.75 percent in New York’s 11th (including Flatbush and Crown Heights) to 24.2 percent in Texas’ 19th, which includes parts of Lubbock and Amarillo. This measure of district ideology, while far from perfect (Leogrande & Jeydel 1997) has the benefit of including two presidential elections and generates a handsomely varying distribution district-by-district. (Holbrook & Van Dunk 1993).

The most liberal and most conservative districts, reflected in the histogram above, are detailed in the table. Notice that the third most conservative district, by this measure,

is the Indiana 6th (surrounding Indianapolis). In 1992 and 1996, that district posted an average Clinton vote of 25.35 percent. A typical Clinton district (near the histogram's mode) is California's 45th, which includes parts of Los Angeles County, including Burbank. True to its stereotype, and down the road in the California 47th district, Hollywood ranks liberal, with an average 66.4 percent Clinton vote in the 1990s. The measure of ideology conforms to expectations, with a wider range of ideological differences in states recognized as having set up partisan gerrymanders. One district may have gone heavily liberal in the 1990s while a neighboring district proved conservative. Is this district-by-district variance in ideology related to how closely Members represent their constituents?

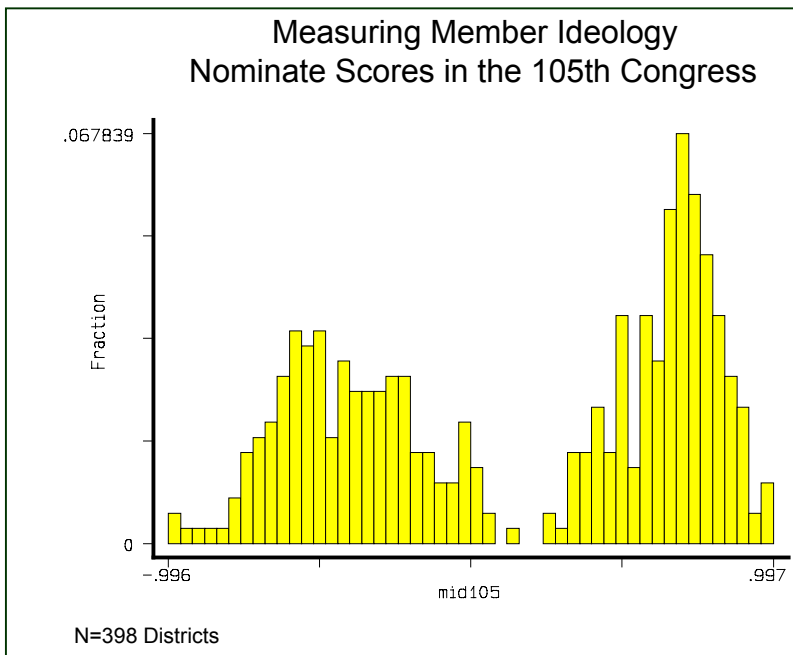
4.2 Member Preferences

Because our measures of district and Member preferences need to be along the same dimension, we need a good indicator of the ideology for each representative from the 398 districts in our sample. The questions of how ideology should be measured, and whether ideology is really significant in legislative behavior has been contentious (Kau and Rubin 1979; Fowler 1982; Kalt and Zupan 1984; Jackson and Kingdon 1992; Koford 1994; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Are Members driven by the reelection imperative, by some over-arching ideology, by deeply held values, by personal experiences, or by a messy combination of it all?

I have had occasion to spend considerable time with Members of Congress since joining the Kennedy School, and I am continually struck by how deeply moved most

Members are by a core and consistent set of values, often highly liberal or highly conservative. Certainly, Members know they have to get reelected, but that imperative acts more as a brake pedal (keeping them from pursuing certain issues or voting certain ways) than an accelerator pedal, dictating daily policy stands. The reelection imperative also feels inadequate when I speak with potential candidates who are considering a first run for office. They know that their chances of surviving a party primary are slim. Almost uniformly, these young candidates seem driven by deep-seated values, not avarice and ambition. Ideology matters.

Despite methodological shortcomings surrounding their approach, Poole and



Rosenthal's first dimension DW-Nominate score fairly accurately captures a complex combination of ideology, party and values. I use that to measure member preferences.

DW-Nominate scores were gathered for

each Member of Congress in the 103rd through 106th Congresses, reflecting votes from January 1993 through December 2000. In theory, DW-Nominate scores can range from -1 (liberal) to 1 (conservative), though the average scores are almost always somewhat closer to zero. Recalling the Ohio 6th, Ted Strickland's DW-NOMINATE score for the

103rd Congress was -0.432, which swung more than a full point to Frank Cremeans' 104th Congress rating of 0.687.

The 104th House, controlled by Republicans for the first time in 40 years, was particularly divisive ideologically. By DW-Nominate scores, Mel Watt, representing North Carolina's 12th district, was the most liberal, scoring -0.958, followed by Ron Dellums (D-CA-10) at -0.957. Neither name would surprise any student of Congress. Among the most conservative were Mel Hancock (R-MO-7) at 0.996, and Bob Stump (R-AZ-3) at 0.955. Again, neither name would surprise students of Congress, though neither Stump nor Hancock have been as nationally visible as Phil Crane (R-IL-8), the third most conservative member of the 104th Congress, or Dan Burton (R-IN-6), the fifth most conservative member, who recently gained national attention while chairing a House campaign finance investigation.

The histogram of DW-Nominate scores in the 105th Congress shows little "middle ground," and as Poole and Rosenthal have demonstrated, this is part of a polarizing trend in the U.S. Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Groseclose, Levitt & Snyder found the same using "inflation adjusted" ADA scores, though their timeseries can only be consistently used following the expansion of teller voted mandated by the 1970 Legislative Reorganization Act. By any measure – anecdotal to highly analytical – polarization has been increasing in the U.S. Congress. The center has disappeared, and party unity has been increasing steadily since the early 1970s. All of these trends, of course, are linked. It is telling that the Congress is polarizing and increasing in partisanship while the mass public has grown in the percentage of self-identified

independents and ticket-splitters. Perhaps Members of Congress are not very representative of the interests in their districts.

From the previous table, however, Dan Burton (R-IN-6) would appear to be a strong counter-example. His district showed up as the third most conservative in the country, and Burton’s DW-Nominate score marks him as the fifth most conservative House member – a nearly perfect match. By subtracting the rank orders of district ideology from Member ideology, one can generate a measure of “divergence” for every Member serving in the 103rd through 106th congresses.

| Fidelity to District Ideology, Based on Ordinal Rankings | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----|-----|----------------|--------------------------|-------|-----|------|------------------|
| 106th Congress (1999-2000) | | | | | | | | | |
| Faithful Agents | | | | | Unfaithful Agents | | | | |
| | | D | M | Diff | | D | M | Diff | |
| Matsui | CA 5 | 86 | 86 | 0 | Brown | OH 13 | 255 | 43 | Left 212 |
| Bono | CA 44 | 249 | 249 | 0 | Chabot | OH 11 | 173 | 381 | Right 208 |
| Jackson | IL 2 | 9 | 10 | 0 | Bonior | MI 10 | 251 | 47 | Left 204 |
| Jones | OH 11 | 24 | 25 | Right 1 | Pomeroy | ND | 345 | 142 | Left 203 |
| Thompson | MS 2 | 51 | 52 | Right 1 | DeFazio | OR 4 | 225 | 32 | Left 193 |

Note: District and Member rankings are from most to least liberal, out of 398 congressional districts

The more divergent a member is from her district, the more polarized one expects the representation to be. Burton’s divergence score for the 104th Congress was two. On closer inspection, a surprising number of Member’s had divergence scores at or close to zero. Bill McCollum (R-FL-8), widely marked as a vocal conservative during President Clinton’s impeachment proceedings, was the 72nd most conservative member of the House in the 105th Congress. By my measure, however, his Orlando district is also the 72nd most conservative district in the country. Similarly, Diana DeGette (D-CO-1),

Charles Canady (R-FL-12), and Roy Blunt (R-MO-7) were perfect matches for their districts, with “divergence” scores of zero. At the other extreme, however, several Members seemed wildly out of touch with their districts by this divergence measure, yielding a nice distribution with which to work. In the 105th Congress, for example, David Bonior (D-MI-10) had a divergence score of 231 by representing the 251st most liberal district while voting as the 20th most liberal member.

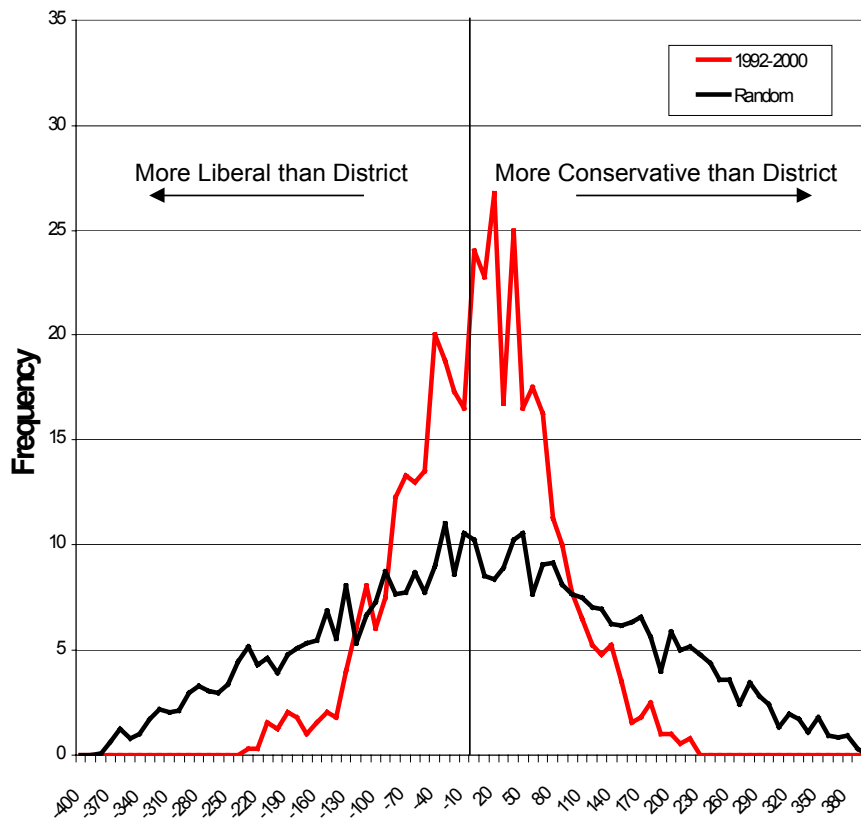
4.3 Divergence from District Preferences

For the 103rd – 106th Congress, the aggregate divergence scores are shown in the figure below, with a contrasting distribution computed by randomly assigning members to actual districts.⁵⁶ Representatives to the “right” on the figure are more conservative than their districts, while Members to the left are more liberal. There is a large spike close to zero, and a majority of the representatives fall within 30 rank divergence points. Compared with the randomly generated representatives, Members of Congress did very well – not surprisingly, but reassuringly, nonetheless.

⁵⁶ A representative was simulated, by randomly generating a nominate score between 0 and 1, for each district. The random member’s ideology was then subtracted from the district’s actual ideology ranking. This was done 30 times for each district, then averaged to produce the “random” distribution.

If our measure of Member-District divergence is useful, we should expect the outliers – those most unrepresentative of their districts – to be punished at the polls. As an indicator, consider the fate of the most divergently liberal and divergently conservative members of the 103rd Congress. The most divergent members proved overwhelmingly likely to retire or be defeated. Of the ten most liberally divergent Members in the 103rd Congress, only one – David Bonior (D-MI-10) – was present in the 104th Congress. His is a special case, since Bonior has stayed in office as a vocal (and

**Member - District Divergence
1993-2000**



rare) defender of pro-life positions among Democrats. Bonior’s abortion stand gives him considerable leeway to be more liberal on a host of less visible and less salient issues. Of

the ten most divergently liberal Members, four retired (with their districts switching parties) and five were defeated in the 1994 general election.

The 1994 elections were a sweep for the Republicans, with the party picking up 56 seats. Even Jay Dickey (R-AK-4), predicted by most observers to be handily defeated, posted a 52-48 percentage point win. Still, among the group of most conservatively divergent members, one finds several intriguing losses. David Levy (R-NY-4) was defeated in the Republican primary, then ran in the general election (and lost) under the Conservative Party banner. Rod Grams (R-MN-6) retired and his district switched to the Democrats, as did Ron Machtley's (R-RI-1) district. In contrast, of the top twenty *least* divergent Members of the 103rd Congress, 18 remained for the 104th Congress, with two Members retiring. There are electoral rewards for representing one's district well, and punishments for being too divergent.

Recall the Ohio 6th district. Based on his voting in the 103rd Congress, Ted Strickland's divergence score was 127. In the 104th, Cremeans' divergence score was 41 – more representative than Strickland, but less representative than a majority of the Republican party. Returning to Strickland in the 105th Congress, his score was minus 123, slightly more moderate than his past record but still highly divergent from the district. Ideological whiplash, again.

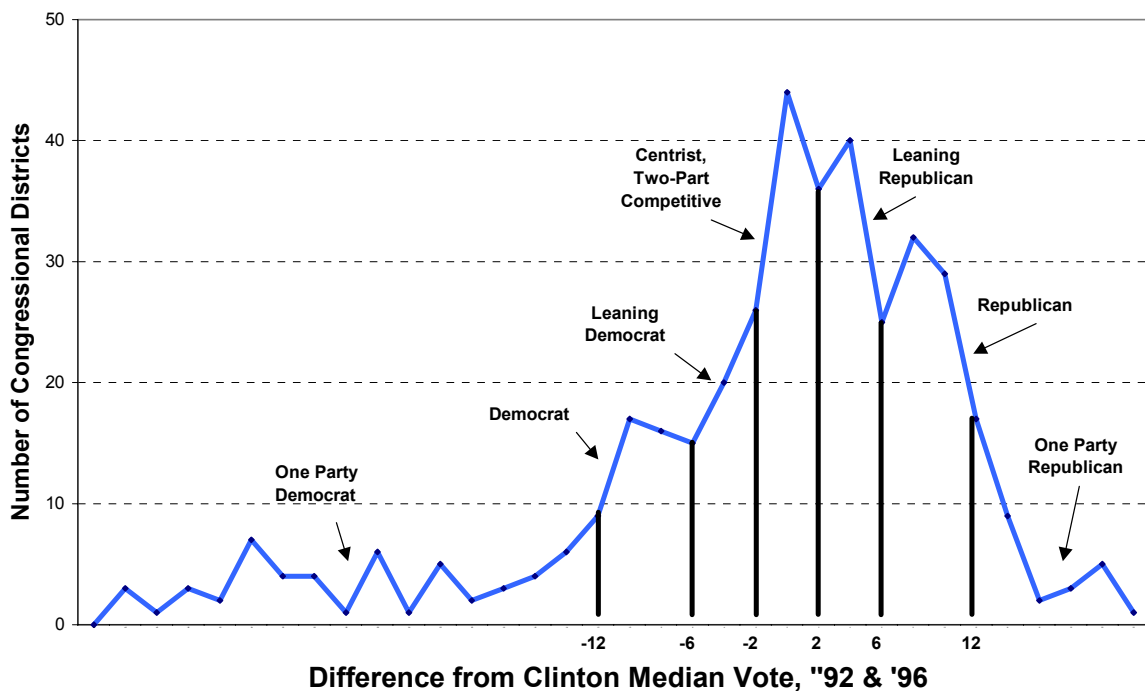
4.4 Party Competition and Centrist Districts

I have argued that the extent of party competition – largely because of selective participation by activists in the primaries – is an important cause of divergence, and thus polarization. From the point of view of the median voter in a district with consistently

divergent representatives, the parties seem especially distant. Elsewhere, I have shown that the greater the gap between an individual and the “closest” party ideologically, the more likely that individual is to mistrust government, fail to participate in campaigns, and not vote in party primaries. The more polarized political parties are, the less most of us care about the political process (King 1997).

To test the “competition and polarization” hypothesis, we need one more measure: the extent of party competition in a district. An older literature, building off of Mo Fiorina’s work in the mid-1970s, focused on marginal districts. However, when trying to explain the variance in divergence scores, a district’s marginality is certainly

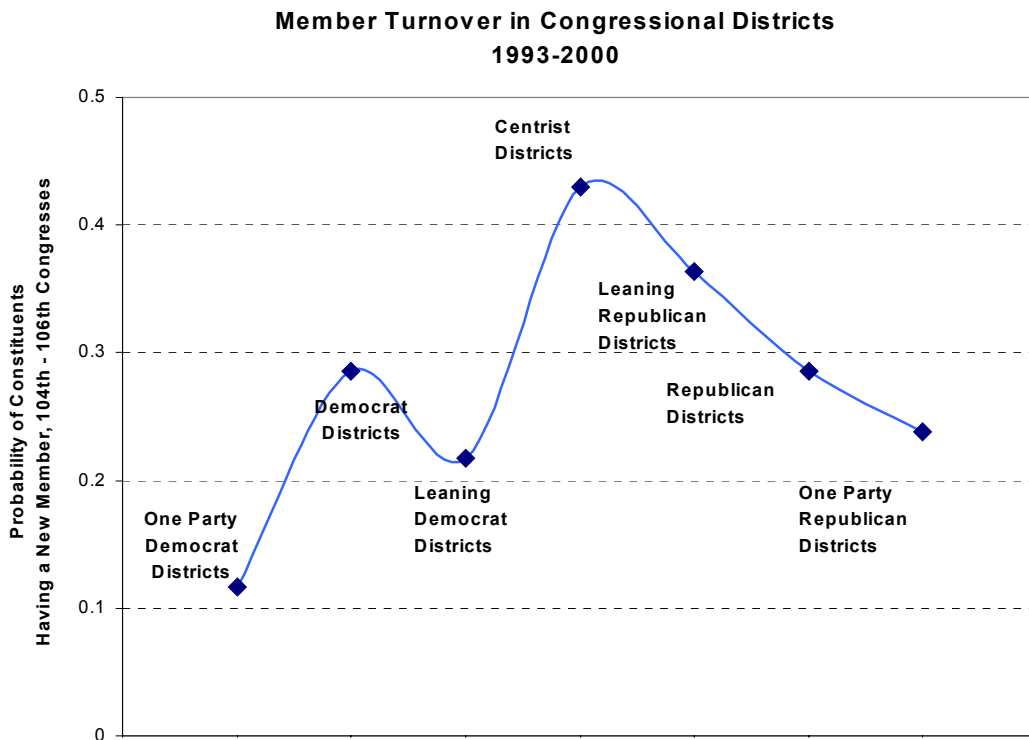
Party Competition in Congressional Districts



endogenous. We have already seen that highly divergent members are the most likely to retire or be defeated, and the least divergent members are the most likely to run again and win. Performance in office is likely driving the marginality of the office – not the other

way around. Constructing an exogenous measure of party competition, however, is daunting. A natural approach might be to explore the ratio of party registrants in a district, but these are reported in only 26 states, and are usually only recorded at the county level.

To reflect the degree of party competition, I use congressional district votes for Clinton and measure the difference from the national median. Seven categories are used, ranging from one-party Democrat districts (with the Clinton vote at least 12 points above the median) to one-party Republican districts. Centrist and two-party competitive

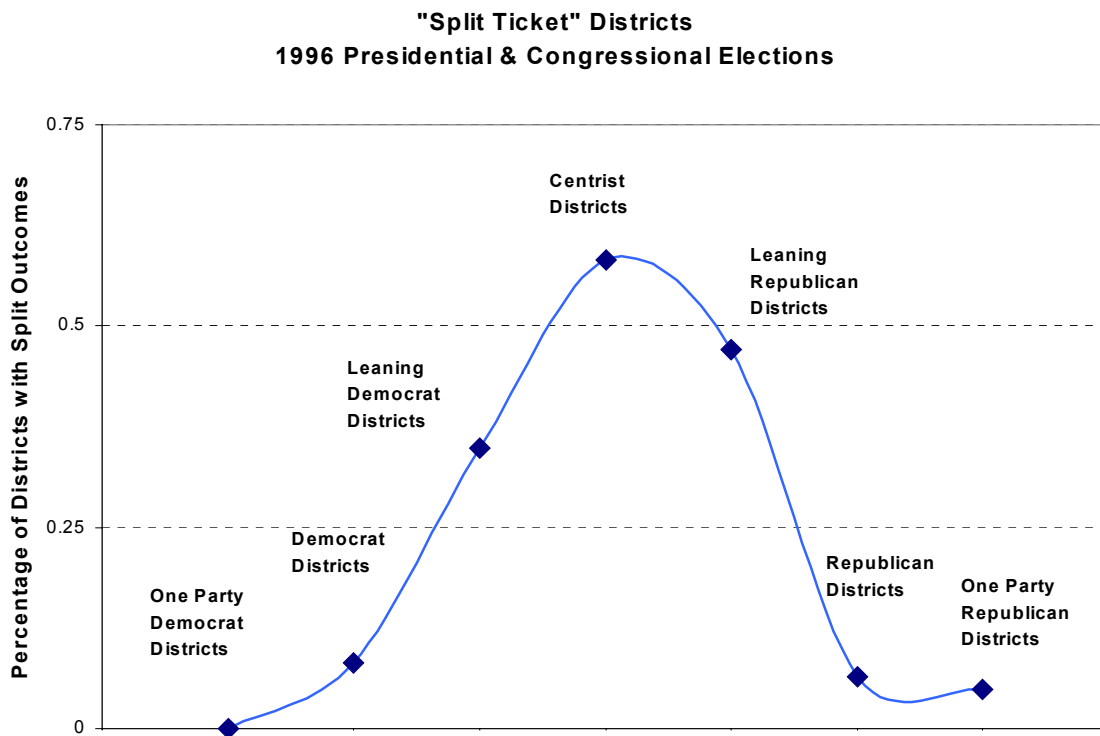


districts are defined as those with a two point spread around the Clinton median vote.

In the original Downsian formulation, fidelity to the median voter's ideology should not vary systematically as we move from one-party dominant congressional districts to competitive ones. Furthermore, if we accept the Hinich, Ledyard &

Ordeshook (1972) clarification of the conditions under which rational extremists will abstain from voting, fidelity should be worse in one-party areas and best in congressional districts that are two-party competitive. One could also argue that the Downsian model should predict convergence toward the median voter in a two-stage game – as long as primary election voters were strategic enough to anticipate how the general election preference distribution would appear.

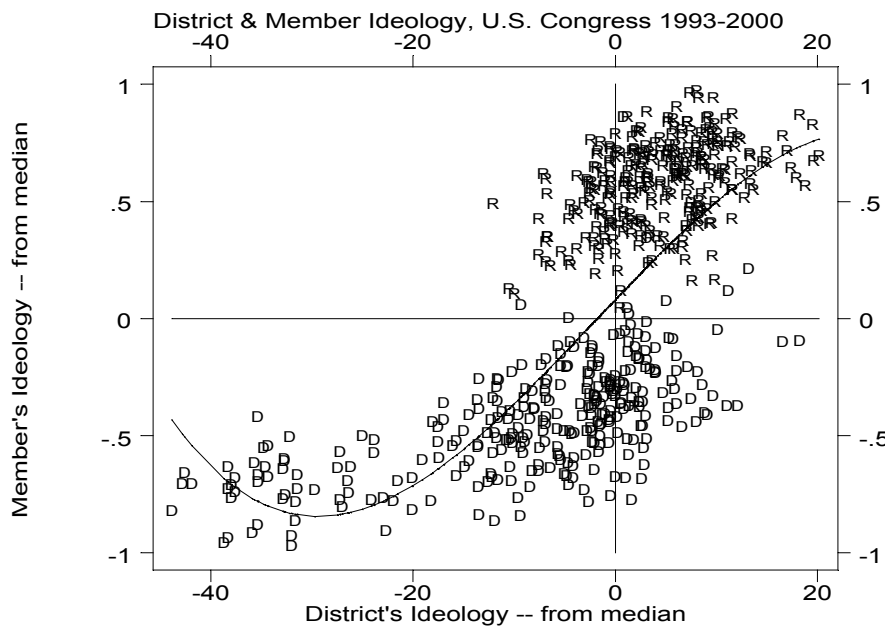
In pre-primary days, when party nominations were made in “smoke filled rooms” by party leaders, the conventional wisdom is that nominees were selected in anticipation



of attracting swing voters. Especially in highly competitive districts – where the probability of a party *losing* the general election is at its peak, one might expect primary election voters to anticipate and reflect the preferences of the general election median voter. That, at least, would seem the rational approach, which is another reason why the

continual whiplashing between ideological extremes, such as Strickland and Cremeans, might disappoint centrists in the Ohio 6th. What do the data show?

First, as one would expect, candidates from centrist districts are the most electorally vulnerable. In the adjacent figure, member turnover – from any source, including death and retirement – is reported. Voters in centrist districts, those with Clinton vote averages plus or minus two percentage points from the national median, had a 43% chance of at least experience member turnover in the 1994, 1996 and 1998



elections combined. Some districts, of course, experienced two or more switches in representation. The turnover rates in one-party dominant

congressional districts were a half to a quarter of the rate in centrist districts. Within centrist districts, the possibility that the minority party may unseat the majority party is highest of all, and this emboldens activists in the minority party within those areas. Not surprisingly, patters for split ticket voting – in which a district elects a member of one party to the U.S. House and a member of the other party to the White House – is also highest in centrist districts. In 1996, for example, not one of the 60 one-party Democrat

districts produced split-ticket results, and less than 5 percent of the one-party Republican districts had split tickets. Meanwhile, 58 percent of the two-party-competitive districts had split ticket results.

The fact that centrist districts have higher rates of member turnover is important to potential political activists. Political activity is a choice, and political inactivity is the norm. The likelihood of potential activists becoming activated depends, in part, on two things: on how extreme their preferences are from the within-district status quo, and on the likelihood that they might win election in order to change policy in their direction. Extremists are more likely to become activated in politically competitive, moderate districts.

How representative were members in the 1990s? Analysis to this point in the paper has depended on ordinal rankings of districts and members. Below I use cubic relationship between the raw numbers for districts and members. A cubic functional form, using district ideology to predict member ideology, works better than a simple linear model, but the results reported below are consistent across ordinal, linear, and cubic models.

The graph above pools average DW-Nominate scores for each member of the House over 8 years (1993-2000). Because of turnover, some districts are represented twice, yielding 587 observations. Democrats are marked with a “D” and Republicans with an “R.” Clearly, party matters and helps structure how one votes. Perfect representation would have each member line up on the cubic, exactly translating House floor votes based on their district’s ideology. These would be perfectly faithful agents, and the distance away from the cubic line would represent the degree of faithlessness.

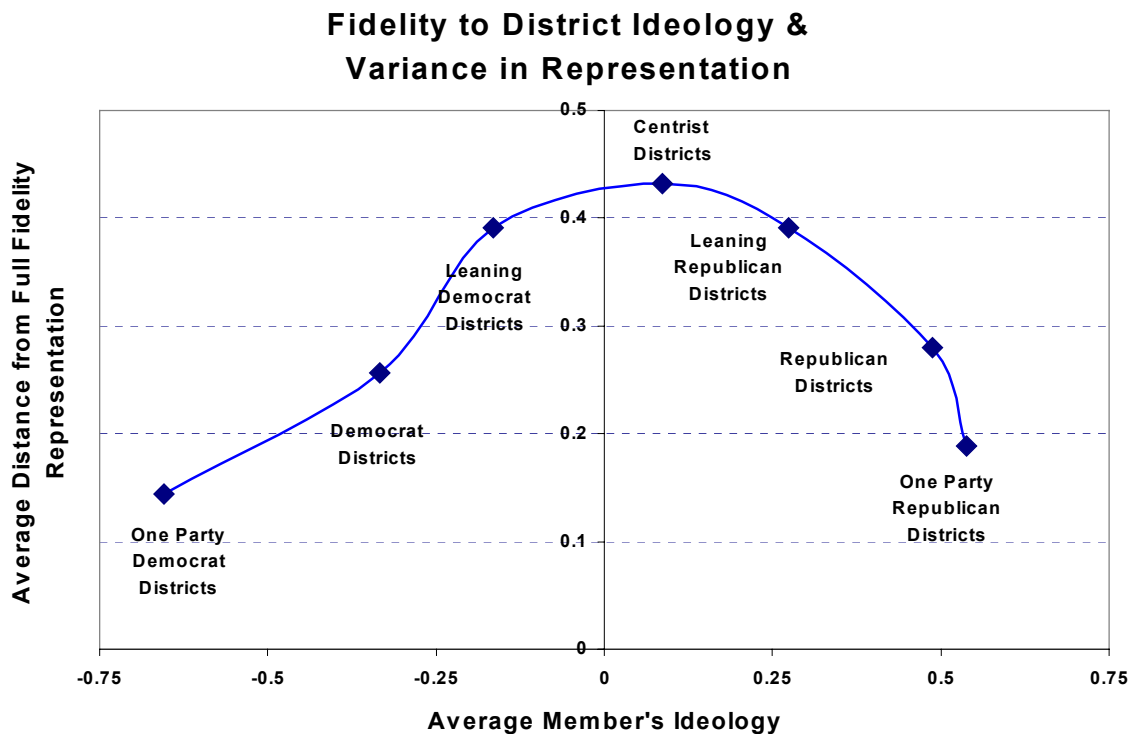
By this measure, the average member of Congress had a “faithless” score of 0.36, and the range was from 0 to 0.96. There is a lot of residual faithlessness in Congress, as members vary from the ideological preferences of their districts.

Upon closer examination of the fidelity measure, several intriguing patterns emerge. First, for every separate two-year Congress, majority party members are, on average, less faithful to their district’s ideological preferences. In the 103rd Congress, for example, the average Democrat’s measure of unfaithfulness was 0.439 (n=236), compared with an average of 0.208 (n=162) for Republicans. In terms of representation, there is a price to be paid for being in the majority party. Similarly, in the 106th Congress, the average Republican’s unfaithfulness score was 0.446 (n=200), and the Democrats had voting records much closer to their district preferences, with an average score of 0.241 (n=197).

I have argued elsewhere that the type of primary that a member survives is strongly predictive of how faithful the member will be to district interests. Beyond partisanship and the gymnastics of surviving primaries, three characteristics of members are consistently related to faithfulness: a member’s seniority, the race of a member, and a member’s gender.

Members who have survived at least three elections tend, on average, to be more faithful representatives. This may be because disgruntled voters weed out poor representatives, and it may be because members learn over time to be more faithful. In the 106th Congress, for example, the unfaithfulness measure for members who had served at least three terms was 0.283 (n=166), while their more junior members were less faithful, scoring 0.391 (n=231). Likewise in the 106th Congress, women proved better

representatives, 0.319 (n=48) than men, 0.391 (n=231), and non-whites were more faithful, 0.298 (n=50) than whites 0.352 (n=347). Each of these relationships survives in multivariate tests and warrants further investigation. The purpose of this paper, though, is to explore the link between a district's two-party competitiveness and the quality of representation.



The standard Downsian expectation is that fidelity to a district's interests should not vary as a function of the competition in the district. But to the extent that rational extremists in one-party districts abstain (Hinich, Ledyard & Ordeshook 1972), fidelity should be worse in the non-competitive districts. The results are exactly the opposite, as shown in the figure below.

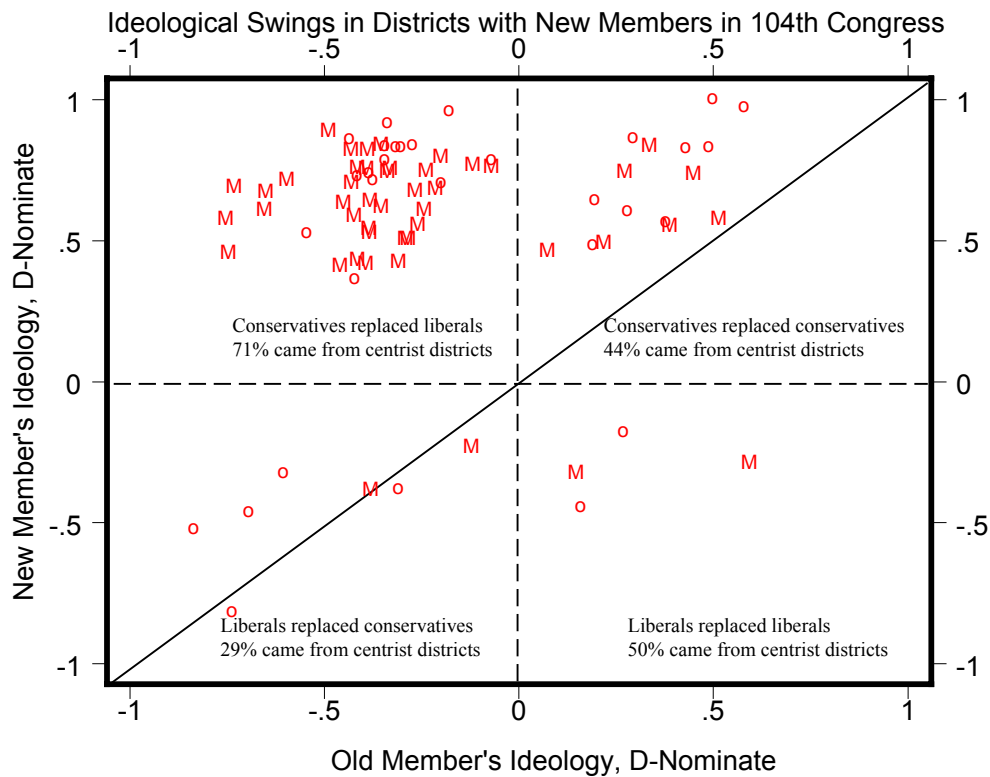
The ideological preferences of politically centrist districts – those closest to the median vote for President Clinton in 1992 and 1996 – are represented, on average, the

worst of all. Furthermore, these centrist and competitive districts are most likely to vacillate between ideological extremes, much as the Ohio 6th district did throughout the 1990s. This empirical result turns Downs upside down, and there may be several explanations for it beyond the story told earlier in the paper. Any theory, however, needs to recognize the ongoing polarization among political activists and the dwindling numbers of people actually voting in congressional primaries.

That the centrist districts tend to have representatives that fit those districts less well, and that those districts are most likely to swing between ideological extremes, may shed light on what happened with the Gingrich “revolution” in the 104th Congress. The Gingrich revolution was short-lived as the likes of Frank Cremeans were quickly replaced in the 105th Congress. In January 1995, Speaker Gingrich claimed a broad mandate, sensing a strong national shift toward conservatism. That shift, however, came overwhelmingly from moderate districts, as shown in the figure below. The figure lists the DW-Nominate scores for new members of the 104th Congress, plotting that against the ideology scores of the members they replaced. Not surprisingly, there is a shift on the graph up and to the left, as conservatives replaced liberals in Congress. The preponderance of those members, however, came from ideologically moderate districts, defined here as having Clinton vote percentages leaning Democrat, centrist, and leaning Republican.

Foot soldiers in the Gingrich revolution were recruited from ideologically moderate districts, and that proved to be electorally unstable terrain. Again, from a pure Downsian perspective, this is unexpected. Moderates are supposed to come from moderate districts, conservatives from conservative districts, and so on. Yet in

ideologically centrist districts throughout America, the party primaries have been



overtaken by ideological purists.

If the dominant metaphors for politics in America are the market and the arena, both holding vigorous competition central to how we think politicians and citizens should behave, perhaps we should find room for an alternative venue: the forum. In a forum, spectators may become participants, and a dialogue unites rather than divides. Our current primary system, built out of our faith in political competition, may be more divisive than we once believed. Party competition and political polarization go hand in hand.

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Chapter 4 **Polarization Among Political Leaders**⁵⁷

(with Richard Zeckhauser)

Political leaders, especially in western-style legislatures, are immersed in ongoing negotiations over the substance of legislation and when legislation should be allowed “on the floor” for a vote. Legislative leaders influence the types of policies – and compromises – that emerge. Party caucuses, following often-harsh campaigns within each party, elect these leaders periodically. “When casting their secret ballots, caucus members are likely to seek a range of ideologies, ethnicity and gender, ultimately producing a leadership whose competing factions are balanced and generally moderate in tone” (Foerstel 2002: 1449).

A political leader's ideology reinforces a group's stand in bargaining situations, serving as an anchor (Raiffa 1982). The surprising implication is that a group that is engaged in significant negotiations will have a strategic interest in choosing a leader with an ideology somewhat more extreme than the group's own ideology. That makes it more likely that the ultimate bargain struck will be closer to what the group desires.

A naïve reading of principal-agent theory might lead one to expect that the ideal agent will either have no ideology, hence being readily willing to carry out the principal's wishes, or an agent with precisely the principal's ideology. That is no longer true if the agent is a negotiator, and the final outcome will be influenced by the agent's ideology,

⁵⁷ An earlier version of this chapter was prepared for the conference on “Leadership 2002: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice,” The Center for Public Leadership, March 14-15, 2002. Cambridge, MA.

not just that of the principal. In the terminology of Thomas Schelling, appointing an extreme leader enhances the credibility of the threat to let negotiations break down unless a settlement is reached that is favorable to the group (1968: 123-31).

Extreme ideologies, like extreme stands, are not without costs in a negotiation. They may it more likely that negotiations break down, and that no deal is struck. A leader's ideology cannot come through mere statements, through what economists would refer to as "cheap talk." Such statements will not be believed by the other side, and correctly so. However, a leader who has a record of supporting a particular ideology, will have created a valuable reputation. Say someone has a twenty-year record of militant support for a particular cause. He is unlikely to change his mind, and even if he did, he might find that too costly to indicate that, since he would surely be accused of treason to his cause. The very histories of such leaders assure the group, but warn the opposite side, that they will not compromise easily.

This paper seeks to apply these lessons to the U.S. Congress. Legislatures are a cauldron of negotiation (King & Zeckhauser 1999), and elected leadership teams serve as the lead negotiators (Peabody 1983), both in their dealings with the other side and in keeping their troops in line. Many dozens of times per year within Congress, whenever there is an attempt to pass a bill, a negotiation ensues. With collective bargaining, as labor negotiator John Dunlop (1984) has remarked, any contract requires three negotiations, one across the table, and one on each side of the table. Legislative deals are much the same. They reflect negotiations within each side, usually represented by a party, and between the sides. In legislatures, party leaders are the principal negotiators, orchestrating the process within their coalition, and hammering out deals across party

lines. A considerable part of a legislative leader's role in life is to be an effective negotiator, or, in the term often used by scholars of Congress, to be an effective bargainer (Baron & Ferejohn 1989).

Legislative leaders present a quite different picture than most leaders: their executive role is small; they are selected by party peers, not by the electorate at large, and one of their principal roles is to negotiate with the other side. Negotiation may not be everything for a Congressional leader, but it is a great deal. All laws are born of negotiations. The settings and contexts for these negotiations contrast sharply with those for labor leaders and business executives, who are usually blessed with quiet negotiation rooms, reasonably unified principals, and the task of completing deals one at a time. Politicians often negotiate in a bubble, with interests groups and the media watching. Constituents and fellow party members rarely speak with a single clear voice. Negotiations on dozens of issues take place simultaneously, some failing and some succeeding.

Politicians are the “human embodiments of a bargaining society,” and their careers depend on successful negotiations to shape laws (Jones 1995: 129). Leadership teams structure many of these negotiations, establish the sequence of issues to be discussed in the House and Senate, and strongly influence what kinds of amendments, if any, will be allowed. Votes are visible and easily monitored by principals, but the art of negotiation lies strongly in shaping legislation before a vote.

II. Median Voter Theory and Legislative Leadership

Should one expect legislative leaders to be centrists or extremists within their own parties? Economists and political theorists are especially fond of assessing representation in terms of the preferences of the median citizen. Imagine a single policy dimension over which a legislature chooses how much money to spend. With public policies designed to reflect the median citizen's preferences, half the population would want the legislature to spend more, half less. The median is a stable political (and philosophical) solution because any move away from it will make a majority worse off and will be voted down (Black 1958). The median voter approach has powerful implications for elections as well.

When seeking to maximize votes in an election, rational parties tend to take policy positions that most closely match (or mimic) the wishes of the median voter (Downs 1957). The idea that parties and candidates tend to gravitate toward the preferences of the median voter has had a far-reaching impact on the study of elections (Enelow & Hinich 1984; Glazer, Grofman & Owen 1989; Ferejohn 1993; Alvarez 1997). Although complicated by the two-stage nature of elections, with primaries preceding general elections (Burden 1999, King 2001), campaigns tend to produce winners who are centrist with respect to the relevant electorate.

Within Congress, party caucuses elect leaders when an opening arises, and the contests for these positions are intense. The elections follow months of behind-the-scenes lobbying on behalf of one faction's candidate or another (Rohde 1991). If elections involving the general public tend to produce centrist candidates, what of elections for leadership teams within legislatures? "The most common view is the 'middleman theory' of party leadership, which asserts that party leaders come from the

(ideological) center of their respective parties” (Grofman, Koetzle and McGann 2002: 88). David Truman articulated this in 1959, arguing that “the likelihood of getting elected and of performing effectively as an agent of the party both [hinge] on being a ‘middleman’ ... not only in the sense of a negotiator but also in a literal structural sense. One would not expect that he could attract the support necessary for election unless his voting record placed him somewhere near the center in an evenly divided party” (Truman 1959: 106, cf. Patterson 1963, Sullivan 1975). Similarly, Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) looked at the ideological positions of party leaders, finding precisely what one would expect from the median voter model, namely that party leaders “have clearly tended toward the caucus median. Indeed, in 1979, then majority leader Jim Wright’s [ideology ranking] indicated that he was *the* median Democrat in the House of Representatives” (pg. 51).

Like Kiewiet and McCubbins, we use Poole and Rosenthal’s DW-NOMINATE scores to measure how liberal or how conservative a member is (Poole & Rosenthal 1997), and besides Jim Wright (D-TX), we notice several House leaders who were the median members of their party caucuses. Tommy Boggs (D-LA) was the statistical “middleman” when he won his first leadership race for party whip in 1962. Gerald Ford (R-MI) was the median Republican when he ascended to party leader in 1966, and Jack Kemp (R-NY) became Chairman of the Republican Conference in 1984 when he, too, was the ideological centrist in his party. Relying on anecdotal evidence of this sort, however, is dangerous. In 2002, for example, Republican leader Trent Lott was at the 69th percentile of his party, and Democratic leader Tom Daschle was at the 68th percentile of his party, where the 100th percentile would be most extreme for either party. To draw

inferences in this paper, we depart from single instances, and look at each Congress individually from 1990 forward.

III. Legislative Leaders as Negotiators

Within the general public, the logic leading voters to prefer centrist candidates is based on the expectation that voters want to minimize the ideological distance between their own ideal positions and the likely actions of elected representatives. A member's ideology – and its proxy through political party identifications – is an efficient shortcut for voters who have limited time to assess and anticipate any number of political issues (Popkin 1991). A legislator's daily choices about which issues to spend time on is most strongly influenced by what a member perceives as constituency interests (Hall 1996). Nearly 5,000 bills are introduced in Congress every year, and the vast majority spawn from parochial interests in which the fingerprints of constituency control are easy to discern. It is fairly straightforward for most legislators to be faithful agents for their constituent principals. They are agents ever wary of the next election.

Party leaders, though, serve multiple masters. They are accountable to the constituents back home, but on a day-to-day basis the bulk of their time is spent in a series of ongoing competitive negotiations with the leadership team of the opposing party and with members of their own party. Legislative leaders are negotiators, ever mindful of the need to swing a majority, however small. In the House of Representatives, the magic number is 218 votes, while 51 votes is the critical threshold in the Senate.⁵⁸

⁵⁸When filibuster are threatened in the Senate, which is common on controversial bills, a 60 vote plurality is required for cloture

Because party leadership teams serve as the lead negotiators for members of Congress, party caucuses play an important role in legislatures and in selecting the leadership teams. In the House of Representatives, the critical party leaders are the speaker, the majority and minority leaders, the majority and minority whips, and the conference or caucus chairs. The Senate leadership structure is the same, except that the majority leader also assumes a role similar to the House speaker. Although one's image of a party leader may be someone like Robert Dole (R-KS), who served 16 years in various leadership positions, or Sam Rayburn (D-TX), who was Speaker for 17 years, turnover is substantial. In practice parties select new leaders for one of their major positions nearly every Congress.

Established research traditions treat leaders as within-party representatives, influencing committee assignments, party agendas, and the like (Sinclair 1983, Rohde 1991, Cox & McCubbins 1993.) They do this, to be sure. However, their negotiation role has been slighted. The leaders will be selected not only for their skills but also for the bargaining leverage that their policy views create. The importance of negotiation as part of the job description has a feedback effect on who is given the role of party leader.

The negotiation game between leaders of different parties is similar to the "dance of negotiation," described by Howard Raiffa (1982). In a negotiation dance, such as bargaining over the price of a rug at an open air bazaar, the buyer starts with a low bid and the seller starts with a high bid. After tugging and hauling, they dance closer together and end up near the middle of the original offer.

We expect to find that legislative leaders tend to be more extreme than their party medians because the benefit of negotiating a favorable outcome may lead fully rational political parties to select relatively extreme leaders.

Each legislative negotiation begins with the leader, and his or her ideology, walking into the room. Consider a hypothetical legislature with ideologies arrayed from 0 to 1 and where the median Republican is at 0.6 and median Democrat at 0.4. Say the Democrats have selected negotiator with a 0.4 ideology. If the Republicans select a negotiator at 0.6, we would expect a 0.5 outcome. However, if the Republicans select a negotiator at 0.7, they should be able to shift that outcome to 0.55 (half of 0.4 + 0.7), which is closer to their party median. Anticipating this, or learning from past losses, the Democrats should counter with a more extreme leadership team in hopes of tugging the result closer to their party median. The centrifugal force of this escalation game would lead to electing the two most extreme members of the party caucuses.

There is a strong countervailing centripetal force that keeps the parties from settling on their most extreme members as negotiators. An extreme negotiator does not achieve a better – i.e., closer to the party median – outcome by magic. He simply refuses or prevents deals that other leaders might accept. Hence, the more extreme a negotiator, the less likely a deal is to be secured. Thus, a caucus would be unwise to select its most extreme member; probably little would get done. How to balance these two forces optimally is our focus below.

IV. A Model of Leadership Extremism

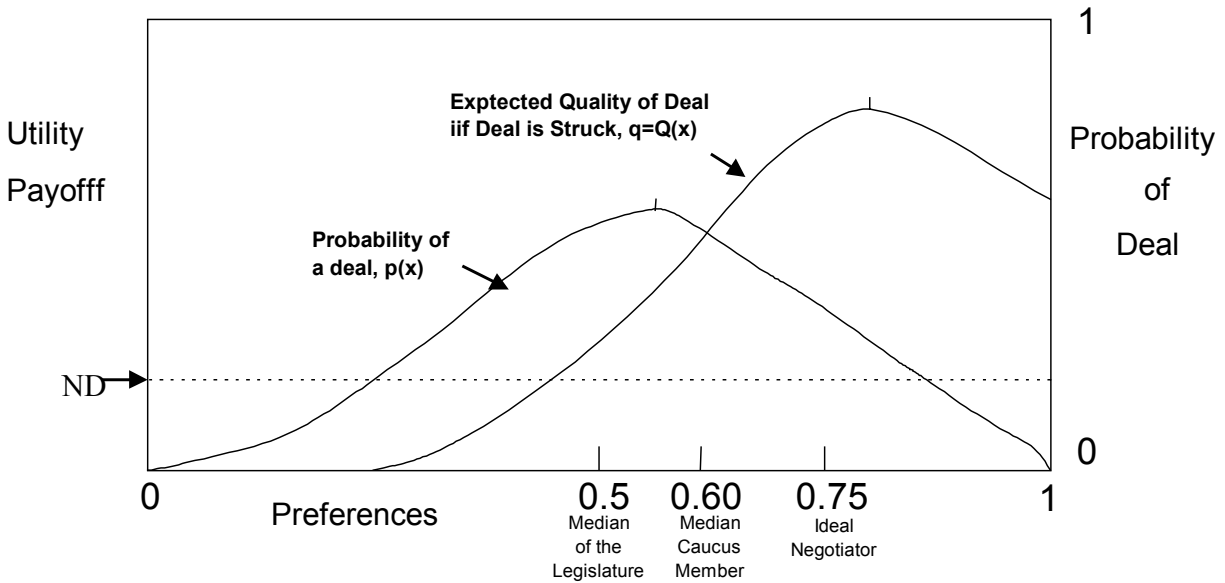
When the House Democratic leadership team for the 108th Congress (2003-2004) was elected by the party caucus, the eventual minority leader, Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) faced a challenge from Harold Ford, Jr. (D-TN). Backed by a coalition of politically moderate (and mostly Southern) “Blue Dog Democrats,” Ford’s supporters argued that Pelosi was too liberal to represent the party on a national stage. To regain a national majority, said Charles Stenholm (D-TX), “Democrats cannot win merely by rallying the faithful. We need to earn the support of the independent and swing voters as well” (Ferrechio 2002).

Nancy Pelosi won her leadership race handily, with 177 caucus votes while Ford received 29 votes. She won, however, not for her potential as a national spokesperson for the Democratic Party. Her caucus supporters pointed to the ongoing battles across the aisle, chiefly with new Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX). The core of negotiation-based model was articulated by Norman Ornstein’s in his observations of Pelosi’s role. Because Democrats are the minority party in the House, noted Ornstein, Pelosi’s role would be “limited to counterpunching. The key to the next two years is the punchers – the Republicans, who will set the policy agenda in substance and timing and will be able to frame the debate and priorities in a nearly unfettered way” (Ornstein 2002).

Members of party caucuses may rationally choose non-median leaders because of the “punching and counterpunching” across party aisles, and we expect that the logic behind Nancy Pelosi’s rise to the minority leader position is of long-standing

Figure 1 displays the calculus of a conservative caucus. The caucus median (0.60) lies to the right of medians of both the other party and the chamber. The calculus

Figure 1: Ideal Negotiator for a Conservative Caucus



involves two curves and a horizontal line. One curve, judged from the standpoint of the median caucus member, shows the expected quality of a deal conditional on a deal being consummated with the other party. Denote this value as q , where $q = Q(x/\text{deal})$, hereafter abbreviated as $Q(x)$. It is constructed assuming some location for the negotiator in the other party, and a negotiating process of the type described by Raiffa. Its payoff is in measured in utiles, or more technically as a vonNeumann-Morgenstern utility.

The second curve gives the probability of a deal, $P(x)$, which falls over as the conservative negotiator moves to the right from 0.55 to 0.60. Its probability values are scaled at the right of the diagram. (Below 0.55, this curve falls off because the conservative caucus would not support such a moderate leader.)

The dashed horizontal line represents the status quo, No Deal, offering payoff ND. It represents the expected value in utiles of doing nothing. Possibly nothing will happen in the future, or a new deal may be struck. The expected value of this future lottery is ND.

In choosing among candidates for negotiator, a caucus member will compute the expected value his ideology will bring. With a negotiator at x , the expected payoff will be:

$$P(x)Q(x) + (1-P(x))ND. \quad (1)$$

Rearranging terms we get

$$P(x)[Q(x)-ND] + ND. \quad (2)$$

To maximize this, the member effectively maximizes the probability of a deal times the gain in the deal over the status quo. This is the first term in the sum; the second term, ND is not affected by x . In the diagram, for the median voter at 0.65, the ideal negotiator is at 0.75, the point where $P(x)[Q(x)-ND]$ is maximized.

Taking derivatives, and maximizing (2), we get

$$P'(x)/P(x) = -Q'(x)(Q(x)-ND), \quad (3)$$

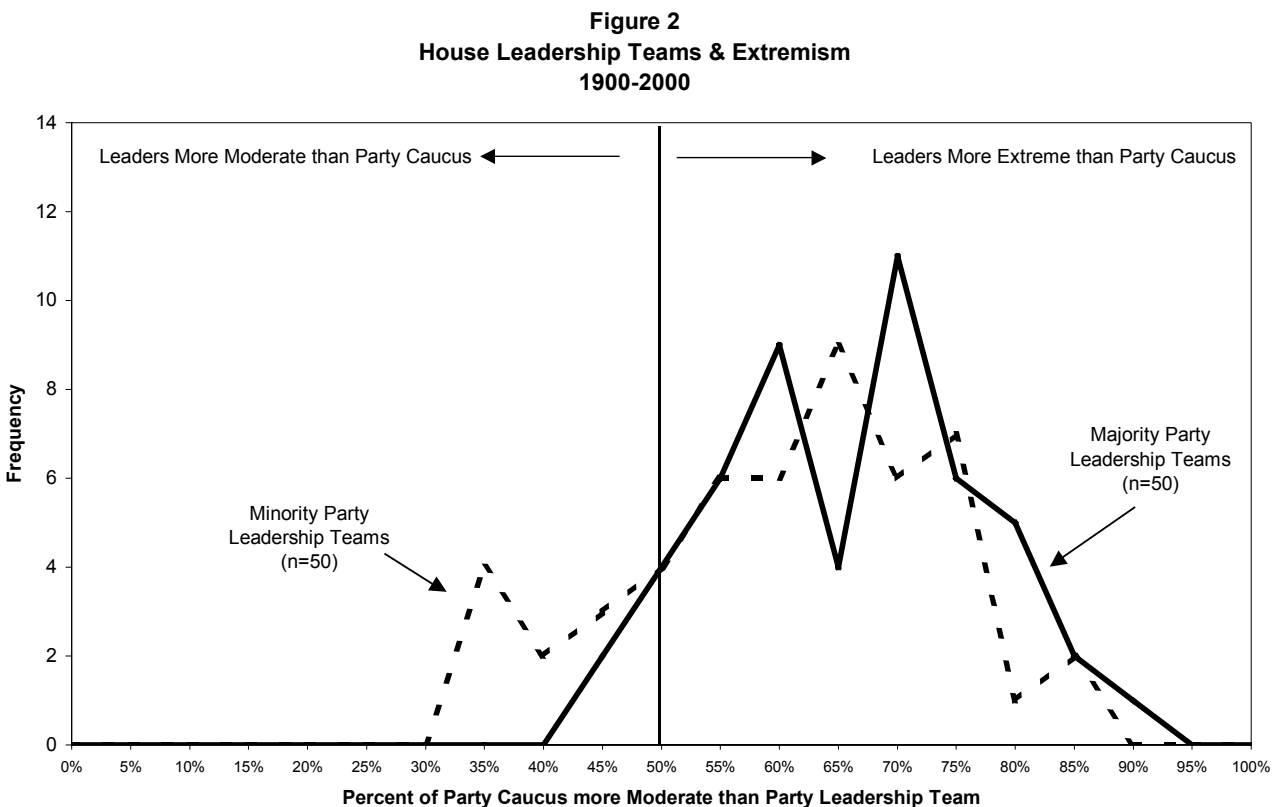
the condition for the ideal location of the leader. This optimum expression (3) tells us the two elasticities with respect to the negotiator's location are set equal: The elasticity of the probability must equal the negative of the elasticity of the gain from a deal. The implication is that a caucus will choose a more extreme leader/negotiator the less this affects the probability of a deal, the more it affects the quality of a deal, and the better is the no deal outcome. What the example illustrates is that it often will be desirable for a caucus to select a legislative negotiator who is substantially more extreme than its median member, though it should hardly choose its most extreme member.

V. Empirical Evidence on Leader Ideology

Neither party exists in a vacuum, and laws are passed by holding onto one's own party base while attracting as many members of the opposing party as possible.

Temporary coalitions are built bill-by-bill, but party leaders' own preferences anchor the negotiations. Accordingly, we suspect that partisans think strategically and elect negotiators who are more extreme than their caucus medians – yet not so extreme that credible deals are unlikely to be completed.

Leaders' Extremism Relative to Party. Evidence consistent with this explanation is found in the ideology of the 100 leadership teams (two per two-year Congress) that



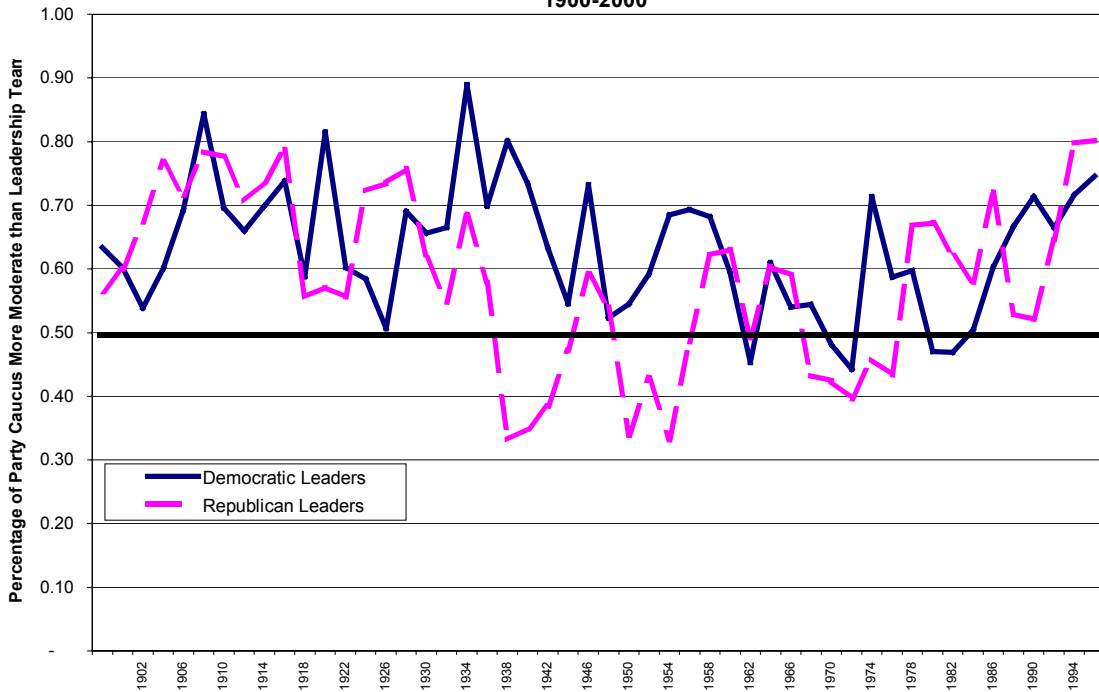
Average DW-NOMINATE scores for 100 leadership teams (two per Congress). Leadership teams include Speakers, Party Leaders, Chief Whips, and Conference Chairs.

were elected by their party caucuses from 1900 through 2000, or from the 56th through the 105th Congresses. A legislator's ideology is measured using Poole-Rosenthal DW-NOMINATE scores. These scores come from factor loadings derived from an analysis of all recorded House and Senate votes in a given Congress. Although depending on the magic of a factor analysis machine, DW-NOMINATE scores are widely used and accepted as indicators of legislators' ideology, and the scores correlate highly with other measures of ideology.

Adapting Groseclose's (1995) approach, we measure the extremeness of a leadership team relative to the party caucus by reporting the percent of the party caucus members who have ideology scores more moderate than the average for the leadership team. For example, following the November 1994 elections, Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in January 1995 and elected a leadership team consisting of Speaker Newt Gingrich (GA), Majority Leader Dick Armey (TX), Whip Tom Delay (TX), and Conference Chair John Boehner (OH). The median member of the Republican caucus in that congress was Jay Kim (CA), who by all accounts never played a pivotal role in the Republican caucus, though 50 percent of the caucus was more moderate than he. By contrast, 55.1 percent the Republican caucus was more moderate than Newt Gingrich that year, 95.5 percent was more moderate than Dick Armey, 91.5 percent was more moderate than Tom Delay, and 77.9 percent was more moderate than John Boehner. Averaging these four percentile rankings, the Republican leadership team was more conservative than nearly 80 percent of the members of their party caucus. On the other side of the Aisle, Richard Gephardt (MO) headed up a leadership team that on average was more liberal than 72 percent of the Democratic party caucus.

If the median voter theory applied to the election of leaders, we would expect the distribution of extremism scores for leadership teams to be centered around 50 percent. (Democrats are more extreme if they are more liberal, whereas Republicans are more extreme if more conservative.) A Congress lasts for two years, with leadership teams usually elected in January of the odd numbered years. Results for the 100 majority and minority party leadership teams are shown in Figure 2, and the pattern is decidedly non-centrist.

Figure 3
House Leadership Extremism Over Time
1900-2000



Average DW-NOMINATE scores for 100 leadership teams (two per Congress). Leadership teams include Speakers, Party Leaders, Chief Whips, and Conference Chairs.

A distinctive pattern emerges from the aggregate statistics. Across the 100 leadership teams in our sample, 82 were more extreme than their party's median. The majority party has had leadership teams at or below the party's ideological median just six times in the 100 years. The minority party – perhaps hopeful at times of building

governing majorities by attracting moderates from the other party – has had leadership teams at or below the party median 12 times in 100 years. The average ideological gap between the party’s median and the leader (61.2% of party more moderate) is substantial. The hypothesis that leaders reflect the median can be easily rejected ($p < 0.0005$). Likewise, while both the majority and minority party leadership teams tend to be more extreme than their party medians, minority party leadership teams tend to be more moderate than their majority party counterparts ($p < .01$).

The evidence reported in Figure 2 is as predicted by our model of legislative leaders as negotiators. On average, legislative leaders are noticeably more extreme than their party medians. The median party member may be willing to support more extreme leaders, (and increase the presumed agency loss on a range of matters) because party members anticipate the “dance of negotiation” and the importance of having agents whose initial positions help to anchor negotiations favorably.

Though our extremism results are very strong, there is one era that appears to be anomalous. From 1936-58 Republic leaders were more moderate than their party. This was an era when the Democrats majority was significant, and Republicans were seeking to build temporary coalitions with conservative Southern Democrats. This is a one-time happening, the amount of data is limited, and we are hesitant to explain exceptions on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, this unusual behavior is widely discussed in the literature (Manley 1973, Sinclair 1982, Rohde 1989).

Levels of Leadership. If our theory is correct, it should apply to all leaders, but should apply most strongly to those who participate most actively in negotiations both

across and on their side of the aisle. To test this, we ranked all members of a party from least influential (not holding a leadership position) to most influential. The latter would be Speaker of the House for the majority party in the House, and Party Leader for the House minority party or either party in the Senate. The pattern that emerges is as predicted, as shown in Table 2. The more senior the figure, the more extreme was his ideology relative to his party. This pattern is particularly indicative, given that the Party Leaders and the Speaker of the House play a prominent additional role representing parties to the electorate at large. Presumably that responsibility creates a pull to the median of the electorate, which in turn is more moderate than the median of the party.

Table 2
Leadership Progressions,
Percentage of Party Caucus more Moderate than Legislator
1900-2000

| | House | Senate |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Not Currently Holding a Leadership Position | 49.9% | 50.0% |
| Conference or Caucus Chair | 57.9 | (na) |
| Party Whip | 62.3 | 54.4 |
| Majority or Minority Party Leader | 63.2 | 57.6 |
| Speaker of the House | 65.8 | (na) |

Voting Histories of Potential Leaders. In our opening discussion, we remarked that it is important that the leader have a personal reputation for an extreme position, that it can not just be adopted once one assumes a leadership position. To determine whether reputation is essential, we looked at leaders' ideologies before, during and after their leadership careers. Table 3 shows the record. In the House, there is a slight decline in

extremism after finishing one's leadership position. In the Senate, leaders are slightly more extreme before assuming leadership, and somewhat less so afterwards. If anything, leaders were chosen for being extremists, moderated very modestly while in office, and then moderated somewhat more after leaving office. In all phases, they were more extreme than their party.

Table 3
Leadership Extremism Over a Career,
Percentage of Party Caucus more Moderate than Legislator,
1900-2000

| | House | Senate |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Member Never Held a Leadership Position | 49.8% | 50.0% |
| Career Before Election to Leadership Team | 61.3 | 57.6 |
| While Serving on Leadership Team | 61.1 | 55.8 |
| Career after Leaving Leadership Team | 58.1 | 52.6 |

VI. Conclusion

Legislative leaders are the prime negotiators shaping our laws – on a daily basis and at every level of government. As negotiators, they are agents for themselves, their constituents, and their fellow party members.

The negotiation of legislation is conducted beneath the public eye. Public attention rewards grandstanding and puffery, and punishes concessionary compromise, which makes serious legislative action more challenging. Many bills are not serious; they are products of conspicuous introduction intended to impress constituents. We focus

particular attention on the ideology of legislative negotiators. Conventional wisdom suggests that a party leader's will align well with that of a median member. However, if leaders are negotiators, and if agents' positions anchor negotiations, parties will have incentives to appoint extreme leaders. In effect, presumed agency loss actually secures more favorable outcomes. The need to reach legislative agreements, however, constrains tugs to the extremes. Empirical analysis of 20th century congressional leaders finds them to be more extreme than their parties. Moreover, they were more extreme before they were elected to their positions.

There is a rich literature on the private sector counterpart to the problem studied here, namely: How faithful and effective are private sector leaders, i.e., corporate managers, as agents for the stockholders they are supposed to serve (Jensen & Meckling 1976, Pratt & Zeckhauser 1985). A central lesson from that literature is that stockholders reap substantial benefits when their interests and those of the managers are properly aligned. Our examination of political parties and their leaders might suggest that preferences are out of alignment. Leaders' policy positions, as revealed through votes, are considerably more extreme than those of the members they represent. We have offered a contrary interpretation for this finding. To improve negotiation outcomes, it is in the collective interest of a party's representatives to have an extreme leader. Such a leader -- through his own reputation and tactics, and by strengthening the members' resolve -- will drag policy outcomes in the members' preferred direction.

Legislation is born of negotiations. Thus, it is no surprise that arm twisting and staking out positions are as much the repertoire of great legislative leaders as are managing agendas and crafting legislation. What we have discovered here is that a

convincing way to stake an extreme position is to select leaders whose reputations show them to be extreme. It is comforting that party members in Congress recognize this lesson.

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