

What's Happened to the Republican Party?

Prof. David Canon

Department of Political
Science

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University of Wisconsin - Madison



RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION

Outline of the talk

- The advertised timeline was Reagan to Trump, but some context needs to be set: individual-level partisan identification and institutional basis for our two-party system and presidential election process.
- Next, I will examine broader trends that pre-date Trump, but were accentuated during his presidency.
- Finally, I will look at areas in which Trump departed significantly from Republican orthodoxy.
- I conclude with some speculation about the 2024 election and the future direction of the R party.

Party identification

- The traditional 7-point scale, from strong D, D, lean D to independent, lean R, R, strong R. Include leaners with independents, or with partisans. Some pollsters use a 5-point scale.
- Trends – an increase in the proportion of independents from less than a fifth to 44% in recent years.
- Democrats maintain a slight plurality, both with and without the leaners.
- But partisanship is much more complex than this scale – the Pew Center typology.

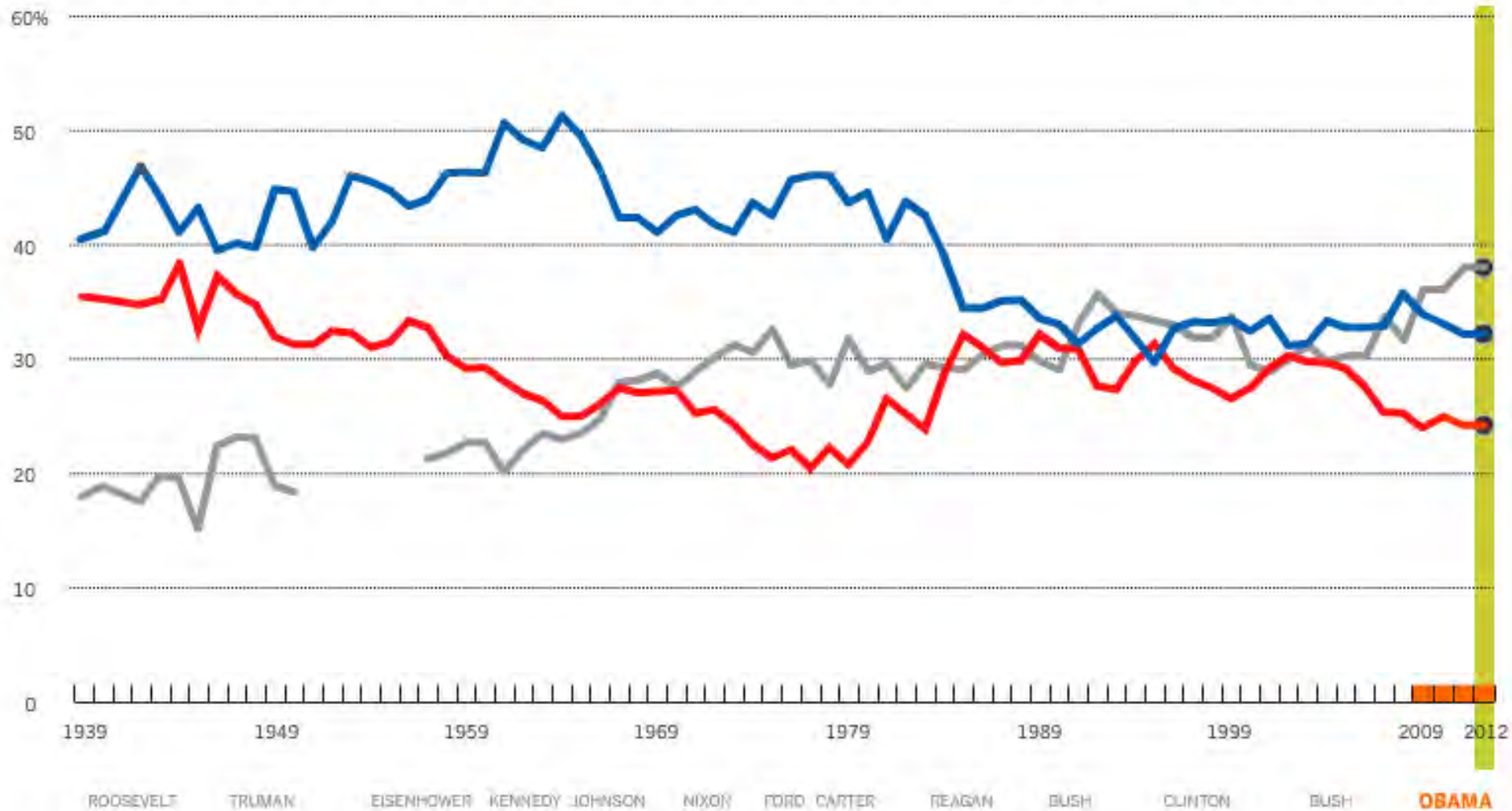
YEAR
2012

32% Democrat

24% Republican

38% Independent

PRESIDENT
Obama



Americans' Party Identification and Leaning, Quarterly Averages, 1991-2021

In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself -- a Republican, a Democrat or an independent? (Asked of independents) As of today, do you lean more to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party?

— % Democrat/Lean Democratic — % Republican/Lean Republican



Figures are the combined percentage who identify with, or lean to, the political parties.

Feb. 2023

Repub. 46
Dem. 49

Americans' Party Identification, Quarterly Averages, 1988-2021

In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself -- a Republican, a Democrat or an independent?

— % Democrat — % Independent — % Republican



Feb. 2023

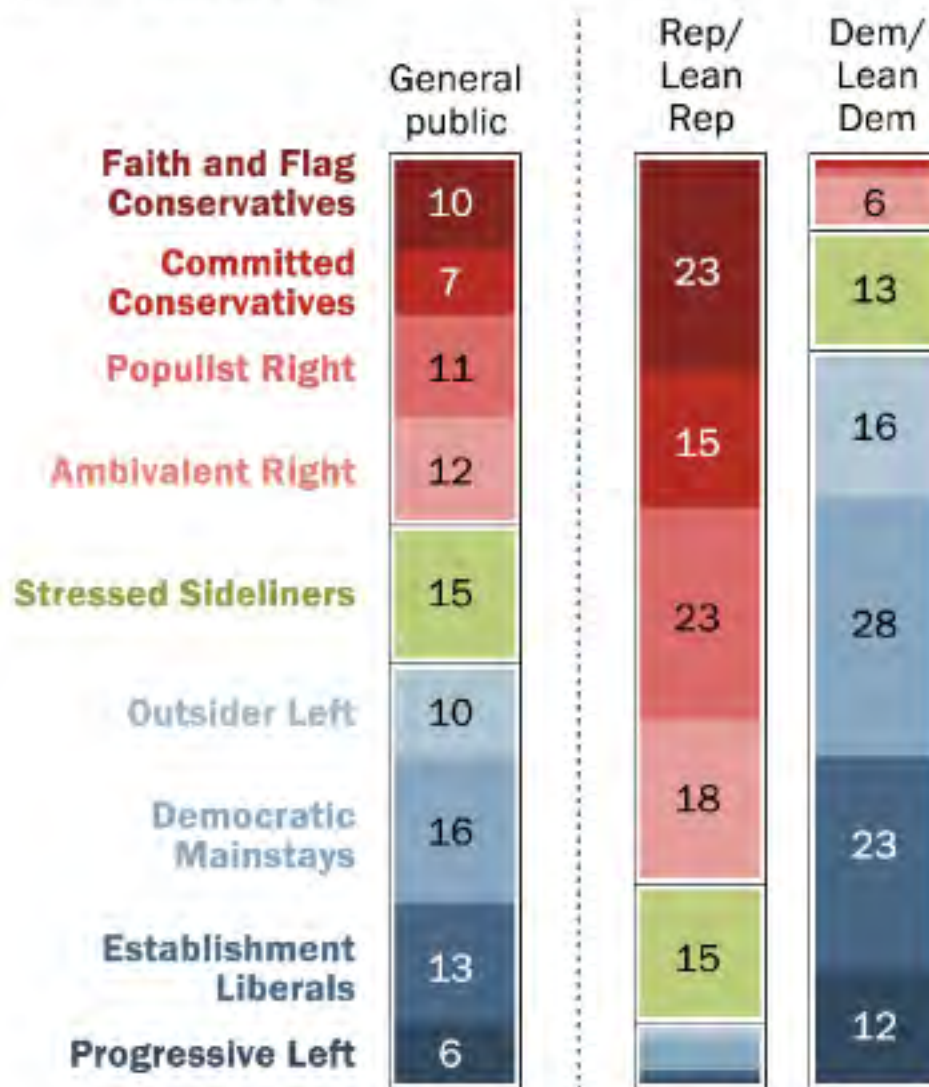
Repub. 27
Dem. 28
Ind. 44

Republican party presidential factions

- Henry Olsen writing in *The National Interest* (2014). There are four Republican presidential factions:
 - moderates (25-30%), Alexander in 1996, McCain 2008, Ron Paul or Jon Huntsman in 2012.
 - somewhat conservative voters (35-40%). Always back the winner: Dole in 1996, Bush 2000, McCain 2008, and Romney 2012.
 - very conservative, evangelical voters (20%). Robertson, Buchanan, Brownback, Huckabee, Santorum.
 - very conservative, secular voters (5-10%). Forbes, Cain, Perry, Gingrich.
- What does Trump do to this analysis?

The 2021 political typology

% of _____ who are ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18, 2021.

Among GOP-oriented groups, divide in views of business and taxes on wealthy

% who say ...

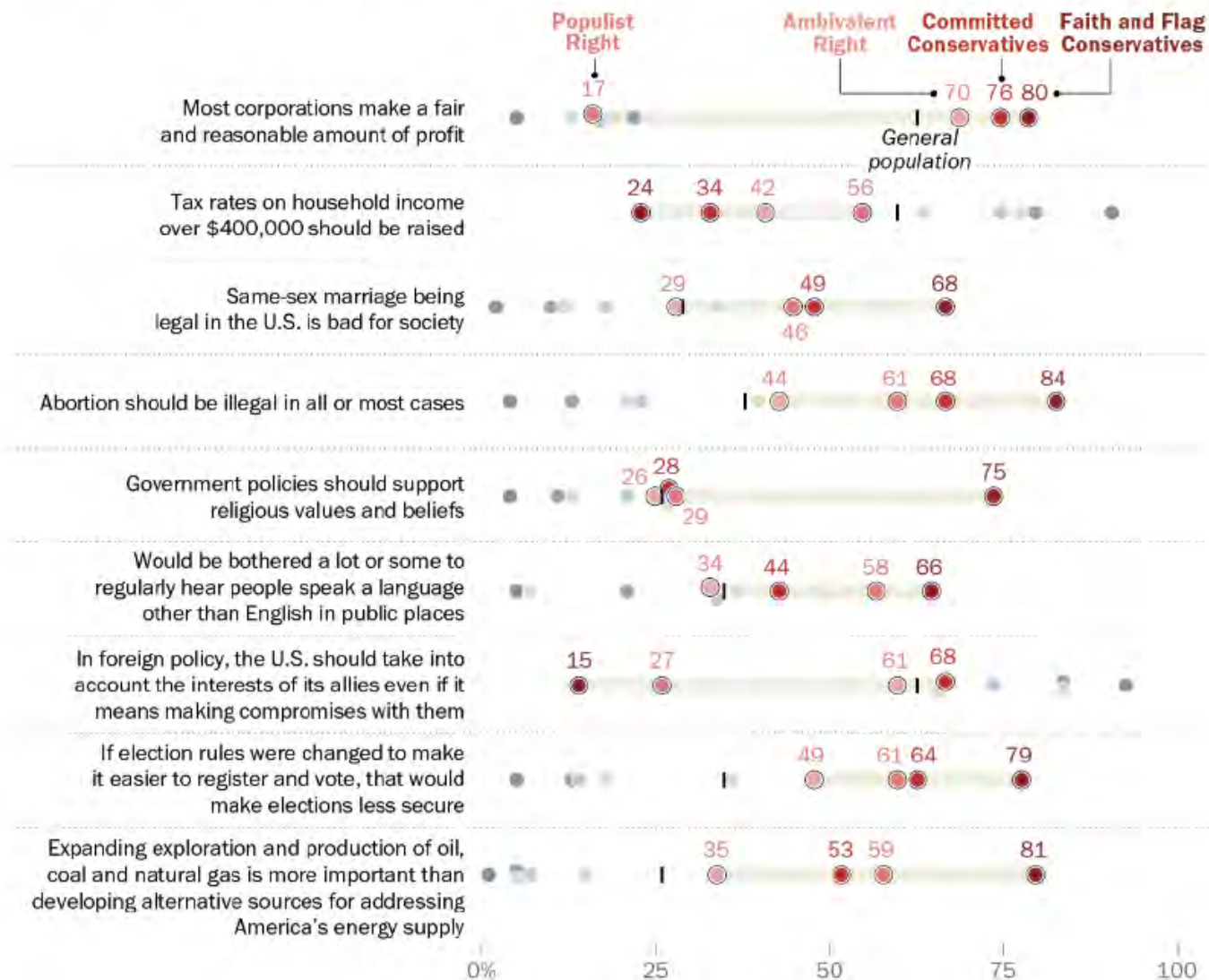
- Progressive Left
- Establishment Liberals
- Democratic Mainstays
- Outsider Left
- Stressed Sideliners
- Ambivalent Right
- Populist Right
- Committed Conservatives
- Faith and Flag Conservatives



Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted July 8-16 and Sept. 13-19, 2021.

Issues that divide the GOP coalition: Corporate profits, same-sex marriage, compromise with U.S. allies, expanding the production of oil, coal and natural gas

% who say ...



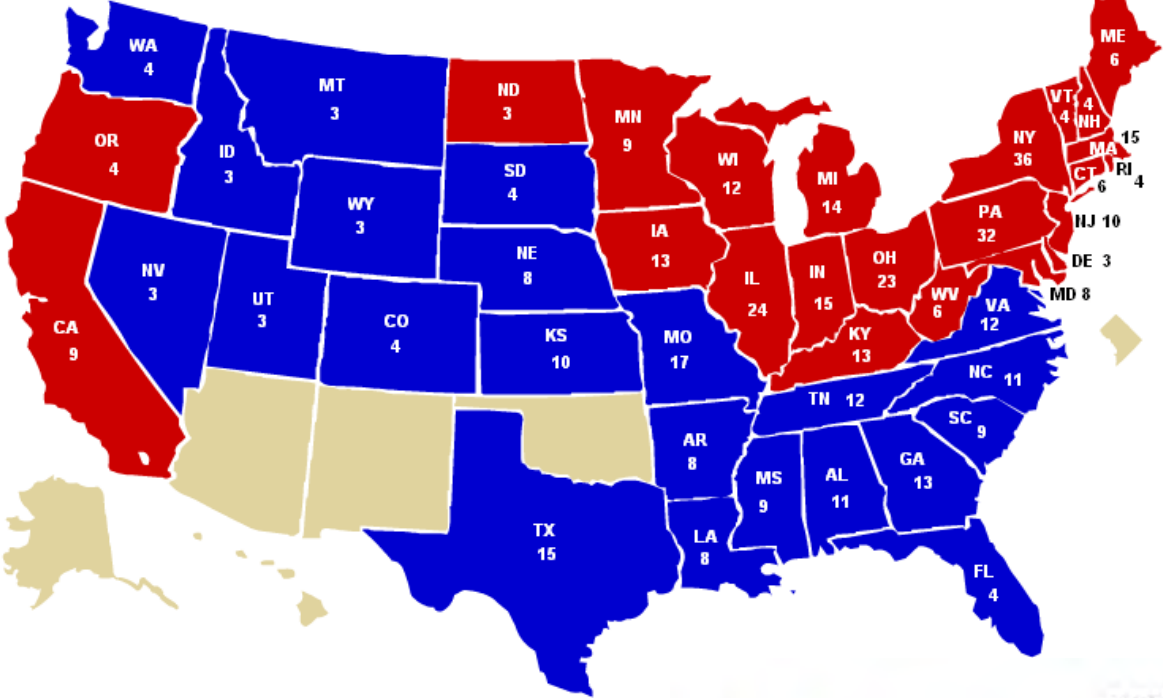
Note: For full question wording and distribution, see detailed tables.

Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted March 1-7, April 5-11, April 20-29, July 8-18 and Sept. 13-19, 2021.

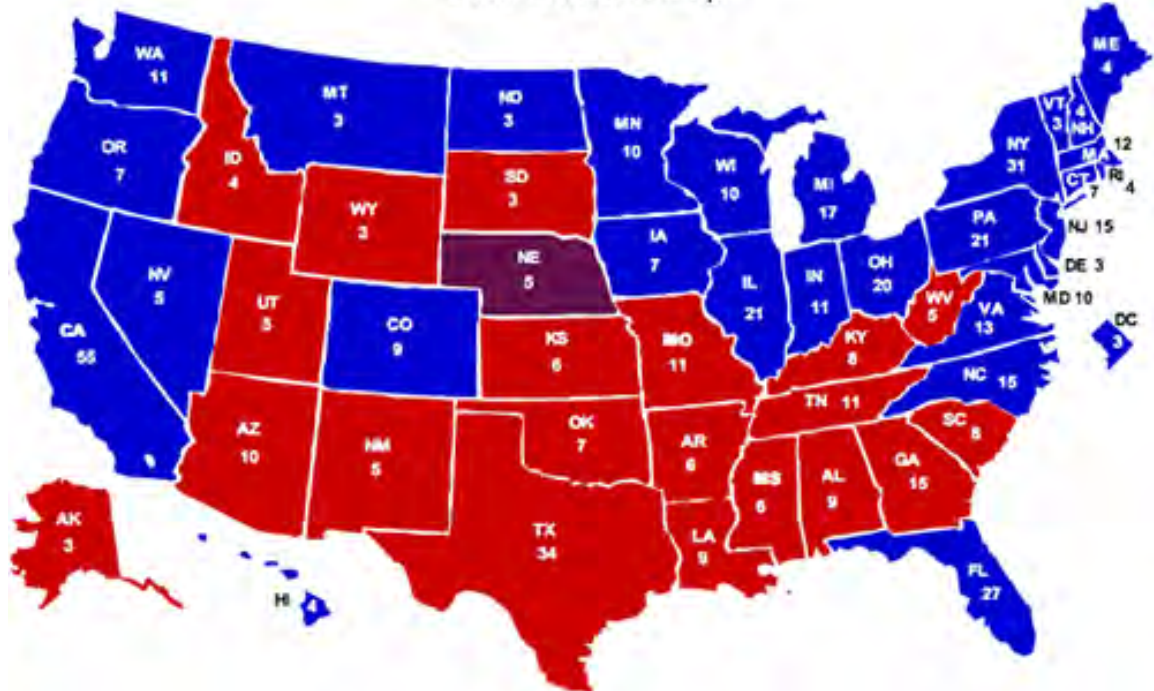
The two-party system

- Why do third parties have such a tough time in the American political system?
 - Institutional explanations: Duverger's Law ("first past the post," winner-take-all; compare to proportional representation), ballot access, campaign finance, the Electoral College, the presidency (compare to parliamentary government).
 - Natural dualism in politics.
 - Cultural explanations.
- But, the two-party system is very dynamic.

1896 election McKinley and Bryan



2008 Electoral Map



Impact of rules on presidential nominations

- Open versus closed primaries – Trump did better in open primaries.
- Winner-take-all (many R states) versus proportional (all D states) translation of primary votes into convention delegates. Look at the impact on the 2016 primaries:
 - Record number of candidates (16) in R party in 2016. Trump wrapped up the nomination on May 24 and Clinton on June 7 (not counting super delegates). Clinton got 55% of the vote and 54.4% of the pledged delegates, Sanders 43% of the vote and 45.6% of pledged delegates. Trump, 44.9% of vote and 62.4% of delegates.

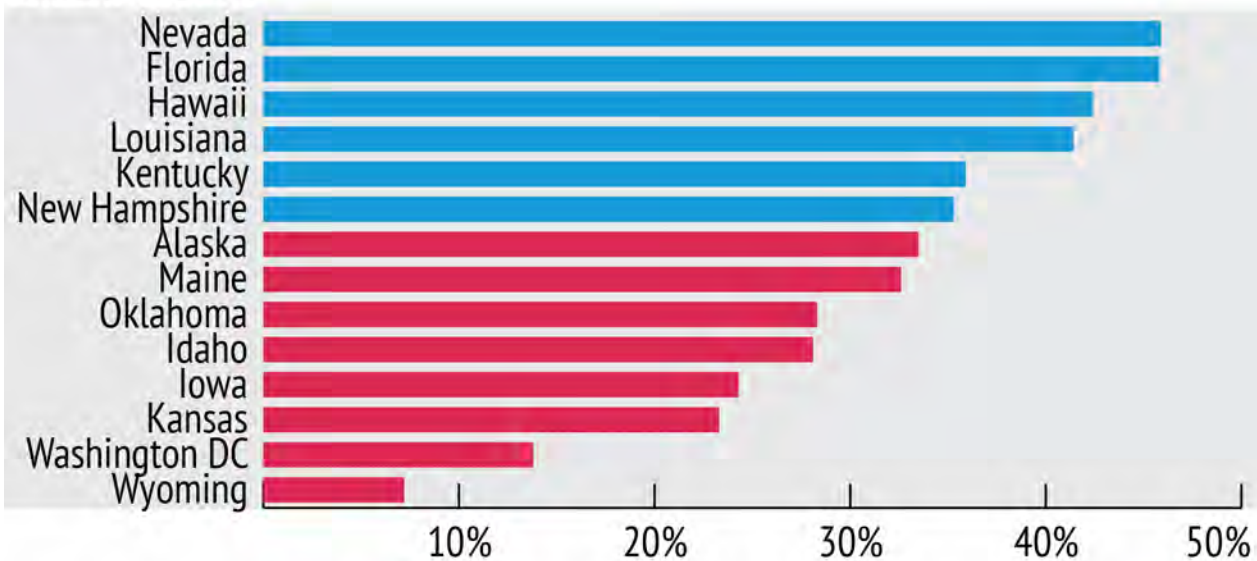
Open to Trump

Donald Trump **wins** a greater percentage of primary and caucus contests in states with open contests and **loses** in closed contest states. Percentage of vote won:

Open contests



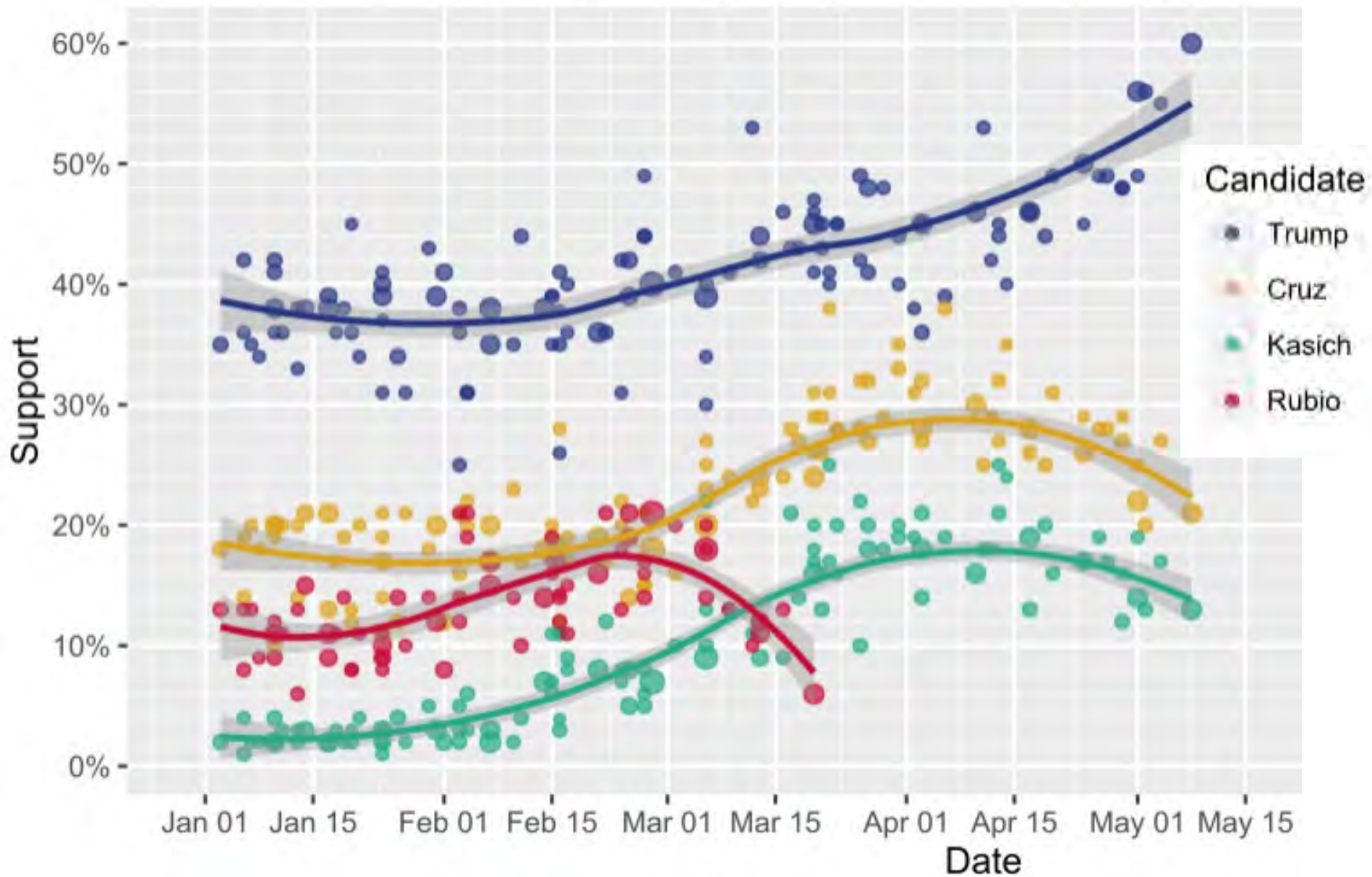
Closed contests



2016 Republican Primaries

- Clear that Trump was the most popular candidate, somewhat less clear that he would wind up the nominee – the “Never Trump” Republicans. None of the alternatives ever gained traction. Jeb Bush spent \$138,092,304 (more than any other R) and got 3 delegates. Scott Walker spent more than \$32 million (7th overall) and got nothing.
- By mid-2012 there were actually 12 declared candidates
 - First tier (at least 10% of the vote): Trump (44.9%), Cruz (25.1%), Kasich (13.8%), Rubio (11.3%).
 - 2nd tier: Carson, Bush, Paul (at least 1 delegate).
 - 3rd tier: Christie, Huckabee, Fiorina, Gilmore, Santorum (got at least some votes).
 - 4th tier: Walker, Perry, Jindal, Pataki, Graham (dropped out before Iowa).

Polls in the 2016 Repub. primaries

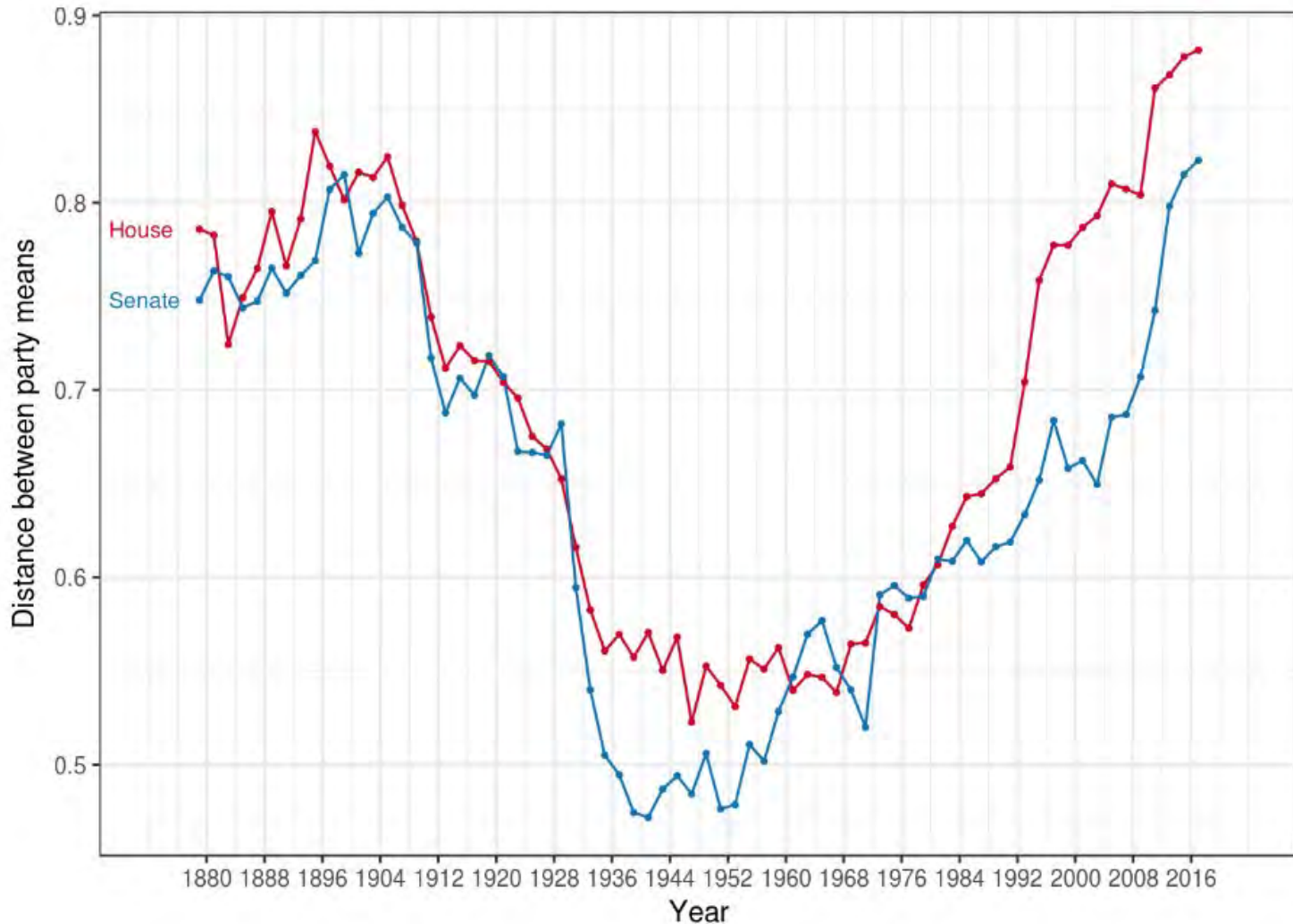


Trends that pre-date Trump

- Political polarization and the demonization of the other party both pre-date Trump, but continued to grow during his presidency.
- Polarization in Congress and in the broader public.
- Roots of Trumpism in the John Birch Society? Certainly shares many of the same ideas, but I think it gives too much influence to the John Birch Society to draw a direct link.

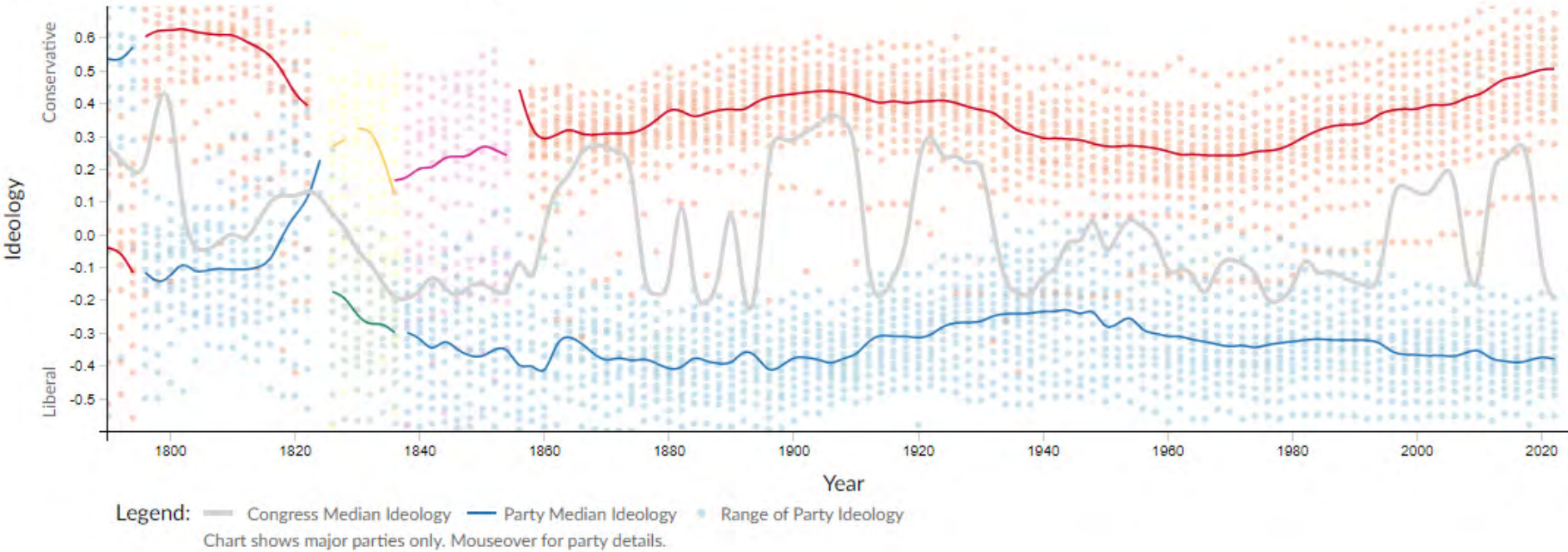
General trends: party polarization, 1880-2017

- Increased party polarization and party unity. Party polarization in Senate and House was highest ever in 2017.



Parties > Parties Overview

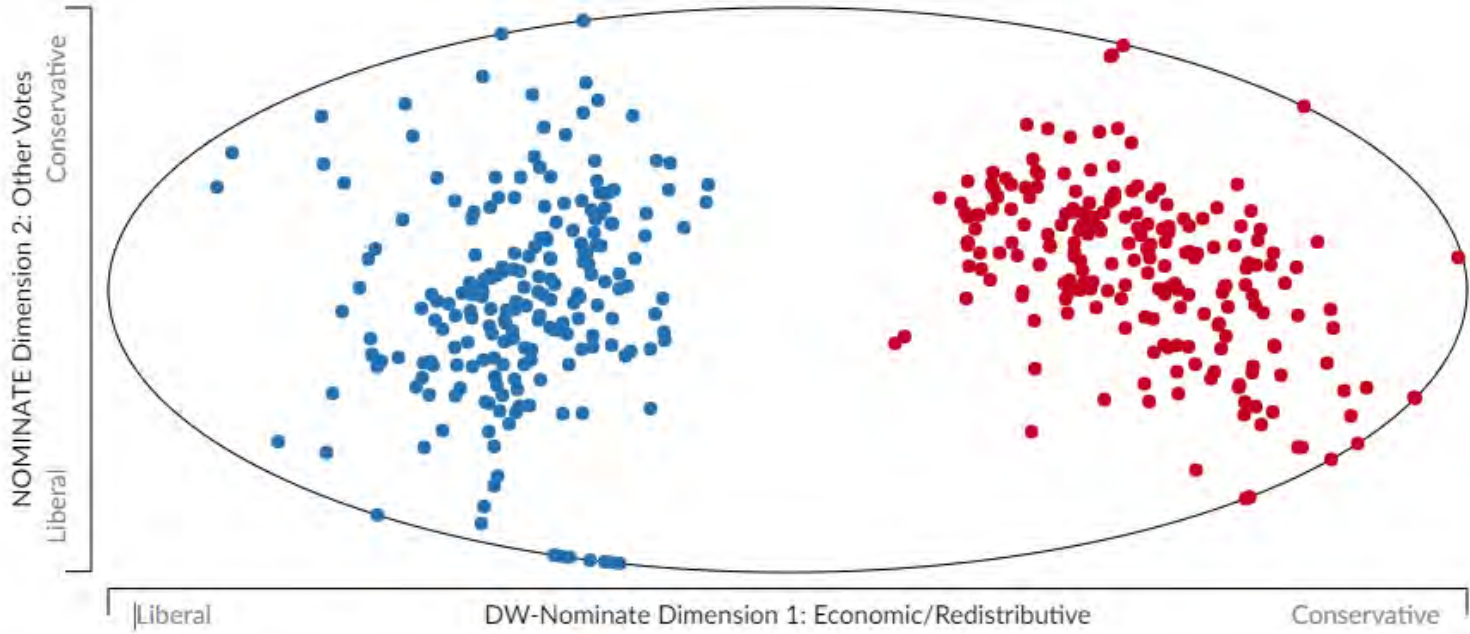
Congress at a Glance: Major Party Ideology



118th Congress (2023-2025) > Representatives

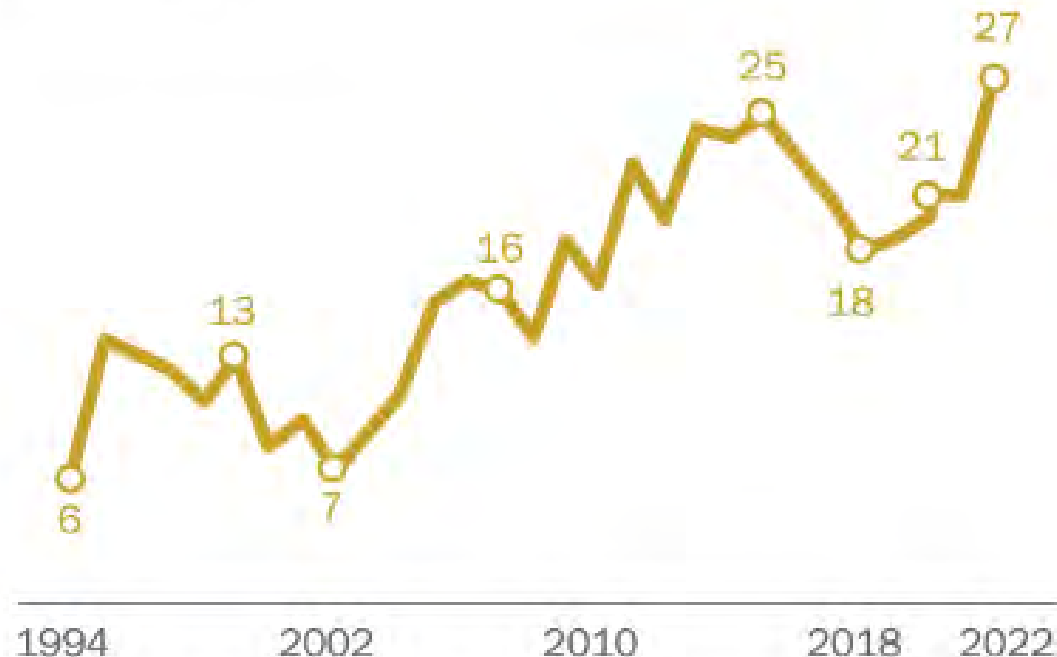


DW-Nominate Plot



Share of Americans holding unfavorable views of both parties among the highest in decades

% who have an unfavorable view of the Republican and Democratic parties



Note: Based on those who rated both the Republican and Democratic parties.

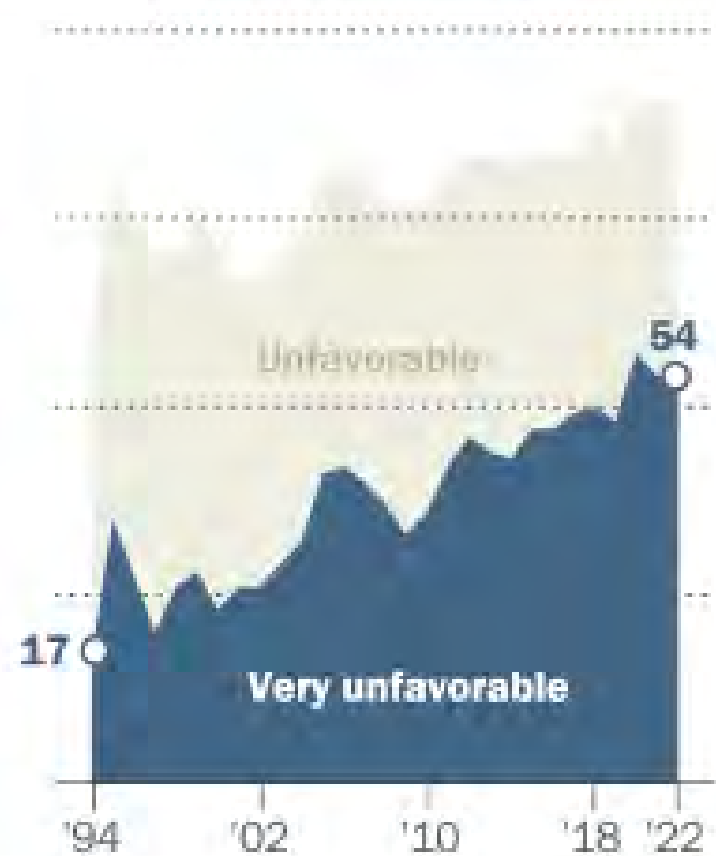
Source: Yearly averages of survey data from Pew Research Center American Trends Panel (2020-2022) and Pew Research Center phone surveys of U.S. adults (1994-2019).

Two decades of rising partisan antipathy

% of *Republicans* with a(n) _____ view of the *Democratic Party*



% of *Democrats* with a(n) _____ view of the *Republican Party*

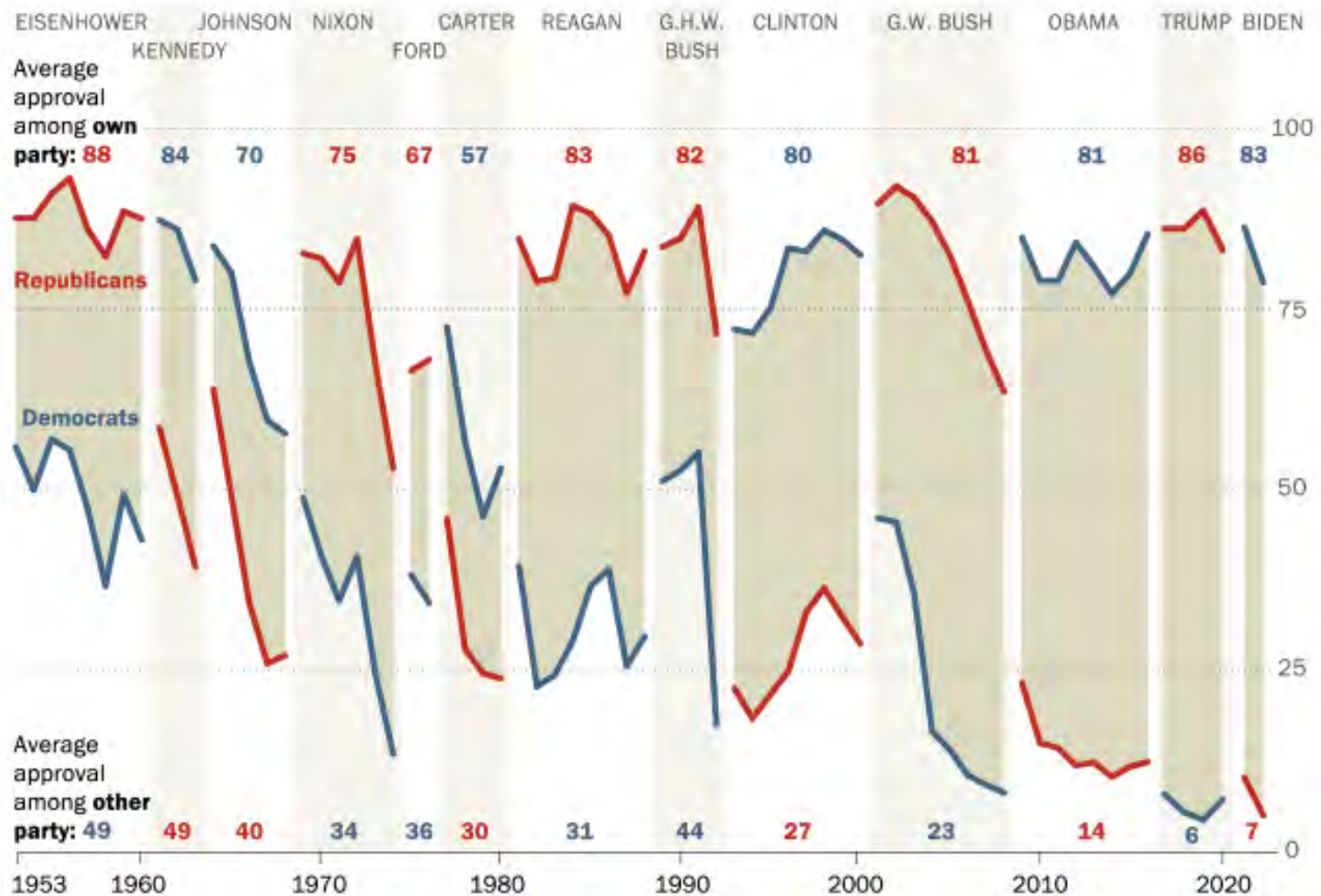


Note: Based on partisans and does not include those who lean to each party.

Source: Yearly averages of survey data from Pew Research Center American Trends Panel (2020-2022) and Pew Research Center phone surveys (1994-2019).

Partisan gaps on recent presidents far wider than for their predecessors

% who approve of president's job performance, by party



Notes: Lines show yearly approval averages; data labels show administration averages. Because some earlier data did not include partisan leaning, Republicans and Democrats in this graphic do not include leaners.

Source: Annual totals of survey data from Pew Research Center American Trends Panel (2017-2022), Pew Research Center phone surveys (1993-2017), and Gallup organization (1953-1993).

Growing shares of both Republicans and Democrats say members of the other party are more immoral, dishonest, closed-minded than other Americans

% who say members of the *other* party are a lot/somewhat more _____ compared to other Americans

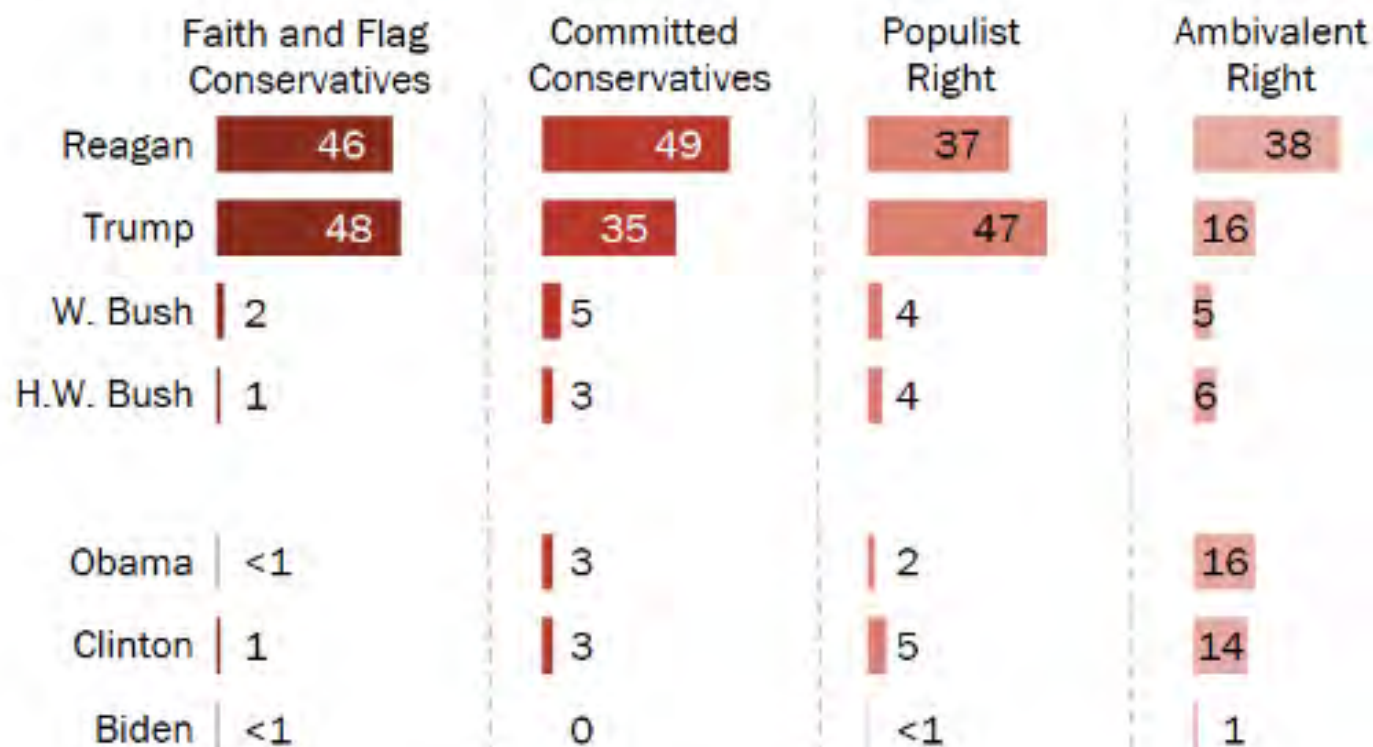
- Republicans say Democrats are more ...
- Democrats say Republicans are more ...



Note: Partisans do not include those who lean to each party.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 27-July 4, 2022.

Populist Right are the only GOP-aligned group in which significantly more name Trump than Reagan as the best recent president

% of each Republican-oriented typology group who say that _____ has done the best job as president over the past 40 years



Note: See Chapter 2 for Democratic-oriented groups

Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted July 8-18 and Sept. 13-19, 2021

Trump's alignment with and departures from Republican policy

- Areas in which Trump aligns with R policy: taxes, abortion, guns, race/civil rights (but more extreme here), free market/deregulation, pro-fossil fuels.
- Split with Republican orthodoxy: protectionist foreign trade (closer to Bernie Sanders than Rs), relations with allies (NATO), isolationist/America first foreign policy, extreme anti-immigrant (GW Bush and Obama had very similar immigration policies).
- Biggest departure is the “Big Lie” and election claims.

Challenges to elections

- Claims of voter fraud versus increasing access to voting. Actual cases of voter fraud are vanishingly small and the 2020 election was our most secure ever. People want *both* more access to voting and voting security.
- The harm being done by the “Big Lie” that Donald Trump really won the election is undermining faith in the election process.

CNN poll, Sept, 2021

Q35. Which of the following best describes your view of democracy in the United States today? [RESPONSES ROTATED IN ORDER FOR HALF/IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF]

	American democracy is under attack	American democracy is being tested, but is not under attack	American democracy is in no danger	No opinion
Aug. 3-Sept. 7, 2021	56%	37%	6%	*

J4. Which of the following do you think is a bigger problem with elections in the United States? [RESPONSES ROTATED IN ORDER FOR HALF/IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF]

	The rules around voting make it too difficult for eligible citizens who want to vote to cast a ballot	The rules around voting are not strict enough to prevent illegal votes from being cast	Neither is a problem in the United States	No opinion
Aug. 3-Sept. 7, 2021	36%	45%	19%	*

		All Respondents	Democrats	Republicans	Independents
8.2. [the government place new limits on voting to protect elections from fraud] In your opinion, it is ... that....	Very important	40%	32%	54%	28%
	Somewhat important	34%	32%	33%	40%
	Not very important	14%	18%	8%	16%
	Not at all important	12%	18%	4%	16%
	Total	1005	451	379	119
8.1. [the government make it easier for people to vote] In your opinion, it is ... that....	Very important	50%	71%	30%	42%
	Somewhat important	31%	22%	40%	27%
	Not very important	12%	6%	17%	19%
	Not at all important	7%	1%	13%	12%
	Total	1005	451	379	119



Doesn't have to be so partisan

- The partisan warfare on voting is a relatively recent thing. It isn't even clear that Rs are hurt by higher turnout. Rs did much better than expected in House and Senate races in 2020 (which had the highest turnout in 100 years).
- Policies that should have bipartisan support:
 - Non-partisan redistricting process (partisan gerrymandering is not a D or R thing).
 - Universal voter registration is one of the best way to deal with Rs legitimate concern about keeping voter rolls up to date.
 - Count absentee ballots before election day (in WI!).
 - National holiday for voting.
 - Election-day registration (like in WI).
 - 1887 Electoral Count Act was amended in December, 2022.

Looking ahead to 2024

- If we have a repeat of the 2016 primaries in which the anti-Trump vote is split, he will be the nominee again in 2024 (and likely lose to Joe Biden).
- If the Republican party can nominate someone else, I think they would have a good chance of winning in 2024.
- I don't think the Rs have a real future in only fighting the culture wars. They could become the majority party again if they return to their Reagan roots with more of an appeal to working class voters.