

CHAPTER 3

The Political Parties Have Sorted

When we speak of political polarization, it is more a matter of Democrats and Republicans becoming more homogeneous in their lives and basic beliefs than it is of the nation as a whole becoming fundamentally divided.

—Andrew Kohut

*I'm here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem.
And I know that because I know America.*

—Barack Obama

The previous chapter noted that the American public believes that it has polarized despite evidence that in the aggregate the public looks much as it did in the 1970s and 1980s, long before polarization became a staple of political commentary.¹ Such perceptions are not surprising. Although many Americans are not interested in politics and make little effort to consume political news and commentary, it is hard to avoid getting some exposure to the widespread polarization meme. Even if only in passing, ordinary citizens are likely

Quotations are from Andrew Kohut, “The Political Middle Still Matters,” Pew Research Center, August 1, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/01/the-political-middle-still-matters/; and Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at Memorial Service for Fallen Dallas Police Officers,” July 12, 2016, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/12/remarks-president-memorial-service-fallen-dallas-police-officers.

1. Even some sophisticated observers share this misconception. An important reason is failure to consider the candidates. Partisan and ideological divisions will be much less apparent in an election featuring a moderate Midwestern Republican and a born-again Southern Democrat (1976) than in an election contested by a liberal Democrat and a conservative Republican (2000–2012).

to hear the extreme and uncivil remarks of members of the political class.² After all, that sort of rhetoric is what the media consider newsworthy. Moreover, the media regularly report the dysfunctional behavior of some of the people who participate in politics and serve in governmental positions—opposition for opposition’s sake, refusal to compromise, threats to shut down the government or take the country over a “fiscal cliff.”³ Although negative political rhetoric and actions are not as common as media treatments make them seem, there is certainly plenty of reason for ordinary citizens to believe that the country has polarized.

The Difference between Sorting and Polarization

What people are actually seeing, however, is different, albeit real and important: the consequences of *partisan sorting* that has been going on for nearly five decades.⁴ This sorting process flies in the face of long-standing political science generalizations about parties in countries like the United States that have single-member districts and majoritarian electoral rules, contrasted with parties in countries that have proportional electoral rules, like most European democracies. For decades, both theory and empirical research concluded that countries with majoritarian electoral rules tended to have two broad-based parties, often termed “catch-all” parties, whereas countries with proportional electoral rules tended to have more than two parties, all of which had clear ideological hues.⁵ As Clinton

2. Matthew Levendusky and Neil Malhotra, “Does Media Coverage of Partisan Polarization Affect Political Attitudes?” *Political Communication* 33, no. 2 (2016): 283–301.

3. As Mutz writes, “One might say that mass media may not be particularly influential in telling people what to think, or perhaps even what to think about, but media are tremendously influential in telling people what others are thinking about and experiencing.” Diana Mutz, *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.

4. Matthew Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

5. The *locus classicus* is Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1954), 216–28, 245–55, *passim*.

Rossiter wrote about the United States in a standard 1960s political parties textbook, “There is and can be no real difference between the Democrats and the Republicans, because the unwritten laws of American politics demand that the parties overlap substantially in principle, policy, character, appeal, and purpose—or cease to be parties with any hope of winning a national election.”⁶ The validity of this conventional wisdom was shown by the electoral drubbings suffered by Republican Barry Goldwater, who gave the country “a choice, not an echo” in 1964, and Democrat George McGovern, who did the same with a similar result in 1972.

By the turn of the century, however, a new conventional wisdom had taken hold, one which asserted that the public had polarized and elections were now about maximizing the turnout of the “base,” not about appealing to centrist voters—because the latter had virtually disappeared. As the previous chapter showed, that conclusion is unwarranted. We can argue about the size of the middle, which depends on how we define it (whether in terms of ideology, partisanship, or specific issues). But once we settle on a definition, the data reported in chapter 2 do not show any decline in its size. Rather, what is true today is that the middle has no home in either party. Political parties in the United States have come to resemble parties in proportional electoral systems. A process of sorting during the past several decades has resulted in a Democratic Party that is clearly liberal and a Republican Party that is clearly conservative.

In a 1998 article, Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders showed that the American electorate was undergoing an “ideological realignment.”⁷ In an earlier, highly influential work, Carmines and Stimson demonstrated that Democrats and Republicans in Congress began to polarize after the election of a large class of liberal Democrats

For a contemporary treatment, see Gary Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

6. Clinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), 108.

7. Alan I. Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders, “Ideological Realignment in the U.S. Electorate,” *Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (August 1998): 634–52.

in the 1958 elections, with racial issues being the apparent cause.⁸ Abramowitz and Saunders concluded, however, that in the general electorate, “this process did not begin until the 1980s and that Civil Rights was only one of a host of issues involved in the realignment.”⁹ Whereas partisanship was only loosely correlated with ideology and issue positions for much of American history (as the mid-twentieth-century conventional wisdom held), the correlations increased dramatically between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s.

As electoral majorities have become more short-lived, the realignment concept has fallen out of favor, so it is more common today to use the term “party sorting” to describe the changes that Abramowitz and Saunders identified. Sorting and polarization are logically independent processes, although they may be empirically related. To illustrate, here is an example of pure polarization:

Time 1	<i>Democrats</i> 70 liberals 30 conservatives	<i>Independents</i> 100 moderates	<i>Republicans</i> 30 liberals 70 conservatives
Time 2	<i>Democrats</i> 105 liberals 45 conservatives	<i>Independents</i> —	<i>Republicans</i> 45 liberals 105 conservative

Between time 1 and time 2 the electorate polarizes, both ideologically (as all moderates move to the liberal and conservative camps) and in partisan terms (as all independents become partisans). As fig-

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

9. Abramowitz and Saunders, “Ideological Realignment,” 649. Using a different methodology, Hill and Tausanovitch confirm that sorting in the public first became apparent in the early 1980s. In another paper they report that the process began earlier with sorting of primary electorates in the South that spread beyond the South. Seth J. Hill and Chris Tausanovitch, “A Disconnect in Representation? Comparison of Trends in Congressional and Public Polarization,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 4 (October 2015): 1058–75. Hill and Tausanovitch, “Southern Realignment, Party Sorting, and the Polarization of American Primary Electorates, 1958–2012,” unpublished paper, June 3, 2016, http://sjhill.ucsd.edu/HillTausanovitch_Primarys.pdf.

ures 2.5 and 2.6 in the previous chapter show, this has *not* happened in the United States.

The preceding example shows polarization without sorting: although the middle has vanished (polarization), the parties are no better sorted at time 2 than at time 1—each party still has an ideological minority wing comprising 30 percent of the party. Consider an alternative time 2*:

Time 2*	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
	100 liberals	100 moderates	100 conservatives

This alternative time 2* shows pure sorting: there are the same numbers of liberals, moderates, and conservatives as at time 1 and the same numbers of Democrats, independents, and Republicans as at time 1, but now the parties are perfectly sorted—all liberals are in the Democratic camp, all conservatives in the Republican camp, and all moderates remain as independents.

Of course, the two processes are not mutually exclusive. Consider another alternative time 2**. If at time 2 above, conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans realize that they are hopelessly in the minority in their parties and migrate to the party in which their views predominate, we would have polarization *and* sorting:

Time 2**	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
	150 liberals	—	150 conservatives

To a less extreme degree this is the case in Congress, where we clearly observe sorting (resulting from the replacement of conservative Southern Democrats by Republicans and of liberal Northeastern Republicans by Democrats) and polarization (reflecting the decline of the moderates within each party).

Obviously sorting produces *partisan* polarization—when conservative Democrats leave the Democratic Party, the party becomes more liberal. When liberal Republicans leave the Republican Party, the party becomes more conservative. The problem with using the term “partisan polarization” is that in common usage the modifier “partisan” often gets omitted and then forgotten. Given that as much

as 40 percent of the electorate claims not to be partisan, casual references to polarization exaggerate the divide in public opinion. (This brings up the whole question of what are independents, leaning and otherwise, which is considered in chapter 6.) The term “sorting” helps us keep in mind that we are focusing only on the two-thirds of the electorate that claims to have a partisan identity.

Different individual-level processes can produce both sorting and polarization.¹⁰ One way is conversion, which in turn can occur in either of two ways. If partisan identity is extremely strong, people can change their ideological positions: liberal Republicans can become conservative Republicans and conservative Democrats can become liberal Democrats. Alternatively, if ideologies are strongly held, people can change their partisanship: liberal Republicans can become Democrats and conservative Democrats can become Republicans.¹¹ In addition, sorting may occur through population replacement without any individuals changing at all: during the course of several decades, liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats die off and younger voters who replace them join the party consistent with their views, if either. Especially when viewed over generation-long periods, each of these processes is probably at work to some extent.

According to Poole and Rosenthal, there is little evidence of conversion in the Congress: individual-level stability is the rule in con-

10. Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort*, chaps. 4–6.

11. The empirical evidence suggests that the first possibility is more common—people change their issue and ideological positions rather than their partisanship. See Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort*, chap. 6; Thomas M. Carsey and Geoffrey Layman, “Party Polarization and Party Structuring of Policy Attitudes: A Comparison of Three NES Panel Studies,” *Political Behavior* 24, no. 3 (2002): 199–236; Geoffrey Layman and Thomas Carsey, “Party Polarization and ‘Conflict Extension’ in the American Electorate,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 4 (October 2002): 786–802. Killian and Wilcox, however, report that on abortion people were more likely to switch parties than switch their positions on the issue. Mitchell Killian and Clyde Wilcox, “Do Abortion Attitudes Lead to Party Switching?” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 2008): 561–73. And most recently, a larger study by Goren and Chapp finds that positions on abortion and gay rights have a larger effect on party identification than vice-versa. Paul Goren and Christopher Chapp, “Moral Power: How Public Opinion on Culture War Issues Shapes Partisan Predispositions and Religious Orientations,” *American Political Science Review* 111, no. 1 (February 24, 2017): 110–28.

gressional voting.¹² Thus, replacement is the dominant process in both party sorting and polarization in Congress. Republicans have replaced conservative Democrats and Democrats have replaced liberal Republicans (sorting), but in addition more extreme members have replaced less extreme ones, resulting in a loss of moderates in both parties (polarization). In contrast, as seen in figures 2.1–2.3 of chapter 2, in the public there is little or no increase in polarization; rather, sorting is the dominant process underlying the increased partisan conflict in recent decades, and both conversion and replacement appear to be at work.¹³ As Andrew Kohut, former director of the Pew Research Center, commented, “When we speak of political polarization, it is more a matter of Democrats and Republicans becoming more homogeneous in their lives and basic beliefs than it is of the nation as a whole becoming fundamentally divided.”¹⁴

Three Features of Party Sorting in the United States

Research to date supports three propositions that we can accept with some confidence. First, members of the political class initiate the process—they do not sort as a response to popular demand; rather, they sort first and the (attentive) public takes note and sorts later.¹⁵ Second, sorting increases with the level of political involvement—the

12. Keith Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Ideology and Congress*, chap. 4 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011).

13. After an intensive and extensive statistical analysis, Baldassarri and Gelman conclude that sorting is the primary explanation for changes in public opinion between 1972 and 2008. Krasa and Polborn concur that sorting is the dominant mechanism between 1976 and 2004, but find somewhat surprisingly that sorting and polarization are of about equal importance in 2008. Delia Baldassarri and Andrew Gelman, “Partisans without Constraint: Political Polarization and Trends in American Public Opinion,” *American Journal of Sociology* 114, no. 2 (September 2008): 408–46; Stefan Krasa and Mattias Polborn, “Policy Divergence and Voter Polarization in a Structural Model of Elections,” *Journal of Law and Economics* 57, no. 1 (2014): 31–76.

14. Andrew Kohut, “The Political Middle Still Matters,” Pew Research Center, August 1, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/01/the-political-middle-still-matters/.

15. Carmines and Stimson, *Issue Evolution*; Abramowitz and Saunders, “Ideological Realignment”; Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort*. Cf. James Campbell’s “revealed polarization theory” in *Polarized: Making Sense of a Divided America* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016).

higher the level of political activism, the more distinct (better sorted) are Republicans and Democrats.¹⁶ Third, related to the second proposition, among typical partisans in the public, sorting has increased but remains far below the levels exhibited by those in the political class. Consider the abortion issue on which the party platforms are polar opposites.

The General Social Survey (GSS) carried out by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago has been asking the same abortion question since 1972. The question reads:

Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if

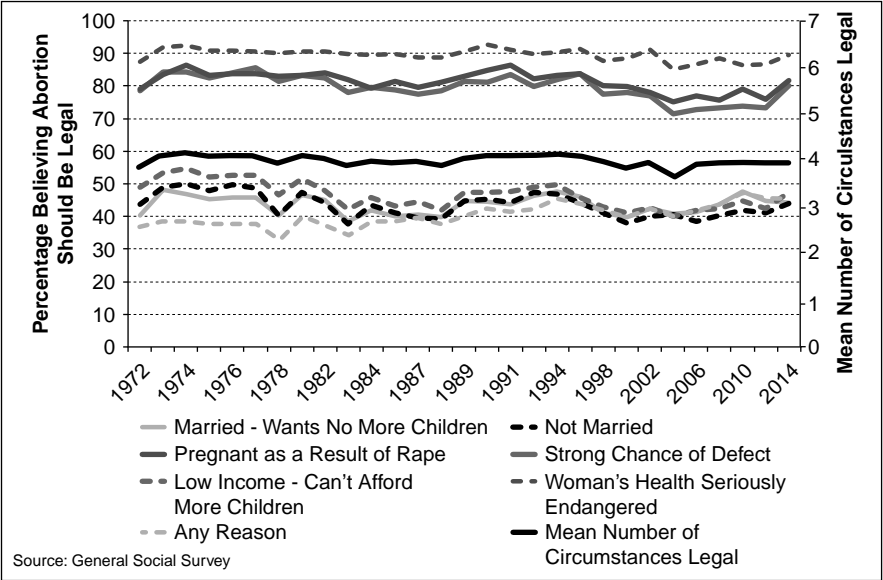
1. The woman's health is seriously endangered
2. She became pregnant as a result of rape
3. There is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby
4. The family has low income and cannot afford any more children
5. She is not married and does not want to marry the man
6. She is married and does not want any more children¹⁷

This survey item avoids emotionally and politically charged oversimplifications like “pro-life” and “pro-choice” and asks directly

16. “No knowledgeable observer doubts that the American public is less divided than the political agitators and vocal elective office-seekers who claim to represent it.” William A. Galston and Pietro S. Nivola, “Delineating the Problem,” in *Red and Blue Nation*, vol. 1, ed. Pietro S. Nivola and David W. Brady (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006). See also John H. Aldrich and Melanie Freeze, “Political Participation, Polarization, and Public Opinion: Activism and the Merging of Partisan and Ideological Polarization,” in *Facing the Challenge of Democracy: Explorations in the Analysis of Public Opinion and Political Participation*, ed. Paul M. Sniderman and Benjamin Highton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 185–206. Most recently Hill and Huber conclude, “Thus we observe increasing extremism and homogeneity within each party as participation increases (from vote to general election voting to primary voting to contributing).” Seth J. Hill and Gregory A. Huber, “Representativeness and Motivations of the Contemporary Donorate: Results from Merged Survey and Administrative Records,” *Political Behavior*, 2016, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11109-016-9343-y>.

17. In 1977 the GSS added a seventh option, “The woman wants it for any reason.” This option lacks the specificity of the previous six, and ANES data show that about a third of those who choose this option reject it when asked about gender selection. Thus, I omit this option from the analysis.

FIGURE 3.1. Abortion Should Be Legal When



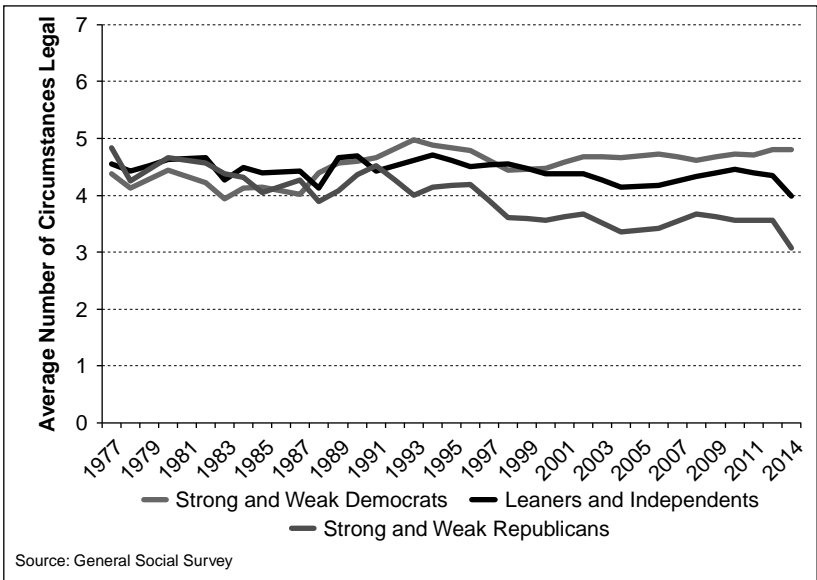
about the specifics of people’s views. As shown in figure 3.1, in the aggregate Americans’ views have changed little during the course of more than forty years. Large majorities favor legal abortion in the three cases of fetal birth defects, pregnancies resulting from rape, and dangers to the woman’s health (the so-called traumatic circumstances).¹⁸ On the other hand, the population is closely divided in the three cases of single motherhood, low income, and enough children already (the so-called elective circumstances). On average, the public believes in legal abortion in four of the six circumstances (the heavy middle line in the figure), with little change over the course of four decades.¹⁹

Figure 3.2 plots the average number of circumstances in which Democrats, independents, and Republicans favor legal abortion.

18. The terms “traumatic” and “elective” are not used in any evaluative sense. These terms are commonly used in the literature.

19. A small recent downturn is evident in the figure. Some analysts attribute it to the controversy over intact dilation and extraction, or “partial birth abortion.” Descriptions of the procedure are graphic and gruesome and may have led some people to modify their views.

FIGURE 3.2. Partisans Eventually Sorted on Abortion



The Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. The delegates to the presidential nominating conventions had begun to diverge even earlier,²⁰ but it took nearly two decades for Democrats and Republicans in the public to get on the “correct” side of the issue. Republicans and Democrats, who began to separate after 1992, continue to do so. This illustrates the first proposition: that the political class sorts first, the public follows.

With the addition of some background information, figure 3.2 also illustrates the third proposition: that although better sorted than they used to be, ordinary partisans are still imperfectly sorted. In 2012 and 2016, the national platforms adopted by the two presidential nominating conventions could not have been more different on the subject of abortion. The Republican platform said, essentially, “never, no exceptions.”²¹ The Democratic platform said, essentially,

20. Kira Sanbonmatsu, *Democrats, Republicans, and the Politics of Women’s Place* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 96–97.

21. Even “to save the life of the mother” is not explicitly included.

“at any time, for any reason.”²² Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that a majority of Republican convention delegates would have answered the General Social Survey question “none of these circumstances” and a majority of Democratic convention delegates “all of these circumstances.” But self-identified Democrats in the public are only at 4.8 circumstances, not 6, and self-identified Republicans at 3.1 circumstances are nowhere near the zero circumstances position that a majority of Republican convention delegates presumably holds. Put another way, after more than two decades of sorting, the gap between partisans on this issue is less than two of the six circumstances whereas the gap between majorities of convention delegates arguably is six circumstances.

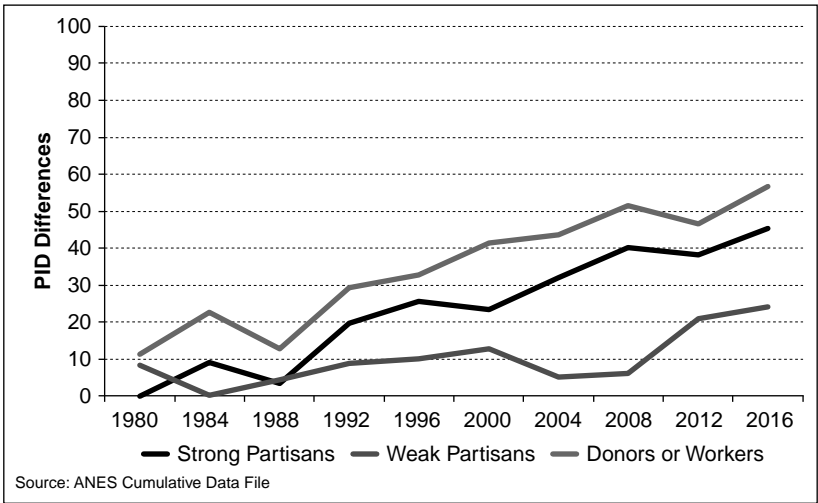
To illustrate the second proposition with its finer gradation of comparisons, consider an abortion item included on the quadrennial American National Election Studies. This item reads, “Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view?”

1. By law, abortion should never be permitted.
2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman’s life is in danger.
3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman’s life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.
4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.

Figure 3.3 contains the responses to the unconditional pro-choice category for different levels of political involvement. In 1980, the differences between weak partisans, strong partisans, and members of the political class (donors and activists) were 10 percentage points or less. By the early 1990s larger differences were apparent, and these have continued to grow in the years since. But weakly committed Republicans and Democrats have sorted much less than strongly committed ones—a 25 percentage point difference in 2016 in the

22. And, contrary to majority opinion, the procedure would be covered by government health programs.

FIGURE 3.3. When Should Abortion Be Permitted?
“Always as a Matter of Personal Choice”



Workers are strong and weak partisans who worked for a party or candidate. Donors are strong and weak partisans who donated to a party or candidate.

former category versus a 45 percentage point difference in the latter category; the donors and activist categories of each party have sorted even more than strong partisans—the former are now nearly 60 percentage points apart.

Like the GSS data in figure 3.2, the data underlying figure 3.3 also provide an illustration of the third proposition. Even at the level of strong partisans, the lack of sorting may surprise some. As table 3.1 shows, in 2016 one out of five strong Democrats believed that abortion should never be permitted or only permitted in the cases of rape, incest, or a threat to the woman’s life, a position closer to the Republican position than that of their own party. Perhaps even more surprising, nearly one-third of strong Republicans believed that abortion should always be allowed as the personal choice of the woman or when there is “a clear need.” Such positions obviously are very distant from that stated in the Republican platform.²³ Why

23. It may surprise some readers to learn that in 2004, at least, abortion was the issue on which most partisans were out of line with their parties. Hillygus and

TABLE 3.1. When Should Abortion Be Permitted?

<i>When Should Abortion Be Permitted?</i>	<i>Strong Democrats</i>	<i>Strong Republicans</i>
Never permitted	7%	26%
Only in case of rape, incest, or the woman's life is in danger	15%	43%
For a clear need	12%	14%
Always as a personal choice	64%	16%

Source: 2016 ANES

do such “unsorted” Republicans and Democrats stay in their respective parties given their views on the issue? Part of the answer is that contrary to widespread impressions from media coverage of politics, most Americans do not consider abortion (and other social issues) to be nearly as important as activist groups in the two parties do, a matter discussed in chapter 5.

Studies that measure constituent preferences on a single left-right dimension generally report “asymmetric polarization”: both parties have moved toward the poles since the 1970s, but Republicans have moved further right than Democrats have moved left.²⁴ Opinion on specific issues, however, shows more variation. On same-sex marriage, for example, sorting appears to be due primarily to Democrats adopting a more liberal stance, although both parties have become more accepting (figure 3.4). On gun control, sorting seems to be entirely a matter of Republicans becoming more supportive of gun rights (figure 3.5); Democrats have scarcely moved at all. To complicate matters, sometimes survey items on the same subject support contradictory conclusions. On the GSS survey item graphed in

Shields reported that in 2004 nearly half of all partisans disagreed with their parties’ positions on one or more issues. Abortion led the list. D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*, chap. 3 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

24. A longer time perspective offers a somewhat more complex picture. Democrats began moving left in the 1950s as the South realigned. Republicans actually moved in a more centrist direction before making a sharp right turn in more recent decades. See Campbell, *Polarized*, chap. 7; Devin Caughey, James Dunham, and Christopher Warshaw, “Polarization and Partisan Divergence in the American Public, 1946–2012,” unpublished paper, 2016.

FIGURE 3.4. Party Sorting on Same-Sex Marriage: Democrats Move More

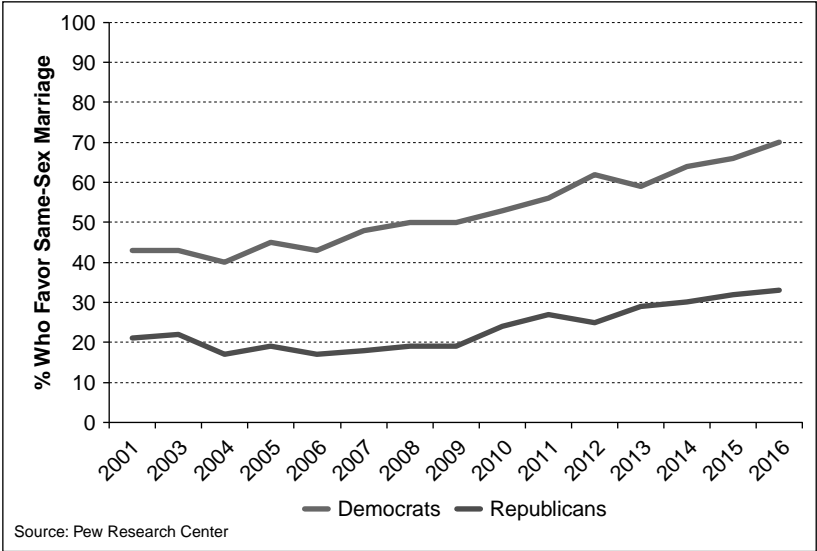


FIGURE 3.5. Party Sorting on Gun Ownership: Republicans Move More

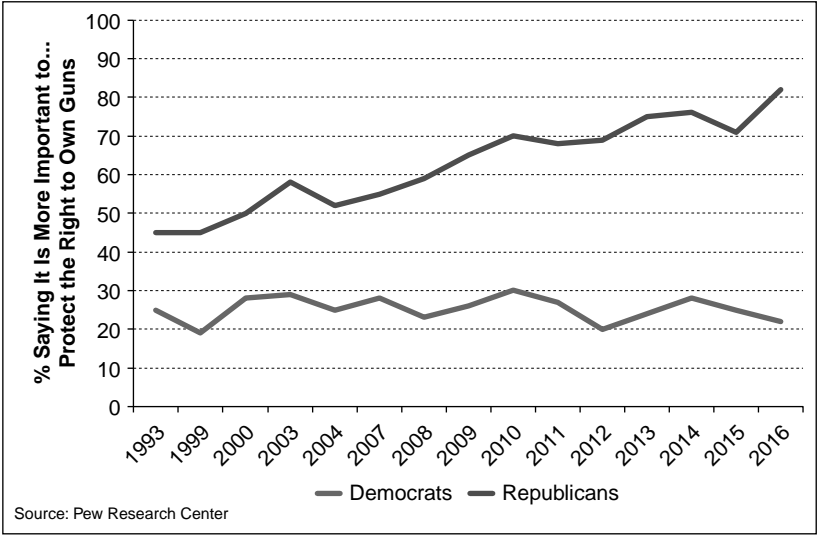


FIGURE 3.6. Partisan Sorting on Abortion: Democrats Move More

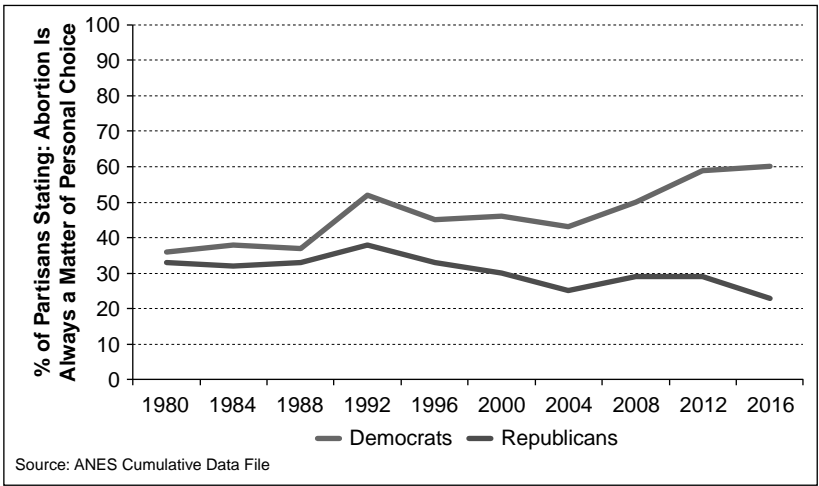


figure 3.2, for example, the sorting seems to be primarily created by Republicans moving to a more restrictive stance. But as figure 3.6 shows, on the ANES item reported in figure 3.3, Democrats’ support for abortion always being a matter of personal choice has nearly doubled, whereas Republicans have become only slightly less opposed to that position. The one thing we can say for sure is that partisans are further apart on most issues today than they were a generation ago.

A great deal of public opinion research shows that what has happened in the case of the issues examined above is the rule, not the exception. On issue after issue, Republicans increasingly find themselves on one side and Democrats find themselves on the other side, although the extent of disagreement often is not great. Sorting has significantly increased; but among typical Americans, even strong partisans, it remains far from perfect. A recent Pew Research Center report provided a wealth of information in support of this conclusion.²⁵ During the past two decades, partisans have increasingly sorted. Looking at

25. Pew Research Center, “Political Polarization in the American Public: How Increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise and Everyday Life,” June 12, 2014, www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

opinions on ten issues, the researchers found that the proportion of extremely consistent Americans doubled from 10 percent to 21 percent and the proportion of mixed or inconsistent Americans declined from 49 percent in 1994 to 39 percent in 2014.²⁶ But as the authors cautioned, “These sentiments [those of uncompromising ideologues] are not shared by all—or even most—Americans. The majority do not have uniformly conservative or liberal views. Most do not see either party as a threat to the nation. And more believe their representatives in government should meet halfway to resolve contentious disputes rather than hold out for more of what they want.”²⁷

Party Sorting and Affective Polarization

Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America took note of Samuel Popkin’s suggestion that even if there were little evidence of increased polarization on the issues, perhaps voters on opposite sides had come to dislike each other more.²⁸ At that time there was only a modicum of evidence consistent with Popkin’s suggestion, but research since then suggests that such “affective” partisan polarization has increased: Democrats and Republicans appear to dislike each other more than they did a generation ago.²⁹

Cognitive and affective polarization are not mutually exclusive, of course. If human beings dislike others the more they disagree with them—a reasonable supposition, *ceteris paribus*—standard

26. The report was widely misinterpreted as showing that partisans had become more extreme, when the actual finding was that they had become more consistent. See Morris Fiorina, “Americans Have Not Become More Politically Polarized,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/06/23/americans-have-not-become-more-politically-polarized/.

27. Pew Research Center, “Political Polarization,” 7.

28. Morris Fiorina, with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Longman, 2011), 68–69.

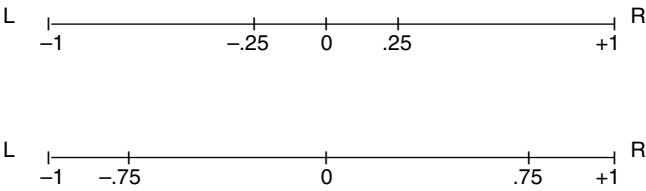
29. Daron Shaw, “If Everyone Votes Their Party, Why Do Presidential Election Outcomes Vary So Much?” *The Forum* 10, no. 3 (October 2012), www.degruyter.com/view/j/for.2012.10.issue-3/1540-8884.1519/1540-8884.1519.xml; Alan I. Abramowitz, “The New American Electorate,” in *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization*, ed. James A. Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

spatial models would predict an increase in affective polarization.³⁰ Consider this pure sorting example:

Time 1	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
	50 liberals		25 liberals
	25 moderates	50 moderates	25 moderates
	25 conservatives		50 conservatives
Time 2	<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
	75 liberals		75 conservatives
	25 moderates	50 moderates	25 moderates

If we assign liberals the value of -1 on a left-right scale, moderates 0 , and conservatives $+1$, then as figure 3.7 shows, as the parties sort, the average Democratic position moves leftward from $-.25$ to $-.75$, the average Republican position moves rightward from $.25$ to $.75$, and the distance between them triples.³¹ One need not conjure up esoteric social-psychological theories to suggest that the greater the policy or ideological differences between the average Democrat and the average Republican, the greater the dislike.

FIGURE 3.7. Sorting Causes Partisan Polarization



Moreover, the preceding observation carries over from conceptualization to measurement. One commonly used measure of affect is the “feeling thermometer.”³² Nearly forty years after their introduction, I

30. Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven Webster, “The Angry American Voter,” *Sabato’s Crystal Ball* 13, no. 30 (August 6, 2015): figure 2, www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/the-angry-american-voter/.

31. The numbers are arbitrary, but the point is general.

32. The item reads as follows: “I’d like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I’ll read the name of a person and I’d like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling

think it is fair to say that no one really knows what these items measure. A voter may feel cold toward a candidate because she thinks he is a terrible human being. Alternatively, she may feel warmly toward him because she approves of his foreign policy. Nothing in the item allows us to separate the affective from the cognitive. The same is true for various other measures. A voter may say that Trump makes him feel “angry” because of Trump’s persona or because of Trump’s policy proposals.

This intermingling of the cognitive and affective is evident in a fascinating finding widely discussed in the media: partisans are now less likely to want to date or marry someone from the other party than they were in 1960.³³ As Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes summarize,

Democrats and Republicans not only increasingly dislike the opposing party, but also impute negative traits to the rank-and-file of the out-party. We further demonstrate that affective polarization has permeated judgments about interpersonal relations, exceeds polarization based on other prominent social cleavages, and that levels of partisan affect are significantly higher in America, compared to the United Kingdom.³⁴

Not all data are consistent with such findings—a study comparing how Americans ranked the importance of eighteen traits in a marriage partner in 1939 compared to 2008 found that “similar political background” increased from eighteenth (dead last) only

thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorable toward the person and that you don’t care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50 degree mark if you don’t feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don’t recognize, you don’t need to rate that person. Just tell me and we’ll move on to the next one.”

33. Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, “Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2012): 405–31.

34. *Ibid.*, 407.

to seventeenth.³⁵ Still, if the findings of Iyengar and his collaborators are accepted at face value, party sorting provides a plausible explanation.

In 1964, what if a daughter came home from college and told her Democratic parents that she was engaged to a Republican? How might they have responded? They probably would have thought, “What kind of Republican?” A Western conservative like Barry Goldwater? A Northeastern liberal like Nelson Rockefeller? A Midwestern moderate like George Romney? Similarly, had a son come home from college and told his Republican parents that he was engaged to a Democrat, they likely would have wondered, “What kind of Democrat?” A union stalwart? An urban liberal? A Southern conservative? A Western pragmatist? In the unsorted parties of that time, no matter what kind of person you were, there were probably people with similar social characteristics and political views in the other party.

In the better-sorted parties of today (reinforced by the crude stereotypes common in the media and in political debate), it is unsurprising that some parents might react very differently. If a son comes home and announces his engagement to a Democrat, his Republican parents might think, “You want to bring an America-hating atheist into our family?” Similarly, Democratic parents might react to their daughter’s engagement to a Republican by asking, “We’re supposed to welcome an evolution-denying homophobe into our family?” In the better-sorted parties of today, it would be surprising if affective partisan polarization has not increased.

Consistent with thought experiments like the one above, empirical research shows that party sorting contributes to the rise in affective polarization.³⁶ Still, at this time I would not argue that the increase in party and issue alignment is the entire explanation. Adopting

35. Ana Swanson, “What men and women wanted in a spouse in 1939—and how different it is today,” *Washington Post*, April 19, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/04/19/what-men-and-women-wanted-in-a-spouse-in-1939-and-how-different-it-is-today/.

36. Lori D. Bougher, “The Correlates of Discord: Identity, Issue Alignment and Political Hostility in Polarized America,” *Political Behavior*, November 2016, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11109-016-9377-1>.

a social identity perspective, Mason argues that party sorting has increased the agreement between partisan and ideological identities, resulting in the strengthening of both:³⁷ “The effect is an electorate whose members are more biased and angry than their issue positions alone can explain.”³⁸ This line of work is reminiscent of the studies reviewed in chapter 2 that show distorted perceptions of the actual positions held by members of the opposite party and those at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. But these findings are stronger in that the inaccurate perceptions appear to increase emotional antagonism. If our present political difficulties have deep psychological roots that have little basis in objective reality, any attempt to overcome the difficulties through institutional reforms will face additional obstacles. As Mason comments, “It may therefore be disturbing to imagine a nation of people driven powerfully by team spirit, but less powerfully by a logical connection of issues to action.”³⁹

The critical question for the future is whether affective polarization will carry over into actual political behavior. Iyengar and Westwood report experimental evidence that partisan hostility and willingness to discriminate on partisan grounds today may be as pronounced in some respects as racial hostility (or at least that people are less inhibited about expressing the former compared to the latter).⁴⁰ A series of experiments reported by Lelkes and Westwood offers a more positive note. They find that affective polarization is associated with acceptance of hostile rhetoric, avoidance of members of the other party, and favoritism toward members of one’s own party, but not with overt discrimination against members of

37. Lilliana Mason, “‘I Disrespectfully Agree’: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization,” *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 128–45.

38. *Ibid.*, 140.

39. *Ibid.*, 142.

40. Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, “Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization,” *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 3 (2015): 690–707. See also an interesting study of online dating that reports findings consistent with those of Iyengar and Westwood: Gregory Huber and Neil Malhotra, “Social Spillovers of Political Polarization,” unpublished paper, 2015.

the other party. On the other hand, Miller and Conover report that controlling for issue and ideological distance, affective polarization increases the likelihood of voting and participating in the campaign, which would increase partisan polarization in elections.⁴¹

Party Sorting and Geographic Polarization

Whereas research on affective polarization delves into mental processes inside the voters' heads, a different line of research examines the physical location of voters' heads. Some years ago a book entitled *The Big Sort* received considerable popular and some scholarly attention.⁴² The thesis of the book is that since the 1970s the United States has experienced a process of geographic political segregation:

We have built a country where everyone can choose the neighborhood (and church and news shows) most compatible with his or her lifestyle and beliefs. And we are living with the consequences of this segregation by way of life: pockets of like-minded citizens that have become so ideologically inbred that we don't know, can't understand, and can barely conceive of "those people" who live just a few miles away.⁴³

This argument is another version of the segregation hypothesis discussed in chapter 2 except that the hypothesized mechanism of voter homogenization is social pressure from one's neighborhood surroundings rather than the media. The arguments and analyses in *The Big Sort* are flimsy, ranging from anecdotal to impressionistic. Briefly, patterns in the presidential vote that are the basis of the argument often differ from patterns in votes for other offices and espe-

41. Yphtach Lelkes and Sean J. Westwood, "The Limits of Partisan Prejudice," unpublished paper, 2015; Patrick R. Miller and Pamela Johnston Conover, "Red and Blue States of Mind: Partisan Hostility and Voting in the United States," *Political Research Quarterly* 68 (2015): 225-39.

42. Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008).

43. *Ibid.*, 40.

cially in party registration, and most Americans don't know their neighbors, let alone feel pressure to conform politically.⁴⁴ Studies find that although many people profess a desire to live in politically compatible neighborhoods, their ability to realize those desires is limited by the fact that when making location decisions, liberals and conservatives alike privilege nonpolitical factors like good schools, low crime rates, stable property values, and commuting time, with political considerations ranking much lower.⁴⁵ After calculating the 2008 presidential vote for more than 120,000 precincts, Hersh concluded, "In this nationwide collection of precinct data it is clear that most precincts are quite mixed in terms of partisan supporters. Most voters live in neighborhoods that are not lopsidedly partisan."⁴⁶

Still, since the 1960s there have been significant changes in the geographic locus of party competition in the country. Until the 1960s, Republican presidential candidates were not competitive in most of the South; today Democratic presidential candidates are not competitive in much of the South. That much is more or less a wash, however. More notably, in the mid-twentieth century most northern states were competitive. In particular, both parties had realistic chances of carrying big heterogeneous states such as New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and California. Today most of these states vote dependably for Democratic presidential candidates; in recent elections only a dozen or so states have constituted the Electoral College battleground that decides the presidential winner.

44. Samuel J. Abrams and Morris P. Fiorina, "The Big Sort That Wasn't: A Skeptical Reexamination," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45, no. 2 (April 2012), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/the-big-sort-that-wasnt-a-skeptical-reexamination/oFEA9EB647CC86566040BA95C6C9C83F>.

45. Iris Hui, "Who is Your Preferred Neighbor? Partisan Residential Preferences and Neighborhood Satisfaction," *American Politics Research* 41, no. 6: 997-1021; James G. Gimpel and Iris S. Hui, "Seeking Politically Compatible Neighbors? The Role of Neighborhood Partisan Composition in Residential Sorting," *Political Geography* 48 (2015): 130-42; Clayton Nall and Jonathan Mummolo, "Why Partisans Don't Sort: The Constraints on Political Segregation," *Journal of Politics*, 2016 (forthcoming).

46. Eitan D. Hersh, *Hacking the Electorate* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 93.

Party sorting very likely makes a significant contribution to this version of geographic polarization. Sixty-five years ago a committee of the American Political Science Association issued a report under the title, “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System.”⁴⁷ Among other things, the report called for more ideologically homogeneous parties that have the tools to discipline “heretical” members and force them to toe the party line. As various scholars have pointed out, much of what the committee desired has come to pass.⁴⁸ But, as critic Julius Turner predicted sixty-five years ago, one of the consequences of what we now call party sorting is a decline in party competition in many areas of the United States:

The reforms which the Committee proposes would increase the tendency toward one-party districts. If local parties and candidates cannot be insurgent, if they cannot express the basic desires of their constituencies, then those local parties can have no hope of success. Regardless of the organization provided, you cannot give Hubert Humphrey [a liberal Democratic senator from Minnesota] a banjo and expect him to carry Kansas. Only a Democrat who rejects at least a part of the Fair Deal can carry Kansas and only a Republican who moderates the Republican platform can carry Massachusetts.⁴⁹

Putting this argument in more contemporary terminology, a Democrat who is anti-fossil fuels and pro-gun control has little chance

47. American Political Science Association, “A Report of the Committee on Political Parties: Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,” *American Political Science Review* 44, no. 2 (September 1950).

48. E.g., Morris P. Fiorina with Samuel J. Abrams, *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics*, chap. 7 (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2009).

49. Julius Turner, “Responsible Parties: A Dissent from the Floor,” *American Political Science Review* 45, no. 1 (March 1951): 143–152. Our sense is that most political scientists, like Turner, believe that catch-all parties are in general electorally advantaged, but there are some dissenters. See, not surprisingly, Bernard Grofman, Samuel Merrill, Thomas L. Brunell, and William Koetzle, “The Potential Electoral Disadvantages of a Catch-All Party,” *Party Politics* 5, no. 2 (1999): 199–210.

in the Appalachians, the South, and many areas of the Midwest and intermountain West. Similarly, a Republican who is strongly pro-life and opposes gay marriage has little chance in many areas of diverse urban states. Only if the parties nominate people whom Turner called “insurgents” in such areas do they have a chance to win, a fact well understood by Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (CCC) chair Rahm Emmanuel when he engineered the most recent Democratic House majority in the 2006 elections. To the dismay of progressive Democrats, the CCC backed candidates who fit the district over more liberal rivals who were less likely to win.⁵⁰ If the parties were less well sorted than they now are, their candidates would be competitive in more districts and states than they now are, and geographical polarization would be less apparent.

50. Naftali Bendavid, *The Thumpin’: How Rahm Emanuel and the Democrats Learned to Be Ruthless and Ended the Republican Revolution* (New York: Wiley, 2007).

CHAPTER 7

The (Re)Nationalization of Congressional Elections

Partisan ideological realignment has not eliminated national tides in elections. It has, however reduced their magnitude.

—Alan I. Abramowitz

The 2006, 2010, and 2014 congressional elections were not kind to the preceding claim. As the political parties sorted, electoral patterns changed, but in a manner that accentuated rather than dampened the likelihood of national tides. The outcomes of presidential, congressional, and even state legislative elections now move in tandem in a way that was rare in the mid- to late twentieth century, not just in the so-called wave elections, but in elections more generally. Political scientists commonly describe this development as nationalization. I write re-nationalization in the title of this chapter because contemporary elections have returned to a pattern that was common in earlier periods of American history.¹ When elections are nationalized, people vote for the party, not the person. Candidates of the party at different levels of government win and lose together. Their fate is collective.

Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 110.

1. Much of the data on recent congressional elections recall patterns that prevailed from the mid-nineteenth century until the Progressive Era in the early twentieth century. Thus, current developments are more of a return to prior patterns than something new in our history.

“All Politics Is Local” (No More)

Late twentieth-century political observers generally accepted this aphorism, credited to Democratic Speaker of the House Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill of Massachusetts, who served in Congress from 1952 to 1987. In retrospect, the period in which O’Neill served might be viewed as the golden age of the individual member of Congress.² Party leadership was decentralized with committee and subcommittee chairs operating relatively independently of the party floor leadership. Members could pursue their policy interests relatively unconstrained by the positions of the leadership or party caucus.³ Party discipline was weak, enabling members to adopt whatever political coloring best suited their districts. Democratic representatives and senators could take the conservative side of issues, especially in the South, and Republicans could take the liberal side, especially in the northeast. Bipartisanship and cross-party coalitions were not at all uncommon.⁴ At the presidential level Democrats could fracture as the party did in 1968 or lose in landslides as in 1972 and 1984, but voters would split their tickets and return Democratic majorities to Congress. Members had learned to exploit every advantage their incumbency offered and to build personal reputations that insulated them from the national tides evident in the presidential voting.⁵

2. The allusion is to the golden age of the MP (Member of Parliament) in eighteenth-century Britain before the development of the modern responsible party system characterized by centralized party leadership and strong party discipline. See Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London: Macmillan, 1957).

3. I use the modifier “relatively” in these sentences to recognize that there were limits on member independence, of course. For example, a member could not vote against his party’s nominee for speaker. And in the aftermath of the 1964 elections, the Democratic caucus stripped the seniority of two members who had endorsed Republican Barry Goldwater for president.

4. For a good survey of how Congress operated during this period, see Kenneth Shepsle, “The Changing Textbook Congress,” in *Can the Government Govern?* ed. John Chubb and Paul Peterson (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1989), 238–67.

5. The literature on these subjects is massive. For a review as the period drew to a close see Morris Fiorina and Timothy Prinz, “Legislative Incumbency and Insulation,” *Encyclopedia of the American Legislative System*, ed. Joel H. Silbey (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994), 513–27. For the most up-to-date survey

Throughout this period, Republicans had talked about their goal of nationalizing congressional elections, by which they meant getting people to vote for congressional candidates at the same levels that they voted for Republican presidential candidates. This would have resulted in Republican House majorities in big presidential years like 1972 and 1980–84.⁶ But voters seemed content to behave in accord with “all politics is local”—until 1994.

The Republican wave in 1994 shocked not only pundits but even academic experts on congressional elections. Republican gains were expected, to be sure, but most analysts expected two dozen or so seats on the outside. Most of us dismissed as fanciful Newt Gingrich’s prediction that the Republicans would take the House.⁷ But when the electoral dust settled, Republicans had netted fifty-four seats in the House and ten in the Senate to take control of both chambers for the first time since the election of 1952. When political scientists looked back over the period, they saw that growing nationalization had been under way for some time, but the signs had not been appreciated.⁸

Elections in the Era of Incumbency and Insulation

Political scientist Walter Dean Burnham first pointed out that the declining correlation between presidential and congressional voting lessened the responsiveness of the political system.⁹ That is, as incumbents insulated themselves from electoral tides, the capacity of voters to hold the government as a whole accountable weakened.

of congressional elections, see Gary C. Jacobson and Jamie L. Carson, *The Politics of Congressional Elections*, 9th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

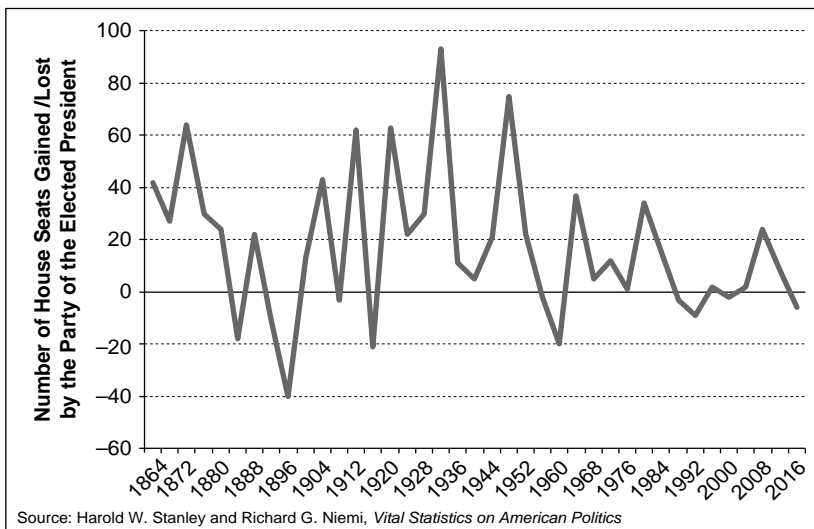
6. Continued Democratic congressional strength in the South would have made it difficult to win a House majority in a narrow presidential election. See Stephen Ansolabehere, David Brady, and Morris Fiorina, “The Vanishing Marginals and Electoral Responsiveness” *British Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (January 1992): 21–38.

7. “He’s blowing smoke,” as I put it to a *Congressional Quarterly* reporter at the time. Wrong.

8. See the essays in David W. Brady, John F. Cogan, and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Continuity and Change in House Elections* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press and Hoover Institution Press, 2000).

9. Walter Dean Burnham, “Insulation and Responsiveness in Congressional Elections,” *Political Science Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 411–35.

FIGURE 7.1. Presidential coattails declined in the second half of the twentieth century.

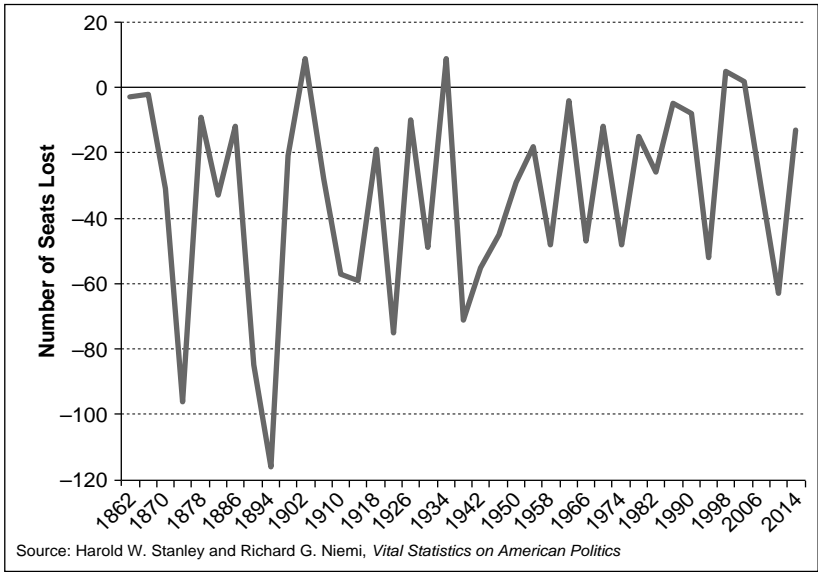


In contrast to elections in the late nineteenth century, presidential coattails had all but disappeared by the 1980s (figure 7.1). Thus, fewer members of Congress felt indebted to the president for their elections. Moreover, midterm seat losses in the modern era were pale reflections of those that occurred in the late nineteenth century (figure 7.2). With most of their fates independent of his, members of the president's party had less incentive to help an administration of their party, especially if it entailed any political cost to them. The unproductive relationship between President Jimmy Carter and the large Democratic majorities in Congress epitomized this state of affairs.

The dissociation between the presidential and congressional electoral arenas probably was both a cause and a consequence of the rapid growth in the advantage of incumbency in the second half of the twentieth century. This terminology referred to a "personal vote," the additional support that incumbents could expect compared to what any generic nonincumbent member of their party running in their district in a given election could expect.¹⁰ Scholars

10. Bruce Cain, John Ferejohn, and Morris Fiorina, *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

FIGURE 7.2. Midterm seat losses by the party of the president declined in the second half of the twentieth century.



identified numerous advantages of incumbency: the growth in non-partisan, nonideological constituency service as the federal role in society and the economy expanded, the decline in high-quality challengers as local party organizations withered and became too weak to recruit and fund strong candidates, and, later, the widening campaign funding advantage incumbents enjoyed. Various measures of the incumbency advantage appear in the literature, but the one with the firmest statistical basis is that of Andrew Gelman and Gary King.¹¹ As figure 7.3 shows, from the mid-1950s to the late 1990s the estimated advantage fluctuated between 6 and 12 percentage points until beginning a downward trend in the new century.¹²

Figure 7.4 provides what is perhaps the most striking illustration of the growing dissociation between the presidential and electoral

11. Andrew Gelman and Gary King, “Estimating Incumbency Advantage without Bias,” *American Journal of Political Science* 34 (1990): 1142–64.

12. For a recent comprehensive analysis of the decline in the incumbency advantage, see Gary Jacobson, “It’s Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in US House Elections,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 3 (July 2015): 861–73.

FIGURE 7.3. The incumbency advantage in House elections has declined to 1950s levels.

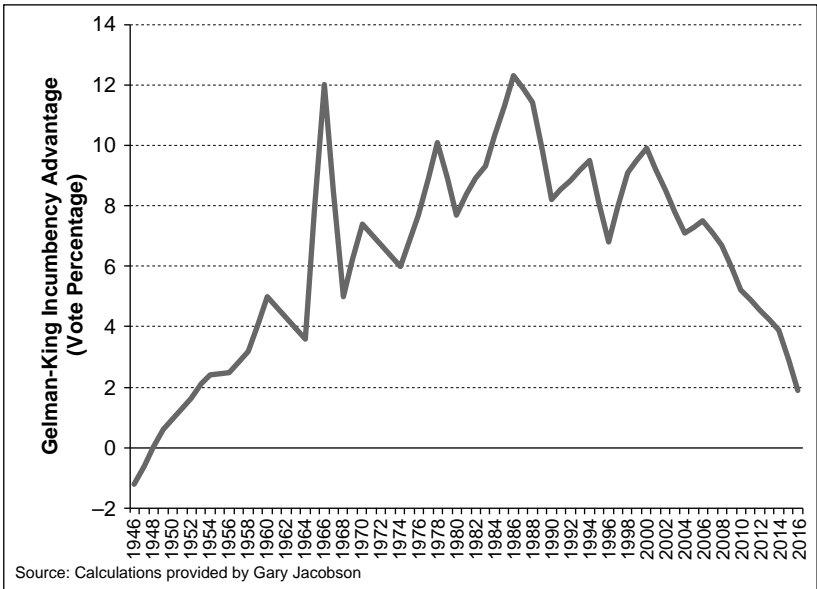
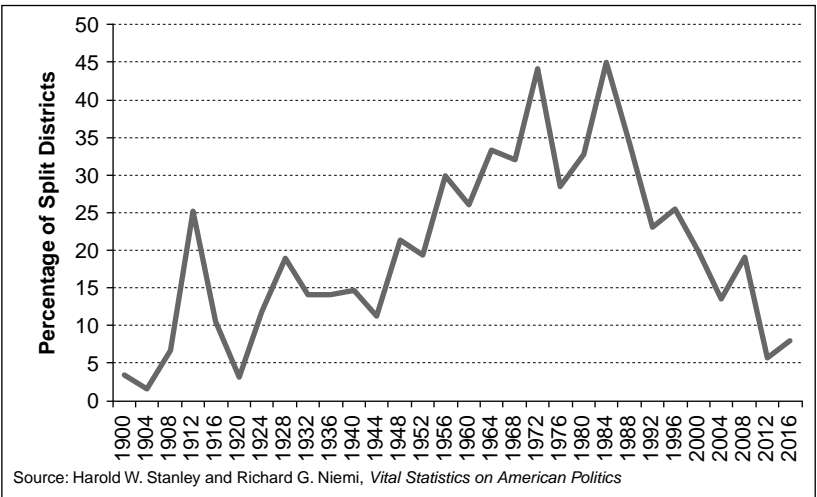


FIGURE 7.4. Split presidential and House majorities in congressional districts today are the lowest in a century.

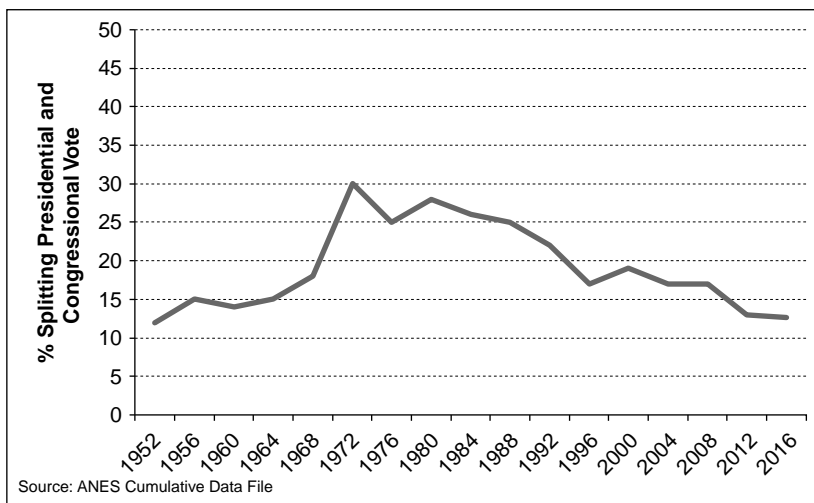


arenas: the growth in the proportion of congressional districts that cast their votes for the presidential candidate of one party while electing a member of the other party to the House of Representatives. In the late nineteenth century when straight-ticket voting was prevalent, such split district majorities were rare, but they jumped after 1920 and increased rapidly after World War II, culminating in elections like 1972 and 1984 when nearly half the districts in the country split their decisions. This development and its reversal in recent elections had important incentive effects. Suppose that after President Reagan's reelection in 1984, Speaker O'Neill had decided to follow the kind of oppositional strategy that congressional Republicans adopted during the Obama presidency. Had he announced his strategy to the members of the Democratic caucus, they likely would have rejected it. In 1985, 114 Democratic representatives held districts carried by Reagan. They might well have said, "Wait a minute, Tip. I have to be careful—Reagan won my district. I can't just oppose everything he proposes." Contrast that situation with 2013 when only sixteen House Republicans came from districts that voted to reelect Obama in 2012. An overwhelming majority of the Republican conference saw little electoral danger in opposing Obama's every proposal. After the 2016 elections, only twelve Democrats represented districts that voted for Trump. Very few Democrats will have any electoral incentive to support him.

The decline in split outcomes reflects the decline in split-ticket voting shown in figure 7.5. During the height of the incumbency era, a quarter to a third of voters split their ballots between the presidential and House levels. Since 1980 that figure has dropped in every election but one. By 2016 it had declined to less than half the 1984 figure.

For a number of reasons, Senate elections are more difficult for political scientists to study. Only thirty-three or thirty-four states hold them every two years, making statistical analysis iffy. Moreover, it is not the same third of the Senate that runs every two years, and the third of states that holds elections in a presidential year next holds them in an off year, and vice-versa. For all these reasons, political scientists tend to focus on the 435 House elections held every two years. But patterns analogous to those discussed have appeared

FIGURE 7.5. Split ticket (president/House) voting has declined.

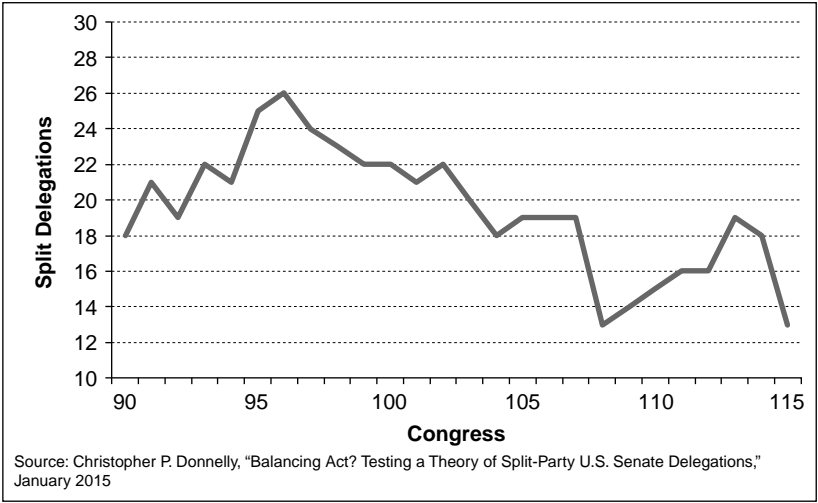


in Senate elections as well, despite the noisier data. As figure 7.6 shows, the number of states that elected one senator from each party rose sharply in the same period as split outcomes in the presidential and House arenas surged, peaking in 1978 when twenty-six of the fifty states were represented in Washington by one senator from each party.¹³ This number dropped in half by 2002 but then began to rise again. I know of no research that explains this recent development. But despite the unexplained recent trend, it is clear that states today show more consistency in their Senate voting than they did several decades ago.¹⁴

13. Thomas L. Brunell and Bernard Grofman, “Explaining Divided US Senate Delegations, 1788–1996: A Realignment Approach,” *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 2 (June 1998): 391–99.

14. Special elections for the House have some of the same characteristics as Senate elections—there aren’t many of them and they are held in very different electoral contexts. Thus, it is interesting that a statistically significant effect of presidential approval shows up in special election results beginning with the 2002 election. That is, special elections have become more nationalized. H. Gibbs Knotts and Jordan M. Ragusa, “The Nationalization of Special Elections for the U.S. House of Representatives,” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 26, no. 1 (2016): 22–39.

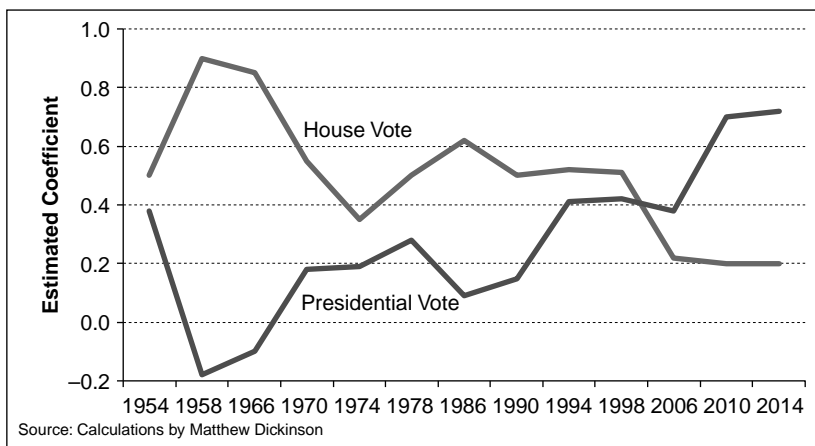
FIGURE 7.6. Split-party Senate delegations have declined in recent decades.



A very striking demonstration of rising nationalization appears in figure 7.7. Suppose you wanted to predict the outcome of a mid-term election in a specific district. Suppose further that you had two pieces of information: (1) the Democratic presidential candidate's vote in that district two years earlier and (2) the Democratic congressional candidate's vote in that district two years earlier. Almost everyone would guess that the second piece of information is the more important of the two, especially since in the vast majority of the districts one of the candidates—the incumbent—is the same candidate who ran two years prior. Congressional election researchers typically treat the presidential vote as capturing the national forces at work in an election—the state of the economy, domestic tranquility or lack thereof, peace and war, and so forth, while the congressional vote captures the local, more individual, more personal factors at work. Statistically speaking, the local component of the vote was more important until the turn of the new century, although the relative strength of the national component had been increasing.¹⁵

15. This analysis was originally conducted by David Brady, Robert D'Onofrio, and Morris Fiorina, "The Nationalization of Electoral Forces Revisited," in Brady,

FIGURE 7.7. The national component of the House vote now exceeds the personal/local component.



In 2006, however, the lines crossed and the national component has continued to be more important. Today one can better predict the winner's vote in a congressional district using the district's previous presidential vote than its previous House vote.

Finally, although there is little research on state level elections, there are indications that the growing nationalization of national elections has extended downward to the state level as well. Gubernatorial outcomes increasingly track presidential results—David Byler reports a simple analysis of the relationship between the presidential vote in a state and the number of legislative seats won.¹⁶ The relationship has fluctuated considerably since World War II. But after falling to a low and statistically insignificant level in 1988, it has steadily risen since. Moreover, recall the discussion in the first chapter about the hun-

Cogan, and Fiorina, *Continuity and Change*. It has been updated over the years by Arjun Wilkins and Matthew Dickinson.

16. Kyle Kondik and Geoffrey Skelley, "My Old Kentucky Home: Could Matt Bevin Soon Be in the Governor's Mansion?" *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, July 16, 2015, www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/my-old-kentucky-home-could-matt-bevins-soon-be-the-governors-mansion/; David Byler, "2016 Presidential Election Could Decide State Legislative Races," *Real Clear Politics*, January 14, 2015, www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2015/01/14/presidential_election_could_decide_state_legislative_races.html.

dreds of legislative seats lost in the midterm waves of 2006, 2010, and 2014. In recent decades, state elections too seem to be showing increasing evidence of nationalization.

Within the political science community there is general agreement that party sorting, which has produced more internally homogeneous parties, underlies the movements shown in the figures presented above. But in my view a number of observers have erroneously located the cause almost entirely in party sorting in the *electorate*. For example, Gary Jacobson writes that the incumbency advantage “has fallen in near lockstep with a rise in party loyalty and straight-ticket voting, a consequence of the widening and increasingly coherent partisan divisions in the American electorate.”¹⁷ Abramowitz agrees: “The decline in ticket-splitting can be traced directly to increasing partisan-ideological consistency within the electorate.”¹⁸ To some extent that is surely the case, but such conclusions overlook the increasing partisan-ideological consistency among the *candidates*. Fifty years ago a New Jersey Democrat and a New Mexico Democrat faced different primary electorates. Today both cater to coalitions of public sector workers, racial and ethnic minorities, and liberal cause groups like environmental and pro-choice organizations. Similarly, fifty years ago Ohio and Oregon Republicans depended on different primary electorates. Today both cater to business and professional organizations and conservative cause groups like taxpayers and pro-gun and pro-life groups. This growing homogenization of each party’s candidates has been reinforced by developments in campaign finance. Individual contributions increasingly come from ideologically committed donors who hail from specific geographic areas—Texas for Republicans, Manhattan and Hollywood for Democrats.¹⁹ And while anonymity prevents similar research for contributions to

17. Jacobson, “It’s Nothing Personal,” 861–62.

18. Abramowitz, *Disappearing Center*, 96.

19. James G. Gimpel, Frances E. Lee, and Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz, “The Check Is in the Mail: Interdistrict Funding Flows in Congressional Elections,” *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2008): 373–94. See also Michael J. Barber, “Representing the Preferences of Donors, Partisans, and Voters in the US Senate,” special issue, *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80 (March 2016): 225–49.

independent committees and other recipients of “dark money,” the same is probably true for campaign funds that come through those avenues. No matter what state or district you come from, if you need contributions from Texas oil interests or Hollywood liberals, you are going to lean in their direction.²⁰ Recent research suggests that these trends may extend to congressional primary elections as well.²¹

Now, if Democratic presidential and House candidates are nearly all liberals endorsed and supported by the same liberal groups and organizations, and Republican presidential and House candidates are nearly all conservatives endorsed and supported by conservative organizations and groups, one major reason to split your ticket has disappeared.²² The simple fact is that we don’t know how many voters would split their tickets if they were offered chances to vote for conservative Democratic or liberal Republican House candidates because the parties offer them few such choices anymore. Consider that in the 2012 elections in West Virginia, Mitt Romney shellacked Barack Obama by a margin of 26.8 percentage points at the same time that Democratic senator Joe Manchin thumped his Republican opponent by a margin of 24 percentage points. If one assumes that everyone who voted for Obama also voted for Manchin, which seems reasonable, the implication is that 25 percent of West Virginians split

20. Tina Daunt, “Obama, Hollywood Huddle to Take Back Senate, House,” *The Hill*, April 6, 2016, <http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/house-races/275386-obama-hollywood-huddle-to-take-back-senate-house>.

21. “Primary challengers, particularly ideological primary challengers, are raising more money, and they are raising much of that money from donors who do not reside in their states or districts.” Robert G. Boatright, *Getting Primaried: The Changing Politics of Congressional Primary Challenges* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 137.

22. Readers familiar with my earlier “policy-balancing” hypothesis will understandably ask how the decline in split-ticket voting relates to the balancing hypothesis. While researchers reported some cross-sectional support for balancing, temporally speaking, as the parties diverged, more balancing (split-ticket voting) should have occurred. The fact that it declined indicates either that the balancing hypothesis is wrong or (I would prefer to think) that its effect has been overwhelmed by other factors. See Morris Fiorina, *Divided Government*, chap. 5 (New York: Macmillan, 1992). But see Robert S. Erikson, “Congressional Elections in Presidential Years: Presidential Coattails and Strategic Voting,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (August 2016): 551–74. Erikson’s analysis indicates that balancing occurs but is dominated by coattails.

their tickets, voting for Romney and Manchin. Are West Virginians unique in their willingness to ticket-split, or are they just unusual in having the opportunity to vote for a pro-life, pro-gun Democrat?

Similarly, noting that self-identified liberals increasingly vote for Democratic congressional candidates and self-identified conservatives for Republicans, *New York Times* columnist Charles Blow opines, “We have retreated to our respective political corners and armed ourselves in an ideological standoff over the very meaning of America.”²³ Such a conclusion is not justified. Liberal and conservative voters may not have changed at all. Compared to a couple of decades ago, in how many House districts today does a liberal voter have a liberal Republican candidate she could vote for, and in how many districts does a conservative voter have a conservative Democratic candidate he could vote for? Commentators have blithely equated the *lack of opportunity* to make the kind of choices made in the past with *unwillingness* to make the kind of choices made in the past. As I discussed in chapter 3, ordinary voters—even some strong partisans—are still much less well sorted than high-level members of the political class. Thus, I believe that the increased similarity of partisan candidates is an important part of the explanation for the decline in ticket-splitting along with the not-so-increased similarity of partisan voters.²⁴ Only the appearance of candidates like Donald Trump whose positions cut across the standard party platforms can let us determine whether electoral stability results from stable voters or similar candidates. Speaking purely as an electoral analyst, I would say that the data generated by nominations of nonstandard candidates like Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Trump, and third-party candidates would enhance our understanding of the contemporary electorate.

23. Charles M. Blow, “The Great American Cleaving,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/11/06/opinion/06blow.html?ref=charlesmblow.

24. An additional factor underlying the decline in split-ticket voting may well be that, with the close party divide, voters realize that they are actually voting for an entire party, not just for individuals. For example, the seats of liberal Republicans like Chris Shays of Connecticut (defeated) and Marge Roukema of New Jersey (retired) became untenable not because they were personally unpopular but because voters in their districts understood that they would be part of a congressional majority they disliked.

Are More Nationalized Elections Good or Bad?

This question is related to the one asked at the conclusion of chapter 4. In contrast to the elections of the late twentieth century when Democratic members of Congress could regularly win despite the travails of their presidential candidates, the electoral fates of candidates at different levels are now intertwined. When combined with the tendency to overreach discussed in chapter 5, the result *contra* Abramowitz can be wave elections like those of 2006, 2010, and 2014 that drastically change governing arrangements over a short period.

Here again there are arguments on both sides. On the plus side, more members of each party are held collectively responsible than previously, giving them more incentive to focus on policies that advance the interests of the country as a whole and less incentive to focus on, say, how many pork-barrel projects they can get for their districts. On the negative side, the disruption of government control gives parties very little time to pass and implement their programs. Some decades ago I argued for more collective responsibility on the part of the parties; whether it has gone too far is now the question.²⁵

Interestingly, the American electorate shows mixed feelings about the current state of affairs. The Pew Research Center regularly queries voters about their satisfaction with the election result. As table 7.1 reports, the voters' collective minds have shown a change across the most recent wave elections. Solid majorities were happy about the thrashings of the Clinton Democrats in 1994 and the Bush Republicans in 2006. But only minorities registered satisfaction with the two more recent waves. It is almost as if voters are collectively saying, "This hurts us as much as it hurts you, but given your overreach, we have to do it."

25. Morris Fiorina, "The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics," *Daedalus* 109 (Summer 1980): 25–45. Cf. Morris P. Fiorina, with Samuel J. Abrams, *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics*, chap. 7 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

TABLE 7.1. Popular Reaction to Wave Elections

<i>Feel Happy About</i>	<i>%</i>
1994 Republican Victory	57
2006 Democratic Victory	60
2010 Republican Victory	48
2014 Republican Victory	48

Source: Pew Research Center