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PARTY POLARIZATION IN AMERICAN POLITICS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2001

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ABSTRACT

While previous research has extensively documented the partisan polarization in Congress, far less attention has been given to analogous trends in the mass public. This study examines trends in party polarization at the mass level, and analyzes the causes and consequences of this polarization, using survey data from the National Election Studies (NES) and data on congressional roll call voting.

I find that the ideological positions of the average Republican and Democrat have grown further apart through the 1990s, and that this polarization extended to a variety of specific policy issues. Polarization was found to be greatest among the most educated and politically active citizens. In contrast to previous explanations for party polarization, my analysis showed that the increase in mass party polarization was not confined to the South, nor was it confined only to racial issues. In addition, the public’s feelings toward the parties became increasingly polarized along party lines in the 1990s, contrary to the predictions of the “party decline” literature.

Polarization in Congress was found to have contributed to polarization at the mass level by raising citizens’ awareness of meaningful ideological differences between the parties. Logit models of congressional vote choice showed that ideology and party identification had a significantly greater impact on the vote decision for those who perceived important differences between Republicans and Democrats.
The analysis also revealed that from the late 1970s to 2000 the impact of ideology on constituents' evaluations of their representatives has grown, while the impact of service to the home district has declined.

On the question of causality between elite-level and mass-level ideology, the preponderance of the evidence points to elite polarization as the cause and mass polarization as the effect. Little support was found for the hypothesis that congressional polarization was simply a response to a polarized electorate.

These empirical results have important normative implications regarding the role of political parties in American democracy and the effects of polarization on the health of the political system. The findings suggest directions for future research on political participation, the incidence of split-ticket voting and divided government, and party system change.
To Valarie
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PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 1990s, the political battleground in Washington, D.C. was filled with intense partisan conflict. From the struggles over the federal budget and the subsequent government shutdowns to the nearly party-line vote on President Clinton's impeachment, the two parties clashed repeatedly on high profile issues. The prevailing opinion among journalists and commentators in the popular press was that American politics had become more partisan, and that the two parties had polarized along ideological lines to an extent not seen in decades. Writing in the wake of the battle over national health care policy, Haynes Johnson and David Broder, two long-time observers of national politics, described an environment in Washington of "growing disgust and disillusionment with the way the system was working—with its polarization, its bitterness, its extremism..." (1996, 596). They lamented the "destructive polarization that had enveloped Washington and brought the functions of the federal government to a halt" (600). This view echoes the earlier observations of another veteran political columnist, E.J. Dionne, who anticipated (and decried) the coming ideological clashes of the 1990s. Dionne (1991) condemned the partisan practice of presenting voters with "false choices" between liberal and conservative extremes, and cited this as a reason for Americans' "hatred" of politics.
Some members of Congress agreed with these characterizations of partisan politics. A disillusioned Bill Bradley, Democrat of New Jersey, announced that he was leaving the U.S. Senate because he believed the system was “broken.” Perhaps even more telling was the decision by Republican Thomas Kean, the popular former governor of New Jersey, not to seek Bradley’s Senate seat. Johnson and Broder (1996) write that although Kean was a leading candidate, he chose not to run because “he had concluded that his moderate views would not be welcomed, or given a voice, within the Republican Party and Republican Senate, as then constituted” (596). Others felt that party polarization was not confined to Capitol Hill. Former Senator Warren Rudman analyzed events in the Congress during the summer of 1995 as follows: “We may be seeing in Congress a microcosm of what’s happening out in the country…. What we are seeing is a polarization out there in the country, and what is happening in Congress is a reflection of that” (quoted in DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996, 691).

Senator Rudman’s assessment raises some interesting questions about the relationship between congressional action and mass opinion. Has the ideological polarization of the parties in Congress been accompanied by similar trends among party identifiers in mass public? Have members of Congress grown more ideologically distant from their constituents, or are they merely reflecting a more ideological and partisan electorate? How has polarization in Congress affected the way that citizens view their representatives?

In this study I seek to provide an empirical foundation from which to address these important questions by examining trends in the ideological make-up of the parties-
in-government and the parties-in-the-electorate, and beginning to evaluate the causal link between the two. While the polarization of congressional politics has received significant attention from scholars (for reviews see Taylor 1996; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995), the extent and nature of polarization in the mass public is not as well understood. One goal of this dissertation is to investigate the degree of ideological polarization in the American mass public more thoroughly than has been done in the past.

While there is a large body of research discussing aggregate trends of liberalism and conservatism in the mass public (e.g., Robinson 1984; Robinson and Fleishman 1984, 1988; Smith 1990; Stimson 1991; Mayer 1992; Box-Steffensmeier, Knight, and Sigelman 1998), there is relatively little work which explores trends in ideology within sub-groups of the electorate, including sub-groups of party identifiers and independents (but see Carmines and Berkman 1994; Mayer 1996). Similarly, a number of researchers have investigated aggregate trends in party identification (e.g., Allsop and Weisberg 1988; Brody and Rothenberg 1988; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989; Weisberg and Smith 1991; Box-Steffensmeier and Smith 1996). The approach taken in this study is different, because the polarization concept addresses changes in the difference between the parties in terms of where each is positioned politically—not just in terms of their respective numbers in the electorate. While it is interesting and important to know about trends in the proportion of people identifying as Democrats versus Republicans (or liberals versus conservatives), this is only part of the story. What will shape the American political landscape is the extent to which the parties disagree on policy issues and philosophies of governing, and the degree of similarity or difference in their
identifiers' views. Thus, when looking only at "macropartisanship" or "macroideology," we may miss some of the nuances of partisan and attitudinal change over time.

In addition, this study will explore the causes underlying the dynamics of mass polarization. Does the level of polarization in Congress simply reflect shifts in the electorate, or does an increasingly polarized environment on Capitol Hill induce a similar change among the masses? Or is there a reciprocal relationship? The nature of the causal relationship between attitudinal and behavioral trends in the electorate and the polarized behavior of members of Congress has not been thoroughly explored to date. The theoretical expectations cut both ways. On one hand, it is possible that Congress became polarized precisely because the public had become polarized. In other words, by taking polar positions the parties in Congress are merely responding to the people. On the other hand, the view of public opinion as elite-driven (e.g., Zaller 1992; Carmines and Stimson 1989) suggests that the ideological behavior of Congress leads the polarization in the public. However, some recent research argues that the relationship between mass and elite opinion may be reciprocal in nature (e.g., Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Hill and Hinton-Anderson 1995; Cunningham and Moore 1997; Hill and Hurley 1999; Jacobson 2000).

Regardless of the answer, this question of causality carries important normative implications. Democratic theorists have long wrestled with issues of mass-elite linkages—how should the political will of the many be translated into the policy actions of the few? What role do political parties occupy in this representational process? What role should they play? Political scientists have often expressed a normative preference for "responsible" parties that offer voters two distinctly different platforms and act on
these programs once in office. There is a remarkable consensus among scholars of political parties that strong parties are desirable, if not necessary, in a democratic system (Epstein 1986). Indeed, much of the literature on political parties has a clear normative element, in the tradition of the American Political Science Association Committee on Political Parties (1950) chaired by E.E. Schattschneider. Those subscribing to the Responsible Parties school of thought advocate two highly organized, cohesive, ideologically distinct parties that offer the electorate a clear choice. The example given by many of these observers is a party modeled after the immediate post-war party system in Britain. In this view, the two parties ought to stake out divergent policy positions.

However, while the parties respond to the distribution of political preferences in the electorate when choosing which issue positions to adopt and selecting the means to pursue their goals, the actions of partisan elites may also shape the public's preferences. In becoming more ideologically polarized, the parties may contribute to polarization at the mass level, and might also impact public approval of government institutions. If so, party actions which are strategically rational—and even viewed by some as normatively desirable—may have serious consequences for the American political system.

In the theoretical framework presented below, both voters and officeholders can respond to the polarized political environment. I argue that the polarization of the parties in Congress has enabled people to more easily detect differences between the parties, and has contributed to ideological polarization at the mass level. I hypothesize that the polarized political environment has resulted in citizens increasingly viewing their representatives through the lenses of partisanship and ideology. Therefore members of Congress are more frequently evaluated in terms of their ideological positions rather than
on their service to the district's constituents. As a result of these trends, the electoral fates of individual members have become more closely tied to evaluations of their party as a whole. This in turn contributes to the nationalization of congressional races, and presents even further incentive for the party leadership to seek unity among its members in order to build a coherent party record upon which to base a reelection campaign. In this way, the relationship between congressional polarization and mass opinion could be reciprocal in nature.

The findings reported in this dissertation, while not conclusive on this point, suggest that the causal relationship between elite polarization and mass opinion runs primarily from the elite level to the masses. In analyses of survey data and data on congressional roll call voting, I find limited empirical evidence of a reciprocal "feedback" component from the mass public back to elected officials. However, I do find considerable support for the hypothesis that elite-level polarization causes mass-level polarization. I find that polarization in Congress has contributed to polarization at the mass level by raising citizens' awareness of meaningful ideological differences between the parties, and that evaluations of members of Congress are increasingly based on ideology rather than service to the district.

These findings have important implications for the study of electoral politics. If partisan behavior in Congress systematically influences mass-level preferences, then models of party competition which posit exogenous voter preferences are misspecified (see Gerber and Jackson 1993). Most spatial accounts of political competition implicitly assume that strategic politicians take a snapshot of the ideological landscape, and then decide where to locate along the policy continuum so as to attract the support of the
median voter. If voters' policy preferences change over time, political parties and candidates re-adjust their positions accordingly. But this action does not occur in a vacuum. The voter can observe the movement of politicians along the ideological continuum, and over the course of time this could shape her preferences. In other words, voter preferences at time $t$ would be a function of her preferences at time $t-1$ and the perceived location of the parties/ candidates at time $t-1$. Thus, voter preferences over an ideological space would be to some extent endogenous with respect to the location of candidates or parties. It would not be the case, then, that voters simply have preferences, observe the candidates' preferences, and make a comparison (ultimately choosing the closest candidate/ party). Rather, in the hypothesized relationship, voters' preferences are shaped (led) by the behavior of political elites.

The empirical investigations in this dissertation bear directly on this issue, and in new, unexplored ways. Previous investigations into the endogeneity of voter preferences have focused on specific high profile issues such as civil rights issues (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Gerber and Jackson 1993) and the Vietnam War (e.g., Zaller 1992; Gerber and Jackson 1993), and have concluded that changes in citizen preferences over time are in part a function of shifting elite preferences. However, previous work does not explore the elite-mass connection with regard to a connected set of issues or an overarching ideology. Describing the state of existing research on mass-elite opinion linkages, Hill (1998) concludes that "more empirical tests for a larger number of policy issues, time periods, and instances of mass-elite linkage will be necessary to support a generalization of these relations" (1328). This dissertation seeks to provide such evidence.
Summary and Description of Chapters

In summary, the focus of this dissertation is the relationship between ideological and partisan trends in Congress on the one hand, and trends in political attitudes and self-identifications among the mass public on the other hand. More generally, this project explores the far-reaching consequences of partisan behavior in Congress.

Chapter 2 begins with some background on the study of partisanship and ideology in the U.S. Congress. This will provide a backdrop for discussing measurement of the polarization concept, and reviewing the evidence of party polarization in Congress. I will then discuss various theoretical interpretations of polarization's causes and consequences, and point out areas where further study is warranted.

I begin chapter 3 by reviewing past theoretical arguments that might shed light on the causes of party polarization. The expectations from prior research on public opinion are varied. Traditional research on representation and responsiveness holds that causality runs from public opinion to the behavior of elected officials. On the other hand, a significant body of research on the origins of public opinion points to elite discourse and behavior as the cause of mass opinion. Still other research suggests a reciprocal relationship. After reviewing this literature, I offer my theoretical account of party polarization, and derive several testable hypotheses. As noted above, I approach the analysis expecting elite polarization to impact public opinion, but also recognizing the strong possibility of a reciprocal effect from the mass level to the congressional level. I hypothesize that the polarization of the parties-in-government makes it easier for people to distinguish between the parties, and to recognize them as standing for different policies and ideologies. I expect that this recognition of party differences, in turn, will lead to
ideology and partisanship playing an increased role in individuals’ political evaluations. In addition, I hypothesize that party polarization will result in citizens’ evaluations of their representatives in Congress taking on a more ideological and partisan tone. The effects of ideology and party identification on vote choice are expected to increase, while factors such as such as constituency service, which provide incumbents with a “personal vote,” are expected to decrease in importance.

In chapter 4 I lay a foundation for testing these hypotheses by documenting trends in party polarization at the mass level using data from the American National Election Studies (hereafter, NES).¹ The chapter begins with a discussion of research on the connection between partisanship and ideology, then presents analyses of survey data showing upward trends in mass-level party polarization. While the analysis in chapter 4 is largely descriptive in nature, some clues begin to emerge as to the connections between elite and mass level polarization. Large differences in polarization emerge across levels of education and political awareness, with the more attentive segments of the public showing greater polarization. This is consistent with the notion that mass polarization is in part the result of elite level cues. In addition, I find evidence of increased polarization both in the South and elsewhere. The fact that significant increases in polarization took place outside the South suggests that the realignment of southern conservatives is not the full explanation for the overall trends in polarization. Finally, I note that although polarization at the mass level has increased, it has not matched the extent of partisan

¹ Documentation for the NES data collection and details of the procedures used to access and analyze the data can be found in the Appendix. Exact wording of survey questions is given in the Appendix, except when the wording already appears in footnotes.
division in the U.S. Congress, suggesting that party polarization is not a completely
"bottom-up" process.

Chapter 5 looks at how perceptions of differences between the parties have
changed over time, and explores how these perceptions are related to party polarization in
Congress. Analysis of NES data shows that over the past three decades, increasing
proportions of people—particularly the most politically attentive citizens—have come to
see "important differences" between Republicans and Democrats. I find that this increase
is due in large part to party polarization in Congress. Furthermore, I find support for my
hypothesis that awareness of party differences conditions the impact of ideology and
partisanship on political evaluations. For those who see important differences between
the parties, ideology and party identification have a greater impact on vote choice in
congressional elections.

In Chapter 6 I examine the effects of the polarized political environment on
citizens’ views of Congress and its members. Using NES data on constituents’
evaluations of House incumbents, I find support for the hypothesis that party polarization
results in members of Congress increasingly being seen in terms of what they stand for
ideologically. Constituents increasingly contact their representatives to express an
opinion, and less to get help or information. And in a set of models of the incumbent
vote, I find that the impact of ideology and party identification have increased over time,
while the impact of service to the district has significantly diminished.

In Chapter 7 I revisit the question of causality between elite- and mass-level
polarization. I estimate a series of lagged regression models and conduct tests of Granger
causality between congressional polarization and mass polarization. The preponderance
of the evidence points to elite polarization as the cause and mass polarization as the
effect. In the second part of chapter 7, I examine panel data from the NES in an effort to
determine what causal mechanisms are at work to produce party polarization. I employ
some standard correlational analyses, as well as a unique cross-tabular analysis technique
developed by Warren Miller (2000) to assess causality in panel data. The results indicate
that for a large segment of the public, opinions adjust to fall in line with party
identification more often than the reverse process of party shifting in response to
ideology. This finding is consistent with the notion that the causal arrow runs from elite
polarization to mass polarization, and suggests that past explanations of “issue evolution”
or “ideological realignment” may be incomplete.

Chapter 8 serves as the concluding chapter in which I summarize the findings,
discuss their implications, and point out avenues for future research.

The analysis in this dissertation will show that the impact of congressional party
polarization on citizens’ views of the parties, on their views of Congress and its members,
and on their own political orientations is greater than previous research has indicated. To
explore these issues, both individual level and aggregate level survey data will be
analyzed, along with congressional roll call data and ideological ratings. Multiple
methods will be employed, ranging from descriptive statistics and graphs to multivariate
analyses. The result, it is hoped, will be a more complete understanding of the linkage
between the partisan behavior of congressional elites and the opinions of the mass public.
CHAPTER 2

PARTY POLARIZATION IN CONGRESS:
EVIDENCE AND EXPLANATIONS

There is a long history of studying the political parties in Congress, and a frequent topic of this research has been the levels of congressional party strength—both of the existing parties and of those desired by the analysts. Despite the normative preference of so many congressional scholars for strong, responsible parties, the prevailing view well into the 1970s was that congressional parties were weak and ineffective organizations that had little impact on members' behavior. The following comments from two influential congressional scholars illustrate this view. In his classic book, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, David Mayhew asserts the following: “The fact is that no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far” (1974, 27). Mayhew argues further that congressional parties are “more useful for what they are not than for what they are” (97). Parties rarely disciplined members, and they allowed members to vote against the party and with their constituencies when their chances of reelection would benefit from doing so. Voicing a similar view of congressional parties, John Kingdon concluded that “the leadership of neither party is particularly important, by any measure” (1989, 142).

The conventional wisdom began to shift in the 1980s and 1990s, however, as work by neo-institutional scholars called into question this disparaging view of
congressional parties. A new body of research finds that party has grown in importance since Mayhew and Kingdon were writing in the 1970s, and may have always been important. Much of the previous literature on legislative coalitions, parties, and party leadership was very descriptive, with a focus on anecdotes about leaders with interesting personalities, or on conflicts between individuals over leadership positions. This descriptive style has been replaced in part by the “new institutionalism,” which has a style that is often mathematical and formal. This research focuses on institutional rules and procedures, and how they constrain and shape outcomes.

An example of this type of research is Cox and McCubbins’ (1993) book, *Legislative Leviathan*. In this influential work, Cox and McCubbins argue that the majority party in the House is a type of “legislative cartel” that controls the legislative agenda in various ways, including through committee appointments and the Speaker’s scheduling power. Party leaders are motivated to enhance the party’s chances for reelection, and thus keep control over the agenda as a means to shape their party’s record. Because the majority party controls the legislative agenda, leaders are able to construct complex logrolls (trades in legislative support) and pass bills that further the interests of their party. Cox and McCubbins find support for this claim in their examination of bills reported from committee. First, they note that most bills reported from committee are sponsored by members of the majority party and are supported by the party’s contingent on the committee. Second, they find that majority party members are much more likely than those in the minority to be “deferential” to these bills once they reach the floor. These findings are consistent with Cox and McCubbins’ view that parties influence legislative outcomes in order to benefit members.
Individual members continually face incentives to cheat on deals that have been struck, but parties can serve as solutions to these collective action dilemmas. The electoral benefits accrue to individual members in the form of a party record that is useful when running for reelection. It is well known that decisions under majority rule are unstable; given certain preference orderings, a voting cycle can result. Since Congress does most of its business by majority rule, its decisions are frequently susceptible to being overturned. The structure of institutions, especially the committee system, has been offered as the reason why congressional decisions do not cycle (Shepsle 1979; Shepsle and Weingast 1981). Cox and McCubbins agree that structure matters, but they shift the focus from committees to parties. Seen from this perspective, parties have never really declined—they have always been important structural features of Congress (see also Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991).

In sum, the recent scholarship on congressional parties reaches a very different conclusion from the earlier textbook view. Parties in Congress are seen as solutions to collective action problems and as vehicles for advancing the reelection goals of their members. Party leaders take an active role in controlling the legislative agenda and maintaining party discipline.

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2 The view of congressional parties as solutions to collective action problems is also prominent in the work of David Rohde (1991) and John Aldrich (1995; Aldrich and Rohde 1998). Whether strong party leadership is a recent development or a long-standing institutional feature is a point of disagreement between the Rhode-Aldrich and Cox-McCubbins accounts. This research is discussed further below, in the context of explaining increased partisanship in Congress.
This reevaluation of the importance of parties is probably due in part to changes in the approach political scientists have taken to studying parties and other institutions, but there is also strong empirical evidence that real changes have occurred in Congress. I turn next to this evidence, which is drawn from data on congressional roll call voting.

Party Voting in Congress

The study of congressional parties has often included the search for effects of party on legislators' voting behavior. Researchers have developed several measures to assess the degree to which two legislative parties disagree on roll call votes, and the extent of agreement on those votes within a party. An early measure of this type was developed by A. Lawrence Lowell (1902), who defined party voting as the proportion of roll calls in a session on which at least 90% of one party voted in opposition to at least 90% of the other party. Today's standards for party voting are usually less stringent: most current measures use the proportion of votes in which simple majorities of the two parties vote against each other. Additional measures of legislative partisanship were developed by Stuart Rice (1925). The index of party likeness measured the difference between the proportions of the two parties voting "aye," and was scored as one minus the absolute value of the difference, so that higher scores indicated party similarity. (This index has also been scored so as to indicate "party dissimilarity," or "average party difference"). These measures and close variants have been used extensively in congressional research.

To assess voting agreement within each party, two measures are commonly employed. The Rice index of party cohesion computes the average proportion of
party's members voting with its majority minus the average proportion voting with the minority. A second measure is the party-unity index, which is based on a set of party votes, as defined above. The value of this index for an individual member is the proportion of party votes on which he or she supports the party's position. Individual scores are then averaged to produce a measure of unity for the whole party or a subset thereof.

Using measures of this type, numerous studies have tracked patterns in congressional party voting and examined its correlates over long periods of time (e.g., Brady, Cooper, and Hurley 1979; Clubb and Traugott 1977; Patterson and Caldeira 1988; Hurley and Wilson 1989). Much of this research tells a story of party decline. Brady, Cooper, and Hurley (1979) examined incidence of party voting in the House, using biennial averages for the 50th through 90th Congresses. Their model had four independent variables representing external forces: 1) the extent of electoral change (the size of the freshman class); 2) a variable indicating whether the House and presidency were held by the same party; 3) a measure of party conflict over economic issues (based on content analysis of party platforms); 4) regional homogeneity of each party's House delegation (Northern versus Southern Democrats, Eastern versus Western Republicans). Their dependent variables included a measure of party strength, which essentially weighted party voting by the party cohesion index. The authors concluded that "long-run decline in party strength in the House" was due to "the increased stability of the membership, a decline in electoral party homogeneity and conflict, and an increasing tendency to have a president of one party and a Congress of the other party" (391). While this model operated at a high level of aggregation, it suggested directions for future research.
One of the most thorough attempts to model party voting was made by Patterson and Caldeira (1988), who analyzed the yearly percentage of party votes from 1949-1984 in the House and in the Senate. They hypothesized that the factors that shape the level of polarization of congressional parties will fall into two broad categories: "exogenous forces that flow from the political environment;" and "endogenous forces displayed in the norms, composition, internal organization, and worklife of the legislative institution" (117). Using OLS regression, Patterson and Caldeira found that increased party voting in the House was related to "external party conflict" (as measured by content analyses of party platforms), the President being from the party in control of the House, the size of the party majority, party homogeneity (Democrats from South, Republicans from East [p=.09]), and weak presidential support. The number of roll calls, bills passed, and the second congressional session were negatively related to party voting. Variables that were not statistically significant include electoral change (influx of new members), split districts, and number of committee assignments. The regression models fit the data particularly well in the case of the House ($R^2=.89$), and reasonably well in the case of the Senate ($R^2=.68$) (124). In the Senate model, only Presidential partisanship (same as the party controlling the Senate), weak Presidential support, and external party conflict (p=.07) were statistically significant predictors of increased party voting.

In a subsequent study of the Senate, Hurley and Wilson (1989) found that over a longer period of time, patterns of party voting in the Senate and the House were very similar. These researchers updated the Brady, Cooper, and Hurley (1979) analysis of the House, extending it to cover both houses of Congress in the 1877-1986 period, and correcting some measurement and modeling problems such as autocorrelation among
variables in the regressions. Hurley and Wilson conclude that “party voting in both bodies declines after the turn of the century at the same rate in roughly the same pattern” (1989, 245).

Rohde (1991) analyzes the post-reform time period through 1988, and concludes that the House has indeed become more partisan. The data indicate a decrease in party unity from the 1950s era of consensus to 1970, followed by a slight increase after 1971, a leveling-off during the mid to late Seventies, then a marked increase in the 1980s and 1990s.

Analysis of trends in partisan activity must be accompanied by caveats about measurement. As Keith Krehbiel (1993, 1996, 1999a, 1999b) has argued, measures of party voting do not necessarily reflect the impact of party on a member’s vote. It could be that the member’s preferences simply line up with those of others in the party. Krehbiel (1993) takes this possibility into account in his analysis of assignments to conference committees and finds little evidence of significant party activity. In Krehbiel’s theory of congressional organization (1991, 1996), party is not considered necessary to explain legislative organizational structure or the behavior of individual members because legislative outcomes are the result of the Congress being governed by majority rule. Outcomes simply represent the will of the majority.3

Thus despite the scholarly interest in party voting, such analyses are of limited use in answering questions of causality that interest students of legislators’ voting decisions (Weisberg, Heberlig, and Campoli 1999, 380-81). Party voting could be the result of

3 For more discussion of Krehbiel’s arguments and a response by adherents to conditional party government theory, see Aldrich and Rohde (1998).
party leaders coercing members to toe the line, or it could simply be the result of members of the same party having similar views or representing similar constituencies. In part as a result of these ambiguities, a great deal of research on roll-call voting has tended to focus on ideological dimensions as well as partisanship.

**Measuring Ideology in Congress**

Observers of Congress have long held to the view that policy preferences underlie legislators' roll-call voting. There have been significant disagreements, however, concerning the number of policy dimensions, and how best to measure them. One approach is to use the ratings of legislators produced by liberal and conservative interest groups such as the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) or the American Conservative Union (ACU). These ratings have often been criticized because they use a very small number of roll-call votes on a non-representative subset of issues to determine the legislator's rating.

Another approach is to utilize statistical scaling models to capture policy dimensions in roll-call voting data (e.g., MacRae 1958, 1970; Miller and Stokes 1963; Weisberg 1968, 1972; Clausen 1973; Sinclair 1978, 1982; Collie 1988). The Guttman scaling technique looks for cumulative dimensions that order votes from least liberal to most liberal, yields a threshold for each legislator in terms of how liberal a bill must be before the member would not support it, and thus permits an ordering of legislators from most liberal to most conservative. This approach has been used frequently to obtain various numbers of policy dimensions based on roll calls. An important work of this type is Clausen's (1973) study of congressional voting during the 1953-64 period. Clausen
examined five policy dimensions: social welfare, government management (economic policies), civil liberties, agricultural assistance, and foreign policy. Roll calls were classified into these issue areas, and Guttman scales were created for each domain. Clausen found that one major Guttman scale explained most of the voting in each domain, and that each of these issue scales was correlated across successive Congresses. He also found that the effects of party, constituency, and the President varied across issue domains. This work was later updated and through the 1970s by Clausen and Van Horn (1977), and extended back in time by Sinclair (1978, 1982) and Collie (1988), with similar results.

This type of work required the *a priori* classification of roll-call votes into separate policy domains. An alternative approach is to analyze all the roll calls in a particular Congress simultaneously. The path-breaking work in this area is that of Poole and Rosenthal, who produced a series of influential articles (e.g., 1984, 1985, 1987, 1991a, 1991b) which culminated in their book *Congress: A Political-Economic History of Roll Call Voting* (1997). Their analysis begins with a simple spatial theory of probabilistic voting, and the assumption that legislators have single-peaked, symmetric preferences. The location of legislators' ideal points on an ideological continuum are estimated using statistical modeling of their roll-call voting patterns. The intuition behind the method is the idea of adjusting the order of legislators on a spatial continuum so as to minimize the errors one would make in predicting their votes on a large set of issues. The roll-call votes create "cutting lines" between groups of legislators. To illustrate, Poole and Rosenthal compare this procedure to "arranging a deck of cards by
first sorting the cards by suit and then sorting by order within the suit" (1997, 22). The estimation procedure developed to recover legislators' ideal points is called D-NOMINATE (which stands for Dynamic Nominal Three-step Estimation). This method yields interval-level data on legislators' ideological locations.

Using D-NOMINATE scores on a single ideological dimension, Poole and Rosenthal are able to account for over 80% of roll-call voting in Congress from the 1780s to the 1980s. Adding a second dimension to the model improved the classification rate by only three percentage points. Thus Poole and Rosenthal opt for the more parsimonious model. The first dimension of NOMINATE captures most of the partisan divisions in Congress, while a second dimension roughly approximates the North-South regional divide (Poole and Rosenthal 1997).

These results were surprising to many, and resulted in controversies over the number of dimensions underlying congressional voting. For example, Koford (1989, 1990, 1991) has argued that a uni-dimensional model may fit the data well even when spaces have higher levels of dimensionality. It could be the case that in a two-dimensional space, for instance, a one dimensional model will have good success at classifying any vote that is not orthogonal to the dimension. If so, marginal increases in model fit (such as the 3% figure reported by Poole and Rosenthal) may understate the impact of a second dimension. In response, Poole and Rosenthal (1991a, 1997) have shown that the second NOMINATE dimension does quite poorly in predicting roll-call

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4 While the intuition behind the method suggests a model which minimizes errors, the actual estimation procedure involves maximization of a likelihood function. The algorithm yields Euclidean coordinates for the "yea" and "nay" roll call outcomes, as well as polynomial functions locating the ideal point of each legislator. A highly detailed discussion of the statistical intricacies of the NOMINATE procedure falls outside the scope of this study. For more detail see chapter 2 and Appendix A in Poole and Rosenthal 1997. The NOMINATE data are available to download at Prof. Poole's web site, http://voteview.uh.edu/.
votes by itself: a mere 71% of House votes, compared to 84% by the first dimension, and 66% by the marginals alone. They assert that their "overwhelming results that show that the first dimension dwarfs the second and higher dimensions convinced even Koford" (1997, 54).

A similar explanation for the co-existence of the multi-dimensional and single-dimensional results is that multiple policy dimensions such as those proposed by Clausen could be highly correlated, so that an underlying liberal-conservative dimension may also be found (Wilcox and Clausen 1991).

In summary, while there may not be uniformity of opinion that a single liberal-conservative dimension is the only dimension relevant to congressional roll-call voting, there is agreement that ideology is an important factor. The NOMINATE scores are now a widely accepted measure of ideology in Congress, allowing analysis of trends over long periods of time. Among the interesting findings to come out of Poole and Rosenthal's work is their conclusion that American politics has become more polarized (see 1997, chapter 4). The evidence on that point is discussed in the next section.

**Polarization in the Congressional Context**

Party polarization has been operationalized in several ways. One common definition is the distance between the average ideological positions of the two parties. For example, to determine how far apart the two parties are, Poole and Rosenthal (1997, 82) calculate the average distance between all pairs of legislators from opposing parties using NOMINATE data. A related approach is to find the average ideological score for one party and subtract it from the other party's average score. Some researchers have
computed these difference scores using the proportion of "yes" votes on roll calls in each party on specific issues like civil rights (Carmines and Stimson 1989) or abortion (Adams 1997). Other scholars have computed the mean NOMINATE scores for each party, and then taken the difference as a measure of ideological distance (e.g., Jacobson 2000, Kimball 2001).

Patterns of polarization are also evinced by interest group ratings of legislators, such as ADA and ACU scores. The ADA (Americans for Democratic Action), the nation’s oldest liberal interest group, rates members of Congress based on twenty roll-call votes. The “Liberal Quotient” can range from a score of 100% for total agreement with the liberal positions, to 0 for no agreement. Those scoring between 40% and 60% are classified by the ADA as “moderates.” The number of moderates in Congress has dwindled in recent years. In 1999, for example, there were only forty moderates in the House (21 Republicans and 19 Democrats), and only three moderates in the Senate (all Republicans). The ADA summarized their ratings of Congress for 1999 by saying, “Republicans and Democrats continue to be pulled to their extremes” (ADA 1999).

This polarization continued a trend found by Taylor (1996), who studied the ideology of the congressional parties over the 1947-1994 time period using ADA scores. The “party ideology” of Republicans and Democrats in the House and in the Senate is measured by the mean annual standardized ADA score of each party’s members (279). Using this definition of ideology, Taylor finds that the parties have polarized since the 1970s, with the Democrats becoming more liberal and the Republicans more conservative. The parties were ideologically close to one another in the late 1950s, the late 1960s, and the early 1970s, before drifting apart in the 1980s and 1990s (281).
Analysis of more recent Congresses reveals that these trends in polarization have continued. Using DW-NOMINATE scores (an updated version of D-NOMINATE) I computed the difference between the mean for Republican House members and the mean for Democratic members in each Congress. The results are displayed in Figure 2.1. A striking trend emerges, as the ideological distance between the parties in the House grew dramatically over time (see Figure 2.1).

Party polarization can also be measured in terms of the ideological “overlap” of the two parties. This measure of overlap is the proportion of legislators in each party who are closer to the ideological centroid of the opposing party (Poole and Rosenthal 1997, 81). As measured using D-NOMINATE scores, party overlap was high during the 1820s and 1850s, was almost totally absent around 1900, increased during the 1960s and 1970s, but has fallen sharply since then (81-82). To illustrate this trend in contemporary American politics, I computed the percent overlap of the two parties in the House by year. These results are shown in Figure 2.2. The trend in polarization is evident. By the late 1990s, the proportion of overlap had shrunk to less than 1% of House members (see Figure 2.2).

The proportion of party votes is sometimes referred to as another indicator of polarization. These are roll calls on which a majority of one party votes against a majority of the other party. The upward trend in the percentage of these votes is pronounced, and has been noted by scholars (e.g., Rohde 1991, Aldrich 1995). However, party votes are not technically a measure of polarization as defined above. To be precise,

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5 Similar results obtain when interest group ratings such as ADA and ACA scores are used instead of DW-NOMINATE scores. For example, see the analysis of “cross-pressured” members of Congress in Fleisher and Bond (2000).
party voting measures the frequency of disagreement between the parties on issues, not the ideological distance between them. Obviously the two concepts are closely related, but they are not identical. However, party voting does serve as an excellent indicator of partisan conflict (e.g., Coleman 1996, 1997). Citizens can observe party-line votes, and this may draw increased attention to the ideological differences between the parties. Thus, even if party votes are not an indicator of “polarization” in the purest sense, this may be a distinction without a difference when it comes to measuring the impact of congressional party behavior on public opinion.

By virtually any measure, then, the two parties in Congress have become more ideologically cohesive and polarized over the past three decades. But why did this polarization occur? I turn to this question in the next section.

Formal Explanations for Polarization: Spatial Models of Party Competition

What are the theoretical explanations for the ideological polarization of the parties? Prior work suggests some explanations, but does not offer definitive answers. For many political scientists, a discussion of the relative ideological positions of the parties brings to mind Anthony Downs’ (1957) classic study, An Economic Theory of Democracy. I begin by reviewing research in the rational choice tradition that grew out of Downs’ path-breaking work.

The classic single-dimensional spatial model of political competition (Hotelling 1929; Smithies 1941; Downs 1957; Black 1958) predicts that the two candidates/parties will converge to the ideal point of the median voter. This convergence result has been formalized, confirmed, and extended by numerous researchers (for a review of this
voluminous literature, see Enelow and Hinich 1984, 1990). The oft-cited expectation of party migration to the ideological center has become part of the "conventional wisdom" among many political scientists. Journalists, too, are fond of describing candidates as "running toward the middle" or "trying to capture the center" in general election contests.

However, there are several spatial models that generate equilibria in which parties do not converge ideologically (for reviews, see Osborne 1995; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995, chap. 2). A review of the literature on spatial election models reveals several general conditions under which candidates/parties do not converge to the median voter's position in equilibrium. First, if candidates care about the policies enacted, not just about winning per se, then they have an incentive to offer different policy alternatives rather than converging to the median position (e.g., Wittman 1977, 1983, 1990; Hansson and Stuart 1984; Calvert 1985; Alesina 1988; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995). The key distinction here is between parties that adopt policy positions in order to get elected (a la Downs), and parties that seek to get elected in order to enact policies. Which type of motive the modeler ascribes to the parties can shape the model's predictions. If parties care about policy outcomes, and have reasonably complete information about voters' preferences, then the result is "partial convergence" even in the multi-dimensional case (Calvert 1985).

A second group of explanations focuses on the voters who comprise the parties. Suppose parties are endogenous—that is, they are composed only of the voters who support them (e.g., Fedderson 1992). If citizens' pay-off functions are concave, then those with extreme ideal points are highly sensitive to differences between the candidates' positions (Osborne 1995). Parties will thus tend to be run by "extremists,"
who have an incentive to make the party's position immoderate. Similarly, candidates
must satisfy the “activists” within the party, which can lead to more dissimilar positions
between the two parties (Aldrich 1983). In addition, the existence of a primary election,
with a more ideologically extreme median voter than the general election, can have a
polarizing effect (Coleman 1971).

A third set of explanations deals with the potential entry of a third candidate into
an electoral contest (for reviews see Shepsle and Cohen 1990; Shepsle 1991). Palfrey
(1984) develops a model in which candidates have an incentive to adopt distinct positions
in order to minimize the threat of further candidates entering the race. A key aspect of
this model is that the candidates from the two established parties can pick their positions
before the third candidate. Thus the two parties will choose positions that do not leave
the third candidate enough “space” in the middle or in the extremes to win the election.
This result holds even if the parties care only about winning, not about policy. However,
Greenberg and Shepsle (1987) have criticized this result by arguing that the third-party
entrant may not have the goal of winning the current election, but rather of finishing
second. Doing so would make the new party “established” in the next election, and allow
it to usurp one of the older parties. In this formulation, the Palfrey divergence result no
longer survives.

The level of information available to the actors can also influence strategies and
outcomes. If voters are less certain about one candidate’s positions than those of the
opponent, the candidate may have an incentive not to move too close to the rival’s
position (Osborne 1995). This can happen when one candidate’s platform is seen as
riskier than the other, and voters are risk-averse. Information (or the lack thereof) also
affects candidate/party strategies. In a study of modern political leadership, Geer (1996) has argued that the advent of public opinion polls has brought politicians something approaching full information about the public's preferences. As a result, the politician will know which issues are salient to most voters, and which are salient to only a small subset of the electorate. The rational political party will use this information to carefully choose its positions on issues. Geer argues (but does not formally prove the result) that the parties will converge to moderate positions on highly salient issues, but may polarize on less globally salient issues such as abortion. Alesina and Rosenthal (1995) also argue that when parties have complete information about voters' preferences, they will converge to the median voter's position. However, when information is incomplete, then equilibrium results can include "partial convergence" and even divergence of party positions.

A key concept emphasized in Alesina and Rosenthal's argument is the credibility of parties' policy commitments. If parties are not credible in their promises, then voters will see past their attempts to mask their true preferences by moderating for general election campaign. Parties would like to be viewed as moderate, but once elected a politician has little incentive not to renege on centrist campaign promises. Voters will expect the party to enact its true ideal point, not a moderate campaign pledge, and will vote accordingly. Thus there is no policy convergence in this model. Over time, however, credibility can be built. If one considers repeated elections with the same parties and voters, partial convergence may reappear (Alesina 1988). Alesina and Rosenthal (1995, 18-19) summarize the theoretical and empirical evidence on party polarization as follows:
The absence of a conclusive theoretical answer to the question of credibility makes it important to look at the choice between an "electoralist" model with full convergence and a "partisan" model without convergence as an empirical question. Which of the two models is more consistent with the evidence of the American system? The empirical evidence...suggests that American politics is polarized. Therefore, models that imply full (or nearly full) convergence of party policies are not an appropriate tool for analyzing American politics.

In summary, several existing spatial models of party and candidate competition have equilibria in which the two parties do not fully converge, and the assumptions of these models (particularly that parties do care about policy as well as election) seem to fit the contemporary empirical evidence much more closely than do the traditional Downsian models. Nevertheless, given the prominence of the Downsian centripetal logic in so many scholarly and journalistic analyses of elections, party polarization is somewhat surprising. The fact that the parties in Congress have polarized—contrary to what many political observers would predict—adds interest to the empirical investigation of this phenomenon and its consequences.

Perhaps it should not surprise us that clear-cut explanations of party polarization in Congress are not to be found in the spatial voting literature. Even at their most cohesive, the parties in the U.S. Congress are by no means unitary actors. Members of Congress have diverse reelection constituencies, and the parties those members comprise do not run nationwide on list ballots as in parliamentary systems. Moreover, it is now an accepted truism of legislative research that the institutional structures of Congress shape the incentives facing members. Thus explanations of why Congress has polarized may be enhanced by examining changes in the internal rules and institutions of Congress. In the next section I review such work.
A large body of research from the past two decades focuses on factors within Congress, such as changes in procedural rules or changes in party leadership (e.g., Rohde 1991; Sinclair 1983, 1992, 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1991, 1993; Aldrich 1995). Among the most important theoretical work in this area is that of David Rohde (1991), who analyzes the impact of the procedural reforms undertaken by Congress in the 1970s. Rohde's explanation begins in the 1950s and early 1960s, when the "textbook Congress" was characterized by low levels of party voting, weak party leadership, and powerful committees. Then, issues such as civil rights, the Vietnam conflict, and the Great Society programs came on the scene in the 1960s, creating new political cleavages. Beginning in 1958, more liberal Northern Democrats were elected to the Congress. Even though their party was in the majority, they still could not translate their numerical strength into liberal policy victories because the Conservative Coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans stood in the way of passing progressive legislation. This stonewalling was possible due to several institutional factors, most importantly the structure of the committee system. Committees dominated the policy process, and committees were dominated by chairmen and senior members—a disproportionate number of whom were conservative Southerners. These Southern Democrats could afford to ally themselves with Republicans because the seniority system protected their places of influence on committees.

Liberal House Democrats formed the Democratic Study Group, which searched for ways to remedy this situation. They developed reform packages that were intended to
change the rules in such a way that would make it easier to advance liberal causes and avoid the roadblocks set up by the Conservative Coalition. According to Rohde, these reforms followed three related tracks. First, and most important, was a set of measures that weakened the powers of committee chairmen and undermined to some extent the influence of committees on policy-making. Second, the power of Democratic party leaders was strengthened, including expanded control over committee assignments and the floor agenda. Third, those in leadership positions were made more accountable to the party rank-and-file by expanding the influence of the party caucus, which met more frequently and could vote to approve or reject leaders and committee chairs.

These reforms were not intended to create a system of party responsibility that resembled a parliamentary system. Rather, the obligation to toe the party line was not uniform among all members. Those in positions of party or committee leadership (or who aspired to these jobs) faced the highest expectations to support legislative initiatives on which there was consensus in the party caucus. As Rohde puts it, "Committee and party leaders were to be responsible to the members, not vice versa" (1991, 166). Together, this system of arrangements is referred to by Rohde as "conditional party government." Members were free to pursue their individual interests, except on matters deemed to be of concern to the party as a whole, and on which there was a reasonably clear consensus among the party membership.

Some of the same forces that bolstered partisanship in Congress also led to increased intra-party homogeneity. Regional differences on new issues such as civil rights, the Vietnam War, and expanded federal social programs produced deep divisions between the northern and southern wings of the Democratic party. Over time, the
composition of each party's coalition gradually evolved. The most important change resulted from the Voting Rights Act: large numbers of Black voters joined the electorate, and most held liberal policy preferences and identified with the Democratic party (Carmines and Stimson 1989). At the same time, some conservative white voters began to identify with the Republican party in the South. Some of these white voters were northern migrants, and others were disaffected Democrats. As a result, the ideological make-up of voters in congressional elections began to look more similar across regions within parties, and more different between the two parties (Rohde 1991, 167). As a consequence of these changes in the electorate, the number of Southern and conservative Democrats declined, and the number of liberal and moderate Republicans dwindled.

Figure 2.3 shows how the regional make-up of the congressional parties evolved over this period. Increasingly the South tilted in the Republican direction, and seats formerly held by Conservative Coalition Democrats were being captured by Republicans (a process that came to a head in 1994). By the late 1990s, southerners made up a larger percentage of the Republican membership than their share of the Democratic House contingent (see Figure 2.3).

Rohde argues convincingly that the procedural reforms of the 1970s served to reinforce the trend of increased party homogeneity, as Democrats were encouraged by their leadership to support the party and refrain from allying themselves with Republicans. This increased ideological homogeneity broadened the scope of conditional party government. There were more and more issues on which the Democrats were in consensus, and so there were more opportunities for party leaders to implement their expanded powers that were created by the reforms. The party's whip system expanded,
as did the scope of the Speaker’s activities as conflict-manager and agenda setter for the party. Following several Democratic partisan victories in the 1980s, the Republicans moved to enact similar reforms which granted their leadership greater power.

Following the Republican takeover of the Congress in 1994, the trend of strong party leadership and intra-party cohesion continued. The leadership pushed through changes to the policy making process that made committees more responsible to the party. The number of committees was cut, and the size of committee staffs was reduced. Committee assignments were heavily influenced by the Speaker and his associates, and seniority was violated in the selection of some committee chairs. The power of committee leaders was reduced by imposing six-year term limits on chairs, and eliminating the practice of casting proxy votes for absent members. The Speaker's Advisory Group took the lead in formulating policy and crafting legislative strategy for the party, taking on some functions normally performed by committees (Aldrich and Rohde 1998; Weisberg, Heberlig, and Campoli 1999).

The Republicans retreated from some of these changes in the 105th Congress, however. As Dodd and Oppenheimer (1997) point out, there were numerous limitations on conditional party government facing the Republicans. Their majority shrank, numerous members faced competitive reelection contests, and there were divisions within the party on policy matters. There was also growing dissatisfaction among some Republicans with the leadership style of Speaker Newt Gingrich. The approach of the Republican leadership eventually moderated somewhat, and Senate Majority Leader Lott worked successfully with Gingrich to enact welfare reform legislation that the President would sign (1997, 406).
Summary and Directions for Further Research

To sum up, studies of conditional party government reveal much about the internal forces that have facilitated polarization in Congress. However, two major areas are addressed only briefly by these accounts: 1) the factors external to the legislature that impinge on the ideological balance of Congress; 2) the impact of the ideological and partisan makeup of the Congress on mass political opinion and behavior. Existing theories of congressional politics offer some explanations about why party polarization has occurred in the past, but they do not include predictions about what effect this polarization will have on future elections. Now that the congressional parties have become (and remained) ideologically distinct, what impact might this have on the citizens views of the parties, of Congress, and of their representatives? Electoral forces are thought to have played a key role in the evolution of a more ideologically divided Congress, but what effect does a more ideologically divided Congress have on the electorate? These are important questions that remain largely unanswered by existing research. The analyses undertaken in subsequent chapters seek to address this deficit by examining more precisely the causal relationship between ideological trends in Congress and analogous trends in the mass public.

In the next chapter, I review the theoretical expectations that can be drawn from the literature on the formation of public opinion. With this theoretical background, I formulate a set of hypotheses about the relationship between party polarization in Congress and polarization at the mass level.
Figure 2.1: Ideological Distance Between the Parties in the U.S. House, 92nd to 105th Congresses
Figure 2.2: Ideological Overlap of the Parties in the U.S. House, 83d to 105th Congresses

--- DW-NOMINATE scores closer to opposing party's midpoint than to own party's midpoint
Figure 2.3: Southerners as a Percentage of Each Party’s Membership in the U.S. House, 80th to 105th Congresses
Prior public opinion research points to competing theoretical expectations about how elite behavior and mass behavior ought to be related. Research on representation and responsiveness suggests a range of possibilities regarding the links between elites and masses, but usually begins with the assumption that the behavior of elected officials is (and ought to be) determined by public opinion. Some research on the formation and dynamics of public opinion offers theoretical insights which lead to the expectation that public opinion is driven by elites. Other work suggests some support for both these views. I now turn to a discussion of the relevant literature.

Mass-Elite Linkages: Representation and Responsiveness

Representation has long been of great concern to political observers. The question of how and to what extent democratically elected officials should represent the interests of their constituents is central to discussions of normative political theory. Following the path-breaking work of Miller and Stokes (1963), a great deal of political science research has focused on “dyadic” representation, the correspondence between the policy opinions of a representative and those of his or her geographic constituency. This innovative research design supplemented a survey of the electorate with a parallel questionnaire administered to
members of Congress and congressional candidates from the districts in the national sample. The Miller-Stokes study spawned numerous other investigations into the nature of dyadic representation (e.g., Erikson 1978; Herrera, Herrera, and Smith 1992; Hill and Hurley 1999; Kuklinski and McCrone 1980; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979; Page et al. 1984; Powell 1982). The concept of representation, however, is multi-faceted (see Pitkin 1967), and can extend beyond correspondence on policy issues to include symbolic/descriptive representation, and service/allocational representation (for a review, see Weisberg, Heberlig, and Campoli 1999, chap. 5). Scholars have debated the existence—and relative merits—of various forms of representation, but these debates fall outside the scope of this prospectus.

Of relevance to the present study is the concept of “collective representation” (Weissberg 1978, Hurley 1982). The basic idea is that representation is not confined to the connection between a legislator and the constituents in his or her geographic district. Given the diversity within congressional districts, a member of Congress cannot possibly represent all constituents in terms of their issue positions and demographic characteristics. However, citizens may still be represented by Congress as a whole. For example, suppose a liberal voter has a conservative representative in Congress. If the proportion of liberals in the legislature is close to the proportion of liberals in the electorate, collective representation can still occur. Using probability theory, Weissberg (1978) argues that collective representation on a policy issue can occur even with random selection of representatives or random voting by legislators. The policy produced with a random process, he argues, will be no less representative of public opinion than the outcome that would result if representatives vote according to their district-level
constituents’ preferences. This controversial argument suggests that representatives do not need to pay attention to opinion in their district in order for constituents’ interests to be represented. An implication is that the debate over the legislator’s role—delegate versus trustee—may be rendered moot if citizens are being represented by someone on Capitol Hill, even if it is not their district representative.

Collective representation of this sort could be provided by political parties (Baer and Bositis 1988, 1993; Hurley 1989, 1991). A Democratic constituent may have a Republican Congressman, but she can still be represented by the actions of the Democratic party in Congress. Hurley’s (1989) analysis investigates the extent of this “partisan representation” during the 1980s by comparing the responses of party identifiers in NES survey data with the roll-call voting patterns of the parties in the House during the 98th and 99th Congresses. The roll calls were grouped by policy areas that corresponded to the NES issue items, and the mean percentage of each party taking the more conservative position (yea or nay) was calculated. Elite conservatism was then compared with the average proportion of partisan identifiers in the mass public holding conservative positions; this was done using two procedures. First, “difference scores” were computed by subtracting the percentage of congressional party members voting conservatively from the percentage of conservative mass partisans. The second method was to determine the number of issues on which the majority of the party-in-the-electorate and the party in Congress were on the same or opposite sides of the issue. In the 97th Congress, difference scores for Republicans showed “generally good correspondence between elite and mass,” with an average difference of only 8% (250). The level of partisan representation declined markedly in the 98th Congress, however, as
the average difference score rose to 29%, and majorities of Republican masses and elites were on opposite sides of several issues (250). Hurley argues that this failure of congressional Republicans to represent the views of Republicans and Independents in the mass public contributed to their inability to sustain electoral gains in Congress and achieve a lasting realignment.

Collective representation can also be thought of in terms of how well Congress represents the nation as a whole. Page and Shapiro (1983) explored congruence between public opinion and congressional policy changes on a large number of foreign and domestic issues. They cataloged thousands of responses to hundreds of survey items, and identified 357 instances of “significant change” (6 percentage points or more) in Americans’ policy preferences between 1935 and 1979 (177). Their investigation focused on the temporal order of change, and found that in nearly two-thirds of the relevant cases, changes in public opinion were followed within about a year by congruent changes in policy. However, their method did not permit Page and Shapiro to rule out earlier policy movement; thus they could not say definitively which came first—public opinion or policy change. The authors acknowledge that in about half (52%) of the cases where opinion and policy lined up, the change in policy may have occurred prior to change in opinion (186-88). Moreover, their bivariate technique did not take account of additional factors such as world events or the behavior of elites.

The advanced statistical analysis by Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) modeled representation as a process in time. Policy responses to shifts in public opinion constitute “dynamic representation.” The approach taken by Stimson and his colleagues differs significantly from many studies of representation in that dynamic representation is a
macro-level concept. Public opinion and policy changes are seen as "global" (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1994) and are measured at the aggregate level, not at the individual level as in much previous research. Also, this conceptualization of representation is not exclusive to legislatures—it is measured for all branches of government. For the House, Senate, Supreme Court, and Presidency, separately, and for "government as a whole," Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) find that policy responds dynamically to changes in their "public mood" index (see Stimson 1991 for details on this mood measure). The responsiveness of the different institutions varies in a manner that would be expected based on the design of the Constitution: the House is most responsive, the Supreme Court least (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995, 559).

While studies of representation take a variety of approaches to the topic, most share a common underlying assumption of classical democratic theory: representatives react to public opinion, not vice versa. In other words, public opinion is an independent variable, not a dependent variable—a cause, not an effect, of legislative behavior. Some public opinion research calls into question that assumption, however.

**Elite Leadership of Public Opinion**

There is considerable evidence from studies of trends in public opinion that would cause one to expect that ideological polarization at the congressional (elite) level would precede polarization in the mass public. In their highly influential work which culminated in the book *Issue Evolution*, Carmines and Stimson (1989) argue that divisions between Republicans and Democrats over civil rights issues in the 1960s produced a partisan realignment in the electorate along lines of racial attitudes. This
process of partisan transformation was a gradual one, akin to biological evolution. As cohorts of younger voters entered the political process, they recognized that the Democrats were more liberal than the Republicans on civil rights issues, and came to identify with the party that best reflected their own preferred position on racial issues. Over time, the mass parties became increasingly polarized on racial issues. Carmines and Stimson argue that by the 1980s, citizens' party affiliations and candidate choices had come to reflect this division on issues of race. The argument has interesting implications for theories of representation and responsiveness. Carmines and Stimson note:

The dynamic trace etched by the parties in Congress will be seen as highly congruent with similar attitudes and party support in the mass electorate...But, the irony is...that the representation runs in a direction counter to normal democratic expectation. For we shall see policy “response” from national institutions preceding the mass awareness alleged to have caused it. (1989, 83)

A similar issue-evolution argument is made by Adams (1997) with regard to abortion. He finds increasing differences between roll-call voting of congressional Democrats and that of Republicans on abortion issues from 1973-1994, with a noticeable polarization occurring after 1984. Analysis of attitudes in the mass public shows that Democratic identifiers were clearly more pro-choice than Republicans after 1988. While Adams' evidence is consistent with elite leadership of mass opinion, his analysis does not include an empirical test of causality.

In his important book The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, John Zaller (1992) presents a strong theoretical argument that the discourse of political elites drives public opinion. According to Zaller’s model of opinion diffusion, the political discourse of elites, to the extent it is given attention by individuals, changes the “considerations” used by respondents to formulate responses to survey questions (Zaller 1992; Zaller and
Feldman 1992). One implication of this model is that when issues divide partisan elites, public opinion on those issues will polarize as a result. This “polarization effect” is conditional on a person’s level of political awareness. When elite discourse is divided, “more aware liberals gravitate more reliably toward the liberal position and more aware conservatives gravitate more reliably toward the conservative position” (Zaller 1992, 102). Zaller finds evidence of this polarization effect on several “partisan issues” such as civil rights, the Vietnam War, nuclear arms reduction, and the Persian Gulf War. Again, this is consistent with the expectation that ideologically charged behavior in Congress will find its analog in the masses.

Yet, as Zaller acknowledges, his analytic approach assumes a priori that the direction of causality flows from elites to masses. In a section titled “Who Leads Whom?” Zaller comments on his approach: “I have taken the intensities of opposing political communications to be exogenous variables and have limited my analysis to the supposed effects of these communications on public opinion. My working assumption, thus, has been that elite communications shape mass opinion rather than vice versa” (1992, 268). This is not an untenable assumption in many instances, and Zaller makes a cogent defense of its use in the particular cases he studies (1992, 268-274). However, while it is reasonable to think that elite polarization would lead to mass polarization, it is also possible that increasing division in the electorate could cause further polarization at the elite level. As noted above, previous research suggests that this scenario is indeed a plausible one.

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Reciprocal Linkages Between Masses and Elites

Some recent studies, as well as reviews of earlier research, suggest that the relationship between mass and elite opinion may be reciprocal in nature. In reviewing the state of research on mass opinion-elite behavior linkages, several authors have emphasized the need to for future work to make the opinion-policy relationship dynamic and interactive (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994a; Page 1994). In discussing directions for future research, Jacobs and Shapiro (1994a) note that most prior work “has treated the opinion-policy relationship as unidirectional—generally focussing on public opinion’s effect on policy makers. The problem is that the public’s impact on policy making is part of a reciprocal or interactive process in which politicians and other actors in the political process…lead, persuade, or manipulate the public” (12).

A growing body of research supports these assertions. For example, Hill and Hinton-Andersson (1995) investigate the causal linkages between public opinion and policy at the state level, allowing for the possibility that the relationship is a reciprocal one. They elaborate on the state policy model of Erikson, Wright and McIver (1989) by adding reciprocal paths between mass public liberalism (as measured in Wright, Erikson, and McIver 1985) and elite liberalism (as measured in Erikson, Wright and McIver 1989). To test the model, Hill and Hinton-Andersson employ two-stage least squares regression, with state policy liberalism (as measured in Wright, Erikson, and McIver 1987) as the dependent variable. Controlling for party competition and mobilization efforts, the authors “find notable causal evidence that reciprocal relationship between the preferences of the mass public and political elites shapes the state policy process” (1995, 933).
In a study of the dynamic relationship between elite and mass foreign policy attitudes, Cunningham and Moore (1997) find that the relationship is nonrecursive. These researchers pooled cross-sectional data from six surveys during the 1974-1994 period, and estimated two OLS regression models with lagged independent variables. One equation regressed mass opinion on elite opinion and the lagged value of mass opinion; in the second model, elite opinion was regressed on mass opinion and lagged elite opinion. The authors find that elite opinion had “a small, yet significant, influence on mass opinion” (65). Likewise, the results of the second regression model “indicate that elites do indeed follow mass opinions” (65). Thus the evidence is consistent with the view that the relationship between mass and elite opinion is reciprocal. However, the Cunningham and Moore analysis does not control for other factors, and cannot preclude the possibility that a third variable caused similar changes in both elite and mass opinion. This type of alternative explanation would be consistent with the view that aggregate public opinion responds to real-world events in a “rational” way (Page and Shapiro 1992). Moreover, the modeling effort is limited by including only one lagged variable, and imposing a lag length of one rather than testing alternative models.

A more complex modeling effort by Hill and Hurley (1999) employs structural equation (LISREL) techniques to the study of dyadic representation. Using the well known Miller-Stokes data from the 1958 Representation Study, Hill and Hurley test a new representation model that allows for the possibility of reciprocal influence between a legislator’s views and those of the district. Specifically, they hypothesize that dual linkages will be present on “party-defining” issues, one-way links will appear on salient issues that are not party-defining, and no links will exist on “hard” issues. The results of
the data analysis support these expectations. The authors report a reciprocal relationship between constituency and legislator liberalism on social welfare (the "party-defining" issue), and no relationship on foreign policy opinion (the "hard" issue). On civil rights, Hill and Hurley find evidence only of a linkage from mass to elite opinion (consistent with the original Miller and Stokes (1963) finding), but note that in 1958 the issue had not yet become a realigning issue as it would in the 1960s and 1970s (1999, 126-27).

In sum, there is considerable evidence that Jacobs and Shapiro (1994a) were justified in concluding that "analysis of the public's influence on policy makers needs to consider reciprocal effects (i.e., influences on public opinion) and to treat the opinion-policy relationship as interactive" (12-13). Studying these reciprocal influences, the authors argue, requires both methodological and conceptual adjustments. Statistical methods such as time series analysis and advanced causal modeling are necessary to disentangle complex dynamic relationships. On the conceptual side, analysts must recognize that "mass opinion and behavior should not be studied in isolation from elite politics" (13). For example, Jacobs' (1992a, 1992b, 1993) research on health policy has documented the development of a governmental bureaucratic apparatus designed to monitor and manipulate public opinion. These efforts to influence public opinion had a "recoil effect" that made elites more sensitive to current public opinion, and in turn resulted in elites being more responsive to public preferences (Jacobs 1992a; 1993, ch. 2).

Thus, while past research provides varying expectations about the direction of causality between mass and elite opinion, the evidence leads one to expect that a relationship between polarization in Congress and polarization in the mass public will indeed exist. Sorting out the various theoretical possibilities will require new empirical
work that allows for the existence of mass-to-elite linkage, elite-to-mass linkage, or reciprocal causation. In the next section, I present a theoretical account of the causal linkages between congressional parties and parties-in-the-electorate, and offer some testable hypotheses. In subsequent chapters I test these hypotheses empirically.

**Toward a Theory of Elite-Mass Party Linkages: The Interplay of Congressional Polarization and Public Opinion.**

In developing an account of the linkage between mass opinion and elite behavior, I begin with the premise that congressional party leaders have an interest in maintaining a "party record" upon which to base reelection campaigns (Arnold 1990; Cox and McCubbins 1993). The modern congressional parties are well-equipped to formulate a record to take to the voters. With the proliferation of survey research, the parties have an unprecedented ability to monitor public opinion, particularly at the national level (Geer 1996; see also Jacobs and Shapiro 1994b; Jacobs 1992a). The leadership groups of both parties in Congress routinely monitor polling information, and utilize it in crafting their legislative agendas and their communications with the press (Jacobs, Lawrence, Shapiro, and Smith 1998; Jacobs and Shapiro 1998), as well as their fund-raising efforts. Voters in turn have unprecedented access to information about the behavior of Congress. While the lack of awareness of politics on the part of the average citizen is a long-standing finding of political science research, it is also the case that the citizens who pay the most attention to political matters are the people most likely to vote. And voters (as opposed to non-voters) are the targets of the reelection-motivated politicians. As the parties clash more frequently in Congress, and adopt national electoral strategies such as the "Contract with America," which emphasize party unity, the ideological differences of
the parties are highlighted and the voter is more apt to see Congress in partisan and ideological terms.

The perception of differences between the parties is a key variable in this framework. If citizens fail to see any meaningful ideological differences between Republicans and Democrats, then the partisan behavior in Congress is unlikely to have an impact on political evaluations—except, perhaps, to highlight disagreements and bickering, and therefore to raise disapproval of the way Congress is handling its job (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995). One would expect that this perception of important differences between the parties is, in turn, affected by individual-level factors such as educational attainment, interest in and knowledge of politics, and the strength of one's own party identification. Therefore, we should expect to find the most politically active to be the segment of the population that most reflects the ideological polarization taking place at the elite level.

A precondition for this voter reaction is the transmission of information about Congress via the media. Some observers have expressed concern that media coverage of Congress is too negative, superficial, and scandal-oriented (Mann and Ornstein 1994; Rozell 1994, 1996). However, there is substantial evidence that the differences between the parties on policy do shine through. Recent work by Morris and Clawson (1999) develops a comprehensive coding scheme for newspaper stories on Congress that focuses on content (person, party, issue, or process frames) rather than tone (positive or negative) as in past studies. Analyzing New York Times stories from 1990 to 1998, Morris and Clawson find that conflict and compromise are prominently featured, but interestingly they report that a large majority of the stories (73%) were framed around policy issues,
not focused on scandals or individual personalities (6). While the party frame was used far less frequently than the issue frame, there was a marked increase in its frequency following the Republican takeover of Congress and the subsequent battles with Democrats. In addition, the levels of conflict in party-focused stories were “extremely high,” with only 14% not containing any conflict (11). The researchers summarize their findings as follows: “Clearly conflict was emphasized when parties were the main focus of the story. Moreover, partisan conflict was present across all substantive frames. Thus, although party-focused stories were not that common, partisan conflict permeates a great deal of Congressional media coverage” (11). Always interested in conflict, the media will gladly present the ideological clashes between Republicans and Democrats in Congress.  

Summary of Hypotheses

In summary, the hypothesis that will be tested at various points in this study is the following: party polarization leads to perceptions of greater differences in what the parties stand for, and in turn to ideology having a greater impact on citizens’ political evaluations and choices. However, this effect is not expected to be uniform across the public. Rather, those with higher levels of interest in and knowledge of politics are expected to be more likely to see differences between the parties, and therefore are the segment of the public most apt to display an increased reliance on ideological and

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6 My preliminary analysis of trends in media coverage of Congress confirms the Morris and Clawson findings. Based on a Lexis-Nexis search of New York Times stories, it appears that the number of stories referring to Congress in partisan terms follows a path very similar to measures of party conflict. Although a more thorough analysis is clearly warranted, these initial results seem consistent with the idea that when the parties disagree, the press takes notice.
partisan considerations when forming political judgments. It is also hypothesized that the
most politically active citizens will most closely reflect ideological trends that are found
at the elite level. Party polarization at the mass level is thus hypothesized to be positively
related to polarization at the elite level, but is not expected to reach levels as high as the
polarization in Congress. Finally, the need to raise campaign funds exacerbates the
incentive for the parties to polarize in response to potential donors by appealing to
partisan activists based on ideologically charged issues such as gun control or abortion
(Weisberg 2000). These fund-raising concerns, combined with a candidate’s need to
secure his or her electoral base, lead to the expectation that members of Congress respond
to ideological polarization among their constituents. Thus, the direction of the causal
relationship between elite and mass polarization is hypothesized to run primarily from
elite to mass; but, given the electoral incentives that face congressional party leaders as
well as individual members, a reciprocal component is also expected.

Before the nature of the connection between polarization at the congressional
level and at the mass level can be determined, however, the extent of polarization in the
public must be assessed. This will be the focus of the next chapter, which presents
analyses of survey data showing trends in mass-level party polarization. The succeeding
chapter will then focus on citizens’ perceptions of differences between the parties, and
the implications of those perceptions for political behavior. Chapter 6 explores the
impact of the polarized partisan environment upon evaluations of members of Congress.
Finally, I revisit the question of causality between elite- and mass-level polarization in
Chapter 7.
CHAPTER 4

POLARIZATION IN THE MASS PARTIES

In this chapter I consider the question of whether Democrats and Republicans in the mass public have become more ideologically polarized over the past three decades. Throughout the chapter, signs of party polarization at the mass level appear, and some interesting theoretical implications begin to emerge. The preliminary evidence points to party polarization at the elite level as a cause of divisions in the mass parties. I find that polarization has increased to a greater extent among the more highly educated and politically aware segments of the population than among those who are less politically informed. The attentive public is the most likely to receive cues from elites, and so this finding is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for viewing polarization as a "top-down" process driven by elite discourse (Zaller 1992). In addition, I find that the trends in party polarization cannot be explained only in terms of increased polarization in the South due to a regional realignment, because polarization has also increased outside the South, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Finally, the results contribute to the ongoing debate in the political science literature over "party decline." The evidence I examine suggests that the public's feelings toward the parties at the close of the 20th century were more often characterized by polarization than by neutrality.
I begin by placing the topic of mass-level party polarization in the context of previous research. As previously noted, few existing studies have had mass polarization as their specific research focus. Nevertheless, some prior work on partisanship and ideology in the electorate provides relevant insights. This work will be discussed in the next section. I will then turn to analyses of NES data to explore trends in citizens' ideological and partisan self-identifications.

Party and Ideology in the Mass Public

During the same time period in which party elites have polarized, changes have also occurred in mass partisanship and ideology. Numerous studies have documented the erosion of the social group basis of party support that characterized the Democratic New Deal Coalition (Stanley, Bianco, and Niemi 1986; Stanley and Niemi 1991, 1995, 1999). The old social divides have been replaced in part by ideological cleavages. In both the South (Carmines and Stanley 1990) and in the North (Carmines and Stanley 1992) conservative whites have deserted the Democrats and gravitated toward the Republican party. In their analysis of NES data from 1972-1988, Carmines and Stanley (1992, 236) find that ideology is related to partisanship even after controlling for social group membership. These results were confirmed with subsequent analysis of NES data from 1972-1994 by Knight and Erikson (1997), who find that the correlation between ideology and partisanship has increased since the 1970s.

7 My focus here is on the connection between ideology and party identification, and how that relationship has evolved in recent decades. The synopsis I will offer in this section necessarily excludes much of the vast body of research on partisanship and ideology. For a review of the party identification literature see Weisberg 1999; Niemi and Weisberg 1993a, chapter 21. For more on liberal-conservative ideology, see Knight 1999; Niemi and Weisberg 1993a, chapter 4.
A more extensive multivariate model of the relationship between party identification, ideology, and social group characteristics was constructed by Levine, Carmines and Huckfeldt (1997). These researchers pooled NES data from the six presidential election years between 1972 and 1992, and estimated OLS regression models of partisanship (measured by the standard seven-point scale) as a function of ideology (as measured by a three-category self-identification) and New Deal social groupings. They find that "ideology exerts a significantly greater impact on partisanship in each succeeding year" and that this effect holds even after controlling for membership in social groups (28). These multivariate results support the conclusions drawn by Carmines and Stanley (1990, 1992) based on bivariate analysis. These authors summarize the ideological trends among partisans as follows:

It is not that the proportion of conservatives has sharply increased; the increase has been quite modest. But what has changed is the connection between ideology and partisanship. Once loosely connected, ideology and partisanship are now much more tightly bound together, and this close connection has rebounded to the benefit of Republicans. (Carmines and Stanley 1992, 236)

Taking this argument further, Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) make the claim that an "ideological realignment" has taken place. These researchers hypothesize that due to the polarization of party elites in the Reagan era, "voters are more likely to choose a party identification based on their policy preferences because they are more likely to recognize the differences between the parties' positions" (643). Analyzing NES data from 1976-1994, including the 1992-94 panel study, Abramowitz and Saunders find evidence of substantial intergenerational shifts in party identification in favor of the Republicans, with the greatest differences among those groups with conservative views. Their examination of voters' placements of the parties' positions on four issue scales
showed increased awareness: the proportion of respondents displaying low awareness dropped from 59% in 1978 to 37% in 1994, while the proportion of those highly aware of party differences doubled from 16% to 32% (644). Furthermore, the correlation between party identification and ideology was greatest among those who were most aware of the differences between the parties. As a multivariate test of their hypothesis, the authors estimate an OLS regression model with the seven-point partisanship scale as the dependent variable and ideology (a composite scale of liberal/conservative self-identification and various issue scales), parental partisanship and demographics as independent variables. The results indicate that the influence of ideology on partisanship increased by almost 75% from 1978 to 1994, while the impact of parental partisanship decreased by about 25% (647).

A look at the NES data shows that these trends in partisanship and ideology observed by scholars in the early and mid-1990s have continued. Figures 4.1 through 4.3 display the trends in party identification of liberals, moderates, and conservatives, respectively. The percentage of liberals identifying with the Democratic Party ranged from a low of 71% in 1972 to a high of 87% in 1996, and remained at or above the 80% level from 1994 through 2000. The proportion of moderates identifying as Democrats remained at or above 50% during the 1972-2000 time period. With the exception of 1982, between 50% and 58% of moderates considered themselves to be Democrats in each NES survey. The most striking trend is found in figure 4.3, which documents the increase in the proportion of conservatives identifying with the Republican Party. In 1972, 56% of conservatives considered themselves Republicans. By 1994 this number
had grown to 71%, and in 2000 76% of conservatives identified as Republicans (see Figures 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3).

Another illustration of this trend is that the correlation between liberal-conservative self-identification and party identification has grown larger since the NES began using the seven-point ideology scale in 1972. Figure 4.4 displays the Kendall’s tau-b correlation\(^9\) for all party identifiers, as well as the subset of partisans who reported voting in the congressional election. For both groups, the upward trend is apparent. For the full NES sample, the tau-b correlation nearly doubled in magnitude, from .25 in 1972 to .48 in 2000. Among House voters, the correlation went from a value of .29 in 1972 to .43 in 1988, and then increased to .51 by 1994. The correlation grew in size through the 1990s, and by 2000 it had reached a value of .55, indicating the tightening of the connection between ideology and partisanship (see Figure 4.4).\(^10\)

A result of this trend is that the two parties’ coalitions now differ considerably in terms of ideological self-identifications. Figure 4.5 presents the percentage of Democrats identifying as liberal, moderate, or conservative, as well as the percentage unable to answer the ideology question. At the beginning of the time period, the Democratic coalition consisted of a mix of conservatives, moderates, and liberals. In 1972, 18% of

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\(^8\) Independent “leaners” are classified as partisans in these figures. Figures later in the chapter keep leaners with independents, as discussed in footnote 12.

\(^9\) I use the Kendall’s tau-b statistic because the two measures are 7-point scales, not continuous variables. Using the Pearson product-moment correlation reveals the same trends.

\(^10\) This trend in the national data is consistent with state-level evidence (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Brown and Wright 1992). However, it should be noted that the increasingly strong relationship between ideology and partisanship at the individual level has not been found at the macro-level. According to a sophisticated time-series analysis by Box-Steffensmeier, Knight, and Sigelman (1998), trends in “macropartisanship” and “macroideology” from 1972-1992 are statistically unrelated. However, as the authors themselves acknowledge (1045), this work focuses only on the aggregate level and says nothing about the existence of causality at the individual level.
Democrats considered themselves conservative, 28% were moderate, 26% were liberal, and 29% did not think of themselves in ideological terms. Of those who could answer the ideology question, 25% identified as conservative. The proportion of Democrats calling themselves conservatives remained fairly steady over the next three decades. During the 1970s, the average percentage of conservatives was about 24%, while the average for the 1980s was just under 26%, and the 1990s saw a slight decrease to an average of 23% of Democrats (who could answer the ideology question) identifying as conservative. However, in the 2000 data the percentage of conservative Democrats dropped to 15%. When those who could not answer the ideology question in 2000 are included in the denominator, the proportion of Democrats who identified as conservative is just 11%. Conversely, the proportion of Democrats identifying as liberal rose over this period, from 36% in 1972 to 46% by 2000 (see Figure 4.5).

The ideological homogenization of the Republican party-in-the-electorate is even more striking than that of the Democrats. As Figure 4.6 shows, the percentage of Republicans who are conservative has grown considerably. Of those Republicans answering the ideology question, 73% identified as conservative in 1996 and 71% did so in 2000. The proportion of liberal and moderate Republicans, on the other hand, has declined markedly. In 1972, 46% of Republicans were either liberals or moderates. By 2000, just 28% of Republicans identified as liberal or moderate. It is also interesting to note the decrease in the proportion of Republicans answering “Don’t Know” or “Haven’t thought about it” to the liberal-conservative scale. By 2000, only 13% of Republicans were unable to answer the ideology question. Thus the Republican coalition at the close of the 1990s was much more ideologically aware and much more conservative than it had
been in previous decades. This increased ideological awareness is in harmony with the findings by Knight and Lewis (1996) that from 1972 to 1994 the proportion of ideologically sophisticated citizens increased, as measured by coding of open-ended questions (see Figure 4.6).

In summary, the evidence reviewed above suggests that the relationship between ideology and partisanship has strengthened over the past three decades. Thus, if we compare the ideological make-up of the two parties-in-the-electorate (in a fashion similar to the comparisons of the parties in Congress presented in Chapter 2) we would expect to find increased polarization over time. This turns out to be the case, as shown in the next section.

Measuring Ideological Polarization in the Mass Public

Several alternatives exist for locating citizens on an ideological dimension, and the literature on the topic of measuring ideology is quite large (for a review, see Knight 1999). One straightforward method is simply to rely on individuals’ self-identifications. This approach has the advantage of being widely applicable, as a question distinguishing self-described liberals, moderates, and conservatives is commonplace on most political surveys. Some researchers have used the standard self-identification measure in combination with other indicators of ideological attitudes such as feeling thermometer ratings of “liberals” and “conservatives” (e.g., Levitin and Miller 1979). Other researchers have cautioned against using hybrid measures, arguing that ideological sentiment and ideological placement along a liberal-conservative scale are two separate dimensions and ought to be modeled as such (Chubb, Hagen, and Sniderman 1991).
For the analyses presented in this section, I use the NES seven-point liberal-conservative scale to locate the ideological positions of respondents. The scale ranges from "extremely liberal" at point 1 to "extremely conservative" at point 7. Ideology self-identification questions are asked repeatedly in the NES series, as well as in other major surveys, and using this item makes it possible to conduct over-time comparisons.

Beginning in 1972, respondents in the NES were asked to locate themselves on the seven-point scale. In various years respondents were also asked to place the parties and candidates on the scale. The NES liberal-conservative measure has several attractive features. First, the liberal-conservative scale is one of the few items that has been asked by the NES during each election year since 1972. While each NES study offers a wealth of items measuring attitudes on policy issues, few questions are asked consistently from year to year in a way that permits meaningful comparisons over long periods of time. More complex ideology scales could be developed using data on policy attitudes in the 1990s, for example, but this would not permit direct comparisons with earlier periods during which party polarization was much lower than current levels. The liberal-conservative scale permits these kinds of comparisons. Second, while it is an imperfect proxy for an overarching interconnected political ideology, the liberal-conservative scale does correlate highly with more complex factor-analytic scales (e.g., Aldrich and McKelvey 1977; Palfey and Poole 1987; Layman and Carsey 2000) or additive indices (e.g. Abramowitz 1994; DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998) that are comprised of multiple indicators. In addition, recent research by Gary Jacobson (2000a, 2000b, 2001) utilizes the NES seven-point scale and finds it adequate to the task of investigating party polarization. My approach will be to present results
based on the liberal-conservative scale, followed by analyses of other items asking about specific issues. I believe the latter results will corroborate the former.

Mass Party Polarization on Liberal-Conservative Ideology

I turn first to a simple analysis of the relative conservatism within each party. A technique used in past research is to compare the percentage of each party's identifiers who take a conservative position on an issue (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Adams 1997; Layman and Carsey 2000), or who identify themselves as conservatives (e.g., Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993). Applying this approach to the NES ideology data, I subtracted the percentage of Democrats identifying as conservative from the percentage of Republicans identifying as conservative.\footnote{The percent conservative was obtained from the 3-point liberal-moderate-conservative scale formed from collapsing the initial 7-point scale and utilizing a follow-up question. Those who were initially uncertain of their response on the 7-point scale were then asked to choose between being "liberal, moderate, or conservative" in the follow-up. See Appendix A for all question wording.} This measure could range from 0 (no polarization) to 100 (complete polarization). Figure 4.7 shows a clear upward trend on this index. The percentage point difference grows from 29% in 1972 to 56% in 2000, indicating that, by this measure, polarization nearly doubled over this period (see Figure 4.7).

Further evidence of mass party polarization is found by employing a set of measures roughly analogous to those used in previous research to study polarization at the congressional party level. A measure of the ideological distance between the mass parties can be obtained by taking the mean liberal-conservative score for Republicans and subtracting the mean for Democrats. The trends for this measure of polarization are
displayed in Figure 4.8. For purposes of comparison, the results are shown for three groups: all party identifiers, those partisans who reported voting in the House elections, and party activists—those who engaged in at least two acts of political participation in addition to voting. An increase in polarization is evident for each of the three groups of partisans over the twenty-year period, and each time trend is statistically significant. The average ideological distance between Democratic and Republican identifiers more than doubled, increasing from .87 in 1972 to a high of 1.91 in 2000. A slightly larger increase occurred among voters, with the between-party distance growing from just under one point in 1972 to a high of 2.23 in 2000. As one would expect based on previous research (Miller and Jennings 1986; Miller 1988; Nice 1984; Stone, Rapoport, and Abramowitz 1990, 1994), the party activists were the most polarized of the three groups. The ideological gap between the activist constituencies of the two parties widened from a low of 1.5 points in 1972 to a high of 2.76 points in 1994, then declined slightly in 1996 and 1998 before rising to a value of 2.51 in 2000 (see Figure 4.8).

Given the aforementioned evidence of partisan realignment in the South, and the "conditional party government" explanations of congressional party polarization reviewed in Chapter 2, we might expect to find interesting patterns when controlling for region in these comparisons of the two parties’ ideological means. Figure 4.9 compares the trends in party polarization for party identifiers and party activists in the South versus

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12 Except where noted above, Independent "leaners" are classified with independents for the polarization figures. This is done in part because it seems odd to speak of an independent as a "party activist." Including leaners as partisans does not alter the substantive findings. In some instances the gap between the parties is smaller when leaners are included, but the upward trends in polarization persist under either operationalization.

13 The acts of campaign participation include trying to influence others to vote, attending political meetings or rallies, working for a party or candidate, displaying a candidate button or sticker, and donating money to a party or candidate. By this measure, about one fifth of voters qualify as activists.
those living outside the South. In the early 1970s, partisans and activists in the South were far less ideologically polarized than their non-southern counterparts. The differences in party polarization by region exceeded the differences across levels of activism, and the distance between opposing partisans in the South exceeded the gap between the two parties outside the South. By the 1990s, regional differences in polarization had dwindled; partisans in the South were nearly as polarized along ideological lines as those living outside the South. The political landscape at the close of the 1990s stood in sharp contrast to the situation in the early 1970s, as the magnitude of differences across levels of activism rivaled the size of differences across regions (see Figure 4.9).

Thus, party polarization over the past three decades was not a phenomenon confined to one region. The upward trends reported in Figure 4.9 reflect not only changes in the South, but also a nationwide shift in the relationship between party and ideology. This is an important finding because it indicates that the realignment in the South is only a partial explanation for the ideological polarization of the parties. If the increased ideological divide between the parties had come about only as a result of conservative white southerners shifting their party allegiances from the Democrats to the Republicans, then we would not expect to find such an increase in polarization outside the South. Yet, this is clearly the case in terms of liberal-conservative self-identification and, as we will see later in this chapter, in terms of various policy issues as well. Thus, we will need to look beyond regional differences alone if we are to understand the development of party polarization.
As discussed above, public opinion research points to elite-level polarization as a likely cause of mass level polarization. If a citizen is to take cues from party elites, however, she must have at least some information about and understanding of politics. Zaller's (1992) research has shown how political awareness conditions the impact of elite political discourse on mass opinion, particularly when competing party elites disagree. Zaller's analysis of this "polarization effect" focuses on specific "partisan issues" on which opposing party elites are in conflict, such as the Vietnam War, and busing students to achieve school integration (1992, chapter 6). I expect that a more generalized "polarization effect" may be occurring on the liberal-conservative dimension over the 1972-2000 period.

As a first approximation of political sophistication, I divided the NES sample by level of educational attainment. As Figure 4.10 shows, the level of polarization was much higher among those with some college education than among those who had not attended college. Moreover, the increase in the ideological distance between the parties over time varied by partisans' level of education. Among those with at least some college education, there is an obvious upward trend in party polarization. In contrast, among those with no college education the increase is not as clear, although polarization seems to increase in fits and starts during the 1990s. Over the 1972-2000 time period, the trend in polarization is not statistically significant among those without a college education. These results are consistent with the notion that polarization at the mass level is at least partially a reflection of elite level trends. Those with lower levels of education are those least likely to pay attention to political developments; conversely, those with higher
education are more likely to receive the messages sent out by political elites (see Figure 4.10).

Further support for this interpretation is found when we control for individuals' level of attention paid to public affairs. The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 4.11. As expected, party polarization is greatest among those who reported following public affairs and government "most of the time," followed by those who follow "some of the time." Among the most attentive group, the distance between the parties' means rose from a low of 1.17 in 1972 to a high of 2.41 in 2000. A similar increase occurred among those in the middle category, with polarization increasing from about .75 in the early 1970s to 2.06 by 2000. Those who do not pay attention to public affairs or do so "hardly at all" are the least polarized group in each year. However, it is interesting to note that a marked increase in the gap between the parties is evident across levels of attention, including the lowest category. If we examine the time period before the polarizing decade of the 1990s, we see a pattern consistent with the theoretical expectations I offered in the previous chapter. In the data prior to 1990, there is not a statistically significant trend among the low and moderate attention groups. Among

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14 The question wording for this item is: Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?
those paying the most attention to public affairs, a statistically significant upward trend does exist, even before 1990. Looking only at the post-1990 data, one finds that polarization significantly increases across all three levels of attention. This finding provides further circumstantial evidence that the polarization of elites has had an impact at the mass level (see Figure 4.11).  

The trends identified above using the distance between the parties’ ideological means as an indicator of polarization are also present when an alternative measure of polarization is employed: the extent of ideological “overlap” of the parties. Overlap occurs when an individual is closer to the ideological center of the opposing party than to the center of her own party. Thus, a low proportion of overlap indicates a high level of polarization. I computed party overlap scores for the mass public using the liberal-conservative data from the NES. The results are shown in Figure 4.12. As before, the polarization measures were calculated for three groups of partisans: all party identifiers, those who reported voting, and party activists. For each group a downward trend in overlap is present, with the percentage of individuals closer to the opposing party’s center declining by more than ten percentage points from 1972 to 2000. Among all party identifiers, the percentage of overlap declined from a high of 39% in 1972 and leveled off at between 25% and 26% in 1992 through 2000. For the subset of partisans who voted in House elections, the point of greatest polarization (least overlap) came in 2000, when just

15 In analyses not shown, I compared party polarization across respondents’ levels of media exposure, interest in the current election campaign, and level of political information as coded by the survey interviewer. The results are virtually identical to the analysis presented here. Those with higher levels of awareness display the highest levels of polarization.
18% of individuals were closer to the opposing party's center than to that of their own party. Among party activists, there was greater volatility in the percentage of overlap, but activists remained more polarized than their less active co-partisans in each year of the time series. The greatest polarization among the two parties' activists came in 1994, with just 13% overlap (see Figure 4.12).

For purposes of comparison, the figure also includes the percentage of overlap in the U.S. House during this time period. It is clear that, by this measure at least, the extent of polarization in the mass public did not match the degree of ideological division of the parties in Congress. By the mid-1990s, only about 1% of House members overlapped ideologically with the party across the aisle. Nothing in the data on mass partisans approaches this low level of ideological overlap.

Thus, the NES data indicate that the parties-in-the-electorate have become increasingly distinct in terms of liberal-conservative ideology since the early 1970s. Their ideological centers have diverged, and the overlap in their respective coalitions has shrunk—albeit to a lesser extent than the parties in Congress. However, it might be objected that because the results presented thus far pertain only to liberal-conservative ideological self-identification, they might obscure changes related to specific issues, or ignore the existence of multiple issue dimensions. Indeed, as noted earlier in this chapter, the NES ideology measure has its limitations. In the next section I extend the analysis to include other issue scales. The basic findings will remain the same: the mass parties have polarized.
**Mass Party Polarization on Issues**

To further assess party polarization across multiple issues, I apply similar techniques to those used above in the examination of liberal-conservative ideology. As noted above, there exist only a limited number of questions on the NES that were asked consistently from year to year. However, there are a handful of issue items that appear in the NES time series frequently enough to permit meaningful over-time comparisons. Most of these items follow a format similar to the liberal-conservative measure discussed above—they are seven-point scales upon which the respondent is asked to place herself. Four of these scales ask about the extent to which government should be involved in solving problems. These include questions on the government guaranteeing people jobs and a standard of living, providing aid to African Americans, supplying health insurance coverage, and increasing services versus cutting spending. Another seven-point scale deals with women’s role in society; that is, the extent to which women should play an equal role with men versus remaining in the home. The issue of abortion is addressed with an item offering four response choices, ranging from making abortion illegal to making all abortions legal. The question wording for all of these issue items can be found in Appendix A. For each of these scales, as I did above using liberal-conservative ideology, I measured the distance between the centers of the two parties by subtracting the mean for Democrats from the mean for Republicans. For purposes of comparison, the results for the six issues are shown together in Figure 4.13, along with the polarization trend for liberal-conservative ideology. While their over-time trajectories vary, these six issues all demonstrate an increase in party polarization from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s (see Figure 4.13).
It is interesting to note the relative extent of polarization across the various types of issues. For example, the distance between the centers of the parties on the women's equal role scale is far smaller than the partisan gap on other issues, although polarization on this measure did increase from just above zero in 1988 to .63 in 1996. One also finds that polarization on the scale dealing with government aid to blacks is consistently smaller than the divergence on other scales, such as government guaranteeing jobs and government providing health insurance. This result is particularly interesting, given the prominent role that scholars have ascribed to racial issues in the generation of partisan realignments, especially in the South (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989).

Figure 4.14 displays the trends in party polarization on the aid to blacks scale for both southern and non-southern whites. In 1972, southern Democrats were actually more conservative on this racial issue on average than were Republicans, as the negative value for polarization indicates. By 1992, however, partisans in the South were more polarized than their non-southern counterparts. Also intriguing is the fact that the level of party polarization on the government aid to blacks scale has actually increased since the end of the data series used by Carmines and Stimson to formulate their influential “issue evolution” argument. The process of partisanship realigning in the South no doubt played a large role in this increased polarization on racial issues, as cohorts of conservative southern Democrats were replaced and the Republicans finally succeeded in attracting socially and racially conservative whites. However, we see on this variable, as we did above on the liberal-conservative scale, that the ideological divide between the parties also grew outside the South. The distance between non-southern opposing partisans grew from a low of .34 in 1978 to a high of 1.08 in 1996, before declining.
sharply in 2000. This polarization outside the South during the late 1980s and 1990s suggests that there may be more factors involved in mass polarization—perhaps including opinion change among partisans who are bringing their own issue stances into line with those of their party (see Figure 4.14).

When we examine polarization on other issues, we again find that the division of the parties along ideological lines is not confined to one region. The increase in the ideological divide is consistently larger in the South than elsewhere, which is to be expected given the shifts in party allegiances discussed above. However, there is also a significant upward trend in party polarization outside the South, on the guaranteed jobs/standard of living scale, government services/spending scale, government health insurance scale, and on attitudes toward school integration (results not shown). I present the results for the four-point abortion scale in Figure 4.15 as an illustration of these regional trends. In 1980, the mass parties were not polarized over the issue of abortion—in fact, among southerners the mean for Democrats was more conservative than that for Republicans. However, in the 1980s the parties’ elites polarized over the issue of abortion (Adams 1997), and their mass coalitions followed suit. Of particular note here is the fact that the polarization took place both in the South and elsewhere. Again, this points us toward the role of elites in generating mass level polarization (see Figure 4.15).

As was the case with liberal-conservative ideology, party polarization on specific issues varies across levels of activism and awareness. The issue of abortion again serves

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16 For purposes of this figure, I break with graphical convention and subtract the mean for Republicans from the mean for Democrats since on the familiar NES abortion scale higher scores indicate more pro-choice positions.
as an example. Figure 4.16 displays the trends in party polarization on the four-point abortion scale, dividing respondents into among activists, voters, and partisans. In addition, the figures show separate trends for those with some college education and those who have not attended college (represented by dashed lines). The results comport with those found earlier with respect to the liberal-conservative scale. Party activists are clearly the most polarized, with a difference of .83 between the parties in 2000, compared to a gap of .61 among voters, and .43 among all partisans. Large differences exist across levels of educational attainment, as well. Among those with at least some college, the gap between the two parties in 2000 was .71; by contrast, the distance between partisans among those with less education was just .17 (see Figure 4.16).

I conducted similar analyses for each of the issue scales mentioned above, and obtained similar results. A thorough exploration of the details of each of these issues is beyond the scope of this study, but suffice it to say that the results echo those found earlier with respect to general ideology: party activists are the most polarized group. Across this range of issues, the group of partisans with higher levels of education is the more polarized ideologically.\textsuperscript{17}

To sum up, the party's identifiers have polarized on liberal-conservative ideology, and on a range of specific policy issues. Across multiple measures, I find that the distance between the means for Republicans and Democrats has grown. This divergence has been greatest among the most active and aware segments of the population. The upward trends in polarization are not confined to the South, suggesting that the southern realignment is only a partial explanation for party polarization.

\textsuperscript{17} These trends also exist across levels of political awareness, as measured earlier in the chapter.
Another question to be addressed is whether these differences of opinion on issues coincide with increasingly polarized affective reactions to the parties. To investigate this aspect of mass polarization, I turn next to data on feeling thermometer ratings of the parties.

**Mass Party Polarization on Feeling Thermometers**

In both popular and scholarly accounts of contemporary American politics, one of the most prominent themes has been the “decline” of political parties. Among academics, perhaps the most resolute statement of this view has been made by Martin Wattenberg in multiple versions of his widely cited book, *The Decline of American Political Parties*. Wattenberg argues that “For over four decades the American public has been drifting away from the two major parties” (1996, ix). One of the chief pieces of evidence came from analyses of NES data on citizens’ feelings toward the parties, which suggested a decreasing salience of partisanship. The average feeling thermometer ratings of the parties declined during the 1970s and 1980s, and analysis of respondents’ answers to open-ended questions revealed a decline in the number of times the parties were mentioned—again, suggesting their decreased importance (Wattenberg 1996). Wattenberg’s findings lead him to conclude that the public was increasingly *neutral* toward the parties, rather than increasingly negative. It was not so much that citizens disliked the parties more (although that was also true to an extent), but rather that parties simply were not as relevant in the candidate-centered era of American politics.

It should be noted, however, that Wattenberg’s initial findings were based largely on a data set that covered the period through 1980 only. Given the tumultuous partisan
changes in Washington during the 1980s and 1990s, it seems that a fresh look at the question of how Americans feel about the parties is in order.

Since 1964, the NES has asked respondents to indicate on a “feeling thermometer” how warm or cold they feel toward the two major political parties (see Appendix A for question wording). Respondents are instructed to rate those toward whom they feel cool at a value below 50 degrees, those to whom they feel warm at above 50 degrees, and those toward whom they feel neither warm nor cool at 50 degrees. These data are interesting for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the long time series which they offer the analyst. The average thermometer ratings for the two parties by year are shown in Table 4.1. Two trends are immediately apparent. First, the Democratic rating exceeds that of the Republican Party in all but one year of the series, 1994, when the Republican mean was two degrees warmer. The other clear trend is the decline in both parties average ratings over this period. Both parties garnered ratings above sixty degrees in the 1960s, but struggled to stay in the mid-fifties during the 1990s (see Table 4.1).

While these trends are interesting, it is the relationship between the two parties’ ratings that is of particular relevance when we consider polarization. Weisberg and Mockabee (1999, 48-50) note that the feeling thermometer scores for the two parties have become strongly negatively correlated. This indicates an increasingly polarized view of the parties among the public. The correlation between the Democratic and Republican party thermometers was -.42 in 1996. By way of comparison, the two thermometer ratings were statistically unrelated in 1972 and 1976 (correlations of .02 and .01, respectively). The level of polarization increased greatly in the 1980s, reaching a
correlation of -.40 in 1984 and of -.39 in 1988. After a decrease in 1992 to a correlation of -.27, party polarization jumped in 1996 to exceed the 1980s levels. These data are displayed in Figure 4.17.

Wattenberg (1981, 1996) observed that during the 1970s there was an increase in the proportion of respondents whose ratings of the parties indicating neutrality between the two. This development was cited as a significant piece of evidence that the relevance of parties had declined. The NES data from the 1990s indicate that this trend has not continued. Table 4.2 presents a typology of responses to the party thermometer ratings items. These categories include the following: warm (above 50°) toward both parties, cool (below 50°) toward both parties, and warm toward one party but cool toward the other party. The table also shows the percentage of respondents falling into one of three classes of "neutrality": those rating at least one of the parties at fifty degrees, those giving the two parties an equal rating, and those rating both parties at fifty degrees (see Table 4.2).

There are several clear trends present in Table 4.2. First, the percentage of respondents feeling warm toward both parties is now half what it was in the early 1970s, dropping to just 21% in 1998 and 2000. The percentage of people rating both parties below fifty degrees has risen steadily since the 1960s, but remains fairly small at about 5%. Of particular interest for purposes of this chapter are the trends in neutrality and divergence of feelings toward the parties. These trends in neutrality and divergence of feelings are displayed in Figure 4.18. The proportion of those feeling warm toward one party and cool toward the other was just 20% in the mid-1970s, but increased steadily through the 1980s and 1990s, reaching a high of nearly 50% in 1996. In 2000 the
percentage of those with divergent feelings toward the parties was 43%, which is more than twice the percentage found three decades earlier (see Figure 4.18).

Conversely, the proportion of respondents showing neutral feelings toward the parties has markedly decreased over this period. In 1976, 43% of respondents placed at least one of the parties at fifty degrees on the thermometer; by 1996, just 22% did so. The percentage of those giving the parties the same rating also shrank, from a high of 43% in 1974 to a low of 17% in 1998. And the proportion of people giving the completely neutral response of rating both parties at fifty degrees also declined, dropping from over 20% in the mid-1970s to below 10% in the 1990s.

In short, the feeling thermometer data suggest that the rising tide of partisan neutrality identified by Wattenberg has ebbed. Instead of a continued decline, the proportion of citizens with divergent feelings toward the two parties has increased considerably. These findings are difficult to square with the notion of party decline. I will have more to say on that subject in the next chapter. For purposes of the analysis here, the feeling thermometer data serve to further confirm that polarization has indeed taken place among mass partisans.
Summary and Conclusions

The evidence reviewed in this chapter suggests that the relationship between ideology and partisanship has strengthened over the past three decades, and that the ideological differences between Republican and Democratic identifiers have widened. Those holding conservative views have gravitated toward the more clearly conservative party, the Republicans. As a result, there is less ideological overlap in the two parties’ mass coalitions. As compared to past decades, the parties at the close of the 1990s were both more ideologically cohesive, and more ideologically distinct from each other. However, the polarization at the mass level has not kept pace with polarization at the congressional level. Polarization among party activists in the 1990s was greater than among less active partisans, but it still did not match the ideological division in Congress. Citizens’ feelings toward the parties also polarized in the 1990s, as measured through feeling thermometer ratings. Since the “party decline” era of the 1970s, the proportion of people feeling neutral toward the parties has diminished, while the proportion feeling warm toward one party and cool toward the other has substantially increased.

What can we conclude from the evidence presented thus far? First, the results suggest that the conventional wisdom about the decline of the party-in-the-electorate may be in need of revision. While the party decline thesis has been extremely influential in the study of American politics, the majority of the evidence in support of this view is now decades old. Much of the literature on party decline analyzed the period from the 1960s through the mid-1980s. The analysis in this chapter extends through 2000, and reveals that several trends associated with party decline have either slowed or reversed altogether. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the data analyzed in this
chapter represent a fairly short time period in American political history. Only time will tell if the trends in increased polarization found for the period of the late 1980s through the 1990s will continue far into the twenty-first century, or if this period of polarization will instead prove to be a temporary phase within a larger era of party decline.

Another implication of the results in this chapter is that the polarization in Congress does not simply reflect the trends in polarization at the mass level; rather, the polarization in Congress appears to be an amplification of the ideological divide in the mass public. Even if one confines the analysis to party activists or to the most informed citizens, one still finds that the level of polarization in Congress exceeds polarization among the public. Thus, the most naïve view of democratic responsiveness—that is, Congress seen as responding to public opinion and not vice versa—is somewhat difficult to sustain based on these data.

On the other hand, the data are consistent with the expectation that elite polarization contributes to mass-level polarization. In the analysis above, ideological polarization was found to be greater among politically sophisticated partisans than among those less politically aware. This is what we would expect to find if citizens’ self-identifications are in part a function of the cues they receive from political elites. Well educated, informed voters are the most likely to receive these elite cues, and therefore would be the most likely to reflect the polarization found at the congressional level. Thus, the data presented so far are consistent with the theoretical expectations outlined in chapter 3. Of course, the picture at this point is far from complete.

The next stage of my argument involves citizens’ perceptions of important differences between the parties. I hypothesize that the parties’ images among the public
form the link between ideological shifts at the elite level and ideological changes in the mass parties. If the public has not recognized ideological differences between the parties, then it will be difficult to support the assertion that party polarization in Congress has impacted ideology, attitudes, or behaviors at the mass level.

The next step, then, is to examine the data on citizens’ views of the two political parties. Among the survey items of interest are a question asking about respondents’ perceptions of important differences between the parties, and a set of issue scales upon which the respondent locates the parties. Both of these items exhibit trends consistent with increased awareness of party divergence. I turn to these data in the next chapter.
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>53.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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Table 4.1: Mean Thermometer Ratings of the Major Parties, 1964-2000
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>One cool</th>
<th>at 50 degrees</th>
<th>Equal rating</th>
<th>Both at 50</th>
<th>Both warm</th>
<th>Both cool</th>
</tr>
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<td>30.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
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<td>30.1%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30.3%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>43.1%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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</table>

Table 4.2: Classification of Respondents' Feelings Toward the Two Parties
Figure 4.1: Party Identification of Liberals, 1972-2000

Figure 4.2: Party Identification of Moderates
Figure 4.3: Party Identification of Conservatives

Figure 4.4: Correlation of Party Identification and Ideological Self-Identification, 1972-2000
Figure 4.5: Democrats' Ideological Self-Identification, 1972-2000
Figure 4.6: Republicans' Ideological Self-Identification, 1972-2000
Figure 4.7: Difference in Percentage of Republicans and Democrats Identifying as Conservatives, 1972-2000

Figure 4.8: Difference in Mean Ideological Self-Placement of Republicans and Democrats, 1972-2000
Figure 4.9: Ideological Polarization of the Parties-in-the-Electorate, South and Non-South, 1972-2000
Figure 4.10: Difference in mean ideological self-placement of Republicans and Democrats by Education Level on the 7-point Liberal-Conservative Scale (Rep - Dem)
Figure 4.11: Difference in Mean Ideological Self-Placement of Republicans and Democrats by Level of Attention to Public Affairs, 1972-2000
Figure 4.12: Ideological Overlap of the Parties-in-the-Electorate and in Congress, 1972-2000
Figure 4.13: Party Polarization on Issue Scales, 1972-2000
Figure 4.14: Party Polarization on Government Aid to Blacks Scale, Southern and Non-Southern Whites, 1972-2000
Figure 4.15: Party Polarization on Abortion Scale, Southern and Non-Southern Whites, 1980-2000
Figure 4.16: Party Polarization on Abortion Scale by Levels of Activism and Education, 1980-2000
Figure 4.17: Correlation of Feeling Thermometer Ratings for Democratic Party and Republican Party, 1964-2000
Figure 4.18: Polarization Versus Neutrality in Feeling Thermometer Ratings of the Parties, 1964-2000
CHAPTER 5

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PARTIES: THE PUBLIC'S VIEWS

Over the past four decades, the two major political parties have been frequently maligned, both in the popular press and in scholarly writings. George Wallace's famous assessment that not "a dime's worth of difference" exists between the two parties has permeated the American political vernacular, and assertions of "party decline" have become commonplace in political science. There is reason to believe, however, that the onset of party polarization will require a revision of the conventional wisdom. The data I examine in this chapter suggest that an increasing proportion of Americans see meaningful differences between the parties, and that the bulk of these differences are ideological or policy-oriented. I find that the upsurge in the public's perceptions of the parties is strongly related to party polarization in Congress. Moreover, I find that among individuals who perceive important differences between the parties, the impact of ideology and partisanship on political evaluations is greater, all else equal. Thus, perceptions of party differences can form a link between party polarization in Congress and polarization at the mass level.
Perceptions of Important Differences Between the Parties

Over the past five decades, the NES has periodically asked the following question: “Do you think there are any important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for?” In 1952 and 1960, only 50% of respondents saw any important differences between the parties. In 1964 this figure increased to 55%, but this increase in perceived party differences proved temporary. In the 1970s, less than 50% of Americans saw meaningful differences between the parties, and more than 10% answered “Don’t Know” to the NES question. The 1980s and 1990s saw a more durable increase in perceived differences, as the proportion of “yes” responses ranged from 58 percent in 1980 to 66 percent in 2000, remaining at or above the 60 percent level each presidential election year. These data are displayed in Figure 5.1.

The “important differences” data support the characterization of the 1980s and 1990s as an era of increased party polarization. In the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, the average percentage of “yes” responses—those perceiving important differences between the parties—was 48%. In contrast, the average from 1980 through 2000 was 57%. Mayer (1998) writes that, “the 1964 level of partisan polarization, once thought to be quite exceptional, has now become the norm in American politics” (204). In fact, seven of the last ten times the NES asked the “important differences” question, the proportion of respondents perceiving important party differences has exceeded that found

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18 Question wording varied slightly in different years. In 1952, the question was, “Do you think there are any important differences between what the Democratic and Republican parties stand for, or do you think they are about the same?” In 1968, “Do you think there are any important differences between the Republican and Democratic parties?”
in the midst of the famous 1964 campaign in which Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater offered voters “a choice, not an echo.”

I hypothesized earlier that this upward trend in awareness of party differences has occurred in part as a result of the increased party polarization in Congress. As the parties become more distinct ideologically, it becomes easier for individuals to recognize differences. I expect the recognition of party differences to be greatest among the more politically sophisticated citizens—those with higher education, and those paying attention to politics and current affairs. This group is the most likely to pick up ideological and partisan cues from political elites. Figure 5.2 compares respondents with no college education versus those with at least some college. As expected, there is a strong effect of education on recognition of party differences. In each NES survey, those with higher educational attainment were more likely to see important differences between the parties. Over this forty year period, recognition of party differences increased significantly among those with some college education, rising from 57% in 1960 to a high of 78% by 2000. Among those not attending college the increase was far less pronounced, moving from 48% in 1960 to a high of 58% in 1996, before declining slightly to 53% in 2000. For this group, the trend is not statistically significant over the 1960-2000 time period (see Figure 5.2).

Similar patterns appear when we look at respondents’ level of attention to public affairs. Those who follow public affairs more regularly are more likely to detect differences between the parties, as Figure 5.3 shows. The percentage of those in the highest attention category who saw important party differences rose from 61% in 1960 to 82% in 2000. This group was the most aware of the parties’ differences in every year of
the NES data collection. Those who follow politics some of the time also show high levels of awareness of party differences, and an upward trend in the proportion of "yes" responses. The low attention group is by far the least aware of party differences, ranging from 38% in 1960 to a high of 54% in 2000. These results are consistent with the interpretation that external political events, including congressional polarization, are picked up by politically aware citizens, who then use these ideological cues in forming their own political evaluations (see Figure 5.3).

The perceptions of important party differences also vary across levels of political activism. Figure 5.4 displays the trends for party identifiers, voters, and party activists. The percentage of party activists seeing important differences between the two parties is consistently about ten to twenty percentage points higher than the proportion of House voters or party identifiers more generally. The percentage of party activists saying "yes" declined below 70% in the 1970s, but rebounded in the 1980s and 1990s, reaching a high of 88% in both 1996 and 2000. A clear upward trend is also visible for party identifiers and voters. In both these groups, the percentage who saw important party difference in 2000 was about twenty percentage points higher than in 1960 (see Figure 5.4).

The Impact of Party Polarization on Perceptions of Party Differences

So, at least as measured by this survey item, the public has increasingly perceived the parties to have meaningful differences. In the previous chapters, I hypothesized that these perceptions are largely due to the polarization of the parties in Congress. To test this expectation, I examined the relationship between the NES "important differences" variable and two measures of congressional party polarization constructed from Poole
and Rosenthal’s DW-NOMINATE scores. The first such measure is the ideological distance between the parties, as indicated by the difference between mean NOMINATE score of each party’s members in the U.S. House. The second measure is the ideological “overlap” of the parties in the House—that is, the proportion of members who are closer to the opposing party’s ideological center than to the midpoint of their own party. (Each of these measures was discussed earlier in Chapter 2).

I begin by looking at aggregate level data. Figure 5.5 plots the percentage of respondents seeing important differences between the parties as a function of the ideological distance between the parties in Congress. The percentage of “yes” responses to the NES “important differences” question in each survey is plotted on the y-axis. The difference in the parties’ mean DW-NOMINATE scores for the Congress immediately preceding the NES data collection is plotted on the x-axis. As the figure shows, there is a clear positive relationship between the level of ideological polarization in Congress and the perceptions of important party differences. A linear regression trendline is shown in the figure. The Pearson correlation between the two variables is strong and positive ($r = .51, p < .01$), indicating that congressional polarization is related to citizens’ perceptions of differences between the parties (see Figure 5.5).

This relationship grows even stronger when the analysis is confined to those respondents who reported voting in House elections. Among voters, the correlation between aggregated perceptions of important party differences and party polarization in Congress is .67 ($p < .01$). On the other hand, congressional polarization seems to have little impact on the perceptions of the parties among the less attentive public. The relationship between party polarization and the proportion of people seeing important
differences between the parties is much weaker when the analysis focuses only on those respondents with no college education. For this group, the correlation between the aggregate percentage seeing "important differences" and the congressional polarization measure is .195. In contrast, among those respondents with at least some college education, the correlation is more than twice as large (r = .57).

Similar results obtain when we substitute the proportion of ideological overlap of the parties as the measure of congressional polarization. With the overlap measure, smaller values indicate greater polarization; thus we would expect to find a negative relationship between overlap and perceptions of party differences. This is indeed the case, as evinced by the statistically significant, negative correlation between the two variables (r = -.50, p < .01). Again, this relationship is stronger among more attentive segments of the public. Looking only at House voters, we find a strong negative correlation between congressional party overlap and perceptions of party differences (r = -.66, p < .01). Figure 5.6 displays the scatterplot of these data; again, a linear regression trendline is shown to assist in viewing the trend.

Similarly, a strong relationship also exists among those with at least some college education (r = -.50). Among those with less than a college education, on the other hand, the link between congressional party polarization and aggregate perceptions of party differences is much weaker, with a Pearson correlation (r = -.16) less than one-third the magnitude of that found among respondents with higher levels of education. These results suggest, as expected, that the evaluations of the parties by those citizens with low information about politics are the least affected by polarization in Congress. These
citizens are less likely to be aware of the partisan conflict in Washington, and therefore are less likely to receive cues from political elites.

In sum, congressional polarization is related to aggregate perceptions of differences between the parties, at least in this bivariate analysis. However, one might also expect these perceptions to be a function of the ideological positions of the parties’ candidates for President. Indeed, there appears to be a presidential election effect at work in Figure 5.1, as the percentage of “yes” responses was consistently higher in presidential campaign years.

Interestingly, prior research finds that the impact of presidential candidates’ ideology does not match that of congressional polarization. In his study of split-ticket voting over the 1972-1996 period, Kimball (2001) finds a strong, positive relationship between perceptions of important party differences and polarization in Congress, as measured using the distance between the parties’ respective mean DW-NOMINATE scores (the same method used above). However, the Kimball study does not find a parallel relationship between the ideological polarization of the major party presidential candidates and perceptions of differences between the parties. The analysis reveals no statistically significant correlation between the NES “important differences” variable and the ideology of the parties’ presidential candidates, as measured using candidate ideology ratings developed by Zaller and Hunt (Zaller 1999).¹⁹

As a further test for the effect of the presidential candidates, I repeated the correlation analysis as above, but substituted the ideological distance between the two

¹⁹ I attempted to obtain the Zaller/Hunt ideology data in order to replicate and extend the analysis, but I did not receive any response from the authors.
major parties' presidential nominees. The measure of candidate polarization is the
difference between the mean placements of the candidates on the NES 7-point liberal-
conservative scale. The mean for each candidate was calculated using only the segment
of NES respondents who placed both candidates on the scale, and correctly placed the
Democratic nominee to the left of the Republican. While by no means a purely objective
measure, this mean placement does yield a measurement of the ideological differences
between the major party presidential candidates that is free of the bias that could be
injected by a subjective rating of candidates by political observers such as journalists or
historians (e.g., Rosenstone 1983).

My results confirmed those obtained by Kimball. The relationship of perceptions
of party differences to presidential candidate polarization is substantially weaker than
their relationship to congressional polarization. For the full NES sample, the correlation
is .33 (p = .47), and among House voters the correlation is .27 (p = .59)—in both cases
well below the magnitude found above using polarization in Congress, and not
statistically significant. Furthermore, if we repeat the analysis of congressional
polarization shown above in Figures 5.5 and 5.6 using only presidential election years,
the relationship between congressional polarization and perceptions of important party
differences is even stronger than before: the correlation reaches .89 (p = .008).

The impact of congressional polarization persists when both the congressional and
presidential candidate variables are included in the analysis. The partial correlation of the
survey-based presidential candidate polarization variable with the important differences
measure, controlling for congressional polarization, is just .01 (p = .98). In contrast, the
partial correlation for the congressional polarization variable, controlling for the
polarization of the major party presidential candidates, is an impressive .87 \( (p = .02) \). As another illustration, I estimated a simple OLS regression model with the aggregate measures of elite polarization as independent variables and the yearly proportion seeing important differences as the dependent variable. The congressional polarization variable remains a statistically significant and potent predictor, while the presidential candidate polarization measure does not approach statistical significance. Repeating these analyses and substituting party overlap as the measure of congressional polarization does not change the substantive findings. The magnitude of the correlation between the overlap variable and perceptions of important differences between the parties in presidential years is slightly larger \( (r = -.905) \), and the regression results are virtually identical across the two measures. Again, the congressional polarization variable remains statistically significant \( (p = .02) \), while the presidential candidate ideology measure does not \( (p = .845) \). Thus it appears that perceptions of important differences are more strongly related to polarization in Congress than to polarization of the parties’ presidential candidates.

However, several caveats are in order. First, it must be noted that the analysis is based on a small number of cases—the eight election years in which the NES asked both the “important differences” question and asked respondents to place presidential candidates on the ideology scale—so the findings must be viewed with caution. Moreover, the presence of this aggregate-level relationship does not guarantee a similar relationship at the individual level. Even putting these issues of statistical inference aside, the finding that presidential candidate ideology plays an insignificant role in shaping people’s perceptions of party differences is puzzling. One might expect that presidential candidates, because of their higher profile, would actually be more salient in
the minds of voters, and therefore have a greater impact than congressional activity. The analyses above found just the opposite result. I can only speculate as to what might cause such a relationship to exist. It is possible that congressional-level activity closely reflects the “true” position of each political party, while the party’s choice for a presidential nominee may reflect the desire to choose an appealing candidate who can run as a moderate in the general election. Thus the presidential candidates may not always offer citizens a particularly strong cue as to what areas of difference exist between the parties. This is hardly a satisfying explanation, but given the lack of an objective indicator of presidential candidate ideology (analogous to NOMINATE scores for members of Congress), it is difficult to explore more thoroughly the impact of presidential candidates on perceptions of their respective parties.

Having examined the aggregate-level relationship between perceptions of important party differences and party polarization in Congress, I turn next to an individual-level analysis. To explore the impact of congressional polarization at the individual level, I estimated a multivariate model of individuals’ perceptions of party differences using pooled data from the NES. The dependent variable is the important differences measure, coded 1 if the respondent saw differences, and 0 otherwise. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, I use logit regression to estimate the model. The independent variables include two indicators of sophistication that were previewed above in bivariate analysis. These are educational attainment (measured here in six categories),

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20 I believe that grouping “Don’t Know” responses with “No” responses makes more sense theoretically than setting these cases to missing, since in both instances the respondent did not recognize important party differences. The substantive results of the model are unchanged when “Don’t Know” responses are dropped from the analysis.
and attention paid to public affairs (three categories, as above). The model also includes some standard demographic controls for the respondent’s age, gender (coded 1 for female), race (coded 1 for white), and region of residence (coded 1 for South, 0 otherwise). To capture the effects of party identification, I fold the traditional seven-point scale to produce a four-point scale that ranges from pure independence to strong partisanship. Likewise, I fold the seven-point liberal-conservative ideology scale, resulting in a four-point measure ranging from moderate to extremely liberal or conservative. Finally, as in previous chapters, I measure congressional polarization as the difference between the mean DW-NOMINATE score for Republicans and the mean for Democrats in each Congress directly preceding the year of the NES survey.\footnote{The results presented below also hold if party overlap is substituted as the measure of congressional polarization.}

Incorporating the effects of congressional polarization into this individual-level model presents some methodological challenges. Since the data are pooled from various years, we must be concerned about observations from the same year having correlated errors, or the errors in some years being larger than in others. A standard practice to deal with this problem is to include dummy variables representing the years in the analysis (Stimson 1985). However, doing so in this instance would result in perfect collinearity with the congressional polarization variable, which takes on the same value for each respondent in a given year. It has been shown that logit estimates are consistent in these types of pooled models (Beck and Tucker 1996; Greene 1997); the remaining problem is that the standard errors are inaccurate. To deal with this heteroskedasticity problem, I
estimate robust standard errors using the standard approach developed by Huber (1967; see also White 1980). The results of the model are shown in Table 5.1.

The findings largely comport with theoretical expectations. Both educational attainment and attention to public affairs are positively related to perceiving important differences between the parties, as they were in the bivariate setting. Strength of partisanship and ideological extremity are also statistically significant predictors, with the more extreme respondents being more likely to perceive distinctions between the parties, all else equal. The statistically significant, negative coefficients for gender and age indicate that women and older respondents were less likely to say that there were important differences. These effects were not anticipated, but suggest interesting possibilities for future analysis. In particular, there may be differences in the way women and men evaluate the parties, and determine what constitute "important" differences. This would be a question worth exploring further, but it falls outside the scope of this study. Of more importance for the analysis here are the results with respect to party polarization in Congress. As hypothesized, the congressional polarization measure is statistically significant. Polarization in Congress is positively related to perceptions of important differences between the parties, even in this multivariate setting.

In sum, the evidence reported in this section shows that the public has come to see the parties as more distinct ideologically, and suggests that this perception is due in large part to the partisan polarization in Congress. But does this increased awareness of party differences make any difference when it comes to political behavior and attitudes? I address that question next.
Does Perceiving Party Differences Matter?

The data presented in the chapter thus far suggest that the American public has increasingly come to see important differences between the parties on issues and ideology. However, it might be objected that this trend is of little consequence if increased perceptions of party divergence do not impact other evaluations or behaviors. Perhaps citizens recognize that the parties differ, but still view both parties as incapable of solving problems, or as unnecessary in the contemporary political system.

This view is articulated by Martin Wattenberg (1996), perhaps the most widely cited defender of the “party decline” thesis. Wattenberg acknowledges the upward trend in the perception of important party differences, but argues that this “does not necessarily imply any revitalization of partisanship. The fact that citizens perceive differences between the parties does not make those differences relevant to them” (1996, 144). The problem faced by the parties, Wattenberg argues, “has not been that fewer people see the policy differences between them. Rather, it has been the increasing failure to persuade them that one party will do a better job on whatever problem they consider to be most important” (1996, 145). As evidence, Wattenberg cites a decline in the proportion of respondents who thought that either party would do a good job handling important problems facing the country. This decline may indicate an erosion of confidence in the problem-solving ability of parties, but does it imply that the relevance of party identification has declined? When asked about the usefulness of political parties, people do express doubts. Yet, an individual’s party identification could still have an impact on political attitudes and behaviors.
A recent study of vote choice (Bartels 2000) indicates that this is the case. In a comprehensive analysis of NES data, Larry Bartels finds that the influence of partisanship on vote choice has actually increased over the past three decades. In a set of probit analyses, the impact of party identification on presidential vote choice was found to have increased in each of the last six elections, reaching its highest point in 1996, at a level nearly 80% higher than in 1972. The impact of partisanship on congressional vote choice also increased in recent elections, although to a lesser extent than was the case at the presidential level. Bartels concludes that "a significant revision of the conventional wisdom of political scientists, journalists, and other observers regarding 'partisan decline' in the American electorate seems to be long overdue" (2000, 45).

This evidence is compelling, but it does not directly address the issue of whether perceptions of party differences really matter. For the theoretical framework I put forth in Chapter 3, this is an important point. I hypothesized that the increased perception of party differences forms a link between party polarization at the elite level and the polarization of the mass parties. As the parties-in-government polarize, it becomes easier for individuals to see ideological differences between the parties, and therefore, I argue, partisanship and ideology will have increased weight in citizens' political evaluations.

To test this hypothesis, I estimated a logit model of major party vote choice in contested House elections. The dependent variable is the respondent's reported vote choice, coded 1 for the Democratic candidate and 0 for the Republican candidate. The independent variables include an array of standard demographic correlates of the vote (gender, age, educational attainment, income, race, region), as well as the seven-point party identification scale (1=strong Democrat, 7=strong Republican) and the seven-point
liberal-conservative ideology scale (1=extremely liberal, 7=extremely conservative).

Also included is a variable identifying whether an incumbent is present in the race. This measure is coded 1 if a Democratic incumbent is running, -1 if a Republican incumbent is running, and 0 for open seats.

Of particular interest in this analysis is the "important differences" variable. To test the hypothesis that perception of party differences will lead to a greater impact for ideology and partisanship, I include two multiplicative terms that interact the important differences measure (a dichotomous variable coded 1 if respondent sees important differences and 0 otherwise) with ideology and with partisanship. If perceiving differences between the parties leads to a greater impact for ideology and partisanship, then the interaction terms should be negative and statistically significant. In addition, I hypothesize that the impact of incumbency may be weakened as perceptions of party differences rise and the weight placed on party and ideology increases. To test this additional hypothesis, I include a third multiplicative term that interacts incumbency with the perception of important party differences.

Finally, as discussed above, there is cause to be concerned about correlation in the errors since the data are pooled from across multiple study years. To account for this possibility, dummy variables representing the year of the NES survey are included in the model (Stimson 1985). As recommended by Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998), I conducted a log-likelihood ratio test to determine if the presence of the dummy variables improves the model performance. The chi-square value was statistically significant ($\chi^2=30.17$, 109
df=9), indicating that the yearly dummy variables are an appropriate addition to the model. The results of the logit analysis are presented in Table 5.2.\(^\text{22}\)

The statistically significant predictors in the model include some of the usual suspects: party identification, ideology, income, and race all affect the probability of voting Democratic in expected ways. Of more concern for the analysis here, however, are the important differences variable and the interaction terms with ideology, party, and incumbency. As hypothesized, recognizing important differences between the parties enhances the effect of ideology and party identification on the vote. The interaction terms for these two variables are statistically significant, indicating that the perception of party differences enabled ideology and partisanship to have a greater impact on vote choice. Transforming the logit coefficients to odds ratios, one finds that a standard deviation increase on the ideology variable, all else constant, lowers the odds of voting Democratic by 27% when the voter perceives no important differences between the parties. If the voter does perceive meaningful differences between the parties, however, then the same change in ideology decreases the odds of a Democratic vote by 49%. The effect for partisanship is somewhat less potent than for ideology. A standard deviation increase on the party identification variable decreases the odds of voting for the Democrat by 67% when no important differences between the parties are recognized, but decreases the odds by 80% when the voter sees important party differences. On the other

\(^{22}\) Following Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998), I do not present the coefficients for these yearly dummy variables in the table.
hand, the interaction term for incumbency is not statistically significant. It appears that the effects of incumbency remain powerful regardless of the perception of differences between the parties.

Summary

The evidence reviewed in this chapter suggests that the attentive public perceives the movement of the parties away from each other, and that this increased awareness of party dissimilarity is due in large part to polarization of the parties in Congress. Over the past three decades survey respondents have increasingly said that there are important differences in what the parties stand for. Awareness of party differences is strongly correlated with indicators of party polarization in Congress. Interestingly, awareness of party divergence is not correlated with the ideological distance between the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates. These aggregate results should be treated with caution, however, due to the small number of time points available for analysis. Only the passage of time will enable researchers to reach more definitive conclusions based on aggregate-level data.

The relationship between congressional polarization and perceptions of party differences also holds at the individual level, controlling for other factors such as education, attention to public affairs, and ideological and partisan self-identifications. Again, the nature of the available data poses analytical challenges that force caution in drawing authoritative conclusions. Nonetheless, I would classify these preliminary results as highly suggestive.
Finally, I addressed the question of whether a respondent’s perception of “important differences” between the parties really matters politically. I hypothesized that ideology and party identification will have a greater impact on an individual’s political attitudes and behaviors when he or she recognizes meaningful policy distinctions between the parties. The results from a logit model of vote choice in House elections supported the hypothesis, as evidenced by statistically significant interactions of perception of party differences with party identification and with ideology. I also hypothesized that the impact of incumbency could be diminished by the perception of party differences, but this additional hypothesis was not supported by the findings. Thus, it appears that when the parties polarize, ideology and partisanship weigh more heavily in the voter’s decision calculus, but the impact of incumbency remains powerful.

In the next chapter I continue investigating how party polarization affects citizens’ evaluations of members of Congress by turning the focus to incumbents. The findings discussed above suggest that incumbents are not necessarily disadvantaged by party polarization. However, I find evidence that the polarization of national politics has resulted in shifts in the bases of citizens’ evaluations of their representatives. Incumbents can remain safe, but perhaps by somewhat different means than a generation ago.
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<th>p-value</th>
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<td>Attention to Politics</td>
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<td>Ideological Extremity</td>
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<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength of Partisanship</td>
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<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polarization in Congress</td>
<td>1.206</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 10,706
Pct. correctly predicted: 66%
P.R.E. = .20
Source: NES data
Notes: entries are logit coefficients, robust standard errors

Table 5.1: Logit Model of Perceptions of Important Party Differences
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Coefficient</th>
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<td>Ideology x Imp. Diff.</td>
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<td>0.004</td>
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<td>Party ID x Imp. Diff.</td>
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N = 5657
Pct. Correctly predicted: 80%
P.R.E. = .59
Source: NES data
Notes: entries are logit coefficients, std. errors; yearly dummy variables included but not shown in table

Table 5.2: Logit Model of House Vote
Figure 5.1: Perceptions of "Important Differences in what the Republicans and Democrats Stand For" 1960-2000
Figure 5.2: Perception of Important Differences in What the Parties Stand For By Educational Attainment, 1960-2000
Figure 5.3: Perceptions of Important Differences Between the Parties by Level of Attention Paid to Public Affairs
Figure 5.4: Partisans' Perceptions of Important Differences in What the Parties Stand For, 1960-2000
Figure 5.5: Percent Seeing Important Differences between the Parties by Level of Ideological Polarization in the U.S. House, 1960-1998
Figure 5.6: Percent of House Voters Seeing Important Differences between Parties by Level of Ideological Overlap between the Parties in the U.S. House, 1960-1998
CHAPTER 6

PARTY POLARIZATION AND THE PUBLIC'S VIEWS OF MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

The evidence presented in this dissertation thus far shows that the ideological distance between the parties in Congress has grown, that the public has increasingly come to see the parties as distinct in terms of what they stand for, and that the mass coalitions of the two parties have polarized along ideological lines. While the polarization at the mass level has not matched the divisions in Congress, the evidence is clear: party politics has become more polarized. In this chapter I take up the following question: How might this highly polarized political environment shape the way citizens view Congress and its members?

The results in the preceding chapter indicate that incumbents maintain an enormous electoral advantage, even when the parties are perceived to be ideologically divergent. However, it may be the case that polarization serves to alter the bases of individuals' evaluations of incumbents by highlighting policy differences that tap increasingly salient ideological concerns. If ideology and party become more important to constituents, then we might also wonder whether other factors will lose some of their potency in shaping constituents' evaluations of their representatives. Past research has identified the importance of the "personal vote" in contributing to the electoral safety of
congressional incumbents (Fiorina 1977; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1984, 1987). Members of Congress can reap electoral benefits from providing good service to constituents, as well as by delivering "pork" to the district. By catering to the particular needs and wants of the district, an incumbent can help insulate herself from national-level trends, such as a lopsided win by one party's presidential candidate, and can maintain a fair amount of independence from the control of her party's leadership in Congress (Fiorina 1977; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1984, 1987). This source of electoral safety, however, depends in part on the importance of district-level service to voters back home. Here is where party polarization re-enters the picture. If the vote calculus is revised to weigh ideology and partisanship more heavily, then the impact of service to the district may be diminished.

The expectation to be explored, then, is the following: if partisan conflict is on display, then citizens are more likely to evaluate Congress and its individual members in light of party identification and ideology, and less on the basis of service to the district. There appears to be mounting evidence supporting the first portion of this hypothesis. Approval ratings of Congress now have strongly partisan and ideological components. After the transition to Republican control of Congress in 1994, Republican identifiers were the most likely to approve of the job Congress was doing. Yet this same group was the most critical of Congress's job performance when the Democrats were in the majority. In the 1994 NES study, just 15% of strong Republicans approved of the job Congress was doing, while a staggering 86% disapproved. By contrast, in 1996 strong Republicans registered 68% approval and 33% disapproval of Congress. Similarly, just 24% of conservatives approved of the job the Democratically controlled Congress was
doing in 1994, but by 1996 the Congress, under Republican leadership, received the approval of 59% of conservatives.

In addition, congressional approval has been shown to have a significant impact on congressional vote choice, with those who approved of Congress being more likely to vote for the candidate of the majority party in 1996 (Patterson and Monson 1999). The party in the majority therefore has an electoral incentive to be concerned with maintaining a reasonable job approval rating for Congress. Moreover, we would expect members’ electoral fortunes to be increasingly tied to their respective party’s record, and to the voters’ evaluations of Congress more generally. Thus the success of the congressional party as a whole ought to be important to individual members, and this provides further impetus for party unity when it comes time to vote. In this way the relationship between congressional party polarization and public opinion can be reciprocal in nature.

Thus we have emerging a picture of a polarized Congress that is increasingly being evaluated through the lenses of party identification and ideology. In this polarized environment, it is reasonable to expect that citizens are increasingly more concerned with having a representative who agrees with them. Voters’ interest in having someone who can provide benefits to the district in terms of service or pork may therefore decline relative to ideological concerns.

Summary of Theory and Statement of Hypotheses

I hypothesize that polarization in Congress leads to clearer differences between the parties, and therefore leads voters to evaluate Congress and its members more in
terms of ideology than they have done in the past. Members of Congress will increasingly be seen in terms of what they stand for ideologically rather than what they bring to the district in terms of constituent service. The party leaders in Congress incorporate information about the extent of polarization in the mass public into their calculations as they seek to build a party record for the next election. The incentive for individual members to join with their party's leaders in paying attention to public opinion (or at least to vote with the party) is derived from the realization that their electoral prospects are in part connected to their party's record, and perhaps even to approval of Congress as a whole—especially for members in the majority party. Thus there can be a reciprocal aspect to the relationship between congressional-level and mass-level polarization.

The hypotheses to be tested in this chapter are the following:

1) As party polarization increases, constituents will increasingly see their members of Congress in terms of what they stand for ideologically rather than what they bring to the district in terms of constituent service.

2) As party polarization increases, the vote for incumbent members of Congress will increasingly be tied to ideology and partisanship, and less to constituency service.

How Constituents View of Members of Congress

The first hypothesis to be tested is that members will increasingly be viewed more in terms of their ideological positions, and less in terms of their constituency service. This expectation can be tested using NES data. From 1978 through 1994, the NES has included questions asking people if they have contacted their representatives, and the
reasons for that contact. These items assess the extent to which people have contacted their members of Congress for help or information versus contacting them to express an opinion, and the degree to which they think their representative would be helpful if contacted. The proportion of NES respondents who reported contacting their incumbent member of Congress remained steady at about 14%. However, as Figure 6.1 shows, the purpose of these contacts evolved over this period. The percentage of contacts made in order to seek help declined from a high of 58% in 1980 to just 35% in 1994. In sharp contrast, the percentage of contacts made for the purpose of expressing an opinion rose dramatically from a low of 35% in 1980 to a high of 57% in 1994. The proportion of contacts seeking information remained fairly stable, increasing slightly from 36% in 1978 to 42% in 1984 before dropping back to 34% in 1994 (see Figure 6.1).

These results are consistent with the expectation that party polarization shifts the bases of citizens’ evaluation of members of Congress toward the ideological and away from constituent service. Further evidence of this is found in the data displayed in Figure 6.2. The NES sequence of questions also asked respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with their representative’s response to their inquiry. Over the 1978 to 1994 period, the proportion answering “very satisfied” declined from 66% to 56%, and remained below 60% in the 1990s. Respondents were also asked how helpful they

23 The question wording for these NES items was as follows: “Have you (or anyone in your family living here) ever contacted <U.S. House incumbent> or anyone in his/her office?” IF YES, “Was it to express an opinion?” “Was it to seek information?” “Was it to seek help on a problem?”

24 The question wording for these NES items was as follows: “How satisfied were you with the response you received from <U.S. House incumbent>? Were you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?” “If you had (another/a) problem that <U.S. House incumbent> could do something about, do you think (he/she) would be very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not very helpful?” “Do you happen to remember anything special that <running U.S. House incumbent> has done for his/her district or for the people of his/her district while s/he has been in Congress?”
thought their member of Congress would be if he or she were presented with another problem by the constituent. As Figure 6.2 shows, the proportion who answered “very helpful” declined steadily from a high of 36% in 1978 to a low of 24% in 1994. The final item in the NES sequence asked respondents if they recalled the incumbent doing anything special for the district. Unlike the other constituency service measures, no clear trend emerges on this item (see Figure 6.2).

In sum, the data reviewed thus far are consistent with the notion that citizens in an era of polarization are increasingly likely to see their incumbent representative in terms of what he or she stands for ideologically. When constituents contact their representatives, the reason is more and more likely to be that they want to express an opinion, and less likely to be that they are seeking help. Taken together, these trends “suggest that the period of the congressional ombudsman may be transient” (Ferejohn 1998).

Determinants of the Incumbent Vote

To further examine the impact of party polarization on citizens’ evaluations of Congress and its members, I turn next to a test of hypothesis #2 using the NES data on vote choice. I split the sample by year and estimated logit models of the House vote (coded 1 if the respondent voted for the incumbent, 0 if she voted for the challenger, and excluding open-seat races) to assess the changing impact of various independent variables over the period of polarization, including ideology, partisanship, congressional job approval and the incumbent’s service to the district. The measure of ideology in these models is the distance on the 7-point liberal-conservative scale from the
The party variable is based on the standard NES party identification scale folded to measure strength of partisanship. Such a measure would typically range from 0 (pure independent) to 3 (strong partisan). For purposes of the vote choice models, this variable has been recoded so that positive values indicate that the respondent shares the same party affiliation as the incumbent. Thus the measure can range from -3 (strong partisan of opposing party) to 3 (strong partisan of same party as incumbent). The congressional job approval variable is based on the standard NES question that has been asked since 1980: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress has been handling its job?” This variable is coded 1 if the respondent approved of congressional job performance, and 0 if she disapproved. The constituency service variable was previewed earlier; it is coded 1 if the respondent recalls the incumbent doing something special for the district and 0 otherwise. This measure has proven to be an effective indicator in previous studies of constituency service (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1984, 1987). In addition to these key variables, I include controls for several standard demographic characteristics: gender (female=1), race (white=1, non-white=0), education (six categories), and income (five categories). It should be noted that because some of the variables were not included in

25 It is possible that there are projection effects associated with the use of the placement of the incumbent House candidate on the 7-point liberal-conservative scale. That is, respondents may locate a candidate whom they like (perhaps for other reasons) close to themselves. To guard against this possibility, I also ran the models using the distance from the respondent to the mean placement (among all House voters) of the incumbent’s party on the liberal-conservative scale in the given year. The substantive results were similar, so the findings based on the simpler, more straightforward measure of ideological distance are reported in the text and tables.

26 These models could certainly include additional predictors, but the purpose of these logit estimations is not to develop a comprehensive model of the congressional vote that includes all potentially significant variables. Rather, the focus here is to examine the specific relationships discussed above while controlling for some of the usual correlates of the vote. For reviews of approaches to modeling the congressional vote, see Niemi and Weisberg 1993a, chapter 15 and 1993b, chapter 13.
every year of the NES time series, it is only possible to estimate models for six different years between 1980 and 2000.

The results of these models are presented in Table 6.1. As discussed above, the theoretical expectation is that the importance of ideology as a predictor of the vote will grow as the parties polarize, while the relative importance of constituency service will decline. We would also expect partisanship to continue to exert a strong influence on vote choice, particularly in light of the findings by Bartels (2000). Considerable support for these hypotheses is found in the logit results. The impact of party identification remains strong throughout the time period, as evidenced by the statistically significant, positive coefficient in each of the seven models. The ideology variable is statistically significant in the 1980 model, but does not attain significance in the models for 1982, 1986, or 1990. The ideology measure re-emerges as a statistically significant predictor of voting for the incumbent candidate in the 1994 and 2000 models. This is consistent with the expectation that ideology will play an important role in individuals' evaluations of members of Congress in a highly polarized political environment.

The results with respect to constituency service also conform to the theoretical expectations presented above. In the first four models, the "done something special" variable is a statistically significant predictor of vote for the incumbent. However, in 1994 and 2000 this service measure does not attain statistical significance. At the same time, ideological distance achieves significance. These results support the expectation that in an ideologically polarized partisan environment, voters increasingly evaluate their representatives in terms of ideology rather than in terms of service to the district. In his study of President Clinton's dealings with the 104th and 105th Congresses on social
policy, John Ferejohn reaches a similar conclusion: "It is becoming more difficult for members to insulate themselves from national tides by providing services to the district.... As a consequence, members are coming to see their fates as more bound up with issues and how their parties are doing nationally" (1998, 76).

Summary

To be sure, the results presented in this section must be classified as preliminary. Although the data have not forced a rejection of the hypotheses presented above, it is too soon to state that the effects of polarization are fully understood, or to confidently predict what will happen in future electoral cycles. We have a relatively small set of time points with which to work (in part because there are several years in which the NES unfortunately did not ask some of the questions relevant to this study), and this restricts the kinds of analyses that can be undertaken. To gauge the impact of polarization more precisely, a more extensive set of data would be required. Nevertheless, I believe the results are too suggestive to completely discount. While the evidence is circumstantial, the preponderance of the data reviewed supports the notion that party polarization has altered the way in which citizens view Congress and its members. The NES data show a trend away from the view of the representative as "ombudsman" and toward a more ideologically oriented view, as constituents seek to express opinions more often than they seek assistance when contacting their members of Congress. In addition, the models of vote choice discussed above lend support to the hypothesis that the electoral fates of incumbents are increasingly tied to party and ideology, and less to constituent service.
The findings are also consistent with a theme running through this study—elite-level polarization impacts attitudes at the mass level. However, the possibility of a reciprocal component to this elite-mass relationship is also compatible with these results. Incumbents facing an increasingly polarized electorate need to respond accordingly. The reelection motive has long been recognized as a strong incentive that shapes the actions of incumbent members (Mayhew 1974). If voters are increasingly choosing based on party labels and ideology, then members may want to re-think a strategy of independence from the congressional party leadership. But, when the parties in Congress polarize, this in turn affects the perceptions of the parties, and the attitudes of party identifiers. So, who is leading whom? In the next chapter, I turn to this question.
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<th>p-value</th>
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<th>S.E.</th>
<th>p-value</th>
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<td>0.557</td>
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<td>0.723</td>
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<td>1.854</td>
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% correctly predicted: 77% 82% 85%
\[ n = 466 \quad n = 389 \quad n = 608 \]

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<td>0.323</td>
<td>0.257</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>0.276</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>-0.033</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>0.882</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.108</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>0.055</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td>0.647</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (white)</td>
<td>-0.795</td>
<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.173</td>
<td>-0.684</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.679</td>
<td>0.322</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>0.621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female)</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.292</td>
<td>0.599</td>
<td>-0.230</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.736</td>
<td>0.395</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td>0.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.436</td>
<td>0.869</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>2.478</td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>1.908</td>
<td>0.611</td>
<td>0.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% correctly predicted: 86% 81% 85%
\[ n = 473 \quad n = 586 \quad n = 484 \]

Notes: Entries are logit coefficients, standard errors. Source: NES cumulative file, 2000 election study.

Table 6.1: Logit Models of Vote for House Incumbent
Figure 6.1: Constituents' Reasons for Contacting Incumbent House Member
Figure 6.2: Constituents' Satisfaction with Service of Incumbent House Member
CHAPTER 7

THE CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONGRESSIONAL POLARIZATION AND PUBLIC ATTITUDES

The preceding chapters have shown evidence of party polarization at the congressional level and mass level, and have suggested some consequences of this ideological divergence for citizens' evaluations of members of Congress. Much of the analysis has provided clues to the nature of the causal relationship between elite-level and mass-level polarization, most of which have pointed to congressional polarization as the cause and mass polarization as the effect. However, as discussed in chapter 3, there are theoretical reasons to expect elite polarization to be in part a function of mass polarization, or to expect a reciprocal relationship between the two.

In this chapter I confront the question of causality between mass-level and elite-level party polarization. I begin by re-examining the possible causes of polarization in Congress, and testing for the impact of public opinion on elite polarization. I then turn the analysis back to the mass level, and model mass party polarization as a function of elite-level ideology. In all model specifications, the causal force from elites to masses is clearly greater than from mass to elites, consistent with the hypotheses advanced in chapter 3. Having addressed the issue of causality between elites and masses, I take another look at mass polarization in an attempt to sort out the various processes of party change that are at work in the electorate. Contrary to previous research, I find that in the
majority of cases when party identification and ideology become more consistent it is ideology that adjusts to partisanship, rather than vice versa. The implications of the findings for normative political theory as well as for empirical political science research are discussed at the end of the chapter.

Who Leads Whom?: Assessing the Direction of Causality

Theoretical Expectations

Much of the evidence reviewed in the preceding chapters has pointed to the impact of congressional polarization on public opinion and political behavior. That is not to say, however, that the polarization at the mass level could not affect the behavior of members of Congress. On the contrary, previous research on Congress would lead to the expectation that members pay attention to their constituents as a means to achieve the goal of reelection. This view was most forcefully stated by David Mayhew (1974), and his emphasis on the "electoral connection" has permeated the theoretical literature on Congress for the past three decades. In two recent studies of congressional party polarization, Gary Jacobson (2000a, 2000b) argues that the electoral connection was the basis of partisan polarization in Congress. Jacobson cites trends in the NES data (similar to those in the figures in chapter 4) showing ideological divergence between the two parties' electoral constituencies. He argues that the polarization in Congress and among voters did not result in a larger distance between voters and their preferred candidates; instead, Jacobson finds that voters in the 1990s were just as close to their preferred congressional candidates as were voters in the 1970s. However, the distance between the average voter and the candidate she voted against did grow over this time period.
Members grew more distant from their opposing voters, but not from their supporters. Thus, members of Congress had little to lose by moving toward ideological extremes.

While this argument is compelling, it fails to resolve the "chicken or egg" question of causality between elite and mass polarization (as Jacobson acknowledges). To explore this relationship further, one needs to allow for causality to flow both from elites to masses, and from masses to elites. My approach will be to model congressional party ideology as a function of mass party ideology, and then to model mass party ideology as a function of congressional party ideology. The hypothesis, as stated in chapter 3, is that the impact of past values of elite-level polarization on mass party polarization will be greater than the effect from masses to elites, but that this responsiveness component will exist.

Analysis of Elite-Level and Mass-Level Polarization

For this analysis I again employ the data sets used in previous chapters: DW-NOMINATE scores at the congressional level, and NES data at the mass level. The measure of polarization in Congress is again the difference between the mean score for Republicans in the House and the mean score for Democrats. The measure at the mass level is analogous, using the difference in party means on the seven-point liberal-conservative ideology scale in each NES election-year study. While providing valid measures of polarization, these data do have limitations when it comes to time series analysis. The primary cause for concern is the relatively small number of data points in

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27 As discussed in chapter 2, DW-NOMINATE scores are the result of a dynamic scaling procedure and are designed to be comparable across time. Using these scores permits direct comparisons across Congresses. For more detail on the computation and use of these scores, see Poole and Rosenthal (1997).
the time series, which runs from 1972 (the first year the NES asked the ideology question) to 1998 (the end of the 105th Congress, the last for which full DW-NOMINATE scores are available). The NOMINATE data are available for each U.S. Congress going back to the start of the Republic, but there is no analogous measure available for mass partisans until the NES studies of the 1970s. Another potential problem is that the unit of aggregation is two years. This may obscure some trends that would emerge if the series was composed of yearly or quarterly data, for example. Given these caveats, the following results should be interpreted with some caution.

Moreover, even with extensive sets of data, there are still methodological challenges that face an analyst who is interested in assessing causality between two series. There are multiple methods for determining the causal ordering of series (see Hamilton 1994; Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1998; Enders 1996). Among the most straightforward of these approaches is to estimate a set of autoregressive OLS models, in which the present values of the dependent variable are regressed on lagged values of the dependent variable as well as other independent variables. To determine the causal relationship between two series, X and Y, we can model current values of X as a function of prior values of Y and prior values of X, and then separately model Y as a function of prior values of X and prior values of Y. For each potential causal ordering—X→Y and Y→X—one can conduct an F-test to determine the "Granger causality" between the variables. Freeman (1983) explains Granger causality as "the idea that a variable X 'causes' another variable Y, if by incorporating the past history of X one can improve a prediction of Y over a prediction based solely on the history of Y alone" (327-28). Put differently, "Granger causality reflects the extent to which the lag process in one variable
explains the current values of another variable” (Cromwell, Hannan, Labys, and Terraza 1994, 33). The null hypothesis to be tested is that X does not Granger-cause Y. If the $F$-statistic is greater than the critical value, we can reject the null and conclude that lagged values of X do significantly explain variation in Y.

In the present context, the most important hypotheses to be tested involve the Granger causality among congressional and mass level variables. Several distinct outcomes are possible: 1) ideological polarization in the mass public Granger-causes polarization in Congress; 2) polarization in Congress Granger-causes mass polarization; 3) there is reciprocal (bilateral) causation; 4) no Granger causality exists; that is, the two series are independent.

One concern related to using this approach is that because of the small number of data points available, it is difficult to estimate a model with a large number of lags—there are simply not enough degrees of freedom. This may not be a critical problem in the present analysis, however. It is unlikely that citizens' memories of congressional actions would extend back much beyond one or two terms, and it is also unlikely that members of Congress would be responding to public opinion from more than a year or two ago. Thus, intuitively it seems that one would not expect to need a large number of lags in autoregressive models of party polarization.

To assess the causality between mass- and elite-level polarization, I estimated two sets of autoregressive models using OLS. For the first set of models, the dependent variable is mass party polarization. In the second set of regressions, the dependent variable is congressional polarization. The independent variables in both models are the
lagged value of mass polarization and the lagged value of congressional polarization.\textsuperscript{28} The results of these estimations are shown in Table 7.1.

Consistent with theoretical expectations, the congressional polarization variable was a statistically significant predictor of mass polarization. This is in keeping with the evidence developed in previous chapters of a causal relationship from elite-level polarization to mass polarization. In contrast, mass polarization was not statistically significant in the equation predicting polarization in Congress. While one might have expected that higher levels of mass polarization would lead to increased congressional polarization, this was not the case using this simple operationalization.

To fully assess the causal relationship between the two time series, however, we need to conduct an $F$-test for Granger causality. First, let us consider the mass polarization equation. To test whether congressional polarization Granger-causes mass polarization, I ran a separate regression excluding the congressional polarization variable. The sum of squares from this restricted equation can then be compared with the sum of squares from the unrestricted model, and an $F$ statistic can be computed.\textsuperscript{29} The null hypothesis is that the coefficient for the lagged congressional polarization term is not statistically different from zero. If the $F$ statistic exceeds the critical value, then we can reject the null hypothesis and infer that the congressional polarization variable belongs in

\textsuperscript{28} I also estimated equations with multiple lags of each variable, but I chose not to include these terms in the final models. In each of the models presented in Tables 7.1 through 7.5, bloc $F$-tests showed that the addition of lags to the equation did not improve the model's performance. Moreover, using multiple lags eats up an already scarce supply of degrees of freedom. Given the statistical evidence, and the lack of theoretical reasons to think a large number of lags would be required, I opted for the more parsimonious models with a single lag.

\textsuperscript{29} The formula is: $F = (n-k)(\text{RSS}_R - \text{RSS}_{UR}) / m(\text{RSS}_{UR})$, where $\text{RSS}_R$ and $\text{RSS}_{UR}$ are the residual sums of squares in the restricted and unrestricted regressions, respectively; $k$ is the number of parameters estimated in the unrestricted regression; $m$ is the number of lagged terms in the regression; and $n$ is the number of observations. The statistic is distributed as $F$ with df = $(m, n-k)$ (Gujarati 1995, 621).
the model. In this case, the $F$ statistic exceeds the critical value ($F = 5.31, p = .04$), so we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that congressional polarization Granger-causes mass polarization.\textsuperscript{30}

The second $F$ test examines the causality from mass polarization to elite polarization. Here the restricted equation excludes the mass-level variables, and regresses congressional polarization only on its past values. When the restricted and unrestricted sums of squares are compared, the resulting $F$ statistic does not reach statistical significance ($F = 1.44, p = .25$). So, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that mass polarization does not Granger-cause congressional polarization.

Thus, the results of the autoregressive models indicate unilateral causality from elite-level polarization to mass polarization. Prior ideological divisions in Congress predict polarization in the mass parties, but not vice versa. However, it should be noted that the polarization measures combine the ideological positions of Democrats and Republicans, and this aggregation may result in overlooking trends among Democrats or among Republicans. If the elite-mass connections are examined separately for Republicans and Democrats, we may find relationships that were not detectable using the combined polarization measures. To explore this possibility I estimated a series of regression models which are discussed in the next section.

**Separate Causal Analyses for Democrats and Republicans**

The approach for this next set of models was the same as that used for the models of party polarization, but Democrats and Republicans were treated separately. So, rather

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\textsuperscript{30} The results of all Granger causality tests throughout the chapter are summarized together in Table 7.6.
than subtract the Democratic means from the Republican means, these values were used in separate models of party ideology. For example, the mean DW-NOMINATE score for Democrats was regressed on its lag, and on the lagged value of ideology among Democratic identifiers. Likewise, the yearly mean self-placement of Democrats on the liberal-conservative scale was regressed on its lag and on lagged Democratic congressional ideology. The analogous models were also run for Republicans. The results are shown in Table 7.2.

The first model in Table 7.2 shows that Democratic congressional ideology at time t is a function of congressional ideology at time t-1, as expected. The coefficient for the ideology of Democratic identifiers at time t-1 achieves a marginal level of statistical significance at \( p = .08 \), suggesting the possibility of a reciprocal relationship whereby congressional Democrats may respond to the ideology of mass partisans. However, the F-test for Granger causality does not result in a rejection of the null hypothesis (\( F = 2.57, p = .13 \)). On the other hand, the model of mass Democratic ideology reveals a strong effect of congressional ideology. The Granger causality test indicates that Democratic congressional ideology does indeed Granger-cause mass-level ideology among Democrats (\( F = 5.08, p = .04 \)). Thus it appears that the causal arrow runs from ideology at the congressional level to ideology at the mass level among Democrats.

The results for Republicans are somewhat different. In the model of Republican congressional ideology, the lagged mass ideology variable reaches statistical significance (\( p = .055 \)), suggesting some responsiveness of Republicans in Congress to their party’s identifiers in the mass public. However, lagged Republican congressional ideology only achieves a marginal level of statistical significance as a predictor of mass ideology (\( p = .141 \)).
and exerts a much smaller impact on mass ideology (beta = .457) than was the case for Democratic congressional ideology (beta = .622). In addition, the Granger causality tests reveal a higher degree of independence between mass and elite ideology among Republicans than among Democrats. For the direction of causality from congressional ideology to mass ideology, the $F$-statistic was not statistically significant ($F = 2.51, p = .14$), indicating that it was not possible to reject the null hypothesis that congressional ideology does not Granger-cause mass ideology. This is a surprising finding, given the strong theoretical expectation that elite discourse would shape mass opinion, and the prior results with regard to party polarization and to the elite/mass connection among Democrats. Instead, it is the causal arrow from Republican mass ideology to congressional ideology that approaches statistical significance ($F = 3.38, p = .09$), although it too falls short of the conventional .05 level.

**Analyses of College-Educated Partisans**

It should also be noted that the preceding analysis examines the mean ideology of all Republican and Democratic identifiers. Yet the analysis in chapters 4 and 5 suggested that the increase in ideological polarization was greatest among more sophisticated, attentive elements of the public. Over the course of the 1972 to 2000 period, those with higher levels of education displayed greater ideological awareness, and as a group they became more polarized along party lines than did the general public. Thus one might expect to find a stronger relationship between elite-level and mass-level polarization if the analysis were confined to those with higher levels of education. Indeed, a recent time series analysis of the relationship between macroideology and macropartisanship (Box-
Steffensmeier and De Boef 2001) suggests that the connection between partisanship and ideology is much stronger among more sophisticated citizens than among the general public. Previous research on the interplay of macroideology and macropartisanship (Box-Steffensmeier, Knight, and Sigelman 1998) found no causal relationship when looking at the general public, but among those with higher education the two series are related (Box-Steffensmeier and De Boef 2001). This finding and the evidence in earlier chapters of this dissertation together point to the expectation that the causal connection between congressional party ideology and mass-level ideology will be stronger if we examine mass partisans with higher levels of education.

To test this expectation I estimated another set of autoregressive lagged models, substituting the mass party means with the means for Republicans and Democrats who had some college education. The results are displayed in Table 7.3. Turning first to the models for Democrats, we find a statistically significant effect of mass ideology on congressional ideology—an effect stronger than that found when looking at the general public rather than college educated citizens only. An F-test confirms that mass Democratic ideology (among those with some college education) Granger-causes elite Democratic ideology ($F = 5.96, p = .03$). This suggests responsiveness of the Democratic party in Congress to the more sophisticated, ideological segment of its mass coalition. Surprisingly, this causation is unidirectional. Democratic congressional ideology does not Granger-cause the ideology of sophisticated Democratic identifiers. This runs counter to the hypothesis that elite-level ideology would drive mass-level opinion; in the case of college-educated Democrats, this relationship does not hold.
For Republicans, the story in Table 7.3 is somewhat different. Congressional Republican ideology emerges as a statistically significant predictor of ideology among college-educated Republican identifiers in the OLS model. A subsequent $F$-tests finds that congressional ideology Granger-causes mass-level ideology ($F = 4.74, p = .05$). In the model of Republican congressional ideology, the coefficient for mass-level ideology (among college-educated Republicans) approaches statistical significance ($p = .08$). However, the $F$-statistic did not exceed the critical value, and the null hypothesis of no Granger causality could not be rejected ($F = 2.36, p = .15$). In this statistical sense, Republican congressional ideology was not responsive to the ideology of college educated Republican identifiers, and was less responsive to mass level trends than was the case for Democrats.

To summarize, the findings with regard to the direction of causality are mixed when Democrats and Republicans are analyzed separately. In general, stronger relationships between elite and mass ideology emerge among Democrats than among Republicans. In particular, the responsiveness of Democratic congressional ideology to mass ideology seems to be somewhat greater than for Republicans. The causal force from the elite level to the mass level is generally more potent than from mass to elite. In some specification, the models suggest the presence of a feedback relationship running from masses to elites, although in one case the relationship is at the margins of statistical significance.
Polarization of the Parties’ Electoral Constituencies

However, it could be argued that one must really look at the electoral constituencies of each party, rather than the party identifiers, if one is to find a connection. Indeed, Jacobson (2000a, 2000b) focuses his recent studies of party polarization on the “electoral connection” between representatives and their constituents, arguing that Congress has become polarized in large part because the parties’ respective electoral constituencies have become more ideologically distinct. To test this hypothesis, I estimated an additional set of autoregressive models using an alternate measure of mass-level polarization: the difference between the ideological mean of those who voted Republican in House elections and those who voted Democratic. The Republican and Democratic means were also analyzed separately, as above, to determine their relationship with the congressional ideology of the respective parties. If the electoral connection hypothesis is correct, we ought to find that polarization among voters Granger-causes congressional polarization. Similarly, we would expect to find that the ideology of Democratic voters Granger-causes the ideology of congressional Democrats, and likewise for Republicans.

Table 7.4 presents the results of the polarization models. No support is found for the hypothesis that voter polarization causes congressional polarization. On the other hand, congressional polarization is a statistically significant predictor of voter polarization. Again, it could be the case that the results might change when Democrats and Republicans are analyzed separately. Table 7.5 shows that these results echo those found in the polarization models. Ideology of House voters is not a statistically
significant predictor of congressional party ideology, but congressional ideology does predict voter ideology (see Tables 7.4 and 7.5).

When Granger causality tests are performed using these regression results, the direction of causality runs only in one direction: from elites to voters. Table 7.6 shows the results of these Granger-causality tests, along with those from the previous models discussed above. The tests of the relationship between voter ideology and congressional ideology reveal no support for the electoral connection explanation of party polarization. Causality is unidirectional, from elite to mass, in each of the tests involving the parties' electoral constituencies (bottom of table 7.6). None of the F-statistics even approaches a level of statistical significance necessary to reject the null hypothesis and accept the assertion that the ideology of voters Granger-causes congressional party ideology.

Thus, the analysis in tables 7.5 and 7.6 reveals no evidence that the ideological positions of the parties in Congress were a function of the ideology of their respective electoral constituencies. The lack of causality running from voters to Congress may be surprising to some readers, given the theoretical emphasis the literature on Congress has placed on the electoral connection. Indeed, the results above did not comport with my hypothesis that a feedback component from the mass level to the elite level would exist.

As noted above, the limitations of the data require that any conclusions be taken with a grain of salt. It is possible that the unit of time aggregation is too large (Freeman 1989), and the sample frame too broad, to detect congressional responses to constituency forces. Perhaps bi-annual national surveys are too blunt an instrument to measure the feedback from constituents to their representatives. And, perhaps different results would
be obtained if a longer time series could be analyzed. Only time will tell if these results will hold over a longer period.

Together with the evidence in prior chapters, these results reinforce the conclusion that polarization in Congress impacts mass level opinion. However, while it is clear that the parties' mass coalitions have polarized along ideological lines, and that the polarization in Congress was in part the cause of this increased mass polarization, it is not clear exactly what mechanisms were at work at the individual level to produce this liberal-conservative divide. Was it the result of individuals changing their party identifications to become more compatible with their ideological viewpoints? Or was it the result of people adjusting their stands on issues to be more consistent with the positions of party elites? I consider this question in the next section.

Another Look at Mass Polarization: Party Switching Versus Opinion Change

The evidence presented thus far has supported the conclusion that congressional polarization has shaped public opinion. Chapter 4 showed that polarization is greater among party activists and those with higher levels of political information, consistent with a causal role for elite discourse, including partisan conflict in Congress. Similarly, in chapter 5 the data showed consistent effects for awareness and activism, such that the more politically informed were more likely to detect differences between the parties, particularly as polarization in Congress grew. And the aggregate-level analysis above found that polarization in Congress Granger-causes mass polarization. These findings are all consistent with a causal role for elite polarization, but they leave open the possibility that two processes of political transformation are at work simultaneously: change in party
affiliation, and change in opinion. That is, some citizens have re-aligned themselves with
the party that holds ideological positions more closely reflecting their own, while other
people have adjusted their own views to become more in line with the pronouncements of
their party’s elites.

Both of these processes can be enhanced by polarization of the parties-in-
government. The increased ideological clarity of the two parties’ policy positions makes
it easier for individuals to choose their party identifications based on ideology and issues.
This is the “ideological realignment” hypothesis (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). But
party divergence also facilitates opinion change among partisans, because the information
provided by party elites contains a clearer ideological message. In this section I attempt
to discern the extent to which each of these polarization mechanisms is at work, and to
identify what types of people are most likely to fall into each category. To do so, I will
turn to an additional data source, the NES panel studies.

These longitudinal studies provide a second valuable resource for assessing
political change. In contrast to the cross-sectional data I have analyzed in previous
chapters, panel data are collected from the same respondents at multiple points in time.
Individuals are re-interviewed and asked many of the same questions, permitted the
analyst to draw inferences about opinion change that could not be made using cross-
sectional data. In this section I test the aforementioned hypotheses about party change
versus opinion change by analyzing panel data using the methodology developed by
Warren Miller (2000) for drawing causal inferences from the temporal ordering of change
in two variables. I begin by describing the technique and summarizing Miller’s findings,
and then I extend the analysis to the 1992-1994-1996 NES panel data.
Temporal Ordering and Causality between Party and Ideology

In his final published article, Miller (2000) addresses the question of the causal ordering between party identification and ideology by examining stability and change of these variables in a cross-tabular setting. Given the two three-category variables, ideology and party identification, the patterns of change in the biennial panel data can be summarized in a nine cell (3 x 3) table. Both ideology and party can move right, both could move left, either could move right or left while the other stays constant, the two could diverge, or there could be no change in either variable. These various scenarios are summarized in ten categories.

The first group of cases demonstrate changes in ideological preferences that become more congruent with stable Democratic preferences. Party identification remains Democratic at both t₁ and t₂, while ideology moves from conservative to moderate, from conservative to liberal, or from moderate to liberal. These patterns of change “encourage the conclusion that (stable) party is the cause and changed ideological position in the effect” (Miller 2000, 126). The second and third groups of cases similarly exhibit shifts in ideological preferences that adjust to fit more closely with stable party identifications, but for Independents and Republicans, respectively. The fourth, fifth, and sixth categories are comprised of cases in which party identifications move into conformity with stable ideological preferences; these correspond to shifts toward liberal, moderate, and conservative orientations, respectively. For the remaining cases, no short-term interpretation of causality is possible. The seventh and eighth categories include instances in which both party and ideology change in the same left or right direction.
between \( t_1 \) and \( t_2 \). The final two groups are those cases in which party identification and ideological position diverge, and finally, those cases demonstrating no change at all.

Miller applies this tabular paradigm to the NES panel studies from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, as well as the long-running Jennings panel study of political socialization. He finds that in the majority of cases in which causal ordering can be assessed (about a fourth of the panel population), ideological preferences changed to agree with party identification, indicating party as the primary cause and ideology as the effect. This causal ordering was not uniform across all citizens, however. In the 1990s panels, for example, about a third of the relevant cases demonstrated the reverse ordering, with ideology dominating partisanship. These results for the 1990-1991-1992 panel are reproduced here in Table 7.7.

Miller also conducted the cross-tabular comparisons using positions on policy issue scales. Again, party was found to be the most frequent cause of attitude change. The most common causal ordering was party identification → ideology → issues (139). There was significant heterogeneity in the panel populations, however. Differences were found with regard to voters’ age, education, and political involvement. In general, those with college education or higher exhibited the least amount of party-driven opinion change, and the highest levels of ideology-induced change. Stable partisanship was especially dominant among moderately educated voters. Non-voters were less likely than voters to exhibit change in policy attitudes resulting from party or ideology, with ideology the least frequent cause. Among older voters, partisanship emerged as the dominant cause of attitude change more often than among younger voters; conversely, for younger citizens ideology and issues appeared more often as causal factors than among
the older generation. Finally, those most attentive to the current campaign were unlikely
to change political attitudes, as were those who paid little attention, while those who were
"somewhat interested" in the campaign displayed the most volatile change (131-37).

For the current analysis of mass polarization, both the results and methodology of
the Miller (2000) piece are relevant. First, the substantive findings provide additional
indirect evidence that the behavior of party elites does shape the opinions of party
 identifiers. Second, the tabular comparison methodology allows the analyst to sort out
the two types of polarization mechanisms mentioned above; that is, it permits
distinguishing between those citizens who gravitate to a party that better fits their
ideology, and those whose ideology adjusts to conform with their party identification. In
the next section I extend Miller's analysis through the 1996 NES study.


Assessing the Temporal Order of Partisanship and Ideology

I applied the Miller tabular algorithm to the data from the NES 1992-1994-1996
panel study in an effort to discern which polarization mechanisms were at work during
the 1990s. This analysis extends the findings beyond the point at which Miller's analysis
ended, and examines a time period in which the parties sharply polarized. As with any
panel data set, there are cases lost to attrition over the course of time. In 1992, 1000
interviews were completed; in 1994, 758 respondents were re-interviewed; and in 1996,
595 respondents were interviewed a third time. More cases are lost due to missing data,
but 426 cases remain in the analysis of changes in party identification and ideology from
1992 to 1994, and 361 cases remain in the analysis of changes from 1994 to 1996. I
classified these eligible cases into the Miller ten-category typology. The results are shown in Table 7.8.

In both comparisons there was significant stability, with 46.7% of respondents in 1994 having the same party and ideology as they did in 1992, and 59% of respondents in 1996 holding to their 1994 positions on both variables. The proportion of cases with an ambiguous causal interaction between the two variables was somewhat higher in the 1992-1994 comparison (21.6%) than in the second comparison (14.9%). The existence of dissonant change in both comparisons (13.8% in 1992-1994, and 9.1% in 1994-1996) is consistent with work on “nonattitudes” in survey responses (Converse 1964, Zaller 1992).

Of particular interest here, however, are the results with regard to causal interactions between party and ideology. The findings are largely in keeping with Miller’s (2000) results from earlier years. In both the 1992-1994 and 1994-1996 comparisons, party emerges as a causal agent twice as frequently as ideology. In the first comparison, 10.6% of the cases showed patterns of change consistent with ideology as the cause, while 21.2% were consistent with party identification causing shifts in ideology. Likewise, in the 1994-1996 comparison 18.6% of the cases suggested party identification as the cause and ideology the effect, while just 7.5% pointed to ideology as the causal agent. Thus, the findings for the 1992-1996 period support Miller’s conclusion, based on earlier data, that ideology shifts into agreement with party identification more often than party changes to accommodate ideology.

Miller’s assertion that these findings imply causality running from party to ideology is likely a controversial point, however. The Miller technique is elegant in its
simplicity, yet it could be criticized for being too simple, since it cannot account fully for problems of measurement error that are known to plague the study party identification and other variables in panel data (Green and Palmquist 1990). Prior research has shown that the branching format of the party identification question results in higher test-retest reliability than the seven-point scale format used to measure ideology and issue attitudes, thus potentially inflating the apparent difference in stability between partisanship and ideology (Krosnick 1991). Therefore a portion of the discrepancy in stability between party identification and ideology is likely due to measurement error.

Miller acknowledges the potential intrusion of measurement error, but responds by pointing out that in many cases the variable determined to be the “cause” was actually the one measured less reliably. Commenting on his analysis of the 1990-1991-1992 NES panel data Miller notes that “…in 32 of 50 cases one could not attribute the greater incidence of causal direction simply to a greater reliability of measurement of the apparently dominant variable because, in fact, the dominant variable was not more stable, or more reliably measured” (2000, 133). So, the impact of measurement error on the results of the tabular classification method is not clear, but it certainly should give one pause in over-interpreting the findings.

These concerns notwithstanding, the results in Table 7.8 do shed some light on the mechanisms of partisan change at work in the mass public. Whether the Miller technique truly gets at “causality” between variables could be debated, but it does highlight the fact that multiple processes underlie the trends in mass polarization that were described in previous chapters. A process of ideological realignment whereby conservatives gravitate to the Republicans and liberals to the Democrats is only one part
of the story. According to the results in the top section of Table 7.8, this process of
switching parties to better accommodate ideology accounts for between 29% and 33% of
all "consistent" changes in party or ideology. In other words, when either ideology or
party changed in a way that made the two variables more consistent at $t_2$ than they were
at $t_1$, about a third of the time party identification was the one that shifted. On the other
hand, it was ideology that shifted to become more consistent with party in about two-
thirds of the cases in which one of the two variables changed.

**Regression Analyses of Ideology and Partisanship**

Further support for these findings is also found when using more orthodox
statistical techniques. Another way to assess the relative causal primacy of ideology and
party identification is to conduct a simple path analysis in which the two variables are
allowed to predict each other across panel waves. One can compare the impact of party
identification at $t_1$ on ideology at $t_2$ with the effect of ideology at $t_1$ on partisanship at $t_2$.
In the case of the 1992-1994-1996 panel data, two sets of comparisons can be
identification and 1994 ideology are each regressed on 1992 partisanship and 1992
ideology. In the second set of comparisons, party identification and ideology measured
in 1996 are predicted by partisanship and ideology in 1994. The results of this analysis
are presented in Figure 7.1.

In both comparisons, party identification proved to be the more stable variable
and the more potent causal agent. Looking at the top comparison in Figure 7.1, we find
that party identification was more stable from 1992 to 1994 than was ideology. In
addition, the impact of 1992 partisanship on 1994 ideology slightly exceeded the impact of 1992 ideology on 1994 party identification. The 1994 to 1996 comparison reveals an even stronger causal role for partisanship. Again, party identification is more stable over time than ideology. Furthermore, the impact of 1994 party identification on 1996 ideology (beta = .244) far exceeds the effect of 1994 ideology on 1996 partisanship (beta = .087). These results provide strong support for the findings obtained above using the Miller tabular classification approach. Party identification again emerges as the more frequent cause of change, with ideology adjusting to comport with partisanship more often than the reverse. However, the path analysis also revealed the existence of ideology-driven change in party.

Together, the evidence suggests that a significant portion of the increase in mass polarization is due to party-induced opinion change, as well as ideologically-driven party realignment. This finding is in stark contrast to the conclusion reached by Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) in their study of "ideological realignment" from 1978 to 1994. Based on their path analyses of the 1992-1994 NES panel data, the authors conclude that the increase in the correlation between ideology and party identification during the early 1990s "...was due almost entirely to respondents bringing their party identification into line with their prior ideological preference" (1998, 645). In contrast, the results in this chapter suggest that both types of polarization mechanisms were at work in the electorate—party persuasion on ideology and issues, as well as ideologically motivated realignment of partisanship—but that party-induced opinion change was the more common of the two.
Part of the reason for these divergent findings doubtless lies in the different operationalizations used in the two studies. Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) measure ideology using an additive index comprised of self-placements on four seven-point scales: liberal-conservative ideology, government responsibility for guaranteeing jobs/standard of living, government aid to minorities, and government health insurance (see Appendix for question wording of these scales, which are discussed in chapter 4). Respondents who were unable to answer a question were placed at the midpoint of the scale. On the other hand, the analysis in Figure 7.1 measures ideology using self-placement on the standard liberal-conservative scale, and does not assign a score of 4 to those without an opinion. While the relative merit of each of these operational choices could be debated, they also underscore the complexity inherent in efforts to sort out the causal mechanisms involved in mass party polarization. In light of these conflicting findings, I think a reasonable conclusion is that both ideologically-motivated party switching and party-driven opinion change are fairly common in the mass public, and that future research is warranted to determine more precisely the conditions under which each phenomenon is likely to occur. At a minimum, both the current study and the work of Abramowitz and Saunders agree on an important point: elite level polarization plays a crucial role in shaping mass opinion.

31 I repeated the analysis in Figure 7.1 using an additive index of the same four items used by Abramowitz and Saunders (1998). When missing values are excluded from the analysis rather than recoded to the midpoint, party identification is the more stable than ideology in both the 1992-1994 and 1994-1996 comparisons. In the 1992-1994 comparison, 1992 ideology has a nearly identical impact on 1994 party identification as 1992 partisanship has on 1994 ideology. Except for this one case, however, party identification clearly emerged as the more potent predictor. Party identification also predominated when issue scales were analyzed individually instead of using a composite ideology measure.
Summary and Conclusions

Determining the causal relationship between congressional polarization and mass-level attitudes is a complex task. The analyses in this chapter should be viewed as a preliminary but useful step in addressing the question of “Who leads whom?”. Numerous autoregressive lagged models were estimated using NES data to measure mass-level ideology and DW-NOMINATE scores to measure ideology in Congress. Granger causality tests were subsequently conducted to determine the direction of causation between elite-level and mass-level variables. In the vast majority of models examined, the causal arrow ran primarily from the elite level to the mass level. Congressional polarization was found to Granger-cause mass polarization, but there was not reciprocal causation from the mass level to the elite level. Similarly, little support was found for the notion that the parties in Congress have polarized in response to the polarization of their electoral constituencies. On the contrary, voter polarization was found to be Granger-caused by congressional polarization—not the other way around. Some evidence of congressional responsiveness to mass level ideology was found when the analysis was confined to respondents with some college education. Democratic congressional ideology was Granger-caused by mass level ideology (of those Democratic identifiers with college education). In general, however, it appears that causality runs mostly from the elite level to the mass level.
The results in this chapter recall V.O. Key’s famous “echo chamber” metaphor for public opinion. Key asserts the following:

"The voice of the people is but an echo. The output of an echo chamber bears an inevitable and invariable relation to the input. As candidates and parties clamor for attention and vie for popular support, the people’s verdict can be no more than a selective reflection from among the alternatives and outlooks presented to them." (1966, 2)

It appears that the increasingly polarized partisan inputs into the echo chamber have indeed resulted in increasingly polarized outputs at the mass level.

It should be noted, however, that the techniques used in this chapter do not permit the analyst to rule out the possibility that a third variable was causing both mass polarization and congressional polarization. The analysis above does not account for such outside influences; it can only ascertain causality between the two series analyzed. It is not immediately clear what this third variable might be, but future analyses could consider such variables as media coverage, military conflict, or economic conditions as possible third variable causes. It is fairly easy to imagine how such forces might drive the public and its elected representatives in one ideological direction or another; it is more difficult to see how a reaction to world events would drive the parties and their identifiers simultaneously toward ideological extremes. Thus, failure to address third variable causes may not be a major weakness of the analysis, but it should be noted as a caveat to the findings on causality and considered as a possible direction for future research.

The final section of this chapter examined the mechanisms by which mass opinion responds to elite ideological cues. The analysis of NES panel data revealed that two processes are at work: individuals switching party identification to better accommodate
their ideological views, and people adjusting their ideological positions to better accord with existing partisanship. In about two-thirds of the cases, ideology was found to be the variable that changed to better align with partisanship. The finding that party-driven opinion change was more common than "ideological realignment" of party identification runs counter to the conclusions reached in previous research. This result also provides further evidence that party identification continues to play a crucial role in shaping citizens' political attitudes, contrary to the claims of the "party decline" literature. This finding also has important normative implications. In his commentary on Miller's (2000) analysis of causation between party identification and ideology, Christopher Achen summarizes the findings and their importance as follows: "Most of the time, party identification controls voter opinion more than the reverse, probably because popular opinion is structured by party elites. The drastic implications for democratic theory are too obvious to need spell out here" (2000, 145).

The aggregate-level findings in this chapter also raise normative questions about who is being represented by the parties in Congress. Clearly the conventional view of democratic responsiveness does not jive particularly well with the data analysis presented above. Rather than respond to public opinion, it appears that more often than not Congress leads mass attitudes. When evidence of responsiveness to mass-level opinion did emerge, it was the views of more educated citizens that drove party ideology. This suggests that perhaps only the more sophisticated, attentive segments of the public have a role in shaping the behavior of elites. Several caveats apply, however. There are many ways to view the concept of representation (Pitkin 1967), and the analyses here speak mainly to partisan representation (cf. Hurley 1989; 1991), not to dyadic representation or
symbolic representation, for example. And, as noted above, the small number of time points requires that the results be considered as preliminary; only the passage of time will permit more thorough investigations of the causal relationships and representational linkages between elite-level and mass-level ideology. The findings here raise more of these questions about representation than they answer, but clearly this is a topic that deserves further scrutiny in future research efforts.
### OLS Model of Congressional Polarization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Polarization</td>
<td>0.959</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.931 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Mass Polarization</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( n = 13, \, R^2 = .981 \)

### OLS Model of Mass Polarization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.397</td>
<td>0.329</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Polarization</td>
<td>1.688</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.716 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Mass Polarization</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.382</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( n = 13, \, R^2 = .495 \)

***p < .01, one-tailed

**p < .05, one-tailed

Table 7.1: Causal Relationship between Congressional Party Polarization and Mass-Level Party Polarization
### OLS Model of Democratic Congressional Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.192</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.906 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Mass Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>0.121 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, $R^2 = .956$

### OLS Model of Democratic Mass Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.788</td>
<td>1.572</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>2.036</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td>0.622 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Mass Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>-0.134</td>
<td>0.379</td>
<td>-0.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, $R^2 = .333$

### OLS Model of Republican Congressional Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.183</td>
<td>0.111</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>0.953</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.923 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Mass Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.103 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, $R^2 = .979$

### OLS Model of Republican Mass Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.577</td>
<td>1.477</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>1.091</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>0.457 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Mass Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.319</td>
<td>0.218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, $R^2 = .379$

***$p < .01$, one-tailed  
**$p < .05$, one-tailed  
*p < .10, one-tailed

Table 7.2: Causal Relationships Between Mass and Elite Ideology Among Democrats and Republicans
### OLS Model of Democratic Congressional Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.147</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>0.900</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.882 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Ideology of Dem. with college ed.</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.165 ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, R-squared = .965

### OLS Model of Ideology of Democrats with College Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.307</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>1.009</td>
<td>1.322</td>
<td>0.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Ideology of Dem. with college ed.</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>0.296</td>
<td>0.398 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, R-squared = .301

### OLS Model of Republican Congressional Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.199</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>0.940</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.910 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Ideology of Repub. with college ed.</td>
<td>0.046</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.104 *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, R-squared = .977

### OLS Model of Ideology of Republicans with College Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.699</td>
<td>1.568</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>1.472</td>
<td>0.703</td>
<td>0.662 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Ideology of Repub. with college ed.</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, R-squared = .441

***p < .01, one-tailed  
**p < .05, one-tailed  
*p < .10, one-tailed

**Table 7.3: Causal Relationships between Congressional Party Ideology and Ideology of Party Identifiers with College Education**
OLS Model of Congressional Polarization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Polarization</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.948 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Polarization of House Voters</td>
<td>0.021</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, $R^2 = .979$

OLS Model of House Voter Polarization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Polarization</td>
<td>2.904</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>1.177 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Polarization of House Voters</td>
<td>-0.508</td>
<td>0.299</td>
<td>-0.429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 13, $R^2 = .755$

***p < .01, one-tailed

Table 7.4: Causal Relationship between Congressional Polarization and Polarization of House Voters
OLS Model of Democratic Congressional Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.137</td>
<td>0.117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>0.947</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.929 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Dem. Voters' Ideology</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 13, R^2 = .952 \]

OLS Model of Democratic Voters' Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.687</td>
<td>1.382</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>2.711</td>
<td>0.862</td>
<td>0.757 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Dem. Voters' Ideology</td>
<td>-0.030</td>
<td>0.321</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 13, R^2 = .556 \]

OLS Model of Republican Congressional Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.962 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Repub. Voters' Ideology</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 13, R^2 = .973 \]

OLS Model of Republican Voters' Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>coefficient</th>
<th>std. error</th>
<th>beta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.862</td>
<td>1.255</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Congressional Repub. Ideology</td>
<td>2.325</td>
<td>0.695</td>
<td>0.970 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged Repub. Voters' Ideology</td>
<td>-0.349</td>
<td>0.290</td>
<td>-0.350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ n = 13, R^2 = .568 \]

***p < .01, one-tailed

Table 7.5: Causal Relationships Between Elite Ideology and Ideology of Electoral Constituencies of Democrats and Republicans
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>F-statistic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polarization in Congress  →  Mass Polarization</td>
<td>F = 5.31, p = .04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Polarization                          →  Polarization in Congress</td>
<td>F = 1.44, p = .25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem. Cong. Ideology                        →  College Ed. Dem. Ideology</td>
<td>F = 0.60, p = .45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization in Congress  →  Polarization of Voters</td>
<td>F = 21.77, p = .00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization of Voters                      →  Polarization in Congress</td>
<td>F = 0.41, p = .53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repub. Voters’ Ideology                    →  Repub. Cong. Ideology</td>
<td>F = 0.69, p = .42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.6: Tests of Granger Causality between Elite and Mass Ideology
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Panel Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plausible Causes:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Democratic Party ID</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Independent Party ID</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Republican Party ID</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Liberal Ideology</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Moderate Ideology</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conservative Ideology</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambiguous/No Causal Interaction:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Both moved left</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Both moved right</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Divergence</td>
<td>24.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. No change</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>81.7%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(705)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Columns do not add to exactly 100% due to rounding error.

Source: Miller (2000), Table 1, p. 129.

## Table 7.8: Plausible Patterns of Causality between Ideological Self-Placement and Party Identification, 1992-1994-1996 NES Panel Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Democratic Party ID</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Independent Party ID</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Republican Party ID</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.2%</strong></td>
<td><strong>18.6%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Liberal Ideology</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Moderate Ideology</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conservative Ideology</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>10.6%</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Both moved left</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Both moved right</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Divergence</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. No change</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td><strong>68.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>73.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>(426)</td>
<td>(361)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Columns do not add to exactly 100% due to rounding error.
Source: Calculated by author.
1992-1994 Comparison

1992 Party Identification \( \rightarrow \) 1994 Party Identification

\[ \begin{align*}
1992 \text{ Party Identification} & \quad .740 \\
1992 \text{ Ideology} & \quad .417 \\
1994 \text{ Ideology} & \quad .608 \\
1994 \text{ Party Identification} & \quad .138 \\
1994 \text{ Ideology} & \quad .175
\end{align*} \]

1994-1996 Comparison

1994 Party Identification \( \rightarrow \) 1996 Party Identification

\[ \begin{align*}
1994 \text{ Party Identification} & \quad .837 \\
1994 \text{ Ideology} & \quad .538 \\
1994 \text{ Ideology} & \quad .636 \\
1996 \text{ Ideology} & \quad .244 \\
1996 \text{ Party Identification} & \quad .087
\end{align*} \]

Notes: entries are standardized regression coefficients; curved lines represent correlation coefficients

Figure 7.1: Path Analysis of Party Identification and Ideology, 1992-1994-1996 NES Panel Study
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF PARTY POLARIZATION

Summary of Findings

The data presented in the preceding chapters have revealed ideological polarization of the parties at both the elite and mass levels. While previous research has extensively documented the partisan polarization in Congress (e.g., Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Taylor 1996; Alesina and Rosenthal 1995), far less attention has been given to analogous trends in the mass public. Therefore, one goal of this study has been to document the extent of party polarization at the mass level over time, with an eye toward subsequent analyses of the causes and consequences of this polarization.

In chapter 4, analyses of survey data from the National Election Studies showed several trends that indicated polarization of the parties-in-the-electorate. The correlation between party identification and ideology has grown through the 1980s and 1990s, with conservatives increasingly identifying as Republicans and liberals as Democrats. The mass parties have become more ideologically homogenous, and there has been a decrease in the ideological overlap of the parties' coalitions. The ideological positions of the average Republican and Democrat have grown further apart since the early 1970s, and this trend is particularly pronounced through the 1990s. Polarization also extended to a
variety of specific policy issues ranging from government aid to minorities, to abortion rights, to national health insurance, to government’s role in providing citizens with a guaranteed standard of living. For each indicator of polarization, the partisan divide was found to be greatest among the most educated and politically active segment of the population. The polarization of the “attentive public” is consistent with the argument that mass polarization is in part a function of polarization at the elite level. Those most likely to pay attention to politics, and thus to receive the ideological and partisan messages contained in elite discourse, are also the most polarized along party lines.

Important findings with regard to regional realignment were also uncovered in chapter 4. Previous research has shown the gravitation of conservative southerners toward the Republican Party and away from the Democrats (Carmines and Stanley 1990; Stanley and Niemi 1991, 1995, 1999). Most of the explanations for party polarization have centered on this southern realignment, including “conditional party government” theories of congressional politics (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Aldrich and Rohde 1998), as well as accounts of “issue evolution” on the basis of civil rights issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989). The analysis in this dissertation demonstrated that the increase in mass party polarization was not confined to the South, nor was it confined only to racial issues. Polarization occurred on the general liberal-conservative scale as well as a variety of issues, and the extent of polarization was actually greater on social welfare issues and general ideology than it was on racial issues. The increase in partisan polarization occurred both inside and outside the South, which implies that the realignment of conservative southern whites toward the Republican Party does not account for the all of the increase in party polarization.
In addition, the public's feelings toward the parties, as measured by thermometer ratings, have become increasingly polarized along party lines during the 1990s. Contrary to the literature on "party decline," I found a decline in neutrality toward the parties, and an increase in polarization. Compared to those in previous decades, respondents in the 1990s were more likely to feel warm toward one party and cool toward the other, and less likely to give both a lukewarm rating or to give the two parties the same rating on the NES feeling thermometers. These findings run counter to the prevailing view that Americans have grown increasingly neutral toward the parties (Wattenberg 1996).

Further cause to re-evaluate the party decline thesis was found in chapter 5, which examined citizens' perceptions of differences between the parties. There I argued that polarization in Congress contributed to polarization at the mass level by raising citizens' awareness of meaningful ideological differences between the parties. This heightened awareness of party differences was hypothesized to result in individuals placing greater weight on partisanship and ideology in their political evaluations. Substantial empirical support was found for these expectations. According to data from the NES, over the past three decades a growing proportion of the public has perceived "important differences" between the parties. The evidence at both the aggregate level and individual level suggested that these perceptions were a function of polarization in Congress. As the parties-in-government moved apart, a greater percentage of the public reported seeing important party differences. This increased awareness of distinctions between the parties has in turn resulted in a greater role for ideology and partisanship in citizens' political evaluations. Multivariate models of congressional vote choice showed that for those who perceived "important differences" between Republicans and Democrats, ideology and
party identification had a significantly greater impact on the vote decision than for those who did not see any differences between the parties. The findings suggest that rather than declining in importance, as the party decline literature argues, partisanship has become even more salient in people's political evaluations as the parties have polarized.

The models in chapter 5 indicated that incumbents still hold a large electoral advantage, even when the parties are ideologically divided. However, the analysis in chapter 6 revealed an evolution in the bases of citizens' evaluations of members of Congress. Data from the NES showed that people's reasons for contacting their member of Congress have shifted since the 1970s and 1980s. An increasing proportion contacted their representative to express an opinion, while a declining number made contact to request help with a problem or to obtain information. This suggests a shift away from the view of the representative as "ombudsman" and toward an emphasis on ideological agreement. Further support for this interpretation was found in logit models of the vote for House incumbents. In the highly polarized political environment of the 1990s, the impact of ideology on constituents' evaluations of their representatives has grown, while the impact of service to the home district has declined. The electoral benefit incumbents accrue from having "done something special for the district," as the NES question puts it, has diminished to the point of statistical insignificance in the 2000 data. This stands in contrast to previous research that found a significant "personal vote" for congressional incumbents (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina 1984, 1987).

Together, the findings in chapters 4, 5, and 6 point to a causal connection between elite-level polarization and mass level polarization. The nature of that causal connection was tested more directly in chapter 7. There I estimated numerous lagged regression
models and then conducted Granger-causality tests to assess the direction of causation between mass-level and elite-level polarization. As noted in chapter 3, there are theories to support a variety of expectations regarding the direction of causality. Traditional democratic theory presupposes a connection from masses to elites, with elected representatives responding to mass opinion, while theories of public opinion as driven by elite discourse would predict that congressional polarization leads mass polarization. Some recent research predicts a reciprocal relationship between mass and elite opinion, and this was my expectation going into the analysis. The preponderance of the evidence found in chapter 7 (and indeed throughout the dissertation) points to elite polarization as the cause and mass polarization as the effect. Little support was found for the hypothesis that congressional polarization was simply a response to an increasingly polarized electorate. Despite the importance of the “electoral connection” as a motive for members of Congress, the analysis in chapter 7 found unidirectional causality from Congress to voters—not vice versa. Evidence of responsiveness of congressional party ideology to public ideology was found only when the analysis was restricted to the segment of the public with some college education. The ideology of sophisticated Democratic identifiers Granger-caused Democratic congressional ideology, but a similar effect was not found among Republicans. Instead, Republican congressional ideology Granger-caused mass-level ideology. In sum, the picture that emerged was one of polarization in Congress leading polarization in the mass public.
Polarized Politics: the 1990s and Beyond

The results summarized above reflect the polarized political environment of the 1990s. From the start, the Clinton presidency proved to be a rallying point for conservatives, as administration initiatives on gays in the military and national health care provided fodder for Republican critics. After the Republicans took control of the House for the first time in four decades, the conflict between the President and Congress increased, and members’ support for the President’s positions increasingly varied by party affiliation (Fleisher and Bond 2000). Several high profile clashes over the federal budget ensued, culminating in two federal government shutdowns. This became an issue during the 1996 campaigns, as Democrats pursued a strategy that emphasized the alleged extremism of Newt Gingrich and the House Republicans. The Democrats ran television ads that sought to link vulnerable Republican candidates, including presidential candidate Bob Dole, to Gingrich and the conservative wing of the party.

In Clinton’s second term, the partisan divide widened again as the Lewinsky scandal and subsequent impeachment vote split Congress—and the public—along party lines. In the House, 98% of Democrats voted against all four articles of impeachment, while 98% of Republicans voted for at least one article. In the Senate, no Democrats voted for conviction on any article, but 91% of Republicans voted to convict Clinton on at least one article of impeachment (Jacobson 2001). Similar partisan differences existed in public opinion as well. Polls found about 65% of Republicans supporting impeachment, and about 85% of Democrats opposing it (Jacobson 2001).

In 2000, after a presidential campaign in which moderate “undecided” or “swing” voters were often the focus of candidate appeals and media coverage, the deep partisan
divides in Congress and in the public were brought to the surface by the bizarre post-
election events in Florida. When asked about the ballot controversies in Florida, survey
respondents were divided sharply along party lines. For example, a Gallup Poll taken in
mid-December found that 85% of Republicans thought Bush had won "fair and square,"
while 49% of Democrats thought he won on a technicality, and 37% said he "stole" the
election. Similar polarization existed with respect to the Supreme Court's *Bush v. Gore*
decision that stopped the manual recounts of ballots in Florida. Polls taken following the
Court's decision found that a slight majority of Americans approved of the outcome, but
found a striking disparity between the views of Gore voters and Bush voters. In a CBS
News Poll, for example, just 16% of Gore voters approved of the decision, and 80%
disapproved. In sharp contrast, 95% of Bush voters approved of the Court’s decision,
while only 4% disapproved. The controversial events of the 2000 election brought the
partisan divide into clear relief. As the results in this dissertation show, however, this
partisan gap was not a new development, but rather the culmination of a growth in party
polarization over the previous three decades.

While it is impossible to predict what the future holds (indeed, who could have
foreseen the strange set of post-election events in 2000), it appears likely that party
polarization will not subside any time soon. The decline of partisanship noted in the
1970s was not quickly reversed, and likewise it seems unlikely that the polarization found
in 2000 will rapidly dissipate. The even partisan balance in Congress and in the
electorate guarantees close, hard fought elections, and it also promotes party conflict and

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gridlock in Congress (Coleman 1997; Binder 1999). Therefore, clashes between the parties in Congress are likely to continue, and thus the differences between the parties will continue to be clear to voters. In addition, a highly ideologically polarized group of party activists now form the pool from which future party leaders and candidates for office will be drawn. This too suggests that party polarization is not likely to diminish in the near future.

Caveats

As with any research, this study faces limitations that require qualification of the conclusions discussed above. First and foremost, the study is constrained by the data available for analysis. While the NES provides a rich source of data on public attitudes and behaviors in each election year, it has weaknesses as well. Only a small number of questions are asked consistently from year to year over the course of the 1952-2000 time period, which can limit one’s ability to make precise comparisons across time. In some cases there are gaps in the time series, when certain questions are omitted from an election study (or several studies) and then subsequently reinstated. In other cases a question begins part of the way through the NES time series, such as the liberal-conservative ideology scale, which was not used until 1972. At several points throughout the dissertation, the analysis is limited because of these interruptions in the NES time series with regard to various items of interest, or because of the small number of yearly data points available for analysis. This weakness is most glaring in chapter 7, where a larger number of data points would certainly bolster the time series analysis of causality between congressional polarization and mass polarization.
A second and more general qualification is to acknowledge the complexity inherent in assessing causality over time, particularly when one is analyzing variables both at the elite or systemic level as well as at the mass level. In examining the causes of party polarization, I have assembled what I believe to be substantial evidence that congressional polarization impacts mass-level attitudes. However, it is difficult to completely disentangle the effects of party polarization from the effects of other factors that occur simultaneously. The models in chapter 5 make every effort to address this concern, but it is a persistent challenge in this type of pooled analysis. Furthermore, as acknowledged in chapter 7, it is possible that there are additional (unmeasured) variables that cause both elite-level and mass-level polarization. A useful direction for future research, therefore, would be to add more control variables to the analysis of causation between the elite and mass levels. Of course, this would require more data to be collected in order to obtain the degrees of freedom necessary to estimate more complex time series models. More generally, it must be acknowledged that any conclusions about the temporal ordering of variables, or inferences about causation among series, are best made after the passage of time. Only time will tell if the relationships found in this study simply reflect a period of aberrant change that will dissipate, or if the results have captured a systematic trend that will persist.

Third, as with any empirical work, the conclusions must be seen in the context of the operational definitions chosen by the analyst. While the operational choices were made with guidance from theory and prior research, they were also constrained by the availability of relevant survey data. The use of the NES data set is again a double-edged sword in this regard. On the one hand, the limited availability of some survey questions
in certain years can force the analyst to adopt operationalizations that may be less than ideal. On the other hand, the use of the NES means that the findings can be replicated and extended by future scholars. Furthermore, the findings are high in external validity because of the national level sample and sound survey methodology on which they are based.

Fourth, I acknowledge that the data analyzed in this study have not fully answered the question of why the parties in Congress continued to polarize through the 1990s. Mass-level polarization alone does not account for the ideological divide between the parties in Congress, so what else could explain the polarization of the congressional parties in the 1990s? Conditional party government explanations offer some insight. The exercise of strong party leadership by conservative ideologues such as Newt Gingrich, Dick Armey, and Tom DeLay was facilitated by the increasing ideological cohesion of the Republican rank and file, as conditional party government theory would predict. Moreover, because of the institutional structures of the House, the leaders of the majority party have agenda-setting powers that minority party leaders lack. This asymmetry results in majority party leaders having even greater influence over members (Aldrich and Rohde 2000). Thus, when the Republicans took control of Congress the influence of the conservative party leadership was magnified, pushing the Republican conference further to the right.

However, the policy preferences of party leaders are checked by the motive of reelection. Members of Congress who wish to be reelected cannot pursue preferences that would be so extreme as to alienate supporters. The evidence in this dissertation regarding polarization in the public suggests that in the 1990s members of Congress
increasingly could expect not to be punished (if not rewarded) for taking more ideologically extreme positions. Party activists and campaign contributors have become more ideological, making it politically feasible for members of Congress to vote with their party leaders. Those citizens who pay the most attention to politics—and who are most likely to vote—are also the segment of the population that exhibited the greatest party polarization. Thus, a politician taking ideological positions may appeal to those most likely to vote, while not substantially hurting his or her standing among the non-ideological members of the public who are either unaware of or uninterested in broad ideology as a basis for political choices (Weisberg 2000).

Again, it must be noted that the preceding discussion relies heavily on speculation. The data do not directly provide a definitive answer to the question of why the parties in Congress continued to polarize through the 1990s. However, the results do permit us to reject the hypothesis that polarization in Congress was simply a response to pre-existing ideological divides between mass partisans. The complexities of how and why party leaders in Congress have exercised their influence will continue to be an important focus in future studies.

Finally, it should be noted that in this study I have not taken a position on the content of the ideological dimension in Congress upon which the parties have polarized. In other words, I have not attempted to argue that the issues being tackled by the political parties of the late twentieth century are of more (or less) consequence than those questions debated by parties in earlier eras. It could be argued that although the parties clearly have become more ideologically consistent and cohesive, the overall scope of political discourse has narrowed (Lowi 1998, 1999). To be sure, a subset of policy issues
receive little attention from either party. Perhaps it is the case that the ideological spectrum has shrunk, despite the fact that the parties have moved further apart. This possibility raises interesting normative questions, but investigating these falls outside the scope of this study.

These caveats notwithstanding, the findings summarized above raise several important empirical and normative questions, and point to numerous avenues for future study. I briefly review these implications in the sections below. First I touch on some of the implications of the findings for future studies of party politics in America. I then discuss the political consequences of party polarization, and offer some concluding thoughts on directions for future research.

Implications for Future Studies of American Party Politics

Models of Electoral Politics

The results in this dissertation have important implications for efforts to formally model electoral processes. As noted in chapter 1, most models assume that voter preferences are exogenous. However, the results in chapter 7, combined with the findings in chapters 4 and 5, suggest that this is not the case. In about two thirds of the cases in which either party identification or ideology changed and the other variable stayed constant, it was ideology that adjusted to partisanship. This suggests that a significant portion of the public brings their policy positions into line with the views espoused by their party elites. This interpretation is bolstered by the evidence in the preceding chapters that party polarization can shape citizens' views of the parties and subsequently alter the bases of political evaluations. If this is the case, then the
preferences of voters are not exogenous with respect to the actions of parties and candidates. When the parties stake out divergent positions, the preferences of some voters are altered.

This insight could help to explain why the parties have polarized, contrary to the centripetal logic of the classic Downsian spatial model. If some voters on either side of the median voter are “pulled” outward when the parties polarize, then over time the distribution of voters becomes more bi-modal, and the parties’ incentive to converge toward the center is diminished. When we recall which segments of the population are most likely to be subject to elite cues, this scenario becomes even more plausible. Those most likely to vote are also those most likely to respond to elite messages, and to polarize along party lines. As noted in chapter 2, it is certainly the case that formal models can generate predictions of party divergence when the parties’ motives are extended beyond the simple goal of reelection. However, it may be that if spatial models can account for the endogeneity of voter preferences over the course of time, then this divergence prediction could emerge even with only the most basic reelection goals attributed to the parties or candidates.

Party System Change

The findings in this dissertation also point to the need for further research to re-examine the nature of party system change in the late twentieth century. The results in chapters 4, 5, and 7 suggest that the evolution of the party system in the late twentieth century differs from earlier realignments in some key respects. Previous theories of realignment have emphasized the role of critical events or new emerging issues in
triggering realignments (Key 1955; Sundquist 1983), while also acknowledging that realignments may be gradual (Key 1959) and may occur through an inter-generational process of political socialization (Beck 1974, 1979). The situation in the 1980s and 1990s, however, does not fit well with past realignment theories. No critical event has shocked the system into realignment, nor has a new issue emerged to cut across old political cleavages to create a new partisan divide. Rather, a more general ideological polarization has taken place. Partisans are more divided along liberal-conservative lines, and that polarization is not confined to a single issue. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the parties-in-government have polarized across a range of issues to an extent not seen in generations.

As a result of this elite-level polarization, citizens can more clearly perceive differences between the parties and more easily align themselves with the party closest to them. The increased ideological clarity of the parties' respective messages also provides stronger cues to mass partisans, who can then adjust their issue attitudes and ideological identifications to conform more closely with those of their party's elites. Rather than the bases of party conflict shifting to a new set of issues or revolving around a singular event, the scope of conflict between the parties-in-government has broadened. This has contributed to polarization in the electorate, which in turn makes it possible for the parties in Congress to continue to stake out divergent positions.

In addition, as I have argued above, the circumstances of the late twentieth century do not completely mesh with accounts of "dealignment" or party decline. A reinvigoration of partisanship has taken place, as evidenced by increased identification with parties, tighter links between partisanship and voting (Bartels 2000), increased
polarization in feelings toward the parties (chapter 4) and greater awareness of differences between the parties (chapter 5). However, as Beck (1999) has noted, there remains a segment of the public that is highly nonpartisan. When considering the changes in the contemporary party system, therefore, we must really assess the composition of “two electorates—one partisan, and evenly divided, the other estranged from the two parties” (Beck 1999, 48).

It must also be noted that the present study has not investigated the impact of party polarization on political independence. Indeed, the analyses here have almost always focused solely on Republicans and Democrats, excluding Independents. While this focus is appropriate to the research questions at hand, the topic of political independence is worthy of further study. Prior work has suggested that changes in political independence serve as indicators of party polarization (Weisberg and Mockabee 1999, 49-50). As parties move apart in terms of ideology and issues, it becomes easier for citizens to distinguish between the parties, thus facilitating identification with a party label, and consequently reducing the likelihood of identifying as “independent.” Thus we should expect to see that as party polarization rises, the proportion of independents declines, all else equal. The counter hypothesis would be that ideologically moderate citizens could be turned off by increasingly extreme parties, and therefore might move toward independence and away from partisanship. These competing hypotheses should be tested in future analyses.

In sum, it is not clear whether the trends uncovered in this dissertation reflect the emergence of a new “party system” in America. Some scholars have concluded that the events of the 1990s do indeed signal a new era in party politics; John Aldrich has even
gone so far as to state that "[t]he conclusion seems inescapable" (1999, 26). However, as Niemi and Weisberg (2001, 384) point out, such conclusions must really await the test of time. Future studies of realignment will have to account for this new set of circumstances in American politics, but this kind of systemic change is best viewed with the benefit of historical perspective.

Political Implications

The Role of Political Parties in American Democracy

The findings in this dissertation raise questions about the role political parties ought to play in American democracy. The debate over the proper role of political parties is as old as any in modern political science. The majority of scholars have advocated two ideologically distinct, cohesive parties that would run on coherent policy platforms (Epstein 1986). The most prominent statement of this normative position came in the report by the American Political Science Association’s Committee on Political Parties (1950) entitled, “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System.” Advocates of responsible parties argue that political parties perform several key functions critical to democracy, such as aggregating the interests of voters, supplying citizens with opportunities for political participation, and providing individuals with cues necessary to make sense of the political world. This view is summarized by Patterson (1996, 2) as follows:

“...political parties are supposed to bring a measure of cohesiveness to an otherwise fragmented system of policy making by generating policy programs and forming the majorities that ensure passage of legislative programs....Many political scientists regard the integration and coordination of policy making as so
important that they openly wonder whether American democracy can survive without effective and disciplined parties.”

From this vantage point, the increased partisanship and ideological cohesion in Congress would be seen as a positive development. Similarly, the increased awareness in the public of ideological differences between the parties would also be considered an encouraging sign.

Opposite the responsible parties advocates in this debate are those who see party polarization as a negative development. For example, sociologists DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) are troubled by the finding of partisan polarization in the mass public. In their study of attitudinal polarization, these researchers found little evidence of polarization on issues or ideology between socio-demographic groups, but did uncover significant inter-party polarization. They summarize the implications of their findings as follows:

Only when we turn to political party divisions do we find evidence of polarization: striking divergence of attitudes between Democrats and Republicans. In traditional pluralist theory, social conflict emerges from struggles between groups in civil society. Political parties, seeking support from the vital center, take the rough edges off such conflicts. Our findings—that the social attitudes of groups in civil society have converged at the same time that attitudes of party identifiers have polarized—raise troubling questions about the role of political parties in a pluralistic society. (1996, 738)

Thus the authors conclude that rather than moderate social divisions, the party system may be exacerbating social conflict (739).

A pessimistic view of party polarization is shared by other scholars as well. David C. King (1997) argues that because of party polarization in Congress, citizens have come to feel distant from the parties, and therefore have less confidence than they once did in the political system and their government as a whole. While ideologically distinct
parties may offer voters a clearer choice, this polarization may also have side effects such as waning approval of institutions and distrust of government. Ideologically moderate citizens, in particular, may not be satisfied that the government in Washington is representing their interests.

The results in this dissertation are not likely to completely satisfy or completely disappoint either camp in this normative debate. The NES survey data show that the polarization of the parties in Congress has not gone unnoticed by the public, particularly those most interested in politics. For those who perceive important differences between the parties, ideology and party identification weigh more heavily in their voting decisions. The authors of the APSA Report would have welcomed these developments. On the other hand, those who see party polarization as a negative development could point to the results in chapter 6 as supporting evidence. The declining proportion of citizens who expect that their representative would be helpful if contacted with a problem is a trend consistent with the decline in trust in government found by King (1997). This dissertation does not attempt to resolve the normative debate over party responsibility. Rather, the results point to the need for future research to continue to contemplate the role of political parties in American politics, and to consider the impact of polarization on the health of our democracy.

**Divided Government**

Another potential repercussion of party polarization is its effect on the occurrence of split-ticket voting and divided government. Some scholars have argued that party polarization leads to higher incidence of divided government (Fiorina 1996; Alesina and
Rosenthal 1995). The basic argument is that moderate voters split their tickets between the two parties (for example, by voting for a Republican for President and a Democrat for Congress) as a means to achieve ideological balance. When the parties become more extreme ideologically, balancing models predict that we should see more ticket-splitting as moderate voters attempt to balance power between the two parties to avoid overly extreme policies. As Fiorina states, “increasing polarization will lead to increasing ticket-splitting, ceteris paribus” (1996, 152).

On the other hand, if parties are responsible and citizens are better able to differentiate between their policy agendas, we might expect a decline in split ticket voting rather than an increase. Indeed, some empirical work supports this alternative hypothesis. Measuring party polarization using the CBS/NYT polls, Brown and Wright (1992) find that polarization has a negative effect on split ticket voting, party defections, vote swings, and the level of volatility in state election results. Their analyses lead the authors to conclude that “increased coalitional polarization results in greater partisan structuring of the electoral environment, thereby strengthening the link between parties and voting behavior” (Brown and Wright 1992, 422). This state-level finding is consistent with conclusion reached by Kimball and Burden (Kimball 1997, 2001; Burden and Kimball n.d.) that polarization is negatively associated with ticket splitting and divided government at the national level. The results in this dissertation strongly support the view that party polarization should lead to a decrease in ticket splitting, although I did not directly test this hypothesis. Future research should continue to investigate the causal role of party polarization in split-ticket voting.
Political Participation

Another possible consequence of ideological polarization by the parties is an effect on political participation. If ideologically moderate citizens perceive the two parties to be too extreme, these potential voters may choose to stay home rather than choose to vote for one of two evils. Evidence from comparative analyses of Western European democracies suggests a different possibility: party polarization may actually increase turnout (Crepaz 1990). The latter hypothesis echoes the views espoused by the authors of the APSA Report, who argued that the parties could invigorate participation by adopting distinct, consistent platforms. The Report classified voters into three groups: non-voters, consistently partisan voters, and party switchers (APSA 1950, 90-91). This first group, the authors argued, could be motivated to participate if “a real choice is presented on matters they personally consider important” (90). The counter-hypothesis is also a plausible one, however. First, those who seldom vote tend to be less educated, less politically attentive, and less ideological than frequent voters. It might be the case, therefore, that the movement of parties toward the extremes would have a negative impact on participation, if it had an impact at all. Second, it is not clear that the issues being addressed by the political parties of today are matters that citizens consider “personally important.” Thus it might not be the case that the polarized parties of the 1990s and beyond will match the hopes set forth by the APSA Committee five decades ago. Testing these competing expectations about the relationship between party polarization and political participation suggests a promising avenue for future research efforts.
Summary

In sum, there are abundant opportunities to apply the concept of party polarization to the study of partisanship, trust in government, approval of institutions, the incidence of split ticket voting and divided government, and political participation. The normative implications of such research extend even beyond the important questions of representation and responsiveness raised by an analysis of the relationship between elite-level and mass-level party polarization. Not only are there questions to be answered about “who leads whom,” but also about what impact that leadership (or lack thereof) has on the health of American democracy. The results in this dissertation cannot resolve these normative debates, but they do evoke further questions about the role of political parties in American politics and suggest several points of departure for future research. Scholars seeking to uncover insights into the workings of the American political system should take into account the evolving ideological composition of the two parties in future research efforts.

In the current study, I have sought to build a foundation from which to investigate more thoroughly the causes and consequences of party polarization in American politics. Taken together, the evidence reported here suggests, at a minimum, that students of public opinion, of political parties, and of Congress should continue to keep a vigilant eye on trends in party polarization.
APPENDIX

NATIONAL ELECTION STUDIES SURVEY DATA

Question Wording

Wording of most of the items used in the analysis in the dissertation can be found in the text or footnotes. The question wording of several long items is included below, along with the variable numbers from the NES cumulative file (Sapiro, Rosenstone, and the NES 1999).

Party Identification (vcf0301)

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

If Republican or Democrat:
Would you call yourself a strong Republican/Democrat, or a not very strong Republican/Democrat?

If Independent:
Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?

Liberal-Conservative Ideology (vcf0803)

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is 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 R)
Government Guaranteed Jobs, Standard of Living 7-point scale (vcf0809)

Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. [1972-1978, 1996-later: Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1]. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his/their own. [1972-1978, 1996: Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6.] Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Government Aid to Blacks 7-point scale (vcf0830)

Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every [prior to 1996 only: possible] effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks [prior to 1986: and other minority groups][1980: even if it means giving them preferential treatment]. [1996-later: Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.] Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. [1996-later: Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2,3,4,5 or 6.] Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about it?

Government Services/Spending Tradeoff 7-point scale (vcf0839)

Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel that it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

Defense Spending 7-point scale (vcf0843)

Some people believe that we should spend much less money for defense. [1996: Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.] Others feel that defense spending should be greatly increased. [1996: Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7.] Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this?

Women’s Role in Society 7-point scale (vcf0834)

Recently there has been a lot of talk about women’s rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others
feel that a women's place is in the home. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this?

**Government Health Insurance 7-point scale (vcf0806)**

There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some [1988, 1994-later: people] feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses [1984 and later: for everyone]. [1996: Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.] Others feel that [1988, 1994-1996: all] medical expenses should be paid by individuals, and through private insurance [1984 and later: plans] like Blue Cross [1984-1994: or 1996: some other company paid plans]. [1996: Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And of course, some people have opinions somewhere in between at points 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6.] Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?

**Abortion (vcf0838)**

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. 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.

**School Integration (vcf0816)**

Some people say that the government in Washington should see to it that white and black [before 1972: Negro] children go [1964-1970: are allowed to go] to the same schools. Others claim this is not the government's business. Have you been concerned [1986, 1990: interested] enough about [in] this question to favor one side over the other? IF YES, Do you think the government in Washington should —

1. See to it that white and black children go to the same schools; or
2. Stay out of this area as it is none of the government's business?
Methodological Notes

Mode and Question Wording Effects in the 2000 Election Study

In the 2000 National Election Study (Burns, Kinder, Rosenstone, Sapiro, and the NES 2001), multiple experiments were conducted on the effects of telephone interviewing versus in-person interviewing, and on the interaction of survey mode with question wording format. In some experiments, half of the sample received seven-point scales for which the wording was changed from the standard format to a branching format similar to that used in the party identification question. To preserve comparability with the data from previous years, I analyzed only the 2000 data gathered using the same question wordings as those employed in prior years. This decision avoids the potential problems associated with changes in question wording and mode. Although this leaves a somewhat smaller sample size for 2000, most analyses still include about 800 respondents (about half of the full sample).

Weights

For variable frequencies, such as those found in chapters 4 through 6, I used the basic NES sample weights. In the NES cumulative file, this weight variable is vcf0009. In the 2000 NES data file, this weight variable is v000002. For more complex analyses such as regression and logit models, no weights were used. The analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows version 7.0, and STATA for Windows version 5.0.
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