

Party Polarization



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POL 001: Introduction to American Politics

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Outline

1. Why two parties?
2. Downs & the spatial model
3. The parties are polarizing
4. Racial realignment
5. Are voters polarizing?

Why Two Parties?

The Two-Party System Is Unusual

- The US has had a political system dominated by two major parties for nearly all of its history
- By global standards, this is unusual!
- Most countries, including countries with presidential systems and FPTP elections, have more than two major parties
- This makes the US a mystery

What Factors Make The US Party System So Limited?

- The US has a non-permissive electoral system
 - Winner-take-all congressional races
 - Ballot access rules
 - High financial costs to win
 - Two major parties that have been entrenched for nearly two centuries
 - Parties are organized around winning the White House
- More permissive electoral systems make new party emergence more likely
- Mechanisms:
 - Proportional electoral system
 - Parliamentary system type

“Plurality” Winner-Take-All Rules

- The Electoral College
 - Every state has electoral votes equal to its number of House members + its number of Senators (2)
 - **Unit rule:** every state* gives all its electoral votes to the *plurality* winner of the state’s popular vote
- Congress
 - All congressional races (House and Senate) are won by the candidate who wins a *plurality* of the vote
 - Recall that House members represent *districts* and Senators represent whole *states*

*Except Maine and Nebraska

Plurality vs. Proportional Systems

Electoral System I

Electoral System II

% votes	% seats	% votes	% seats
35.2	55.1	37.7	42.5
32.3	30.6	30	34.5
22.1	9.6	10.8	9.3
		10.1	7.1

“Plurality”

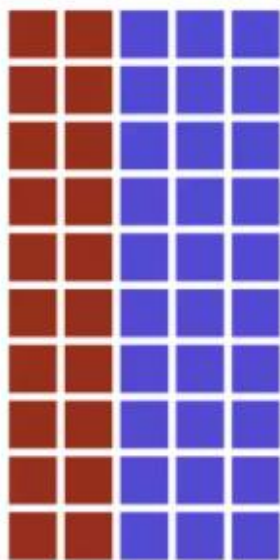
“Proportional”

Being FPTP Matters!

Gerrymandering, explained

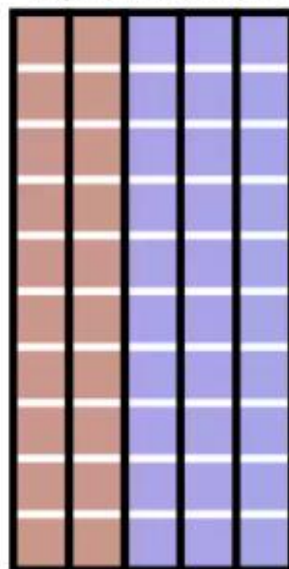
Three different ways to divide 50 people into five districts

50
people



60% blue,
40% red

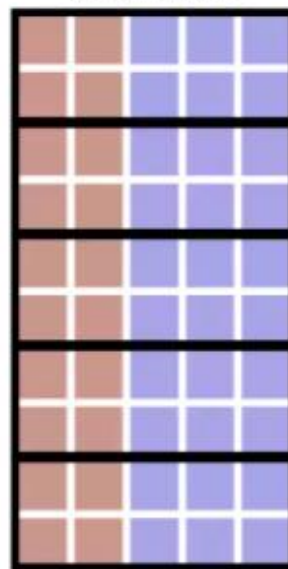
1. Perfect
representation



3 blue districts,
2 red districts

BLUE WINS

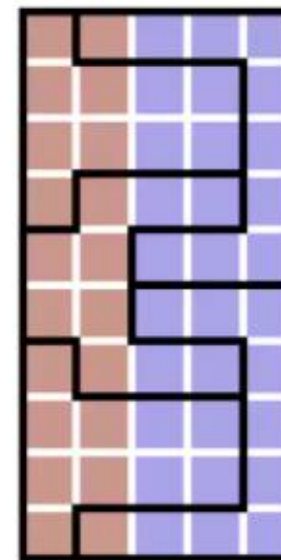
2. Compact,
but unfair



5 blue districts,
0 red districts

BLUE WINS

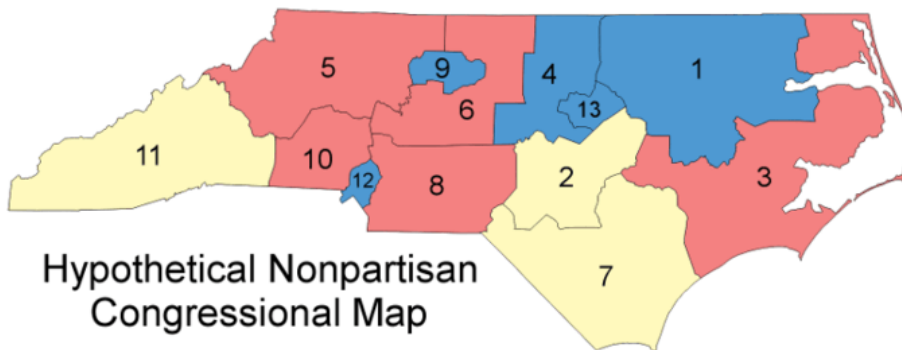
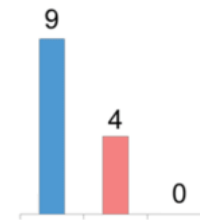
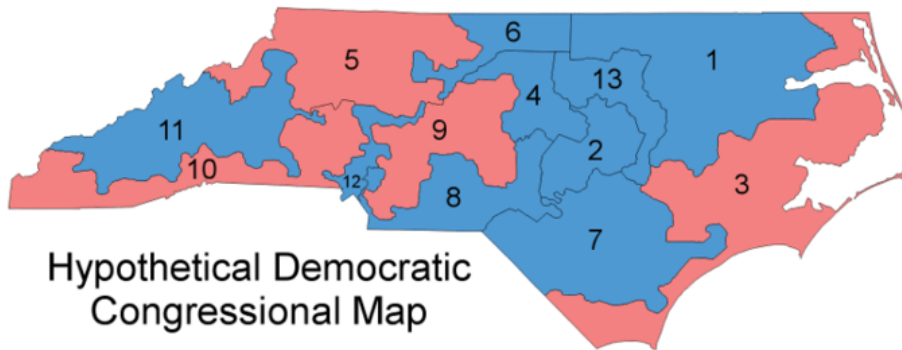
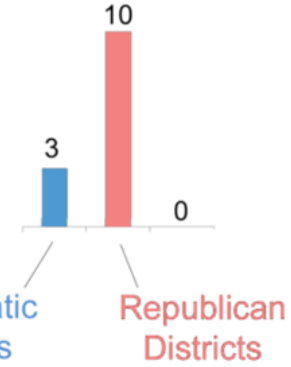
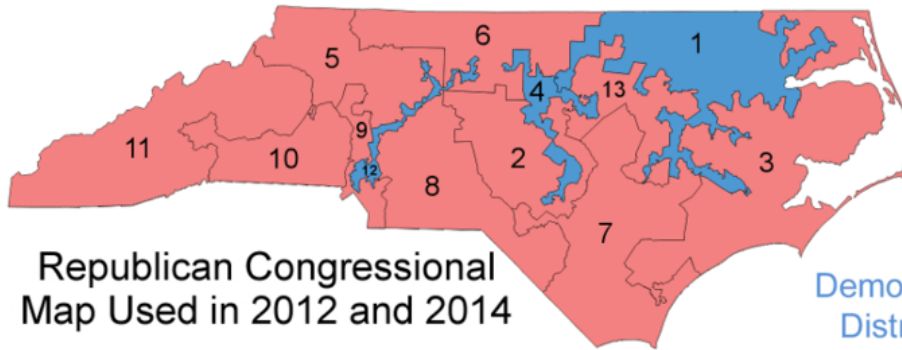
3. Neither compact
nor fair



2 blue districts,
3 red districts

RED WINS

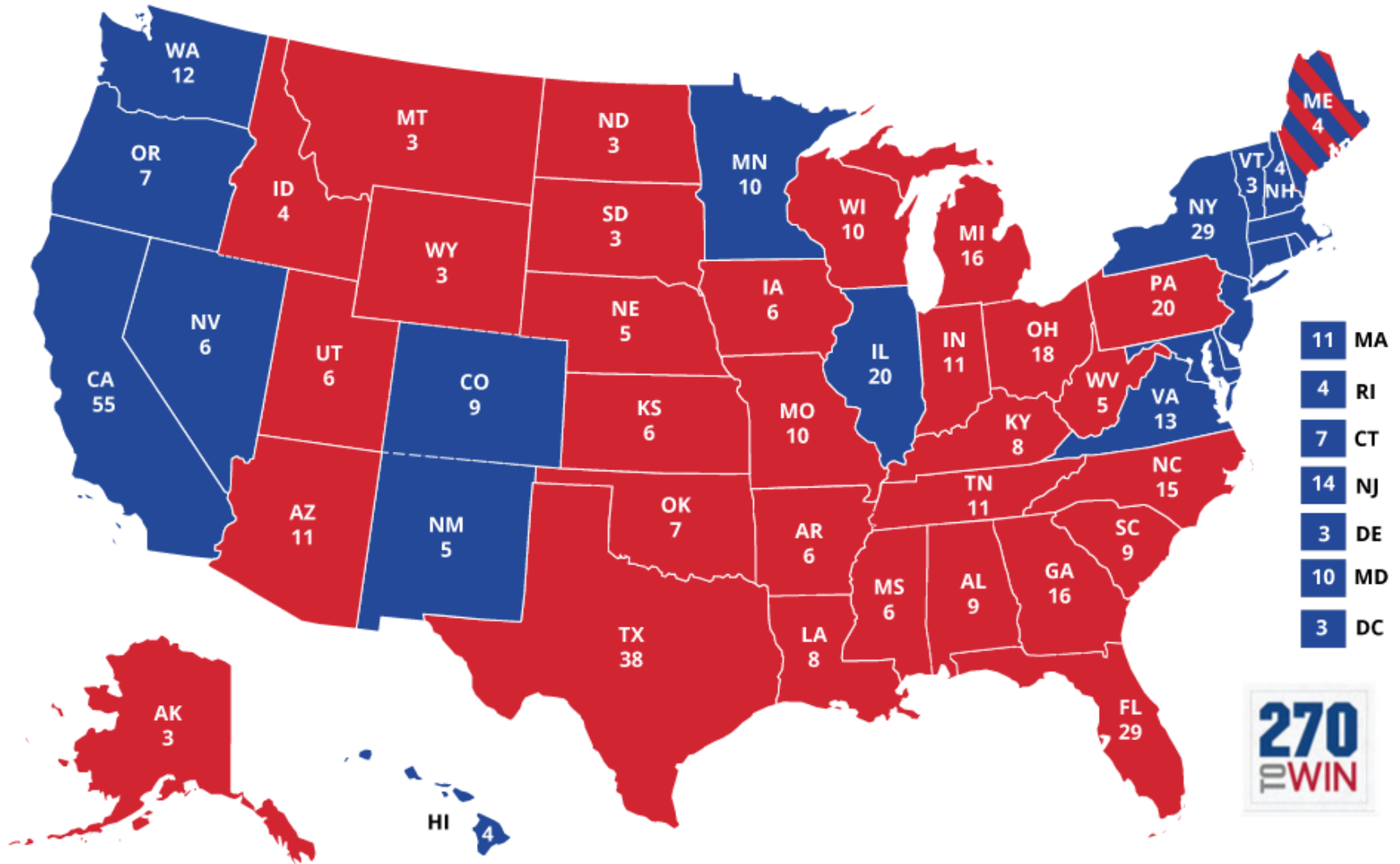
How Gerrymandering Can Swing Elections



The Electoral College Is *Also* Winner-Take-All

Candidate	Party	% votes	EV
Donald Trump	Republican	46.1	304
Hillary Clinton	Democratic	48.2	227

- **Recall:** how can the popular vote winner *lose* under the electoral college?
- Why is this bad for third parties?
 - There is no prize for 2nd (or 3rd!) place

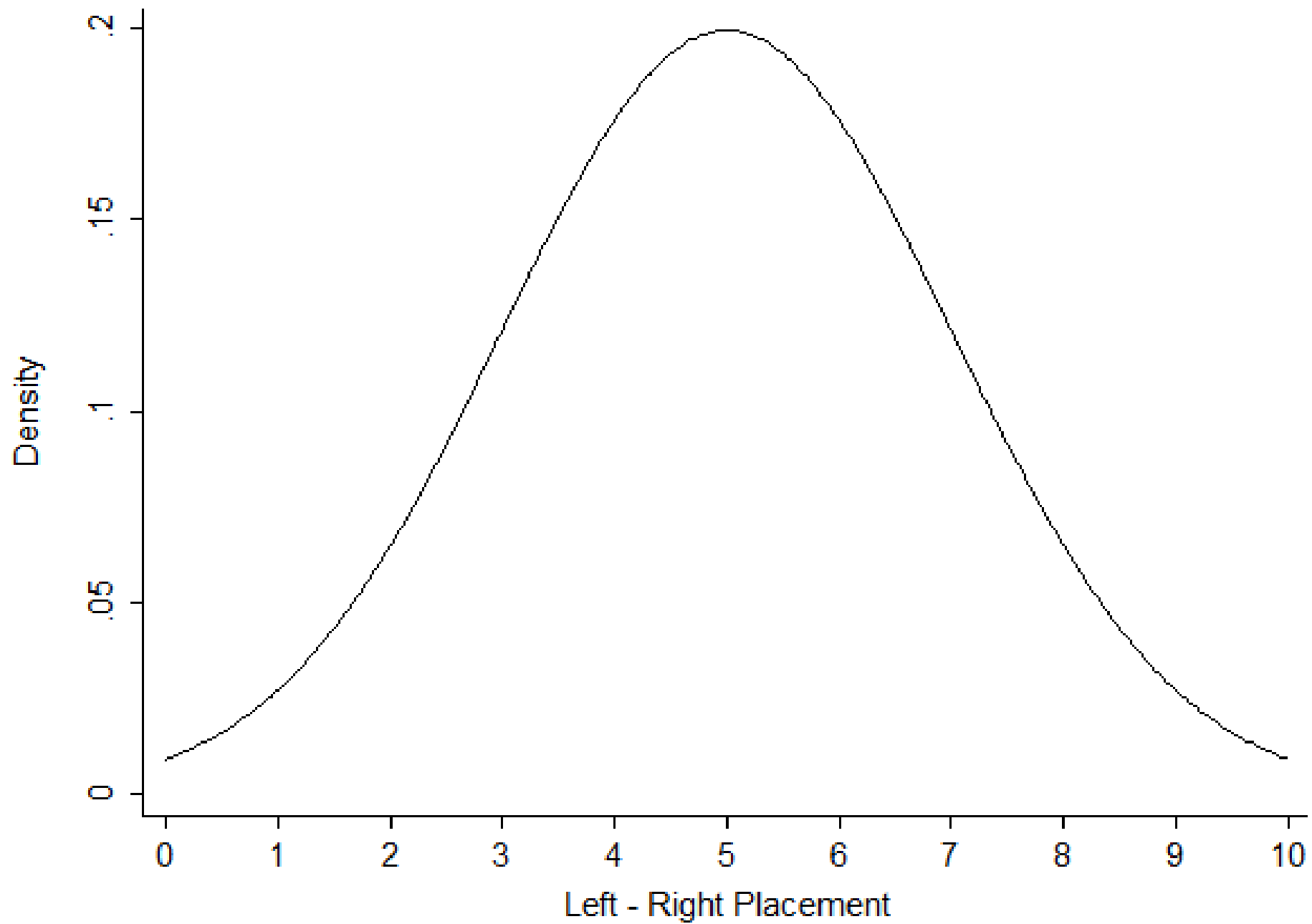


270
TO WIN

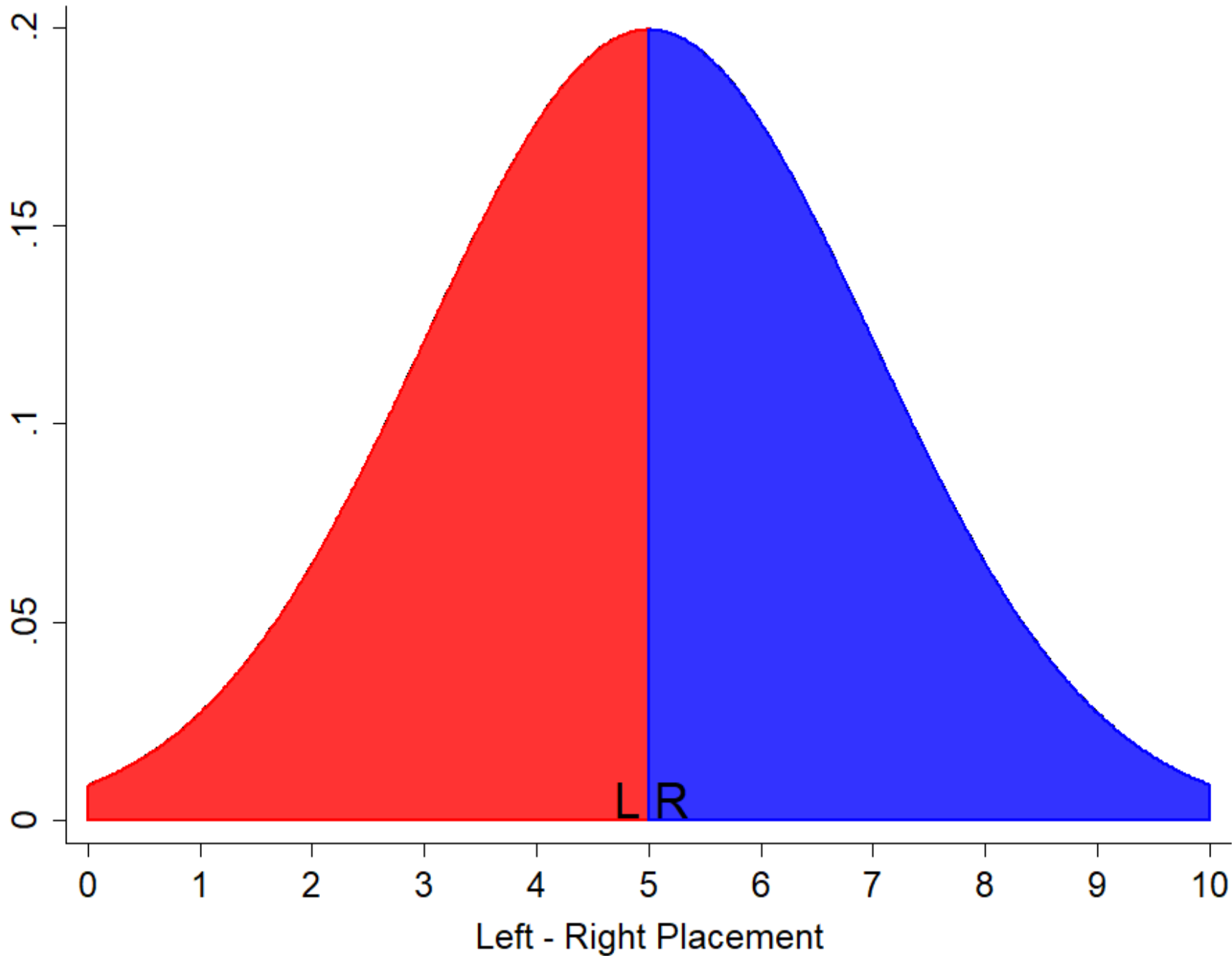
Downs & the Spatial Model

Downs (1957): The Economic Theory of Democracy

- This classic spatial model makes a lot of assumptions
- Parties are **election-seeking**, and do not have set policy preferences
- Voters do have policy preferences, and vote for the party that most closely represents them
- Most voters are moderate
- Voters do not abstain
- There are only two party choices

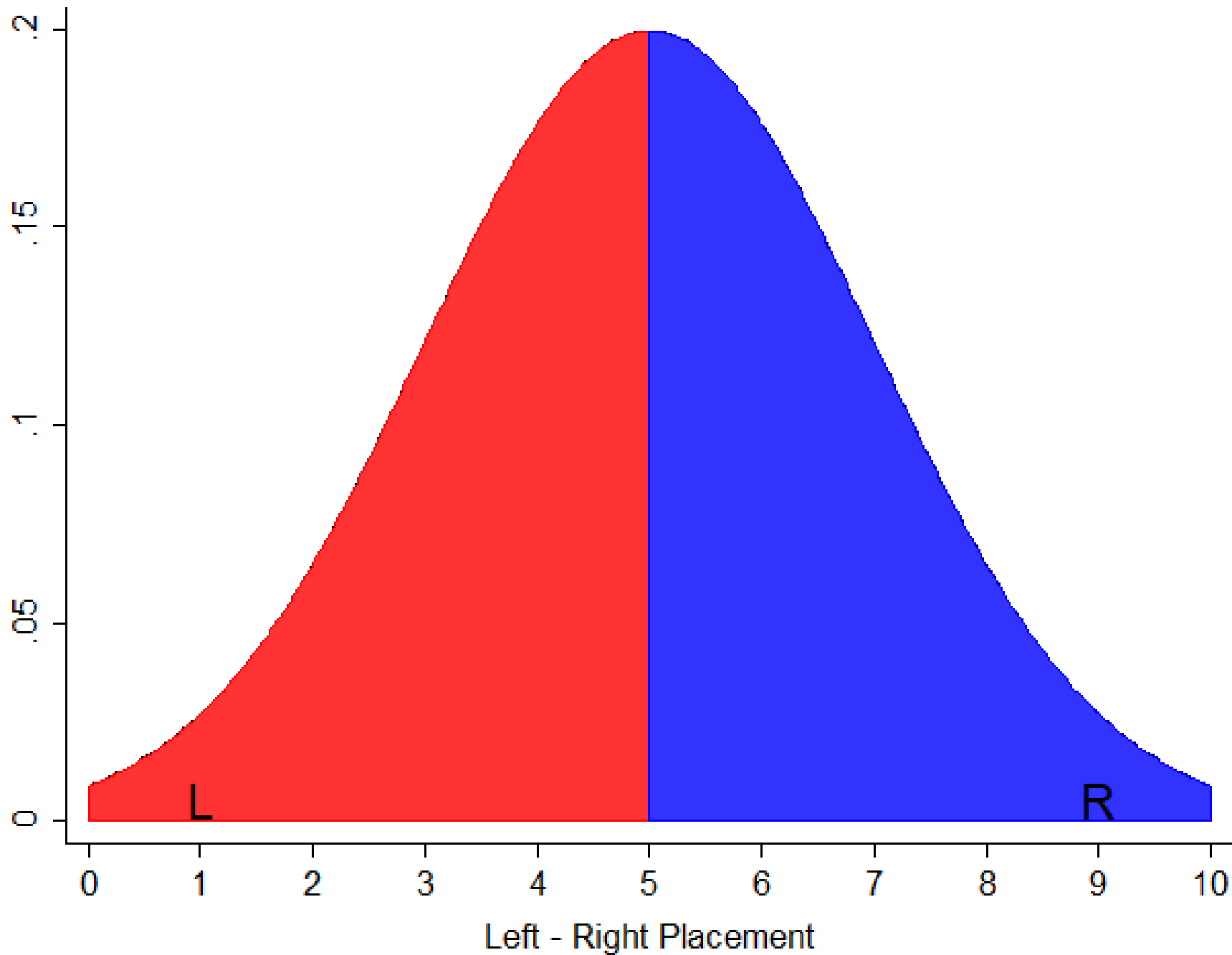


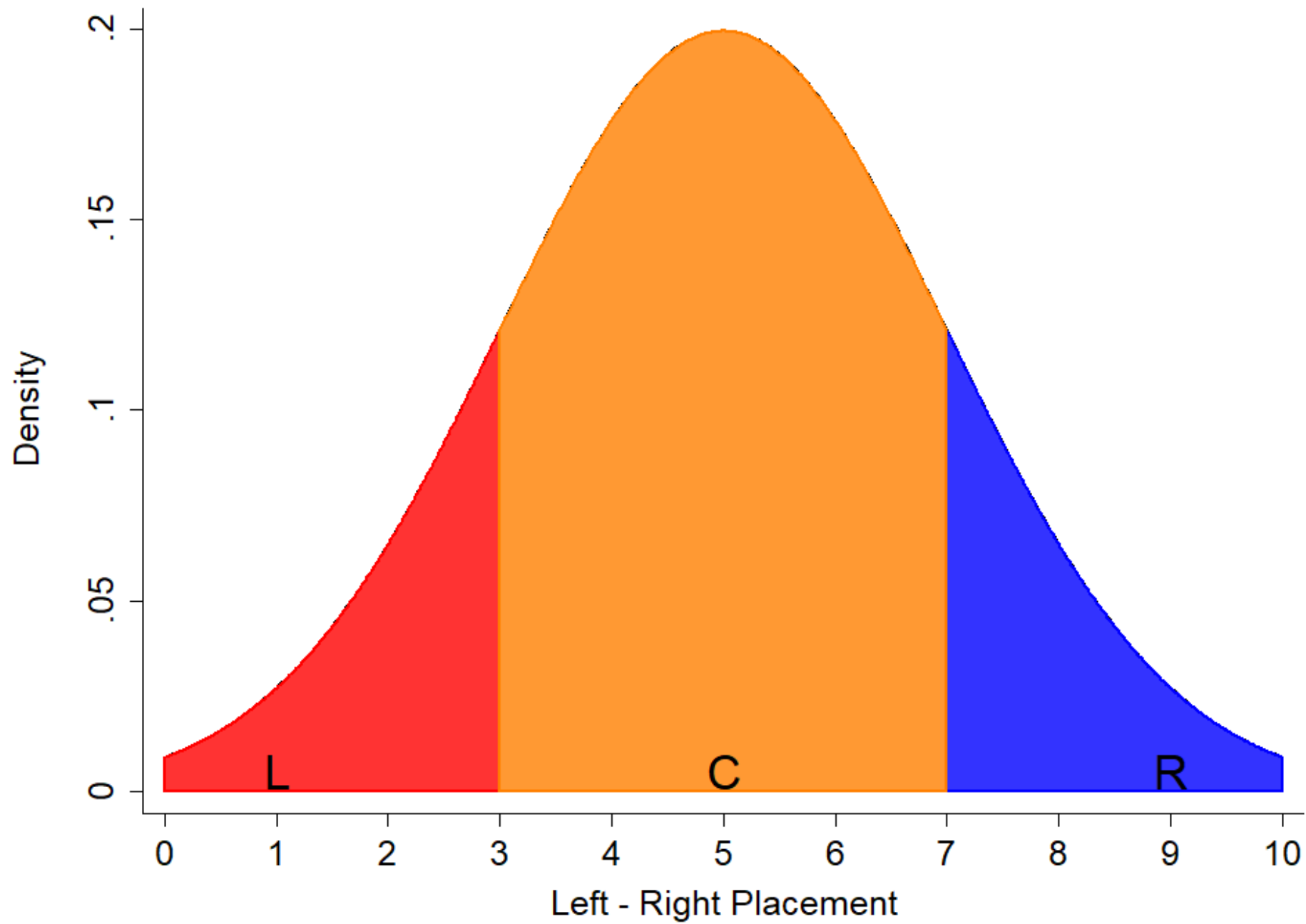
Density



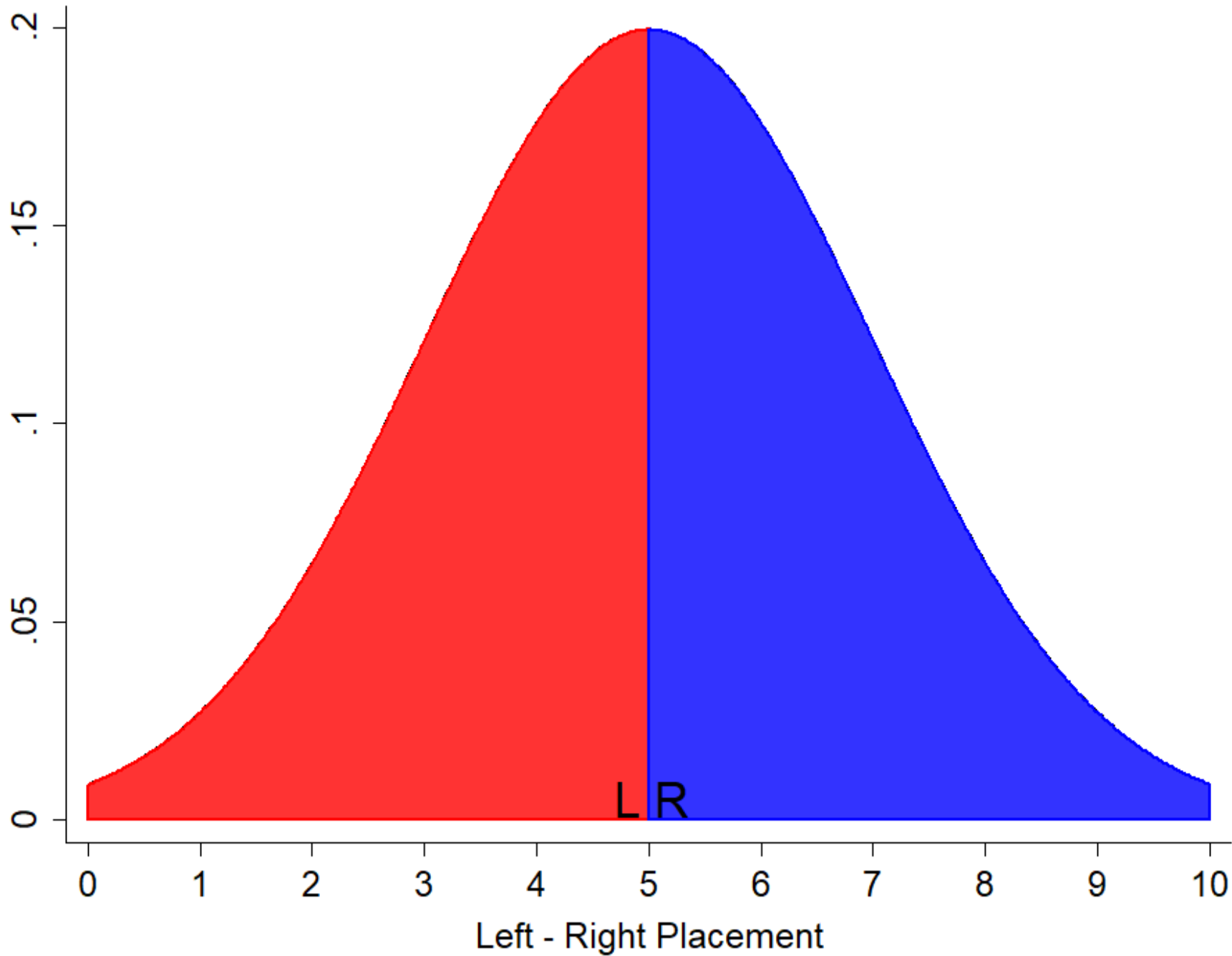
LR

Density





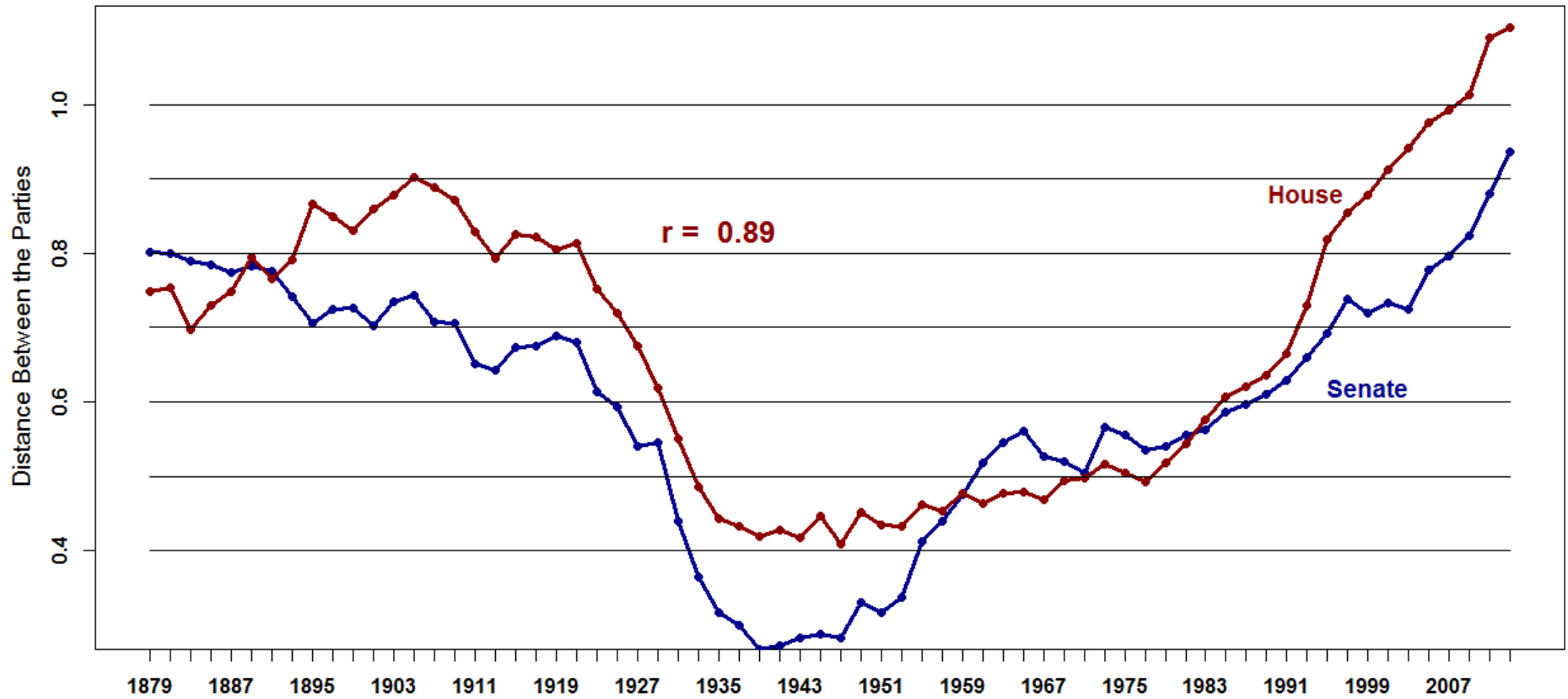
Density



Party Polarization

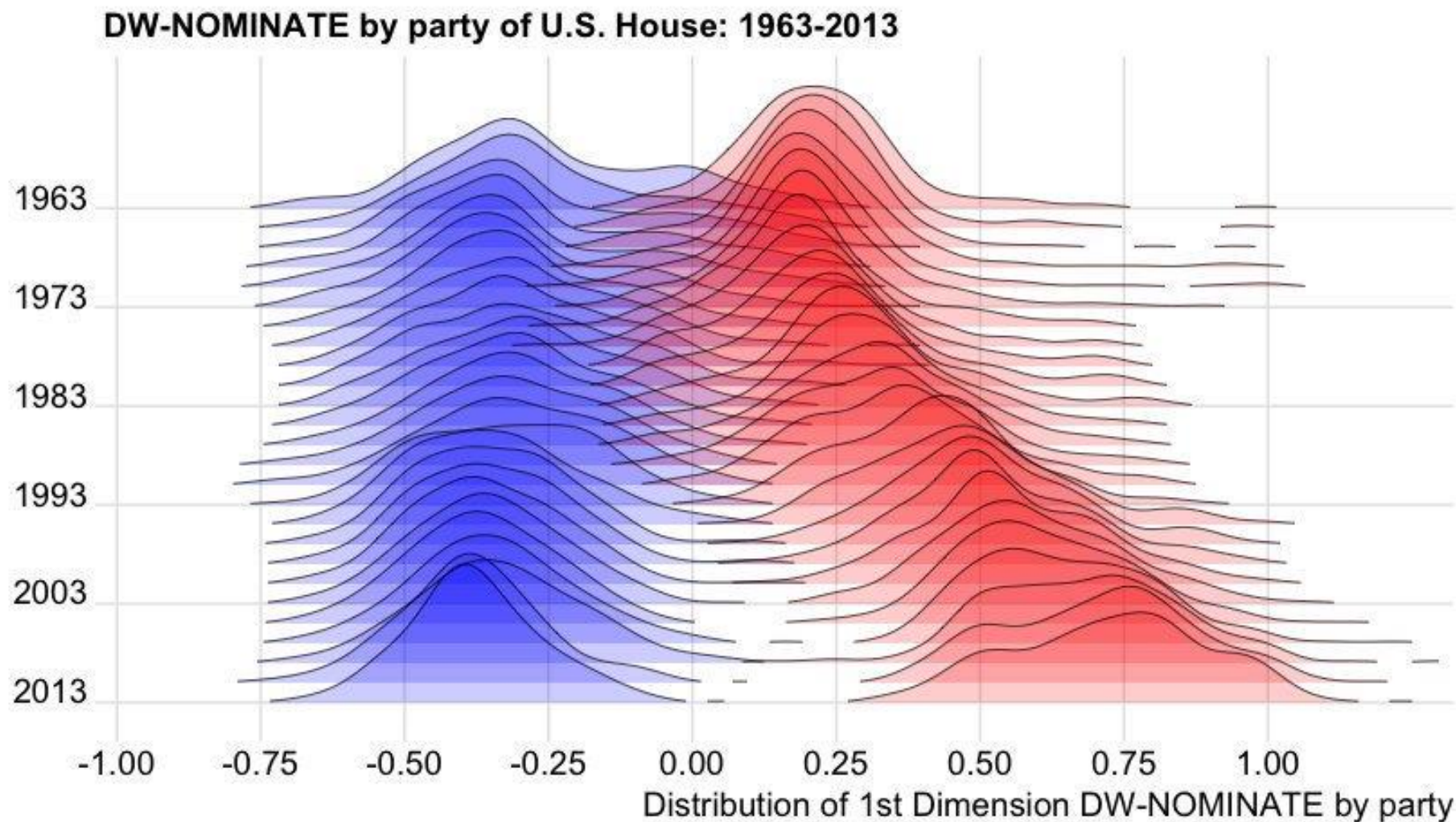
The Congressional Parties Are Historically Polarized

Party Polarization 1879-2013
Distance Between the Parties First Dimension



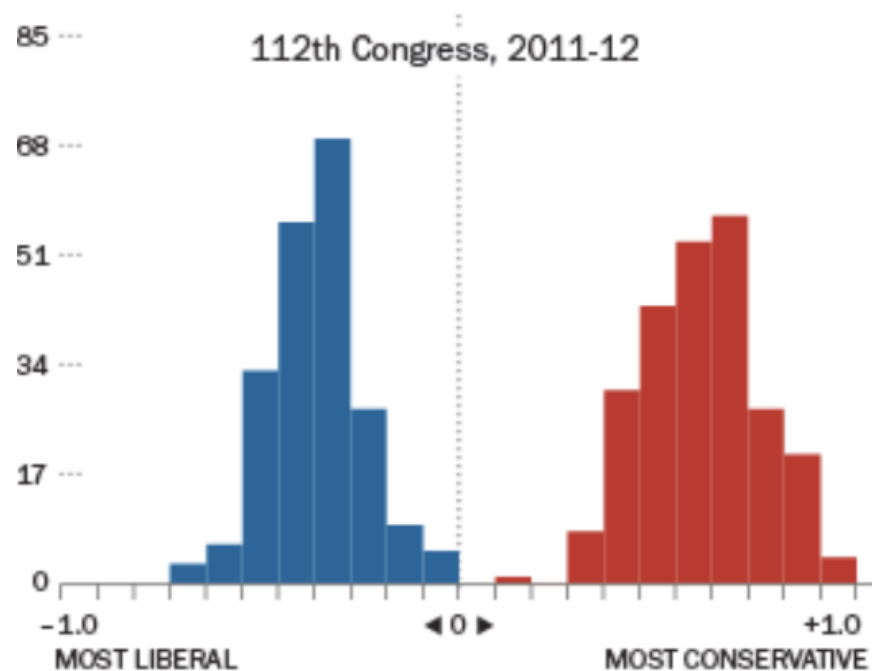
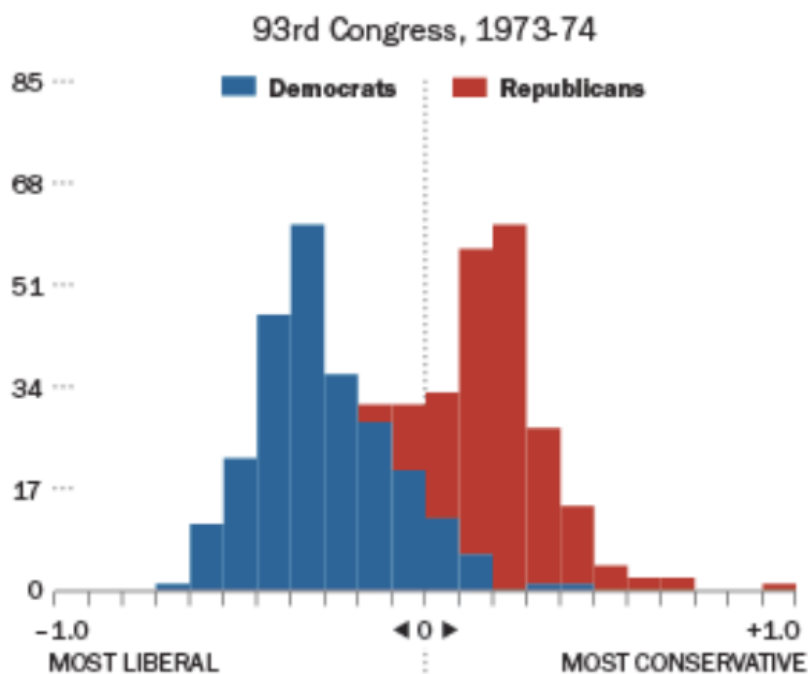
Polarized America / voteview.com

The Congressional Parties Are Polarizing Asymmetrically



The Congressional Parties No Longer Overlap

Number of Representatives



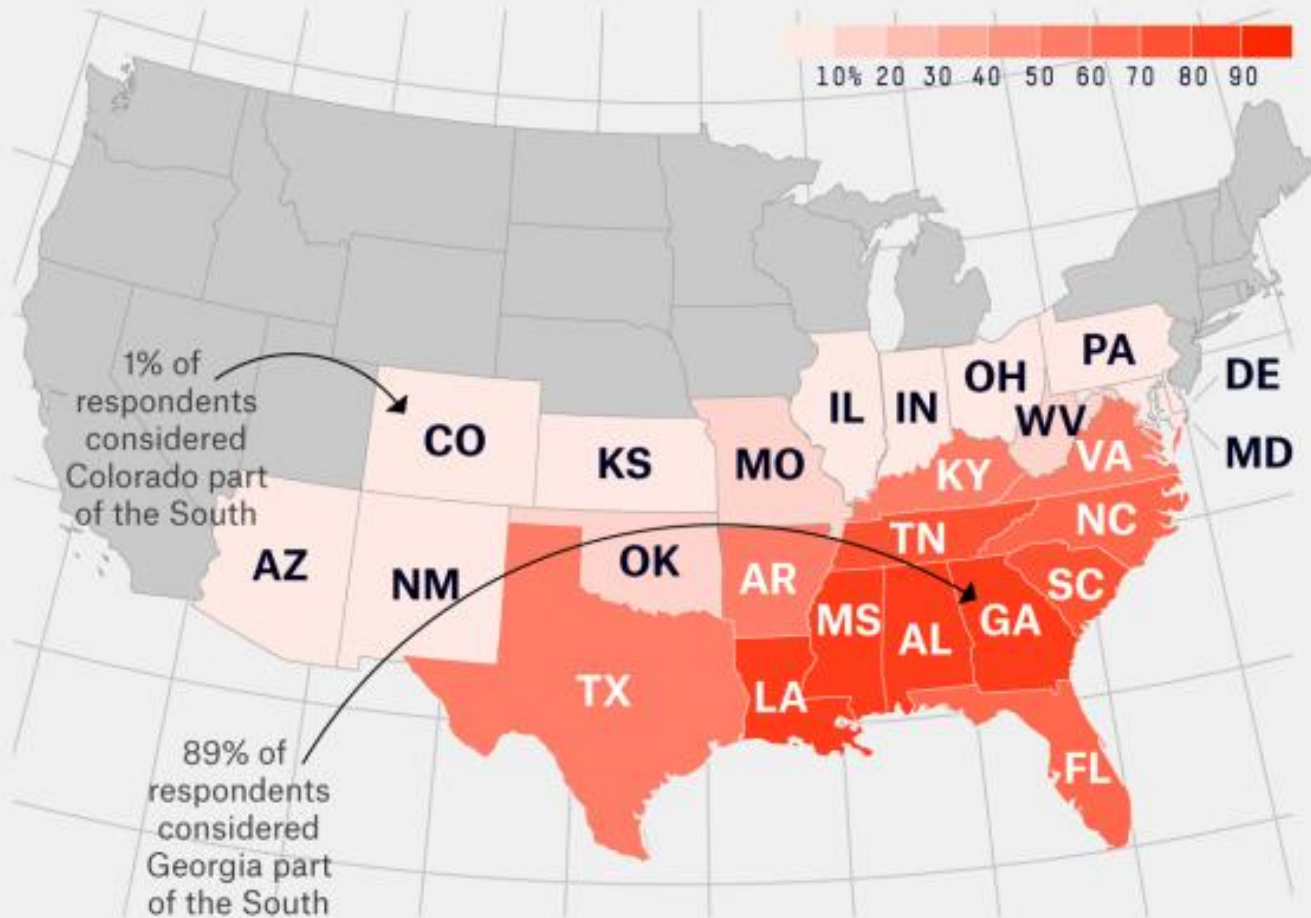
Racial Realignment

Racial Realignment

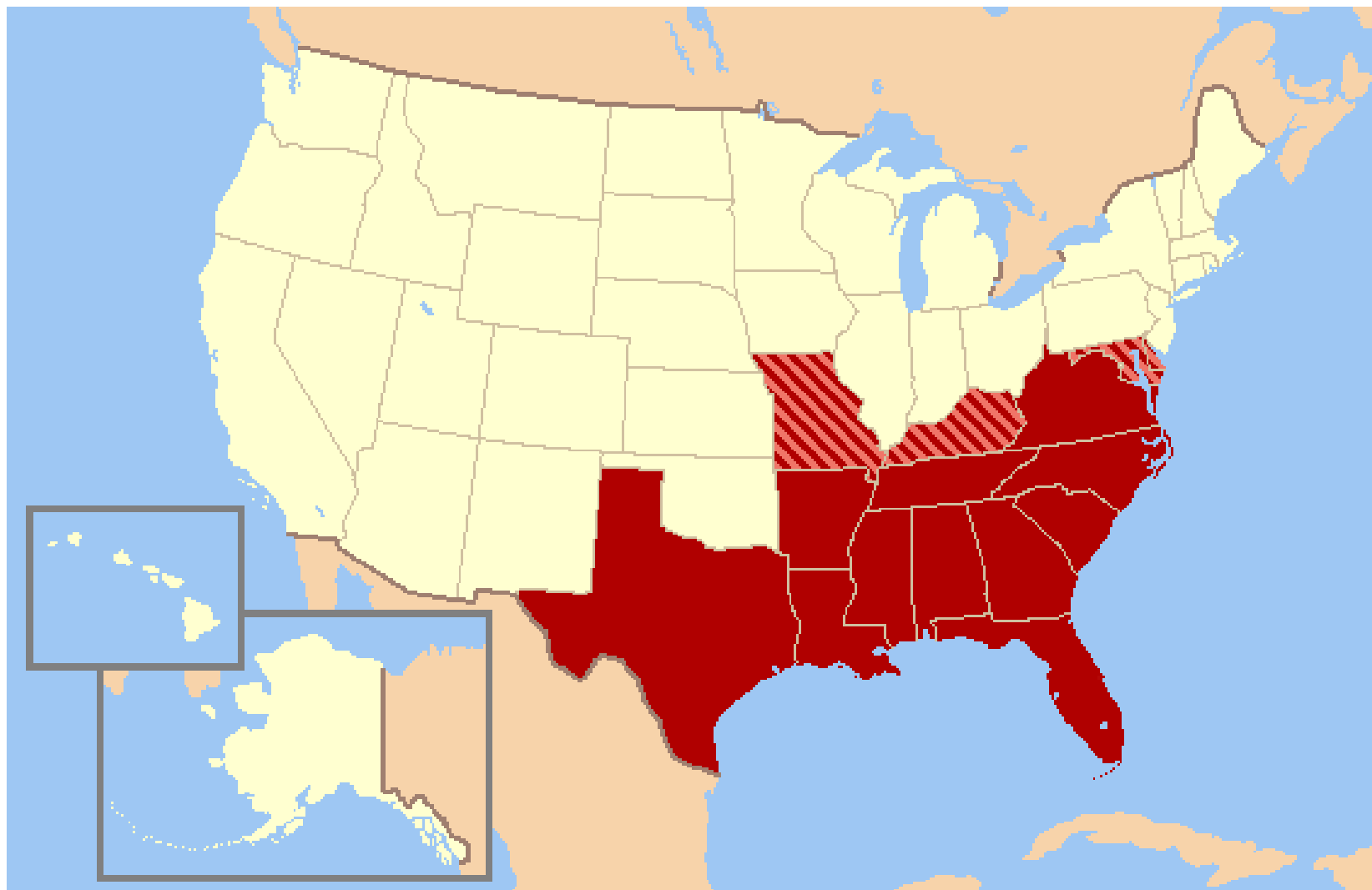
- Why are the parties polarizing? In large part because ideology is now 1-dimensional
- Previously, left vs. right was not the *only* relevant ideological dimension
- In addition there was a racial dimension to politics that strongly divided the Democratic Party
- With the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, the Democratic Party began to be associated with racial liberalism, setting off a decades-long political realignment

'Which States Do You Consider Part of the South?'

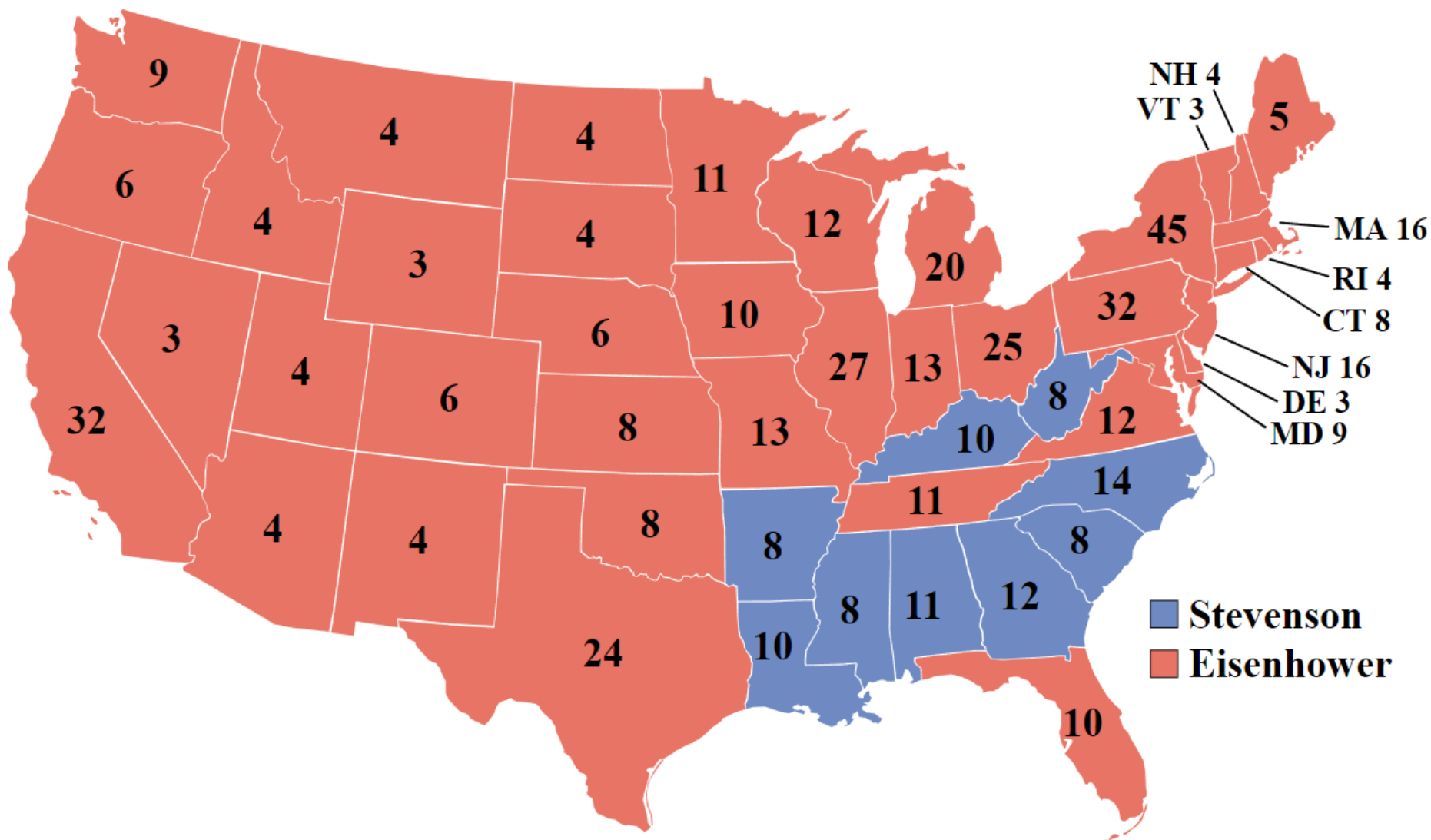
Percentage classifying each state as part of the South, from a survey of 1,135 people identifying "some" or "a lot" as a Southerner



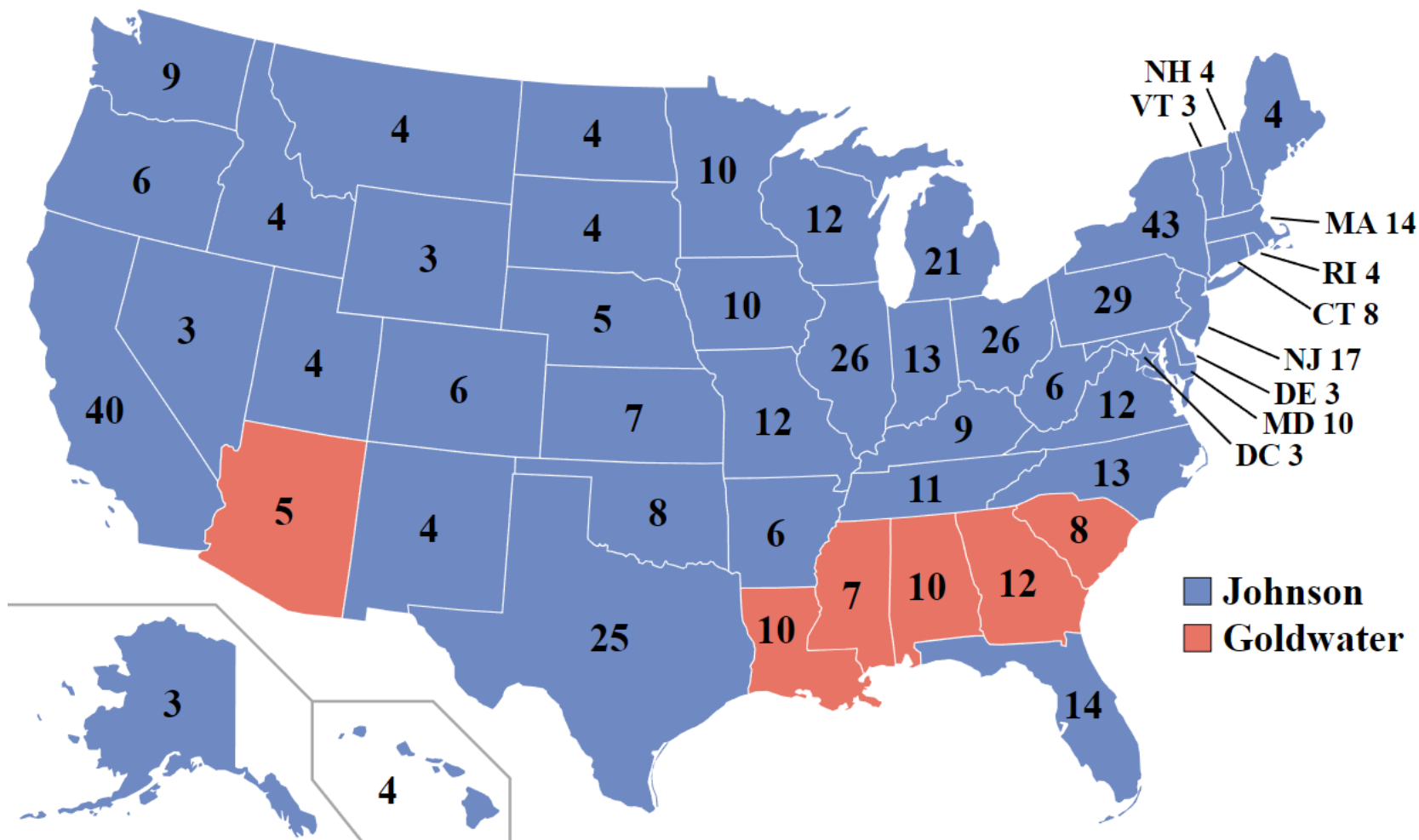
The South Is Generally Considered the Old Confederacy + West Virginia



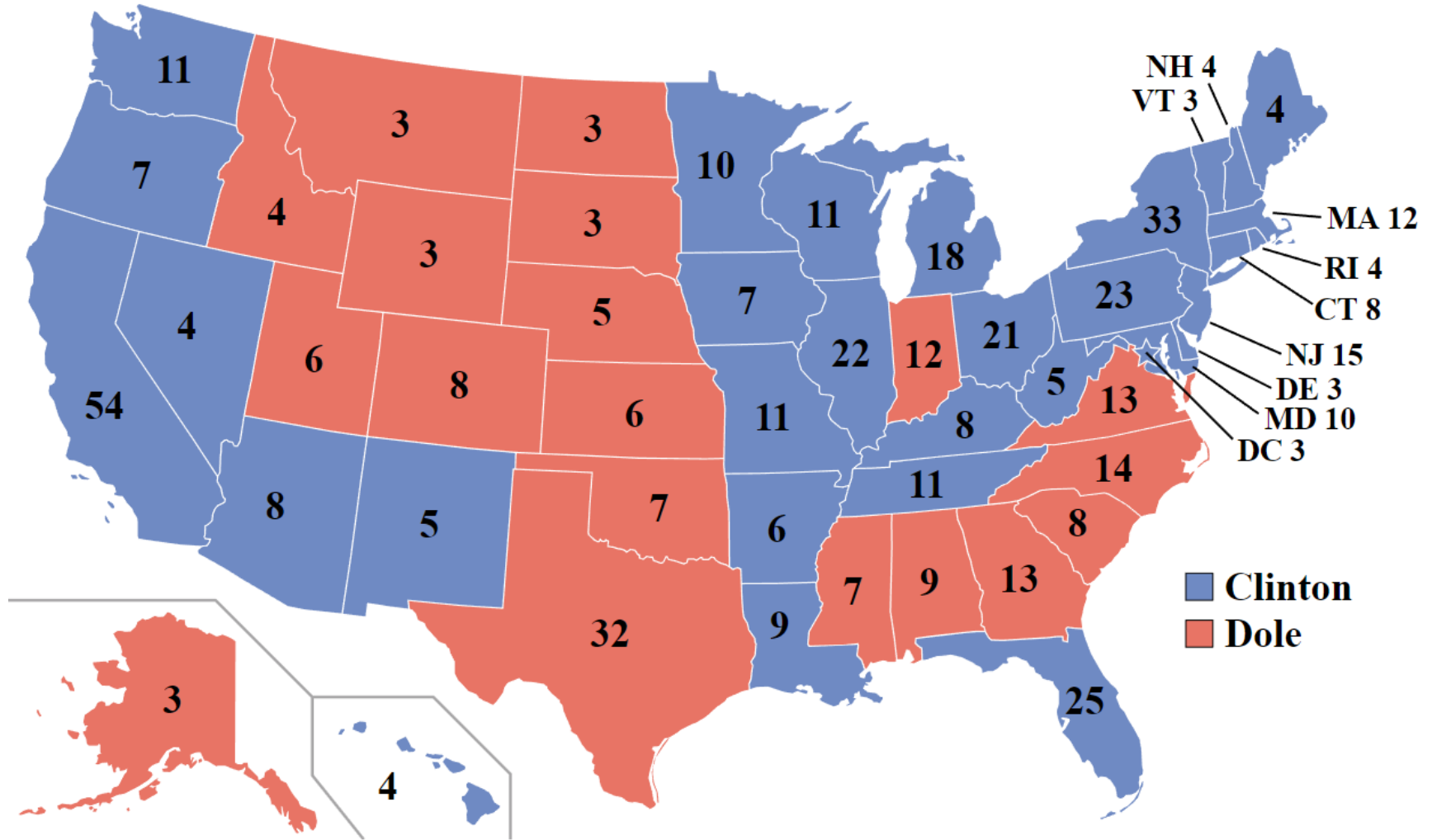
The South Was Solidly Democratic Under Jim Crow



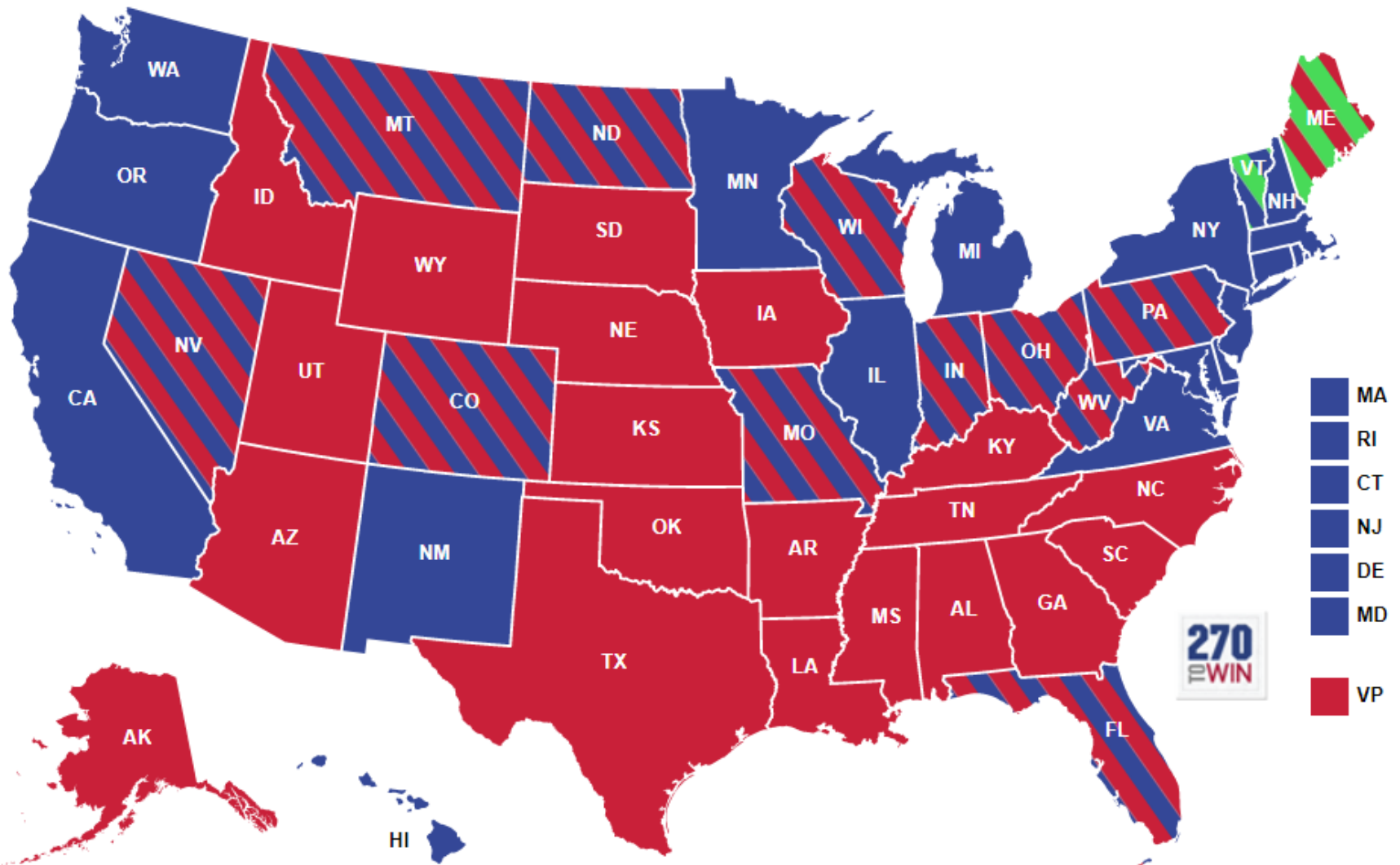
1964 Signals the Shift In the South



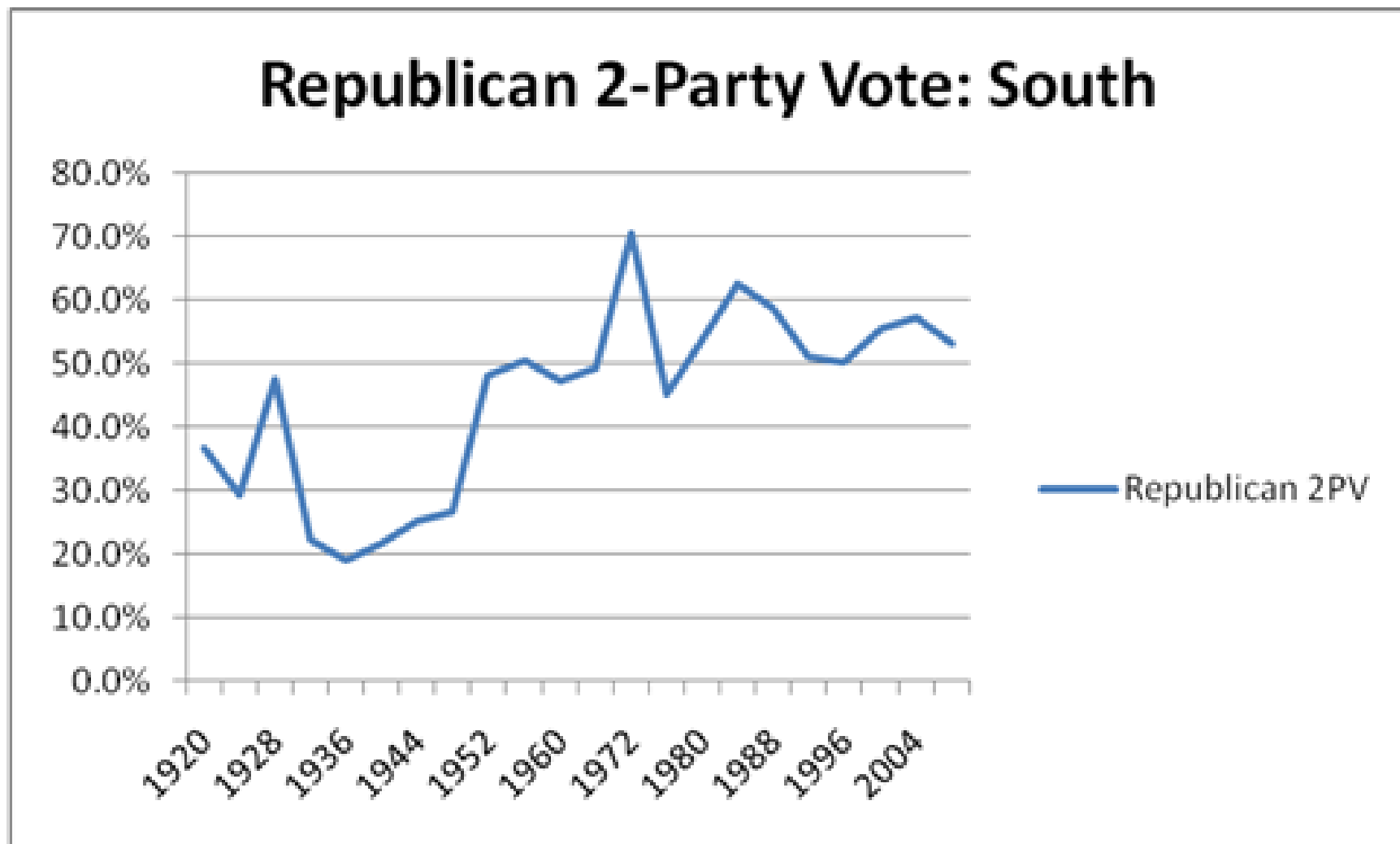
Bill Clinton Is the Last Democrat to Win a State In the Deep South



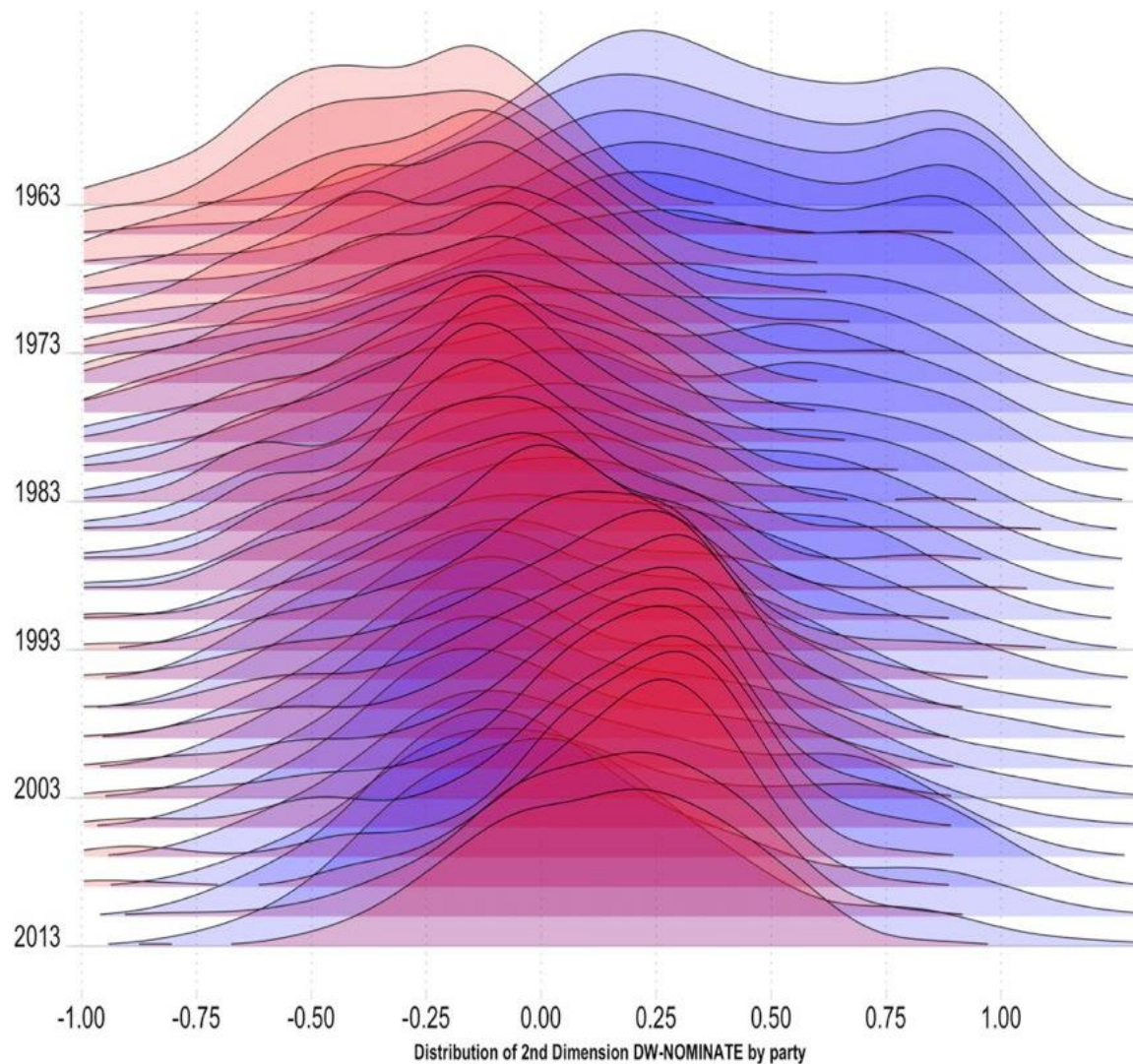
Only Two Southern States Have Democratic Senators



Republican Vote in the South Has Increased Dramatically



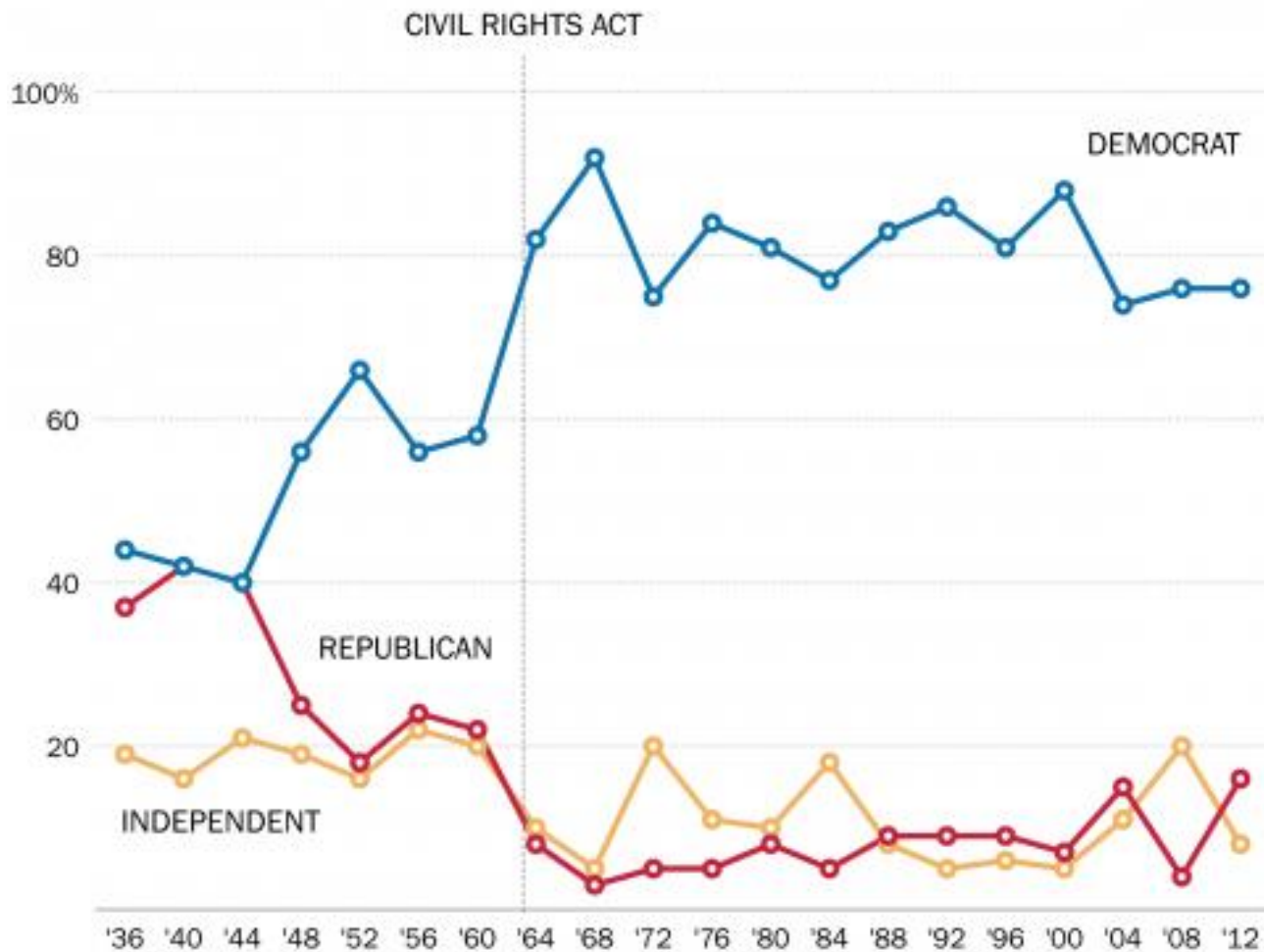
The Democratic Party Has Shifted Massively on Race



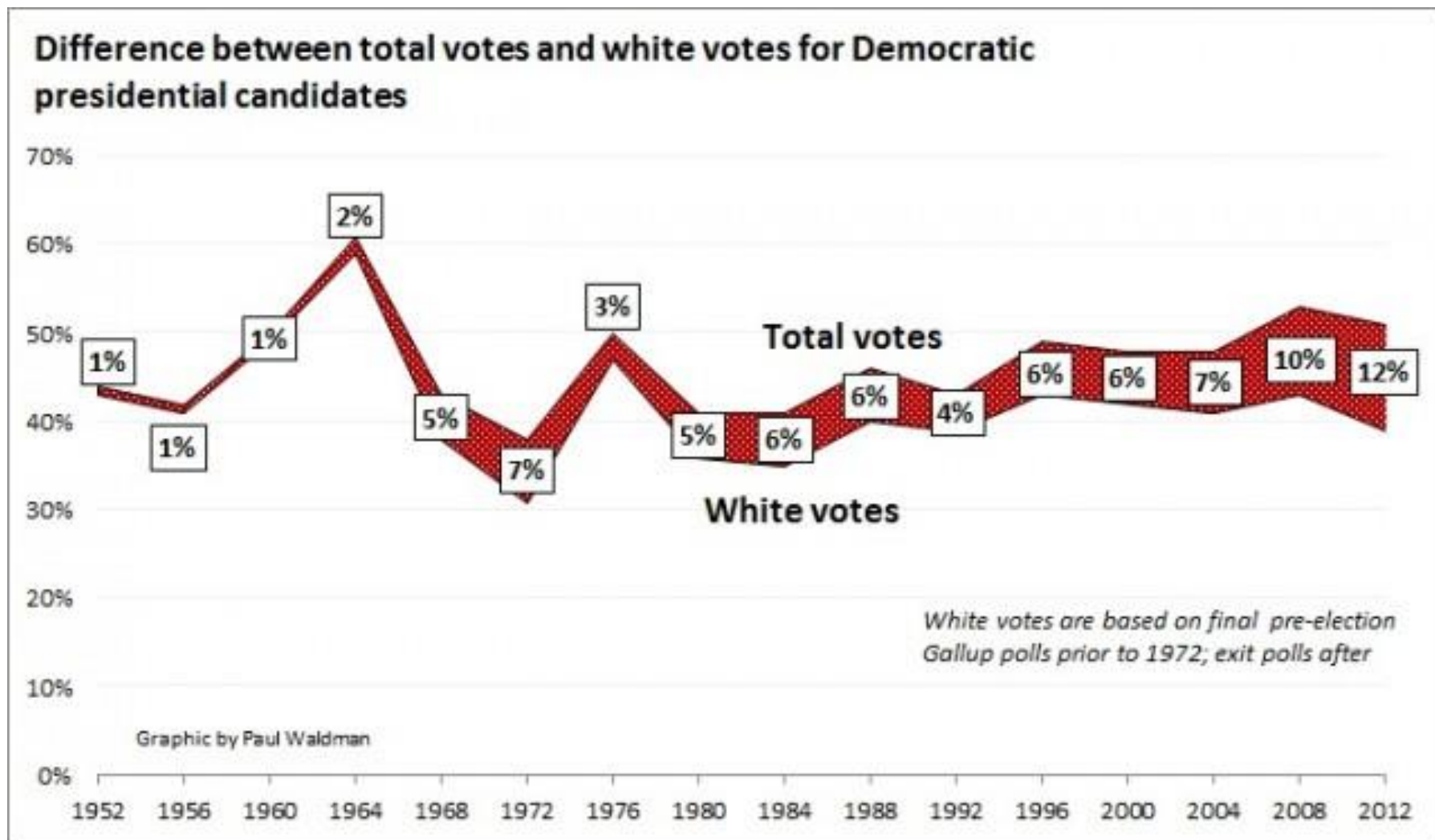
Black Party ID Shifted Dramatically...

Black party identification

Data compiled by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies from a variety of sources.



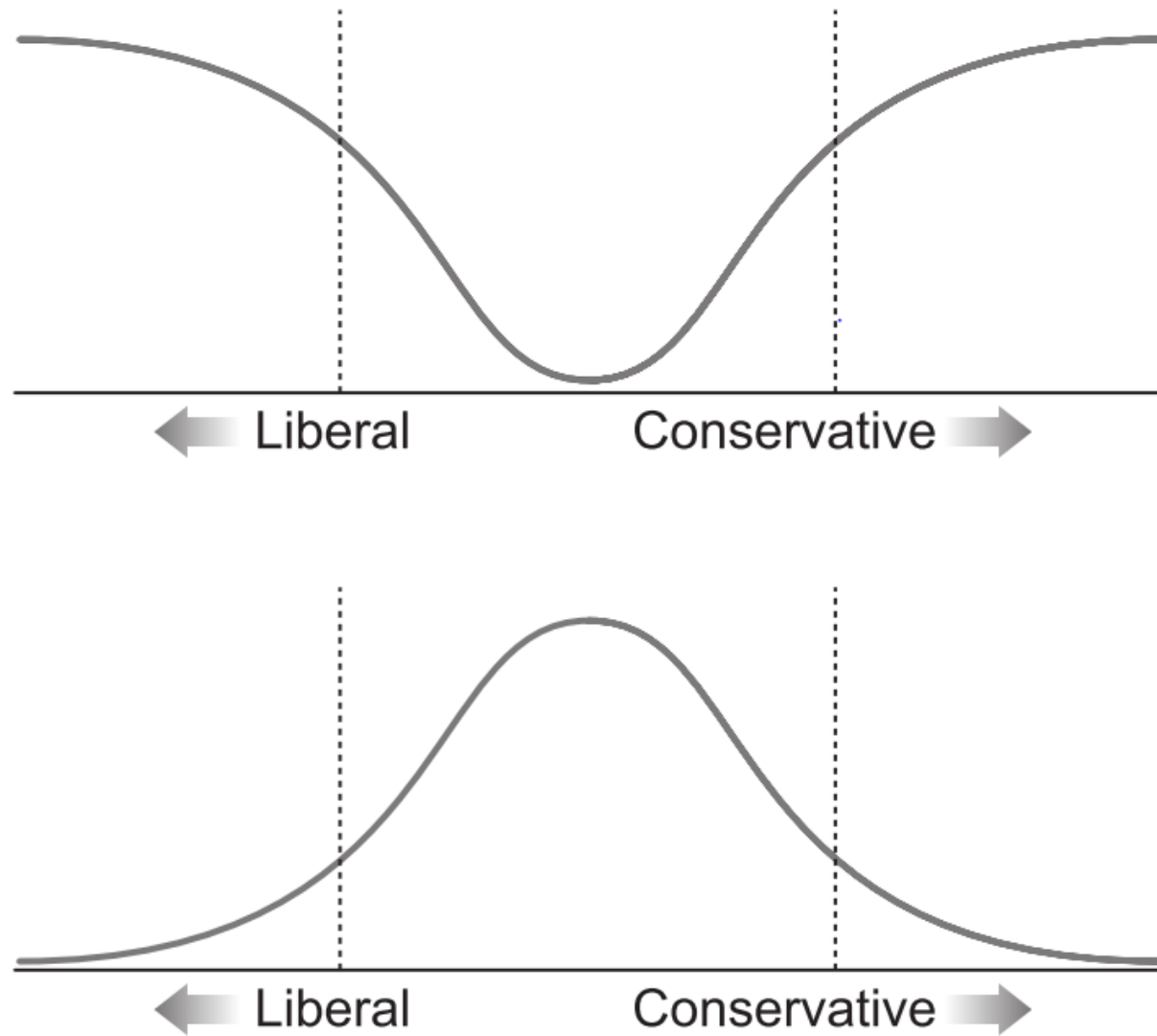
... and Democratic Candidates Now Rely on the Non-White Vote



Are Voters Polarizing?

Are Voters Polarizing?

- We know that the *parties* are polarizing... but are voters?
- What does a polarized electorate look like?
- What does a depolarized electorate look like?
- What do Abrams and Fiorina find?



The Public Is Not Polarizing Fast...

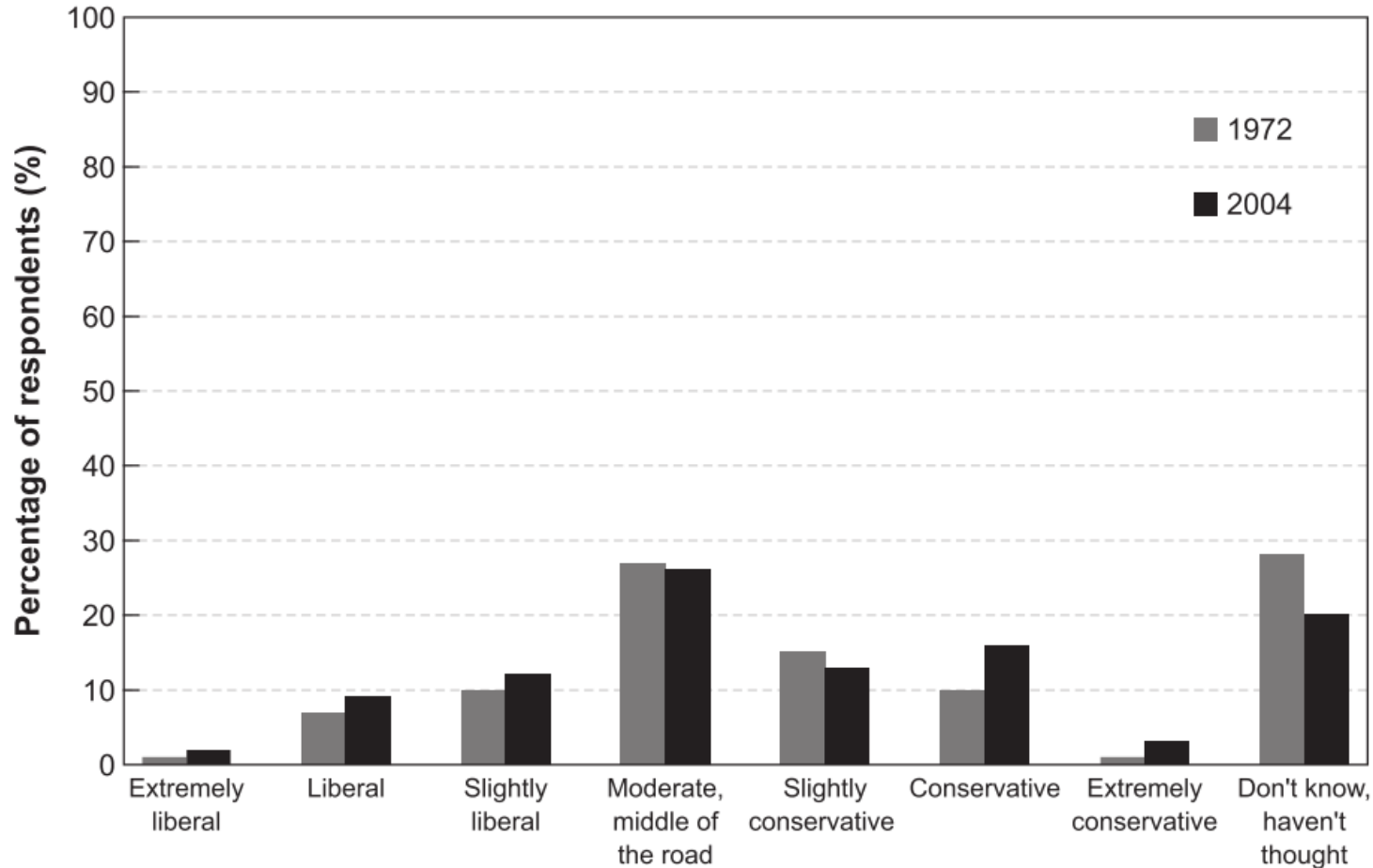


Figure 3

Political ideology: National Election Studies, 1972 versus 2004.

... Though Change Is Occurring

Only about a third of Americans have a mix of conservative and liberal positions; in 2004, nearly half had mixed political values

Distribution of the public on a 10-item scale of political values

1994



2004



2017



Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see report methodology).

Source: Survey conducted June 8-18, 2017.

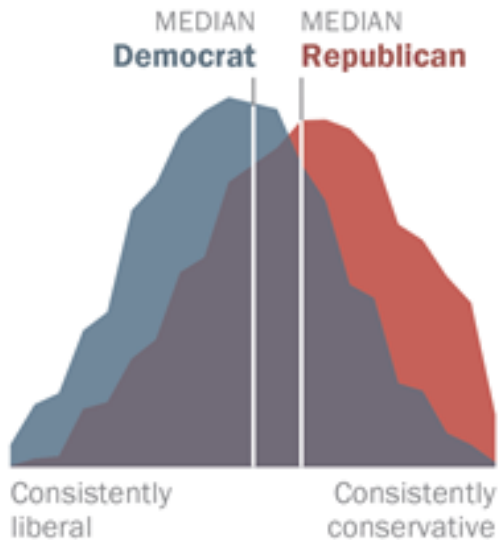
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The Public Is Moderate, But Partisan Voters Are Not

Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values

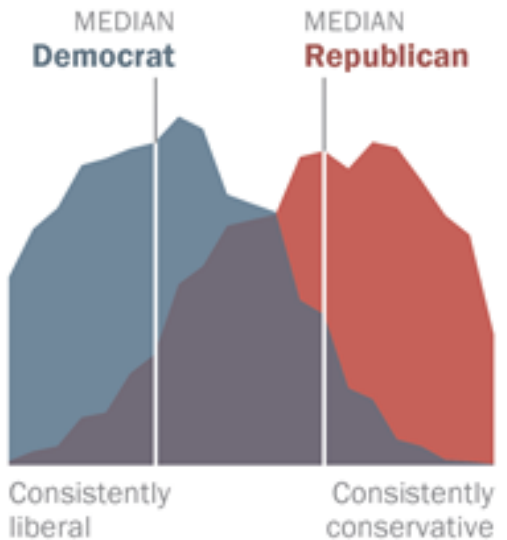
1994



2004



2014



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

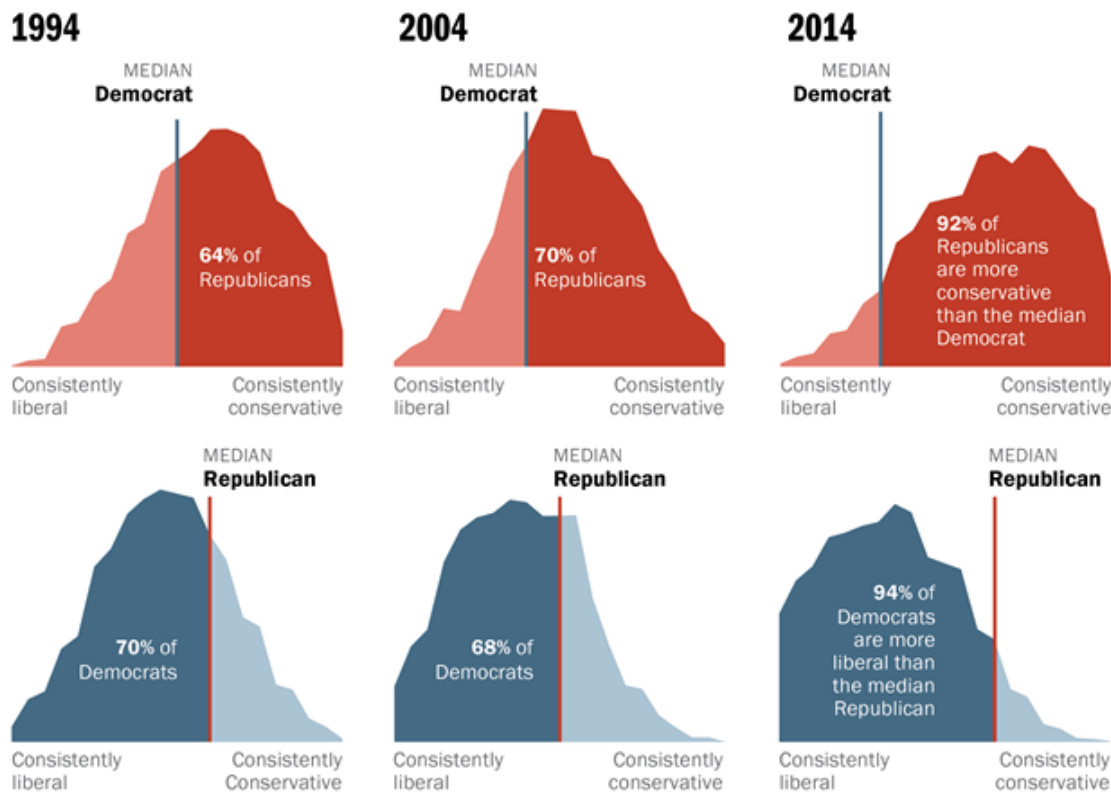
Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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The Public Is Moderate, But Partisan Voters Are Not

Republicans Shift to the Right, Democrats to the Left

Distribution of Republicans and Democrats on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

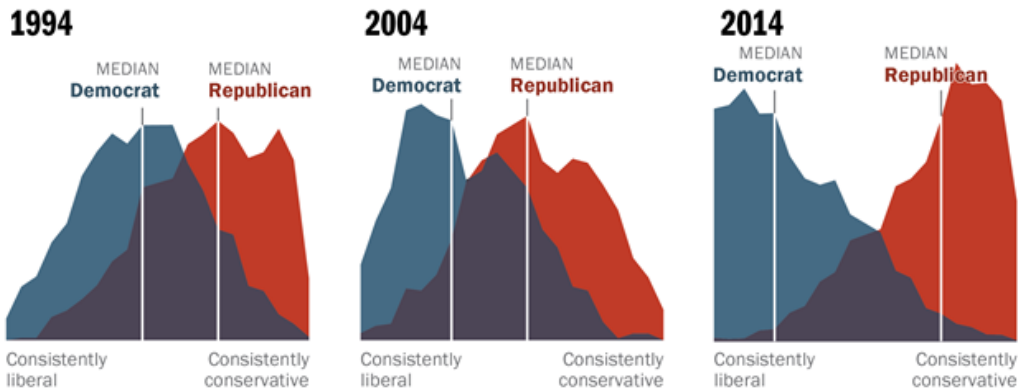
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This Is *Especially* True Among the Politically Engaged....

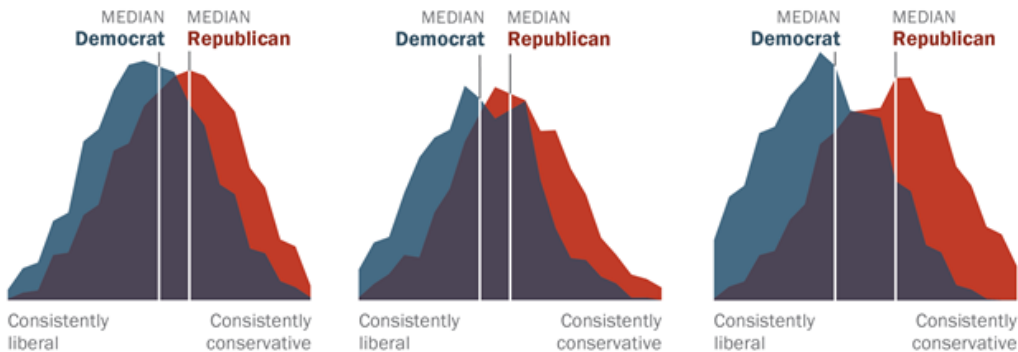
Polarization Surges Among the Politically Engaged

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values, by level of political engagement

Among the politically engaged



Among the less engaged



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B). Politically engaged are defined as those who are registered to vote, follow government and public affairs most of the time and say they vote always or nearly always.

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...And the Politically Engaged Are the Most Likely to Participate

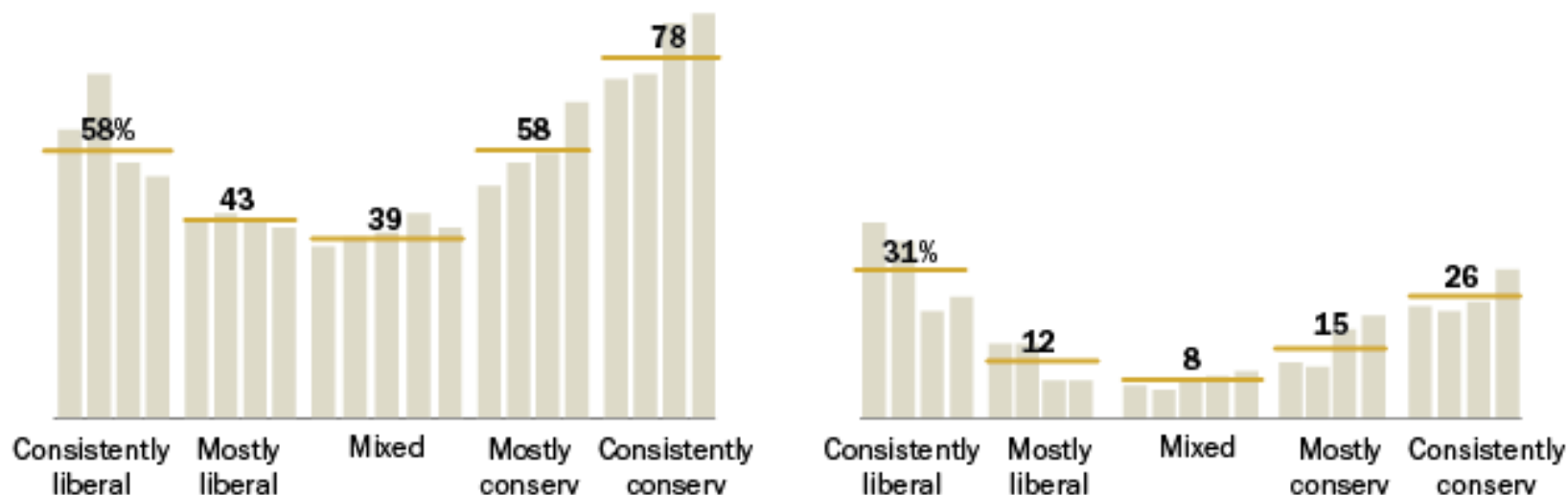
The 'U-Shape' of Political Activism; Higher at Ideological Extremes, Lower in Center



Percent who **always vote**



Percent who contributed to a **political candidate or group** in the past two years



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Note: Bars represent the level of participation at each point on a 10 question scale of ideological consistency. Figures are reported on the five ideological consistency groups used throughout the report (see Appendix A).

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Discussion: Parties and Polarization

- Is polarization bad?
 - There are good arguments on both sides!
- Are two parties sufficient?
- Does a two party system lead to the kind of tyranny of the majority Madison feared?

Q&A