

# Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State

## Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

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29 Oct 2010

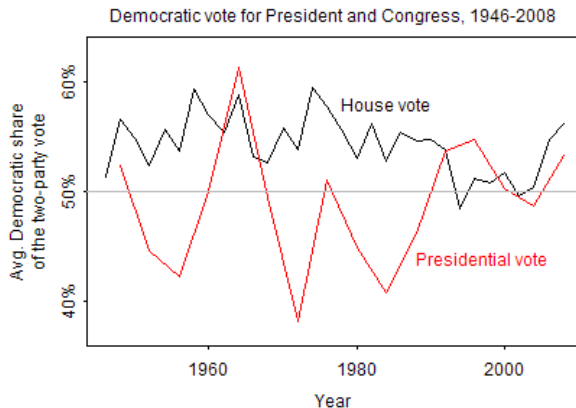
# Election 2010

- ▶ Public opinion and voting
- ▶ Factors that predict congressional elections
- ▶ What's going on with public opinion?

## Public opinion and voting time series

- ▶ Most variable: Presidential approval
- ▶ Less variable: Trial-heat polls (“Whom party do you plan to vote for?”)
- ▶ Less variable: Presidential election outcomes
- ▶ Less variable: Congressional election outcomes
- ▶ Slowest to vary: Party identification

# Congressional and presidential voting

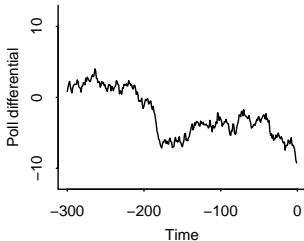


## Unpredictability of polling trends

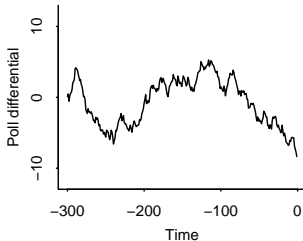
- ▶ “Polling is essentially a random walk . . . the polls are about equally likely to move toward one or another candidate, regardless of which way they have moved in the past.” — Nate Silver, *New York Times*, Oct 2010
- ▶ You can't use past polling trends to predict the future
- ▶ Analogy to coin flipping, efficient stock prices
- ▶ “Random walk” sounds reasonable, but . . .

# Is polling really a “random walk”? Some simulations

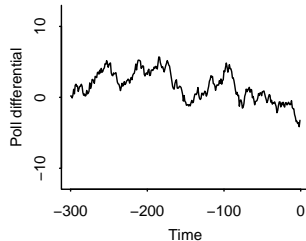
**Random walk simulation 1**



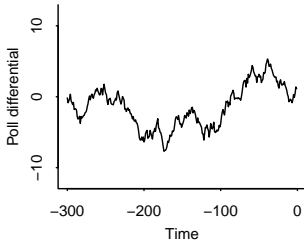
**Random walk simulation 2**



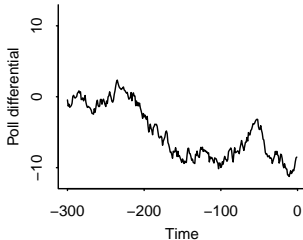
**Random walk simulation 3**



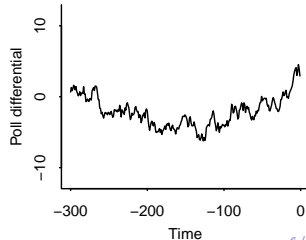
**Random walk simulation 4**



**Random walk simulation 5**



**Random walk simulation 6**



## Factors that predict election outcomes

- ▶ “The Democrats are gonna get hammered.” — me, Sept 2009
- ▶ Off-year elections favor opposition party
- ▶ Poor economy
- ▶ Generic ballot predicts popular vote for Congress (after adjustment)
- ▶ District-by-district analysis takes you from votes to seats

# Voters hate Republicans but are voting for them anyway

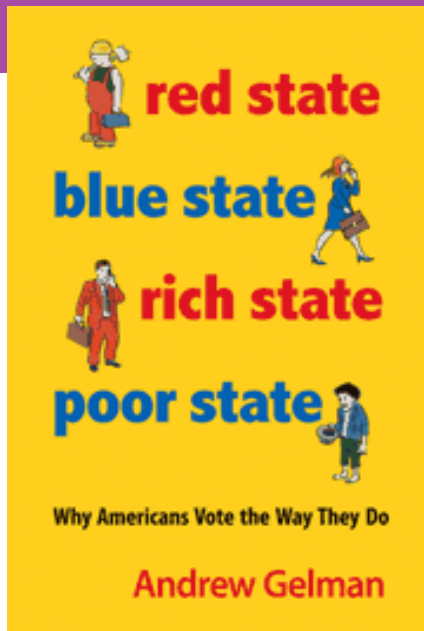
- ▶ From the latest polls:
  - ▶ Voters are split about Obama (he has about 45% support)
  - ▶ They dislike the Democrats
  - ▶ They hate the Republicans
  - ▶ ...and ...
  - ▶ They're planning to vote R
- ▶ What's going on??



# Voters hate Republicans but are voting for them anyway

- ▶ Move to partisan balance; divided government
- ▶ Different electorates in midterm and general elections
- ▶ R shift from 46% to 52% of the vote
- ▶ ... Now, on to the background

## The Book



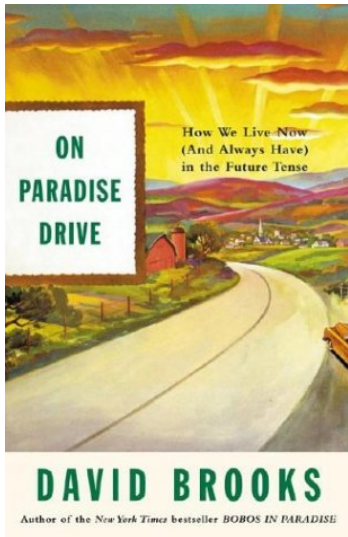
## Polarization: The Red and the Blue



# Polarization: The Haves and Have-Nots

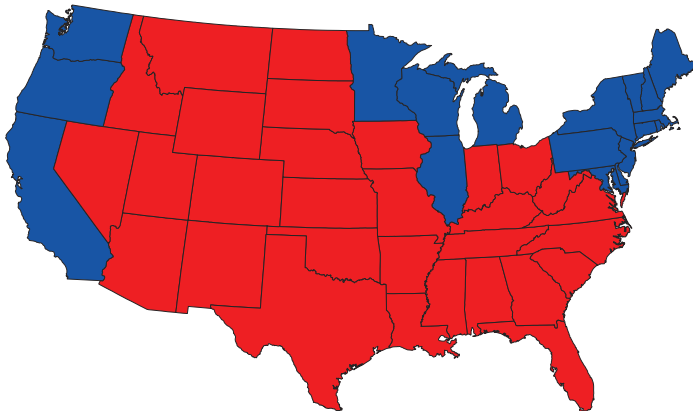


## The New Upscale Democratic Party?

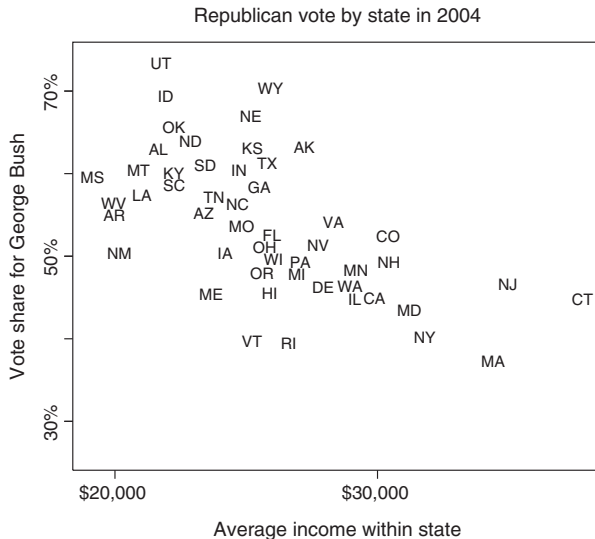


## Red and Blue States

2004 election

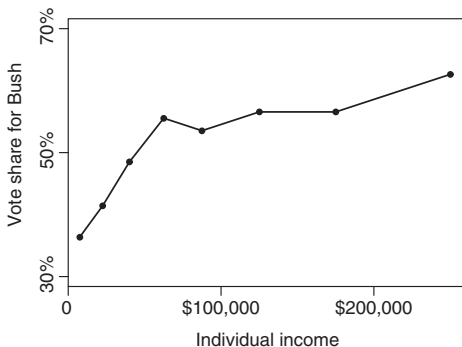


# Rich States are More Democratic . . .

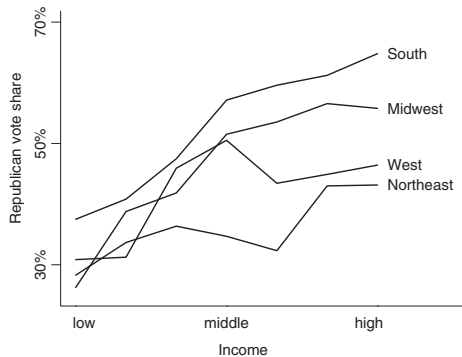


## ... But Rich People are More Republican!

Bush vote in 2004 by income



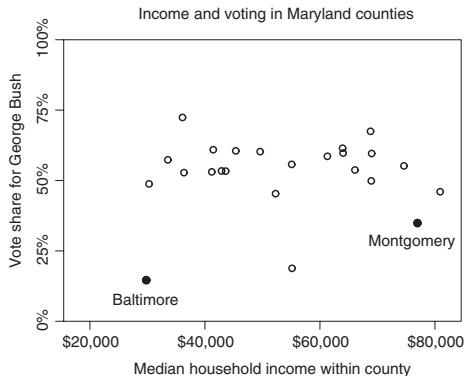
2006 House exit polls





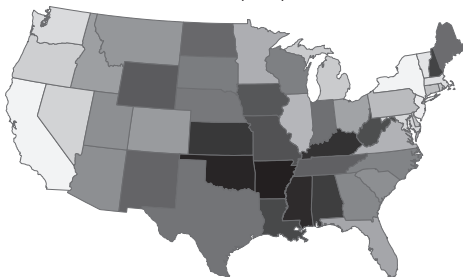
## David Brooks and Maryland

- ▶ “Like upscale areas everywhere, from Silicon Valley to Chicago’s North Shore to suburban Connecticut, Montgomery County supported the Democratic ticket by a margin of 63 percent to 34 percent.”
- ▶ “In Red America churches are everywhere. In Blue America Thai restaurants are everywhere. In Red America they have QVC, the Pro Bowlers Tour, and hunting. In Blue America we have NPR, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and socially conscious investing.”

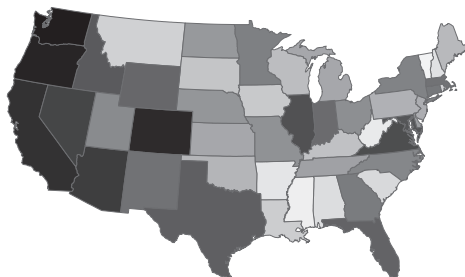


# Starbucks and Walmart

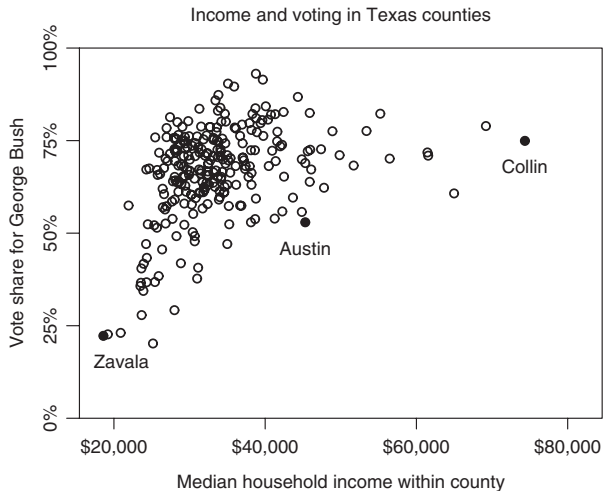
Wal-Marts per capita



Starbucks per capita



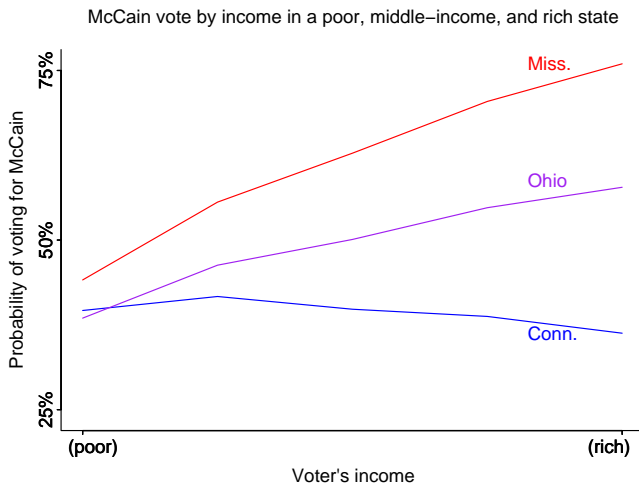
## Counterexample: Texas



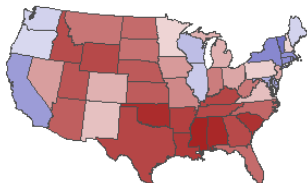
# The Key to the Answer: Context Matters

- ▶ How wealthy you are is associated with how you vote (and think)
- ▶ But how much it does depends on where you live — context matters
- ▶ In some states the rich are very different from the poor but not in other states
- ▶ Texas and Maryland

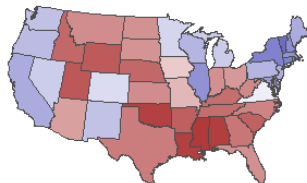
# Anna Karenina and the Paradox Resolved



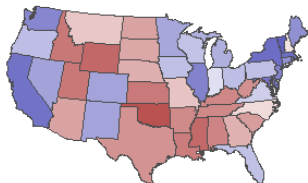
State winners in 2008  
(incomes over \$150,000)



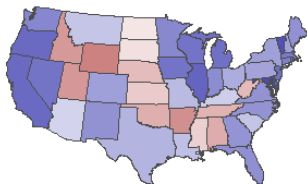
State winners in 2008  
(incomes \$75-150,000)



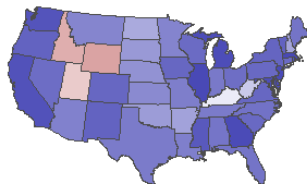
State winners in 2008  
(incomes \$40-75,000)



State winners in 2008  
(incomes \$20-40,000)



State winners in 2008  
(incomes under \$20,000)



## How Some Journalists See the Country

- ▶ “One of the Republican Party’s major successes over the last few decades has been to persuade many of the working poor to vote for tax breaks for billionaires.” — Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times* columnist
- ▶ “Who are the trustfunders? People with enough money not to have to work for a living, or not to have to work very hard. These people tend to be very liberal politically. . . .” — Michael Barone, author of the *Almanac of American Politics*

# The New Working-Class Republicans?

## WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS?



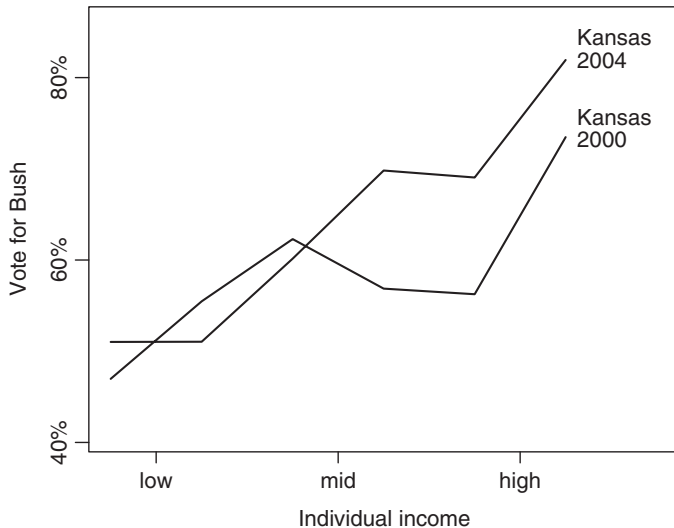
HOW CONSERVATIVES WON  
THE HEART OF AMERICA

THOMAS FRANK





## Whassup with Kansas?



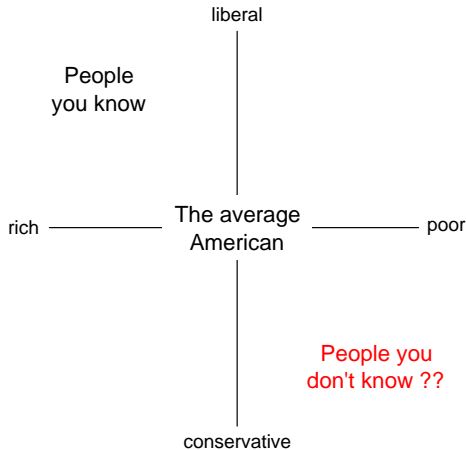
## Pauline Kael and Availability Bias

- ▶ “I can’t believe Nixon won. I don’t know anybody who voted for him.”  
— attributed to Pauline Kael, movie critic for the *New Yorker*
- ▶ *Availability bias*: the tendency to generalize based on nearby information

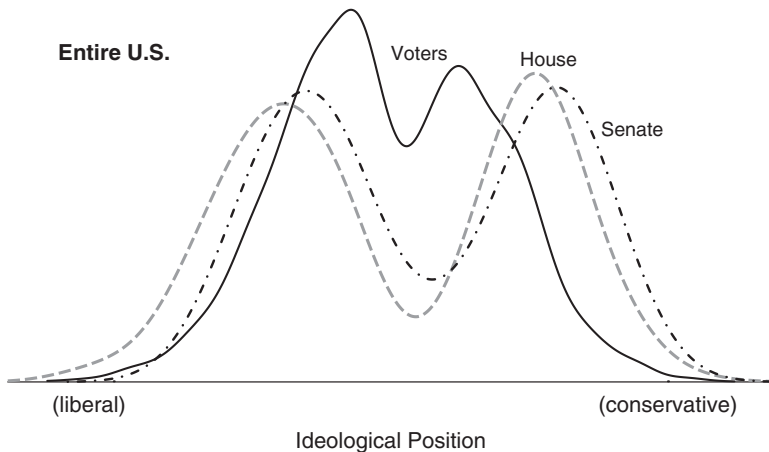


## Michael Barone and Availability Bias

- ▶ “It evidently irritates many liberals to point out that their party gets heavy support from superaffluent ‘people of fashion’ and does not run very well among ‘the common people.’”  
— Michael Barone
- ▶ *Second-order* availability bias: generalizing from observed correlations
- ▶ The people you know are high-income and vote Democratic. Therefore . . .

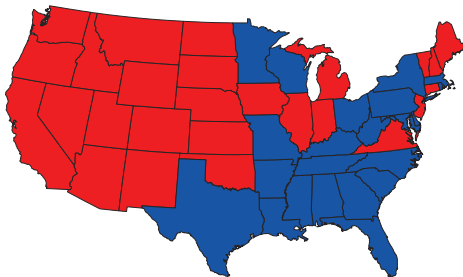


# Polarization is real

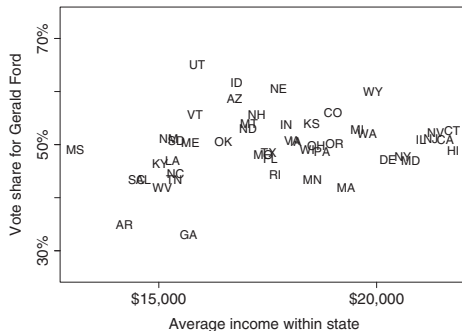


## 30 Years Ago, Things Were Different

1976 election



Republican vote by state in 1976



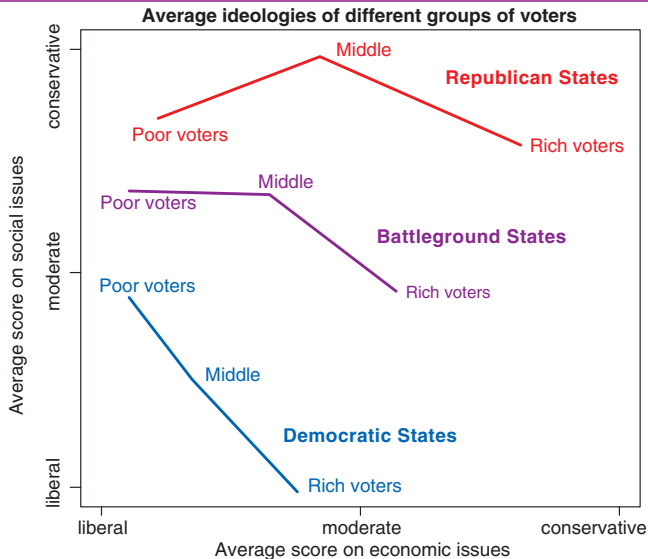
# Incomplete Explanations for the Change in State Vote

- ▶ Is it rich people who are changing?
  - ▶ No. We showed that in the beginning.
- ▶ Is it race?
  - ▶ Mostly no. Excluding blacks from the analysis diminishes the effects we see only partly.
- ▶ Is it the South?
  - ▶ No. We see the effects in the South and outside of it.
- ▶ Is it inequality?
  - ▶ No. Interstate income inequality has changed little, and intrastate income inequality is more tied to immigration trends.

# Our Explanation I

- ▶ The poor are similar in Red and Blue America, but the rich are different.
- ▶ We've looked at voting.
- ▶ Now look at attitudes on economic and social issues.

# Economic and Social Attitudes of Rich and Poor





## Our Explanation II

- ▶ *Voters* haven't changed within states—and *states* haven't changed much either, but *parties* have.
  - ▶ Parties are more polarized than they've ever been.
  - ▶ Democratic and Republican voters are (slightly) more ideologically distinct
  - ▶ Positions by elites are more uniform than they've been in the past. The end of Rockefeller Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats.
- ▶ Wealthy people in rich, blue states are conflicted in their party choice; hence the flat slope. Wealthy people in poor, red states are not conflicted in their party choice; hence the high slope.

# Culture Wars and Polarization

- ▶ “Sometimes I think this country would be better off if we could just saw off the Eastern Seaboard and let it float out to sea.” — Barry Goldwater
- ▶ “People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along?” — Rodney King

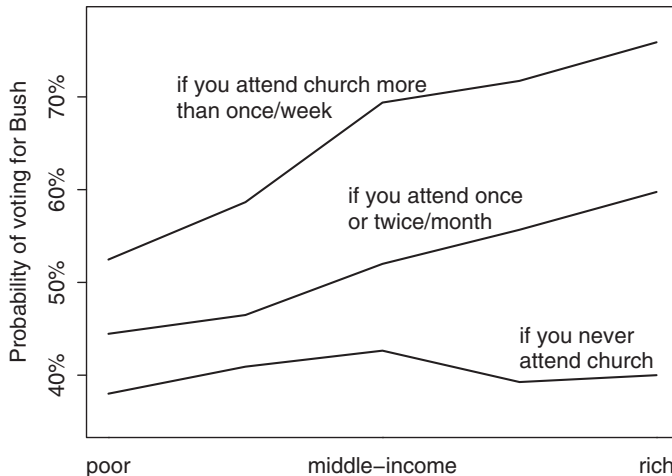


## “Opiate of the Masses” vs. “Postmaterialism”

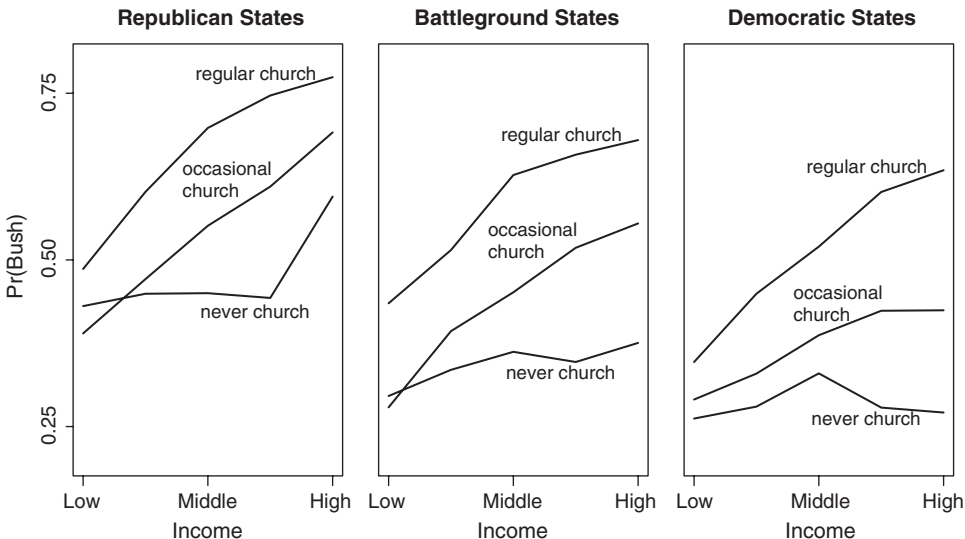
- ▶ “I don’t know that atheists should be considered citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God.” — George H. W. Bush
- ▶ “Very few of us . . . could name even five NASCAR drivers, although stock-car races are the best-attended sporting events in the country.” — David Brooks
- ▶ Two theories:
  - ▶ *Opiate of the masses*: Rich people vote their interests, poor people vote “Gods, guns, and gays.”
  - ▶ *Postmaterialism*: Poor people vote based on economics, rich people have the luxury to vote on social issues.

## “Opiate” No, “Postmaterialism” Yes

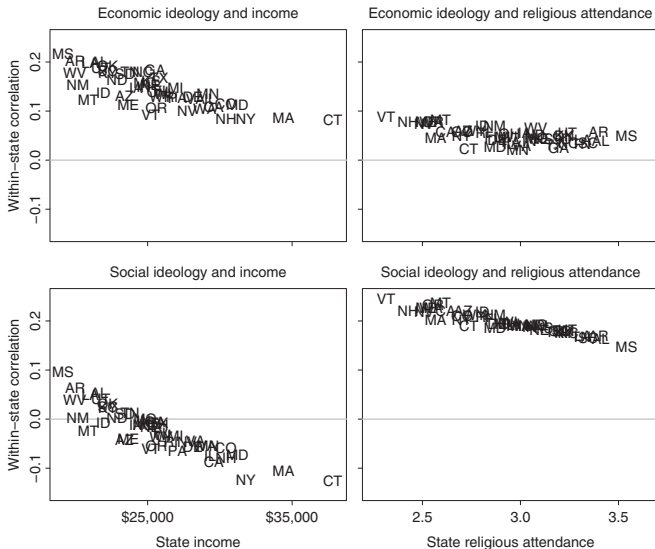
Bush vote in 2004 by income and religious attendance



## Similar Patterns in Red and Blue America



# Economic/Social Ideology and Income/Relig Attend, by State



## Takeaway Points

- ▶ Polarization, stereotyping, and the red-blue divide
- ▶ Statistics is too important to be left to the statisticians!
- ▶ What's the matter with Connecticut?
  - ▶ If you want to understand the differences between states, study the wealthy.
  - ▶ The culture war is real but is concentrated among upper-income voters.
- ▶ It's easy to get confused: "media center" states don't look like the rest of the country.

## End—Time for Your Questions

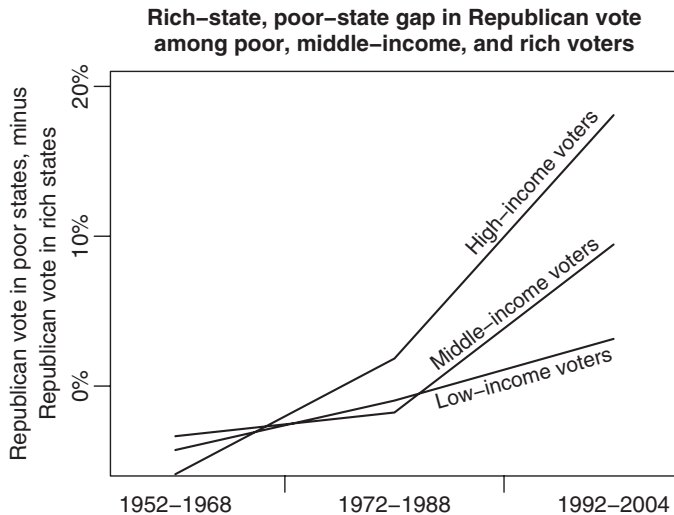


Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

Andrew Gelman

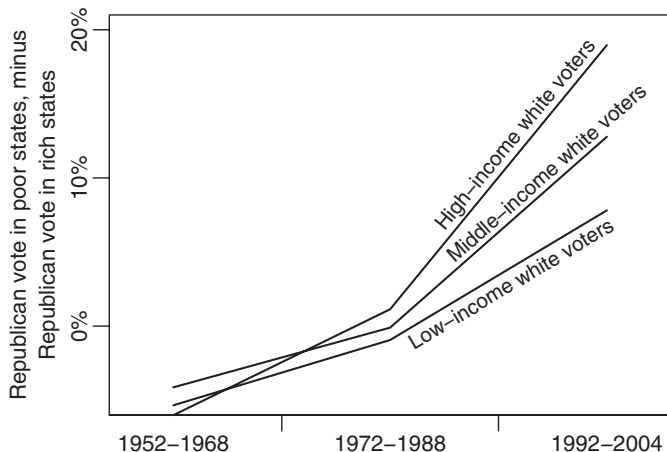


## Putting It Together

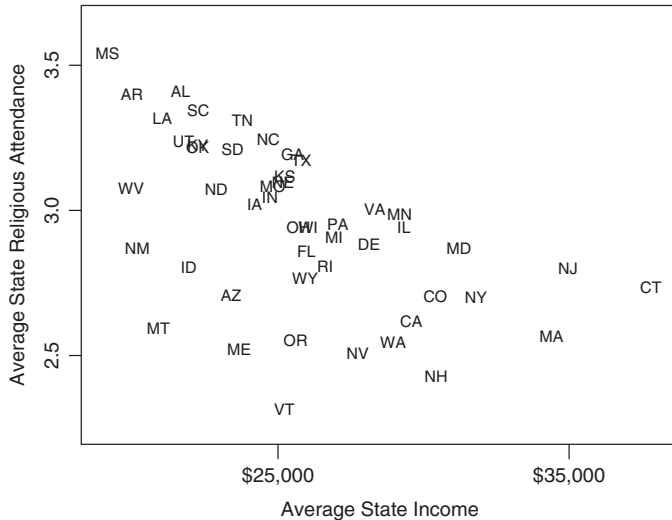


## Race Explains Half the Pattern

**Whites only: Rich-state, poor-state gap in Republican vote among poor, middle-income, and rich voters**

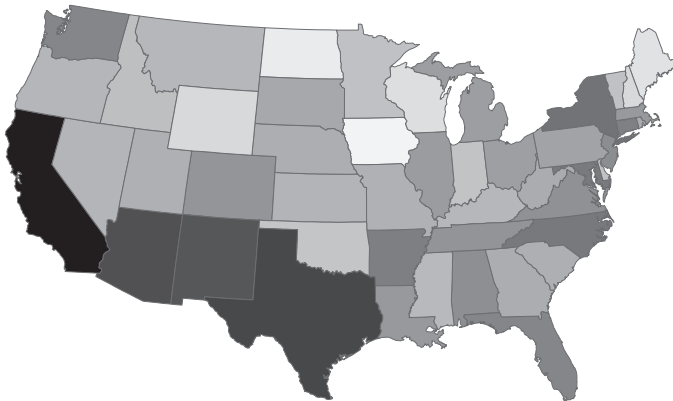


## Religion and State Income

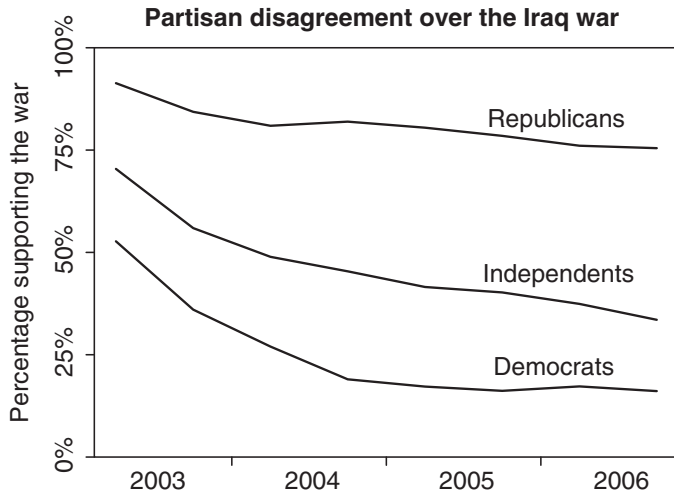


# Inequality in the States

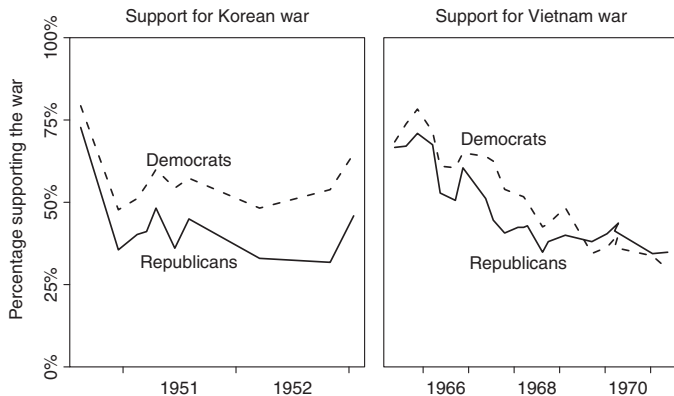
States with high and low income inequality



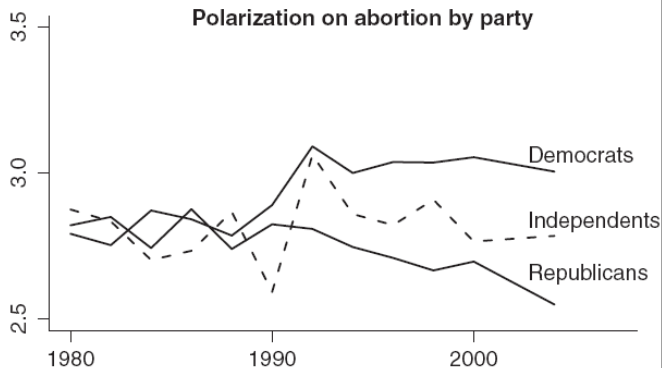
## Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy



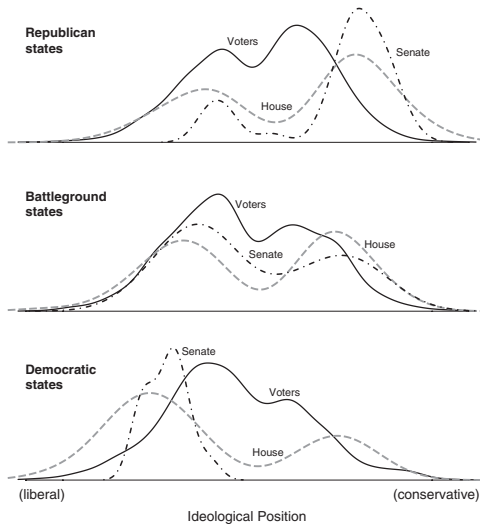
## Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy



## Polarized Parties: Domestic Policy

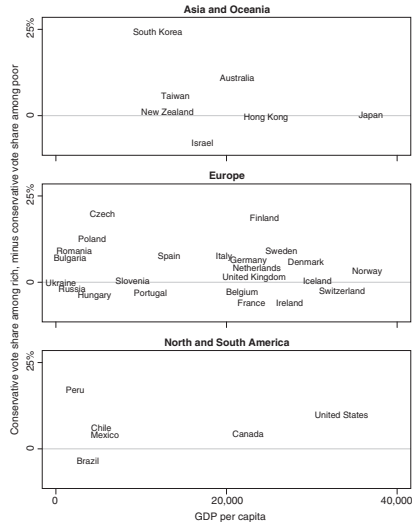


# Polarization in Red, Purple, and Blue States

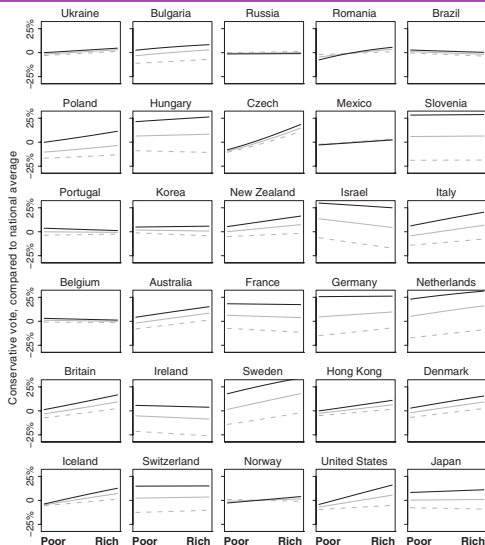




# Other Countries: Income and Voting



# Other Countries: Income, Religion, and Voting

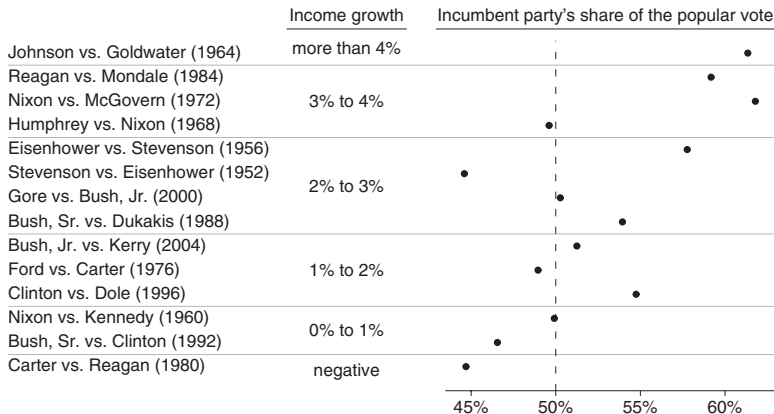


# Election 2008: What Really Happened?

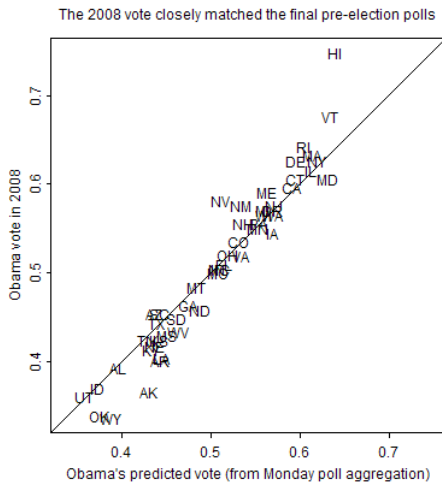
- ▶ National election returns
- ▶ State-by-state election returns
- ▶ Race, age, income
- ▶ Pre-election polls
- ▶ Congressional elections

# Obama Did as Well as Expected

## Forecasting elections from the economy



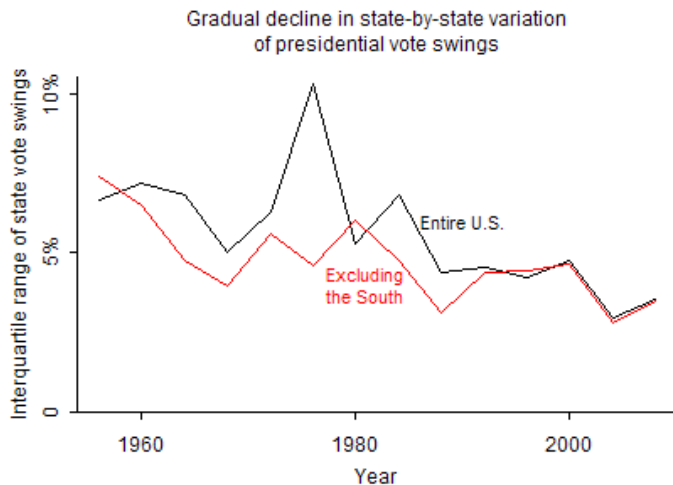
# The Polls Did Well



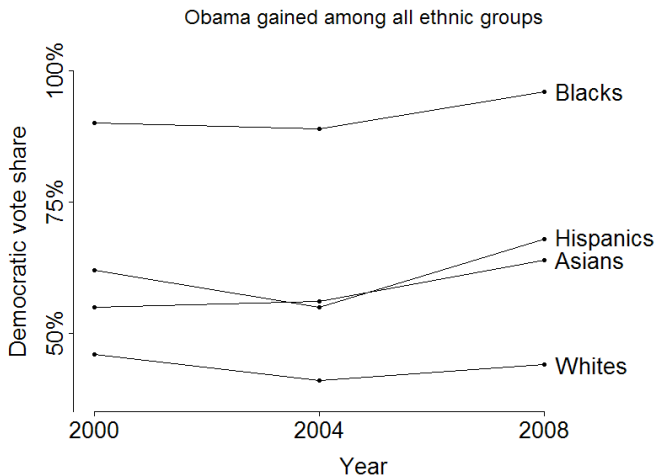
The swing from 2004 to 2008 was pretty uniform



## Swings are More National Than Before

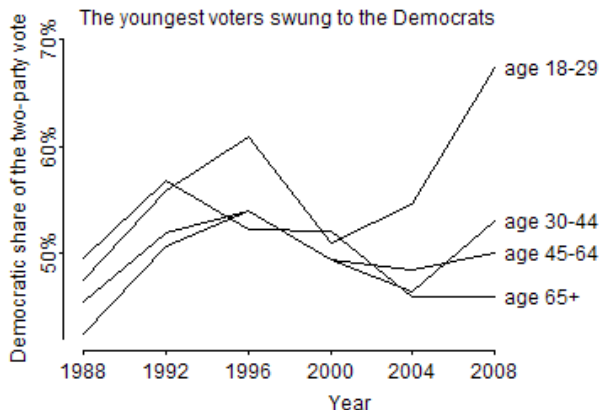


## Whites and Minorities

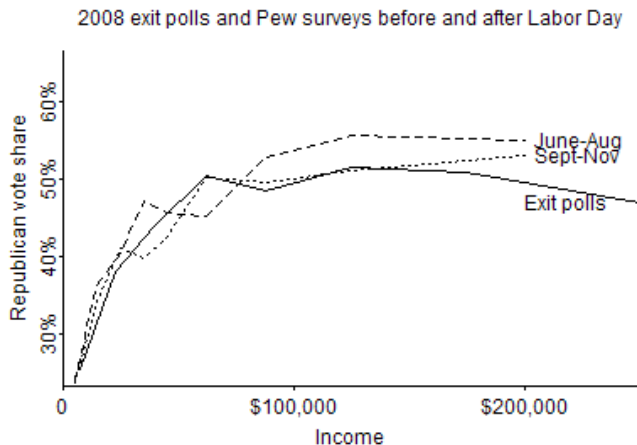




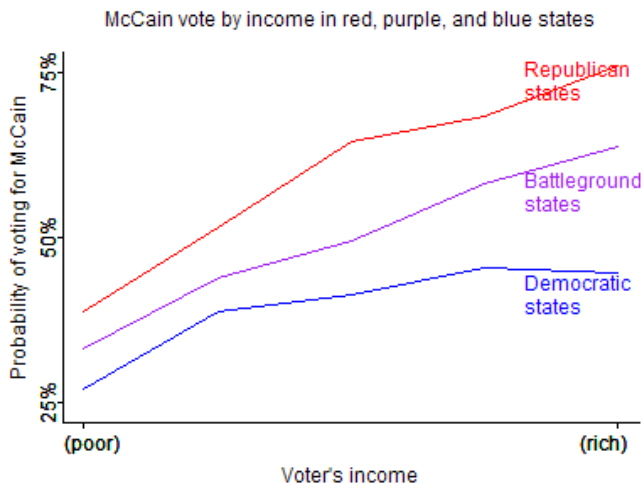
## Young and Old



# Rich and Poor

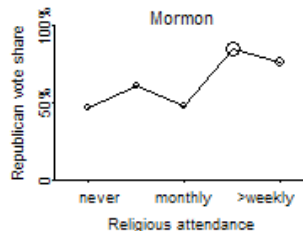
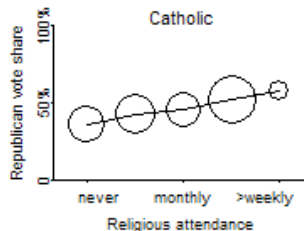
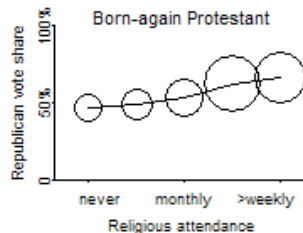
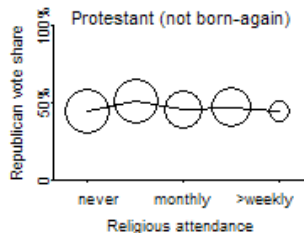


## Rich and Poor, by State

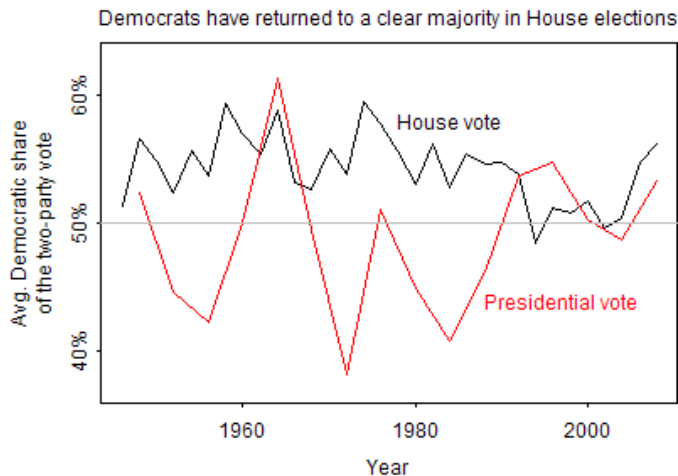


# Religious and Secular

McCain vote by religion and religious attendance



## Comparing votes for President and Congress



## Further Questions?



Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

Andrew Gelman