Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

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The Book

red state
blue state
rich state
poor state

Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

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Polarization: The Red and the Blue
Polarization: The Haves and Have-Nots
The New Upscale Democratic Party?
Red and Blue States

2004 election

Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
Rich States are More Democratic...
But Rich People are More Republican!

Bush vote in 2004 by income

Vote share for Bush

0 30% 50% 70%

Individual income

0 $100,000 $200,000

2006 House exit polls

Republican vote share

30% 50% 70%

Income

low middle high

Northeast

Midwest

South

West

Northeast

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Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
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

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Counterexample: Texas

Income and voting in Texas counties

- Median household income within county
- Vote share for George Bush

Collin, Austin, Zavala

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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

McCain vote by income in a poor, middle–income, and rich state

- Miss.
- Ohio
- Conn.
Geography, Income, and Voters
Explanations and Implications
Election 2008: What Really Happened?

The Paradox
Journalists Get It Wrong (and Right)

What if Only X Voted?

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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?

![Graph showing vote for Bush by individual income in Kansas for 2000 and 2004.](image)

- In 2000, the vote for Bush increased with individual income, starting at around 40% for low income, rising to about 60% for mid income, and reaching about 80% for high income.
- In 2004, the pattern was similar, with a slight drop in the mid-income group, but the overall trend remained the same, with a high vote for Bush in the high-income group.

The graph illustrates the paradox in Kansas, where the vote for Bush increased with income, challenging the typical red-state, blue-state model.
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
“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

Entire U.S.

Ideological Position

(liberal) (conservative)
30 Years Ago, Things Were Different

1976 election

Republican vote by state in 1976

Vote share for Gerald Ford

Average income within state

$15,000 $20,000

30% 50% 70%
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

Average ideologies of different groups of voters

- **Republican States**
  - Poor voters
  - Middle
  - Rich voters

- **Battleground States**
  - Poor voters
  - Middle
  - Rich voters

- **Democratic States**
  - Poor voters
  - Middle
  - Rich voters

Average score on economic issues
- liberal
- moderate
- conservative

Average score on social issues
- liberal
- moderate
- conservative

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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

Probability of voting for Bush

- poor
- middle-income
- rich

if you attend church more than once/week
if you attend once or twice/month
if you never attend church
Similar Patterns in Red and Blue America

**Republican States**

- **regular church**
- **occasional church**
- **never church**

**Income**
- Low
- Middle
- High

**Pr(Bush)**
- 0.25
- 0.50
- 0.75

**Battleground States**

- **regular church**
- **occasional church**
- **never church**

**Democratic States**

- **regular church**
- **occasional church**
- **never church**
Economic/Social Ideology and Income/Relig Attend, by State

- Economic ideology and income
- Economic ideology and religious attendance
- Social ideology and income
- Social ideology and religious attendance

State income
Within-state correlation
-0.1 0.0 0.1 0.2

State religious attendance
Within-state correlation
2.5 3.0 3.5

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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
Rich–state, poor–state gap in Republican vote among poor, middle–income, and rich voters

- **High–income voters**
- **Middle–income voters**
- **Low–income voters**

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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican vote in poor states, minus Republican vote in rich states</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Race Explains Half the Pattern

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

- High-income white voters
- Middle-income white voters
- Low-income white voters

Inequality in the States

States with high and low income inequality
Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy

Partisan disagreement over the Iraq war

Percentage supporting the war

2003 2004 2005 2006
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Republicans
Independents
Democrats
Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy

Support for Korean war

- Republicans
- Democrats

Support for Vietnam war

- Republicans
- Democrats

Percentage supporting the war

1951 1952
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

1966 1968 1970
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%
Polarization on abortion by party

- Democrats
- Independents
- Republicans

1980 1990 2000
Polarization in Red, Purple, and Blue States

Republican states

Battleground states

Democratic states

Ideological Position

(liberal) (conservative)
Other Countries: Income and Voting

Asia and Oceania

Europe

North and South America

Conservative vote share among rich, minus conservative vote share among poor

GDP per capita

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Other Countries: Income, Religion, and Voting

- Ukraine
- Bulgaria
- Russia
- Romania
- Brazil
- Poland
- Hungary
- Czech
- Mexico
- Slovenia
- Portugal
- Korea
- New Zealand
- Israel
- Italy
- Belgium
- Australia
- France
- Germany
- Netherlands
- Britain
- Ireland
- Sweden
- Hong Kong
- Denmark
- Iceland
- Switzerland
- Norway
- United States
- Japan

Conservative vote, compared to national average

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Election 2008: What Really Happened?

- National election returns
- State-by-state election returns
- Race, age, income
- Pre-election polls
- Congressional elections
Forecasting elections from the economy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Income growth</th>
<th>Incumbent party’s share of the popular vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johnson vs. Goldwater (1964)</td>
<td>more than 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reagan vs. Mondale (1984)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon vs. McGovern (1972)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humphrey vs. Nixon (1968)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhower vs. Stevenson (1956)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevenson vs. Eisenhower (1952)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gore vs. Bush, Jr. (2000)</td>
<td>2% to 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush, Sr. vs. Dukakis (1988)</td>
<td>2% to 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush, Jr. vs. Kerry (2004)</td>
<td>2% to 3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford vs. Carter (1976)</td>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinton vs. Dole (1996)</td>
<td>1% to 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon vs. Kennedy (1960)</td>
<td>0% to 1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush, Sr. vs. Clinton (1992)</td>
<td>0% to 1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter vs. Reagan (1980)</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Polls Did Well

The 2008 vote closely matched the final pre-election polls.

![Graph showing correlation between Obama's predicted vote and Obama's actual vote in 2008, with states represented on the scatter plot.](image)
National Partisan Swing

The swing from 2004 to 2008 was pretty uniform
Swings are More National Than Before

Gradual decline in state-by-state variation of presidential vote swings

Interquartile range of state vote swings

Year

1960 1980 2000

Entire U.S.

Excluding the South
Whites and Minorities

Obama gained among all ethnic groups

Democratic vote share

Year

2000

2004

2008

50%

75%

100%

Blacks

Hispanics

Asians

Whites

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Young and Old

The youngest voters swung to the Democrats

Democratic share of the two-party vote

Year


age 18-29
age 30-44
age 45-64
age 65+

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Rich and Poor

2008 exit polls and Pew surveys before and after Labor Day

- Republican vote share
- Income

- June-Aug
- Sept-Nov
- Exit polls
Rich and Poor, by State

McCain vote by income in red, purple, and blue states

- Republican states
- Battleground states
- Democratic states

Probability of voting for McCain

Voter's income

(poor) - (rich)
Religious and Secular

McCain vote by religion and religious attendance

Protestant (not born-again)

- Republican vote share vs. religious attendance:
  - Never: 0%
  - Monthly: 50%
  - >Weekly: 100%

Born-again Protestant

- Republican vote share vs. religious attendance:
  - Never: 50%
  - Monthly: 100%
  - >Weekly: 50%

Catholic

- Republican vote share vs. religious attendance:
  - Never: 50%
  - Monthly: 100%
  - >Weekly: 50%

Mormon

- Republican vote share vs. religious attendance:
  - Never: 0%
  - Monthly: 50%
  - >Weekly: 100%
Comparing votes for President and Congress

Democrats have returned to a clear majority in House elections

Year

1960
1980
2000

Avg. Democratic share of the two-party vote

40%
50%
60%

House vote

Presidential vote
Further Questions?

red state
blue state
rich state
poor state

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