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

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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

![Graph showing Democratic vote for President and Congress, 1946-2008](image-url)
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
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
Polarization: The Red and the Blue

United States of Canada

Jesusland
Polarization: The Haves and Have-Nots
The New Upscale Democratic Party?
Rich States are More Democratic . . .

Republican vote by state in 2004

Average income within state
Vote share for George Bush

$20,000 $30,000
30% 50% 70%

State Abbreviations:
AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, DC, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, VT, WV, WI, WY

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But Rich People are More Republican!

Bush vote in 2004 by income

Vote share for Bush

Individual income

2006 House exit polls

Republican vote share

Income

Northeast
Midwest
South
West
“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

Income and voting in Texas counties

Vote share for George Bush

Median household income within county

$20,000 $40,000 $60,000 $80,000

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Collin

Zavala

Austin
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

- Conn.
- Ohio
- Miss.

Voter's income
Probability of voting for McCain
25% 50% 75%
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 individual income vote for Bush in Kansas 2000 and 2004.](image)
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)

House

Senate

Voters

(liberal) (conservative)

Ideological Position
30 Years Ago, Things Were Different

1976 election

Republican vote by state in 1976

Vote share for Gerald Ford

Average income within state

30% 50% 70%

$15,000 $20,000
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
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

- Poor
- Middle-income
- Rich

If you attend church more than once/week:
- Probability of voting for Bush:
  - Poor: 40%
  - Middle-income: 50%
  - Rich: 60%

If you attend once or twice/month:
- Probability of voting for Bush:
  - Poor: 50%
  - Middle-income: 60%
  - Rich: 70%

If you never attend church:
- Probability of voting for Bush:
  - Poor: 60%
  - Middle-income: 70%
  - Rich: 80%
Similar Patterns in Red and Blue America

Republican States

Battleground States

Democratic States

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Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State

Geography, Income, and Voters
Explanations and Implications
Extra material
Opiate of the Elites
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

Within-state correlation

Economic ideology and income

Social ideology and income

State income

$25,000 $35,000

State religious attendance

2.5 3.0 3.5
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
Putting It Together

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

Republican vote in poor states, minus Republican vote in rich states

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Rich–state Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952–1968</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972–1988</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–2004</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Graph:**
- Y-axis: Republican vote in poor states, minus Republican vote in rich states
Religion and State Income

Chart showing the relationship between average state religious attendance and average state income for various U.S. states. The states are plotted on a scatter plot with average state religious attendance on the y-axis and average state income on the x-axis.

States are represented by their two-letter abbreviations: AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, OH, OK, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, MD, WI, WV, WY.
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

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Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy

Support for Korean war

- Democrats
- Republicans

Support for Vietnam war

- Democrats
- Republicans
Polarized Parties: Domestic Policy

Polarization on abortion by party

- Democrats
- Independents
- Republicans

Years:
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**
- Australia
- Hong Kong
- Israel
- Japan
- New Zealand
- Taiwan

**Europe**
- Austria
- Bulgaria
- Czech
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Russia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom

**North and South America**
- Argentina
- Brazil
- Chile
- Mexico
- Peru
- United States
- Canada

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

GDP per capita

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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
### 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>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nixon vs. McGovern (1972)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humphrey vs. Nixon (1968)</td>
<td>3% to 4%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhower vs. Stevenson (1956)</td>
<td>2% to 3%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevenson vs. Eisenhower (1952)</td>
<td>2% to 3%</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>1% to 2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush, Jr. vs. Kerry (2004)</td>
<td>1% to 2%</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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Polls Did Well

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

Entire U.S.
Excluding the South

Year

1960 1980 2000

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Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
Whites and Minorities

Obama gained among all ethnic groups

- Blacks
- Hispanics
- Asians
- Whites

Democratic vote share

Year

2000 2004 2008
Young and Old

The youngest voters swung to the Democrats

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

Democratic share of the two-party vote

Year

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

25%
50%
75%
(poor) (rich)
Religious and Secular

McCain vote by religion and religious attendance

Protestant (not born-again)

Born-again Protestant

Catholic

Mormon

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Comparing votes for President and Congress

Democrats have returned to a clear majority in House elections

- Average Democratic share of the two-party vote

House vote
Presidential vote
Further Questions?

red state
blue state
rich state
poor state
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