

Presidents, Polarization, and Divided Government

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Abstract

Some commentators contend that George W. Bush is the most extreme president of the modern era, pointing to his ideological rigidity and party polarization as the sources of that extremism. But despite increases in partisan polarization across the past several decades, presidents of the 1990s and 2000s, including Bush, are no more extreme in their policy stances than presidents of the 1950s and 1960s. Using data on presidential policy positions from the 1950s through the early 2000s, I show that changes in the presidential nomination process, which some implicate as a source of polarization and extremism, has no effect on presidential policy stances. Further analysis indicates that presidents have become more extreme as party polarization has increased, but divided government, which has been quite common in recent decades, counteracts this tendency by motivating presidents to take more moderate stances. Eisenhower and Clinton appear relatively and similarly moderate because they tended to face opposition control of Congress, where Bush, Kennedy, and Johnson seem similarly extreme due to their party's control of Congress.

Presidents, Polarization, and Divided Government

For several decades American politics has been polarizing along partisan, ideological, and issue lines at both the mass and elite levels. One implication of this growing polarization is that the political middle has shrunk. Moderates have almost completely vanished in Congress, for example (Fleisher and Bond, 2004). Especially at the elite level of activists, candidates for office, and office holders, the political world consists a block of consistent liberals who are Democrats facing another block of consistent conservatives who are Republicans. In this restricted use of the term, the world of American politics has grown more extreme.

This paper investigates the implications of this growing polarization and extremism on the American presidency. Although the presidency is a key political institution, and often at the center of important political changes and developments, rarely has the literature on party polarization looked at the place and role of the president. Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz's (2006) review of the literature reveals that the bulk of the research on polarization focuses on Congress and the mass public, "[T]he work on growing polarization between the parties in government has focused largely on Congress." (p. 87). When the president is considered, it is with regard to the way that increasing party polarization in Congress affects presidential relations with Congress, generally making an already difficult relationship more problematic (Binder, 2003; Edwards and Barrett, 2000; Fleisher and Bond, 2000a, 2000b; Pomper, 2003; Sinclair, 1997, 2000, 2002). Cameron provides one of the few extended discussions of the implications of polarization on the presidency that moves beyond presidential-

congressional relations (Cameron, 2002). Yet even here Cameron provides more an agenda for future research than definitive research.

This paper asks several questions with regard to the presidency. One, has the presidency also become more extreme? Despite the increase in polarization in American politics, which should push presidents toward the policy extremes, by several different measures, including public perceptions and a time series of presidential policy positions, the chief executive of the era of polarized parties, roughly the 1990s-2000s, does not appear more extreme on average than presidents of the 1950s and 1960s. Two, I investigate the sources of presidential policy positions. The results indicate that changes in the presidential nomination process of the 1970s, which have increase the influence of extremists over that important decision, has not led to greater presidential extremism. But, presidents seem somewhat responsive to the degree of party polarization, becoming more extreme as the parties have polarized. However, this effect is almost totally overwhelmed by divided government, which has been quite common during the age of polarized parties. When government is divided, out of a motivation to see policy implemented, presidents moderate their policy stances.

The Party Activist Theory of Presidential Extremism

In their review and synthesis of the literature on polarization Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz (2006) identify party activists as the primary catalysts for the heightened party polarization of the past several decades. Party activists are thought to promote polarization for two reasons. One, they hold relatively extreme policy views compared to voters and rank-and-file members of parties. Two, they play a critical role in selecting the parties' candidates for office and the resources they provide to candidate's in general

elections. The influence of activists on their respective parties increased with the reforms of the 1970s, in which primaries replaced party caucuses and other devices for nominating candidates and the party activists replaced other political leaders in selecting the parties' nominees. As the influence of activists within the parties grew, the Democratic Party moved left and the Republican Party right. Moreover, owing to their critical role in the primary and nomination process, activists served as gatekeepers, insuring that the party's nominees would reflect the activist strata's policy preferences. This in turn pushed the parties' nominees, and eventual office holders, toward the policy extremes.

The reforms of the presidential selection process in the 1970s exposed the presidency to the influence of these party activists. Presidents, and presidential aspirants, could accommodate to the growing influence of party activists within their parties through selection and/or conversion effects, moving Democratic presidents and aspirants to the left and Republicans to the right. Selection effects suggests that as party activists become increasingly important in the nomination process, candidates on the political extremes would be more likely to gain the nomination than less extreme or moderate candidates. Conversion effects suggest that presidents seeking re-nomination and aspirants for the nomination would move to the political extremes in their parties to gain the support of these extreme party activists. Mitt Romney's move to the right in the 2008 Republican presidential nomination contest illustrates this conversion process.

The motivation for office, including re-nomination, link these nomination and election processes to governing, thereby affecting the policy positions that presidents espouse. The policy positions and statements that presidents make in office will affect

their ability to obtain the nomination a second time. If they take positions at variance with the preferences of the party activist stratum, they may undermine their chances for the nomination. The lukewarm, if not cold reception that John McCain has received in 2008 among conservative Republican Party activists for his positions on campaign finance and immigration reform, among others, illustrates the linkage between governing and nomination-election politics. Second term presidents too have an incentive to cater to these party activists, even though they can not run for the presidency again. By maintaining their “extreme” or “orthodox” policy credentials, they maintain some ability to influence who the party selects as their successor, which helps build the president’s legacy.

The party activist perspective leads to two hypotheses with regard to the presidency. First, presidents in the period subsequent to the primary reforms should be more extreme than presidents prior to those reforms. But second, presidents and presidential candidates should become increasingly extreme as party polarization has grown from the mid-1970s, when the primary reforms set in, to the present. For instance, data, such as the Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores for Congress, suggest a wider distance between the parties since the 1970s. More to the point, King (1997, 2003), Jacobson (2000), Saunders and Abramowitz (2004), and Layman, et. al. (2005) all find that party activists themselves have increasingly polarized on both ideological and policy grounds over the past 30 or so years. If the selection and conversion effects mechanisms are at work, we should see presidents becoming more extreme over time since the presidential primary nomination reforms of the 1970s.

Testing the Party Activist-Presidential Extremism Hypotheses

To test the above hypotheses I use two measures of presidential policy extremis, public perceptions and presidential ideal point policy estimates.

Public Perceptions

Since 1972 the American National Election study has been asking respondents to locate the parties and the president on a seven point liberal-conservative scale.¹ Figures 1 plots the mean respondent placement of the two parties, while Figure 2 plots the folded mean presidential placement. To create the folded mean scores, I take the absolute value of the mean presidential score subtracted from the scale mid-point (4). This provides a picture of the extremism of presidents, as opposed to the level of liberalism for Democrats and conservatism for Republicans.

Figures 1 and 2 about here

There are limitations in using perceptual data to measure presidential and party location on the left-right dimension, although a venerable tradition exists that uses these data for just such a purpose (e. g., Page, 1978). First, these are not data on actual presidential behavior. People may misperceive the parties' and presidents' locations, viewing their party and president as close to them and the opposition as farther away, for instance. In some instance, due to their misunderstanding of the terms liberal and conservative, people may locate the president or party on the wrong side of the spectrum. For instance, if we assume that Democrats lie on the liberal side and Republicans to the conservative, the 8.8% of respondents from the 1972-2004 cumulative ANES incorrectly

¹ The question wording is: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place the {NAME} {on this scale}?", from the Cumulative National Election Study, VCF0503-Democratic Party, VCF0504-Republican Party, VCF0803-Respondent, and VCF9080-President.

place the president.² Second, although these data cover a relatively long period of American history, over 30 years, they begin at about the same time as the party reforms. If we consider the early to mid-1970s as a transition period, we have no comparable data on public perceptions of presidents in the clearly pre-reform era.

The parties' data on figure 1 display little support for either hypothesis, noting the difficulty of providing a strong test of the hypotheses for the reasons offered in the previous paragraph. The trend line across the 32 year span of these data is essentially flat for both parties—neither party, in the public's estimation, moved toward the extremes during these three decades. In contrast, the public views the Democrats as slightly moderating beginning in 1978. Only with 1998 does the public perceive a movement of the Democrats away from the center. This movement, however, is small. A regression of these Democratic mean scores on year is insignificant ($b = -.000$, $t = -0.05$, $p = .97$). Republicans show a faint up tick in extremism, moving from 4.85 in 1972 to 5.17 in 2004. In contrast to the perception of Democrats, the public sees a slight increase in extremism for Republicans, which regressing a year counter on the mean Republican perception is statistically significant, although it is substantively tiny ($b = .01$, $t = 3.14$, $p = .01$). The .01 regression coefficient indicates that from 1972-2004, the public perceived only a .32 shift to the right for the Republican Party.

With both parties remaining essentially at the same perceived ideological location, we would not find any support for the second hypothesis that the gap between the parties widened after the reforms of the mid-1970s. If we mark 1976 as the first year of the new primary system, respondents perceive the parties to be 1.97 units away from

² I calculated the percentage incorrect by adding the percent who classify Democratic presidents as extremely conservative or conservative, and Republican presidents as extremely liberal or liberal.

each other. In 2004, the last year in the series, they perceive the distance to be 2.12 units. Regressing year on these mean differences from 1976-2004 produces insignificant results ($b = .01$, $SE = .01$, $t = 1.44$, $p = .09$, one-tailed test). The public essentially sees neither party becoming more extreme, nor do they see the gap between the parties widening, as the party activist hypotheses would suggest. Still, we must remind that these tests are far from definitive because we do not possess respondent perceptions of party ideological placement prior to 1972.

The presidential placement data on Figure 2 shows somewhat stronger, yet not overwhelming, support for both hypotheses. First, presidents in the early and mid-1970s appear somewhat less extreme than later presidents. But the big upsurge in presidential extremism comes with the transition from Carter to Reagan. Carter's extremism score in 1980 is 1.2 compared to Reagan's 1.85 score in 1982. However, after Regan, presidential extremism subsides with presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Presidential extremism only begins to increase in 2000, Clinton's last year in office, and 2004, the first and only year for which we have such data for the second Bush. Still, presidents' Bush, Clinton, and Bush have an average extremism score of 1.47, which is larger than the average score for Nixon-Ford-Carter (1972-1980) of 1.19. A regression of these presidential extremism scores on year is significant ($b = .013$, $t = 2.16$, $p = .05$), indicating a .013 increase in extremism for each successive year; across the 32 years of this series, this amounts to .42, a noticeable amount given that the folded scale can only range from 0-3. But substantively, .42 is not much compared to the growing polarization of the parties in Congress.

Although there is a trend in public perceptions towards greater presidential extremism, the trend is not linear. The presidents of the 1970s are comparatively moderate and show no tendency towards increasing extremism. Then Ronald Reagan becomes president and the public perceives him as quite extreme compared to his predecessors, Nixon-Ford-Carter. Reagan is followed by two presidents, Bush I and Clinton, who are less extreme than Reagan but more extreme than the presidents of the 1970s. Finally, we have only one data point here for George W. Bush, who the public in 2004 viewed as extreme as Reagan's most extreme score (1982). From these data, according to the public, although Bush II may not be the most extreme president in several generations, he at least ties as the most extreme. The trend in public perceptions of presidential extremism provides us with modest support for the party activist hypotheses.

Presidential Policy Positions

The great limitation of the above data is that they are perceptual. Many factors may enter into voters' perceptions of the ideological placement of the parties and presidents, for instance media reporting, as well as actual party and presidential location. The public might view Reagan as so (comparatively) extreme, not because he was so, but because the news media painted him as being extreme. Thus, we turn to actual presidential policy behavior.

Figure 3 plots Michael Bailey's (2007) ideal point estimates of presidential policy positions from 1951-2002.³ These ideal point estimates have several advantages over DW-Nominate Score for presidents, another way of locating presidents' policy positions. DW-Nominate scores for presidents are calculated based on all positions that the

³ I accessed these data from Bailey's web page: <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/baileyma/>.

president took while in office, and thus can not vary over time for an individual. Thus at most we would only be able to compare presidents, and not whether an individual president's policy position shifts during his time in office. These estimates are also preferable to the perception data used above. Not only do they measure actual presidential positions, but they do so with a metric that allows us to compare the president's position with Congress and the Supreme Court. Plus, they span a longer period of time, capturing the pre-reform, as well as the reform eras.

Figure 3 about here

Turning to Figure 3, we see a growth in presidential extremism from the early 1970s on, consistent with both party activist hypotheses, but presidential extremism peaks in the late 1980s with Ronald Reagan, as we witnessed with the public perceptions data. And like the public perceptions data, George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton are comparatively moderate compared to Reagan, but not necessarily more extreme than the presidents of the 1970s. For instance, Reagan's average ideal point extremism estimate is 1.07 compared to .81 for George H. W. Bush and .66 for Bill Clinton, while the Nixon-Ford-Carter estimates for 1972-1980 average .67, almost identical to Clinton's. Also, in contrast to the perceptions data, we do not see much of an upsurge in extreme with George W. Bush, whose score here is .5 (the average of 2001 and 2002). George W. Bush actually appears less extreme than the average president (.77). But we possess only two ideal point estimates for Bush. Perhaps George W. Bush became increasingly extreme the longer he served in office. Until data like these are extended to cover more years, we can only speculate.

But these data do allow us to test the two party activist hypotheses, that we should see an increase in presidential extremism coming shortly after the enactment of the primary reforms, and that the degree of presidential extremism should continue to grow as the party activists became more extreme. Looking at the data prior to 1972 undermines the party activist hypotheses. Here we see Kennedy and Johnson as two of the most extreme presidents, surpassing Reagan's level of policy extremism, with Kennedy averaging 1.32 and Johnson 1.44 to Reagan's 1.07 score. Presidents prior to the party reform era could be highly extreme, rivaling, if not surpassing the extremism of reform era presidents.

Further, while presidents of the pre-reform era (1951-1976) appear somewhat less extreme than the post-reform presidents (1976-2002), .70 to .84, that difference seems meager compared to the predictions of the party activist hypothesis. The story becomes even cloudier if we reset the cut-point that distinguishes the two eras to 1951-1972 and 1973-2002. Now pre-reform presidents average .74 compared to .79 for the post-reform eras.

We can more formally test the party activist hypotheses with these data by regressing the presidential extremism ideal point scores on two variables: a pre-post reform dummy using such as 1951-1976=0 and 1977-2002=1 and a counter such as 1951-1976=0 and 1977=1 . . . to 2002= 26. The pre-post dummy tests whether there is a difference in the extremism of presidents of the two periods (party activist hypothesis one) and the counter tests whether extremism among presidents of the reform era have become more extreme over time (party activist hypothesis two).

Since the dependent variable, folded presidential ideal points, the pre-post dummy, and the counter are all nonstationary (see Table 1), I estimate a single equation, error correction model (ECM) (Table 2).⁴ The general form of the single equation ECM model regresses the dependent variable in differenced form on the first order lag (in levels) of the dependent variable, plus the independent variables in both differenced and first order lags.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

The error correction estimation lends support to the analysis thus far, which fails to detect any effect of the party reforms on presidential policy stances. None of the party reform variables (e. .g, the pre-post reform dummy and the reform counter) in any form (levels or differences) proves to be statistically significant. Another estimation, not reported here, replaced the counter variable with Poole-Rosenthal DW-Nominate scores for Congress to measure polarization. That variable also failed to attain statistical significance. Only the lagged value of presidential ideal points attains significance, with a negative sign, which indicates that there is a long-term equilibrium between past levels of presidential extremism and changes in extremism. As the president becomes increasingly extreme, there is a pull back to the center. The bottom line of this analysis detects no support for the Layman, Carsey, Horowitz party activist hypothesis, at least as it pertains to presidential position taking or to public perceptions of presidential and party location.

⁴ On single equation error correction models, see De Boef and Keele (2008). Readers are probably more familiar with ECM models that employ an error correction mechanism variable, which is composed of the first order lagged residuals of regressing the dependent variable on itself, lagged one period, and the independent variables in levels. Although the single equation estimation may consume degrees of freedom, it allows us to determine which levels variables affect values in the dependent variable.

An Alternative Theory Presidential Policy Positions:

Policy Motivations, Divided Government and Party Polarization

The above analysis indicates no increases in presidential policy extremism due to changes in the nomination process. Yet Figure 3 reveals considerable variation in presidential extremism over time. As discussed above, some presidents, like Kennedy, Johnson, and Reagan exhibit relatively extreme behavior compared to Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Carter, and even George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the latter two serving in an era of highly polarized parties. If changes in the nomination process do not affect presidential policy stances, what does? This section offers an alternative model to the party activist-party reform model offered above.

Policy considerations may have more direct impact on presidential policy positions than party activists and the reformed nomination process. Since Congress is so important to the enactment and implementation of presidential policies, presidents will take the congressional environment into account when establishing their policy positions. Party activists may indirectly affect presidential policy choice through their impact on Congress.

This alternative model begins by assuming that presidents are motivated by policy. Policy motivated presidents want to see at least some of his policy proposals enacted by Congress and implemented. Several factors may lead to this policy motivation among presidents. First, president's own beliefs may underpin this policy motivation, perhaps because the president recognizes a problem and sees his policy as a solution to that problem. Second, presidents may offer policies to repay groups and voters for their support in the past election, as well as use policy to attract their support in

upcoming elections. Third, presidents may view the enactment and implementation of policy as a way to build an historical legacy. The important point for this analysis is that this motivation will affect presidential behavior as the executive interacts with Congress to produce public policy.

Assume a simple spatial model in which the president and the “pivotal” member of Congress must come to an agreement over policy if it is going to be enacted. Further, assume that unless this pivotal member and the president hold the same policy preference, the president and that pivotal member must compromise, moving from their ideal points to an acceptable point between them. Also assume that members of the president’s party are closer to the president than members of the opposition party. When the opposition party controls Congress, the pivotal member will come from the opposition party by definition. Divided government requires larger movements or compromises by the president than united government to enact a policy.

Underlying this model is that presidents value policy success, that Congress will enact some policies for which the president can claim credit. At some point, the amount of movement may be too great for the president, so the president prefers the status quo, and will forgo “winning” or seeing a policy enacted on that issue. This situation is more likely to occur when government is divided than united. Presidents may decide, when faced with a Congress that is too far away in policy space to compromise with, to blame Congress for the failure to compromise, in effect turning the policy difference into a campaign issue (Groseclose and McCarty, 2001).

But presidents, even those facing policy distant Congresses due to divided government, can not forgo all possible policy enactments. They must enter into some

compromises, even those that might require extensive movement, with Congress to produce policies. Presidents will enter into such compromises because they and their party need to show policy leadership and accomplishment on at least some occasions. Societal problems, public outcry, and fear of electoral defeat may force government to produce a policy to address the problem. For instance, a budget must be passed, a nominee appointed to office, a response issue to a threat from a foreign nation, etc. In the face of the mortgage and credit crises of early 2008, the Bush administration even proposed a new set of financial policies and regulations despite the administration's preference for limited government involvement in the economy. Thus incentives exist under divided government for the president to sometimes compromise with Congress. In contrast, fewer and smaller compromises will be necessary when the president's party controls Congress. Consequently, due to the motivation to produce policy, presidential policy positions will be more moderate during divided than united government.

The above model implies that presidents exclusively negotiate with the opposition party during divided government. The president's party may impose costs on the executive for collaborating only with the opposition party during divided government. It, for instance, may dislike being relegated to such a secondary role in the policy making process and may object to allowing the opposition party to share with the administration for policy accomplishments while itself being shut out. In retaliation for collaboration and/or to keep a place at the policy making table, during divided government the president's party may threaten to withdraw its support for the president on this, and perhaps, other policies. These intra-party costs to the president during divided government will mount as polarization between the parties widens. For example,

Republicans failed to support George W. Bush in 2006 and 2007 on immigration policies, who most in his party felt took a position too far from the party and too close to the Democrats.

With polarized parties and divided government, presidents have an optimization problem to solve—how to maintain the leadership and support of their party while also gaining some legislative accomplishments, the latter requiring some compromising and moderation on the president’s part. Polarized parties will reduce the amount of presidential movement toward the middle during divided government, offsetting some of the moderation tendencies that divided government forces on the president. This leads to two hypotheses:

H1: Presidents will be more moderate during divided than united government.

H2: The degree of presidential moderation during divided government will lessen as the political parties become more polarized.

Testing the Divided Government-Polarization Models

Like above, I use Bailey’s presidential ideal point estimates (folded) to measure presidential positions. I use a dummy variable, coded “1” if the opposition party controls at least one chamber of Congress, “0” if the president’s party controls both congressional chambers. At the simple level, these data provide initial support that divided government moderates presidential policy positions: Under united government, presidents score 1.05 compared to .62 for divided government. To measure party polarization, I use the Poole-Rosenthal DW-nominate scores. For each congress from 1951 through 2002 (82nd through 107th congresses), I take the absolute value of difference between the Democratic and Republican medians for both chambers of Congress, which I then average to create a

“congressional party polarization score”. To capture the interaction effect between divided government and polarization, I multiply the divided government dummy by the congressional polarization measure. In years of united control, this interaction assumes a “0” value; during years of divided government it assumes the congressional polarization value. The basic equation for estimation is thus:

$$\textit{Presidential Extremism} = \textit{constant} + \textit{Divided Government} + \textit{Congressional Polarization} + \{\textit{Divided Government} * \textit{Congressional Polarization}\}$$

To fully estimate the interaction effects requires entering both elements of the interaction term, divided government and congressional polarization, as separate variables (Friedrich, 1982; Brambor, et. al., 2006). And as above, I use a single equation ECM due to nonstationarity the ideal point estimates (as before), as well as each of the three independent variables (polarization, divided government dummy, and their interaction, see Table 1 for details). Hence, the estimation includes the dependent variable in levels lagged one year, plus the three independent variables, in levels lagged one year as well as first differences. Table 2 displays results of this estimation, which provides strong support for the divided government-polarization model.

First, past presidential positions (in levels) affect changes in presidential ideal point estimates. Like above, and as is usually the case in such models, the sign is negative, indicating that more extreme past presidential positions lead to some moderation in presidential position taking. Second, none of the independent variables in levels form attain statistical significance, indicating no long term relationship between divided government, party polarization, and their interaction on presidential position taking.

In contrast, changes from united to divided government (and visa versa), as well as changes in the interaction between divided government and polarization affect presidential position taking as hypothesized, although changes in polarization by itself has no impact. The results indicate that when congress changes from united to divided government presidents moderate their policy stances by 1.6 units on Bailey's scale. This is a substantively substantial effect. In levels, presidential Bailey scores range from .25 to 1.64. In changes form they range from -1.15 to 1.02, or 2.15 Bailey units from year to year. The shift from united to divided government accounts for about 74% of the possible year-to-year change in presidential policy positions (1.6/2.15).

As also hypothesized, party polarization moves presidents in a more extreme direction, but only during divided government. To understand the conditional effects of party polarization, consider that if congress shifts from united to divided government but polarization does not change, presidents will moderate their policy positions from one year to the next by 1.6 units. Now if party polarization increases by one standard deviation (.23), then presidents will become more extreme by about .46 Bailey units. Subtracting this from the moderating effect of divided government lessens the degree of presidential moderation from 1.6 to 1.14. When party polarization increases at its maximum year-to-year amount, it virtually wipes out any effect of divided government to .09 $\{1.6 - (1.99 * .76) = .09\}$. As hypothesized, during divided government, presidents moderate their policy stances, but as the congressional parties become increasingly polarized, this tendency for presidents to moderate during divided government is restrained.

Conclusions

Presidents, on average, have not become more extreme in their policy positions despite the growing polarization between the parties of the past several decades. One would expect that presidents would exhibit the same behavior patterns of growing extreme as we see in voters, party activists, and members of Congress. As the analysis in this paper indicates, it is not that in the age of polarization that presidents are not as policy extreme as members of their own parties, but that presidents were quite extreme in their policy stance in the 1950s and 1960s, when the parties were not so polarized, under specific conditions. Specifically, under united government, presidents, no matter the degree of party polarization, tend to take relatively extreme policy positions. For the most part John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were decidedly liberal, and about as far to the left as Ronald Reagan (and perhaps George W. Bush) stood to the right during the age of highly polarized parties.

Divided government motivates presidents to moderate their policy positions in order to achieve policy compromises that result in the production of public policy. It just happens that in the age of highly polarized party, divided government has become more common, perhaps even the norm. Yet party polarization limits the moderating pull of divided government on presidents, as their own parties impose costs on presidents who compromise too often or too much with the opposition party that controls Congress. Thus, presidents of the polarized age, when they faced an opposition Congress, Reagan, Bush I, and Clinton, appear more extreme relative to Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford in the face of opposition control, but when the parties were not so polarized. In a sense, this is a story of the impact of separation of powers. As intended, separation of powers pulls

politics toward the center and helps cure the “mischiefs of faction,” one of those mischiefs being extremism in government policy.

What about the impact of the party reforms of the 1970s and the rise of activist influence over party nominations? The analysis here detects no direct support for party activist-party reform effects on the presidency. But insofar as activists, and the reforms that they helped institute, as well as took advantage of, pushed the respective parties to the political extremes, resulting in inter-party polarization, then indirectly, through polarizing the parties, activists and their party reforms may have impacted the presidency and policy making. Ironically, insofar as polarization between the parties breeds divided government, then party activists may be perennially disappointed, as divided government mutes their ability to move policy as far to the right or left as they would prefer.⁵

⁵ On the positive relationship between polarization and competition, and thus divided government see Fiorina, Morris P. 1974. *Representatives, Roll Calls, and Constituencies*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books. Huntington, Samuel P. 1950. “A Revised Theory of American Party Politics.” *American Political Science Review* 44 (September): 669-677 provides the classic and seminal statement on the relationship between competition and polarization.

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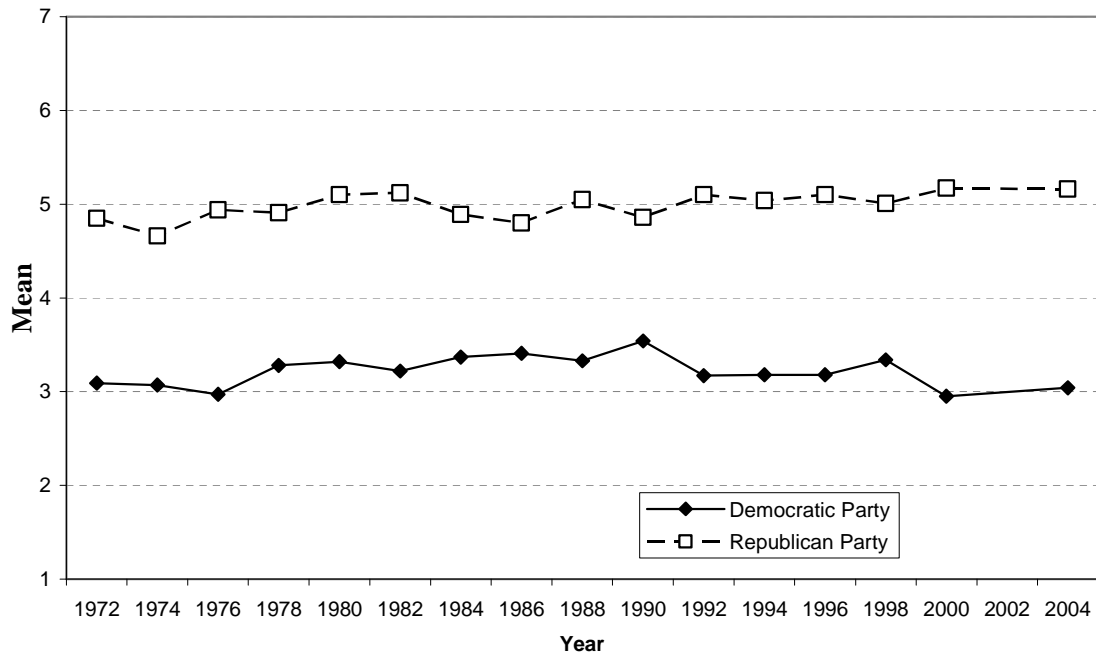
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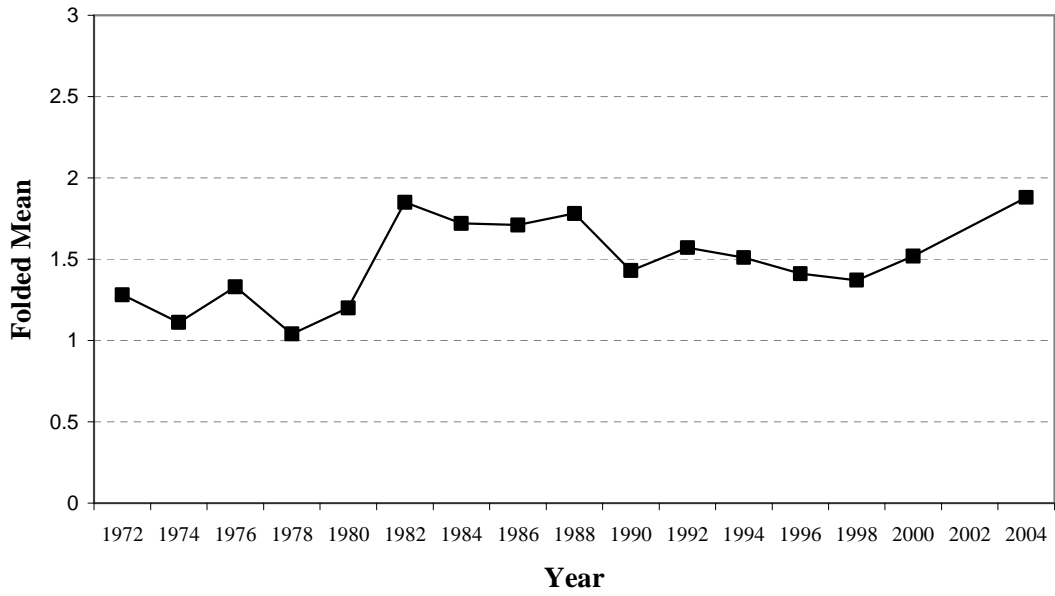
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Figure 1. Respondent Mean Placement of the Two Parties on a Seven-Point Liberal-Conservative Scale, 1972-2004 (ANES)



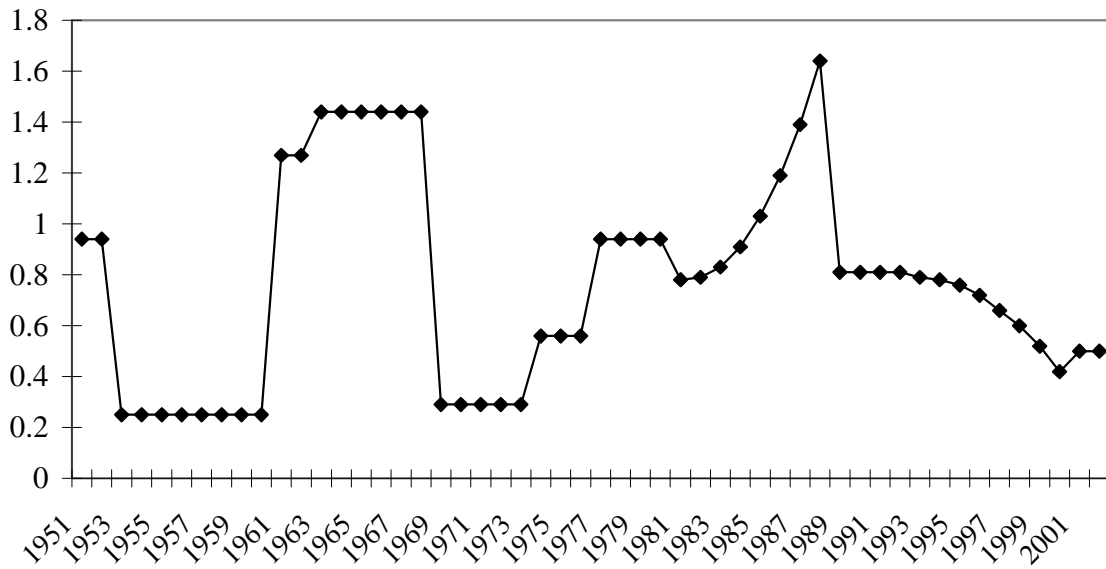
Source: American National Election Studies

Figure 2. Respondent Placement of the President on Mean Folded Seven-Point Liberal-Conservative Scale, 1972-2004 (ANES)



Source: American National Election Studies

Figure 3. Folded Ideal Point Estimates of President Policy Positions, 1951-2002



Source: Bailey, Michael A. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/baileyma>

Table 1. Dickey-Fuller Unit Root Tests for Variables Included in the Analysis		
Variable	Levels	Changes
Folded Presidential Extremism*	-2.51	-7.08
Divided Government	-3.10	-6.95
Party Polarization	1.49	-8.45
Interaction of Divided Government and Party Polarization	-2.64	-6.97
Pre-Post Reform Dummy	-0.98	-7.07
Reform Era Counter	8.17	-1.00
Critical Value at .01	-3.58	-3.58
Source: *Bailey (2007) and text for details.		

Variable	Divided Govt.-Polarization Hypotheses			Party Activist-Reform Hypotheses		
	b	SE	p*	b	SE	p*
Lagged Presidential Ideal Point	-.21	.10	.02	-.25	.10	.01
Pre-Post Reform Era Dummy (levels)	----			-.23	.30	.22
Reform Era Counter (levels)	----			-.01	.01	.18
Pre-Post Reform Era Dummy (Changes)	----			xx**		
Reform Era Counter (Changes)	----			.36	.27	.10
Divided Government (levels, lag)	0.29	0.61	0.32	----		
Polarization-DW Nominate (levels, lag)	0.44	1.01	0.33	----		
Interaction (levels, lag)	-0.64	1.07	0.28	---		
Divided Government (changes)	-1.60	0.72	0.02	---		
Polarization-DW Nominate (changes)	.49	2.13	0.41	---		
Interaction Divided Govt* DW Nom (Changes)	1.99	1.21	0.05	----		
Constant	-0.05	0.56	0.93	.16	.09	.07
n/ R ² / Adj. R ²	51	0.43	0.33	51	.16	.09
DW	1.96			1.84		
LM (4)	0.83		0.36	.01		.90
Q-lag 1	0.02		0.89	.35		.55
Q-lag 2	0.43		0.81	.90		.64
Q-lag 3	0.43		0.93	.95		.81
Q-lag 4	1.24		0.87	.95		.92
* one-tailed test						
** variable dropped from the analysis due to lack of variance.						