Partisan Polarization and Gender Socialization in the United States

Abstract

Since the 1950s, voters have become more strongly identified with the two major parties, and within those parties, have become more ideologically extreme. This polarization has arguably led to greater policy deadlock but also greater mass mobilization. Given the significance of its consequences, understanding the causes of polarization is an important step in forecasting the durability of its effects. I present a novel argument about the causes of polarization with strong implications for the future of polarization. I argue that much of the polarization we see in current electorate is an consequence of generational replacement and generational differences in political socialization between men and women. I support this argument with data from the American National Election Studies. My findings have strong implications about the causes and durability of mass polarization in the American electorate.

Introduction

One of the well-known facts about the modern American polity is the presence of strong partisan-ideological polarization.[1] This increase in polarization had been associated with a number of political outcomes, both good and bad. For example, some research has shown that increased political polarization has led to increased mobilization amongst the electorate (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Hetherington 2001, 2008, 2009; Saunders and Abramowitz 2004). Others have argued that increasing partisanship has clarified party positions and given voters a clear choice of candidates (Bartels 2000; Burden 2004; Garner and Palmer 2011; Jacobson 2005; Levendusky 2010). However, others have argued that polarization has decreased interest in politics, especially amongst moderates (Dionne 2004). Another negative outcome might be a decrease in the civility of rhetoric, which has important implications for things like trust in government (Mutz and Reeves 2005; Galston and Nivola 2006). Given these varied but important consequences of polarization, it is critical to understand its causes both for proposing remedies and understanding how long these effects might persist.

What, then, might explain the growing partisan-ideological polarization within the electorate? Many theories have been offered to explain the rise in polarization over the last 60 years. These

[1] Although there remains some disagreement about the substantive size of this polarization, even those arguing against widespread polarization concede that the ideological difference between Democrats and Republicans has grown over time (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005).

theories offer many different agents of change including both elites (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Layman and Carsey 2002; Layman et al. 2010) and the general public (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Abramowitz 2010; Stoker and Jennings 2008). One common assumption between many of these theories is that the composition of the electorate itself changes very little, and can be implicitly assumed to be constant in many cases. However, such assumptions may mask hidden dynamics of polarization based in more gradual generational changes.

One gradual change in the American polity that has potential implications for growing polarization is the shrinking gender gap in political sophistication. In the past, American women voters tended to lag behind voting men in political interest, information, and efficacy (Conway, Steuernagel and Ahern 1997; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997; Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001).[2] However, this gap in political behavior has diminished to a point where women voters tend to look very much like men. This significant convergence in political behavior is likely ignored because the demographics of gender have not changed; men and women still constitute roughly one half of the population each. However, this fundamental shift in American politics has important implications for understanding the growth of political polarization over time.

In light of recent changes in the American electorate, I present a theory of mass polarization that incorporates important generational differences in the electorate. Through the mechanism of political socialization, younger generations of women are now more politically polarized than older generations in a way systematically different from their male counterparts. Furthermore, through the process of generational replacement, these younger, more polarized generations now constitute a much larger portion of the electorate. Thus, the current levels of political polarization can be attributed, in part, to the increasing partisan-ideological polarization of women in the electorate.

In order to test this theory, I use survey data from the 1948-2008 Cumulative American National Election Studies (ANES) data set. By comparing differences between the political attitudes of men and women both within their own birth cohorts and among other birth cohorts, I show that

[2]Specifically, when one measures these variables in traditionally "masculine" ways, such as through voting and questions about leading political actors. Burns, Schlozman and Verba (2001) demonstrate that in many political arenas, such as participation in local political organizations, women can participate and be knowledgeable as much if not more than men.

women became polarized at a much faster rate than men. Furthermore, I link these changes in ideology to changes in socialization experiences, such as those fostered by parents and education. In total, this evidence provides insight into how social-historical changes in the electorate have led to changes in the political character of the electorate. These results expand our understanding of mass polarization by offering a mechanism for polarization independent of elite behavior, by calling attention to important changes in the electorate over time, by considering different polarization stories for different subgroups in the electorate, and by placing polarization within the greater historical context of American politics.

Polarization in the Electorate

While some have argued that the partisan-ideological polarization of Americans is constrained mostly to the realm of political elites (e.g. Fiorina, Abrams and Pope 2005, 2008; Fiorina and Abrams 2008), a growing body of evidence suggests that partisan ideological polarization has occurred at the mass level as well (Abramowitz 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Garner and Palmer 2011; Jacobson 2006; Ura and Ellis 2012). Given the potential implications for this polarization, it is important to understand what polarization looks like and why it has happened.

From the early 1970s to the early 2000s the moderate share of the electorate dropped, and respondents identifying as either liberal or conservative increased (Figure 1).[3] The percent of respondents identifying as "moderate" has decreased from around 35% in early 1970s to around 25% in the early 2000s. Furthermore, the share of respondents identifying as "somewhat liberal" and "liberal" has increased from around 20% to 25%. On the conservative side, the corresponding categories have grown from around 30% to 35%. Even within the non-moderate respondents, "somewhat liberal (conservative)" was the modal category in the early 1970s, but has now been surpassed by the more extreme "liberal (conservative)" category.

Another way of seeing polarization is to look at the ideology of a particularly salient subset of the population: voters. Since voters play a pivotal role in American politics, understanding the

[3]Scale values are 1="Very Liberal", 2="Liberal", 3="Somewhat Liberal", 4="Moderate", 5="Somewhat Conservative", 6="Conservative", & 7="Very Conservative".

ideological distribution of voters is paramount to understanding polarization in American politics writ large. Prior literature has used the spread of voter ideology as a measure of such a concept (Abramowitz 2010; DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson 1996; Levendusky 2009). If the spread of voters on an ideological scale has increased over time, this suggests that voters are moving away from moderate positions into more extreme positions. In considering the distribution of voters on the 7-point ideological self-placement scale over time, voters[4] are moving away from the center of the scale and towards the edges. Since 1972, the standard deviation of the ideological self-placement question has increased from 1.3 to 1.6, which is a 24% increase in the spread of voters along the scale.[5] This suggests polarization among voters.

In addition to the general spread of voters, one might also consider comparing how ideology varies by party (Abramowitz 2010; Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). In the two party American system, divergent ideologies between the means of party supporters suggests polarization in the electorate. Over time, voters identifying with each party have become increasingly divergent in their ideologies (Figure 2). The mean ideology for Republican identifiers has increased from around 4.7 to 5.4, which indicates a marked increase in the concentration of self-identified conservatives in the party. The mean ideology for Democratic identifiers has decreased from 3.7 to around 3.3, which signifies an increase in the concentration of liberals in the Democratic party. Together, this divergence between the ideology of parties indicates a growing polarization in the electorate. The average ideological self-placement of Republicans identifiers has increased (become more conservative) by 0.7, and the ideological self-placement of Democratic identifiers has decreased (become more liberal) by about 0.4. The total divergence mirrors nearly a category's increase in the difference between Democrat and Republican self-placement over the past 30 years.

[4]Both this and the following analyses of "voters" relies on respondent self-reported voting. While it is well known that survey respondents over-report voting, this would only hinder my analysis in that self-reported voters who do not actually vote are *less* likely to be politically active and partisan when compared to their veracious counterparts (Belli, Traugott and Beckmann 2001). Since political activity and partisanship correlate with more extreme ideological beliefs, this sample of "voters" likely contains an an over-representative amount of moderates; thus, any analysis here is likely to err on the conservative side when estimating polarization (Saunders and Abramowitz 2004).

[5]While, in general, ordinal measures are not interpreted through means or standard deviations, I include the analysis here because it is common practice within this literature. Nevertheless, looking at changes in the interquartile range leads to a similar conclusion; there is an increasing spread in the ideological distribution of voters over time.

Causes of Mass Polarization

Given that polarization has grown, what might be causing this growth? In general, theories of mass polarization can be classified by the main agent of polarization, which is to say who is responsible for pushing liberals and conservatives apart. One explanation for polarization ascribes this agency to political elites, whose political behavior induces extreme preferences in the electorate. A second class of explanation entails members of electorate responding to exogenous, non-political factors, such as education, and adopting more political views as a consequence.[6]

Perhaps the earliest expression of the elite-driven argument is that of Carmines and Stimson (1981, 1986, 1989). In their theory of issue evolution, Carmines and Stimson explain how parties adopt divergent positions on new issues, and mass identifiers will then adopt the positions of the parties. In an updated application of this idea, Layman and Carsey (2002), in their theory of conflict extension, theorize the adaption of party platforms to new policy issues increases in the polarization of elites, and that the public, especially partisan identifiers, reacts accordingly. Indeed, in looking at party activists, Layman et al. (2010) find that elites have become very polarized over time. Given previous research about mass public reaction to elite public opinion (e.g. Zaller 1992), it is a small step to conclude that such polarization in elites will lead to polarization in the mass public (Levendusky 2009). Within this vein of thinking rests explanations wherein the manipulation of hot-button social and economic issues, such as abortion, homosexual rights, or redistributive taxes, by the parties has led to an increasing partisan divide (Bartels 2006, 2008; McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006).

A second class of explanations for mass polarization looks to changes in the mass electorate itself for sources of increasing partisan-ideological divergence. A simple example of this type of argument involves how education influences partisanship and participation. Citizens with higher levels of education have long demonstrated higher propensities for partisan identification and participation (Campbell et al. 1960; Verba and Nie 1972). Over the past half-century, Americans

[6]For a comprehensive review of the literature on polarization at the mass and elite levels see either Layman, Carsey and Horowitz (2006) or Hetherington (2009)

have achieved higher and higher levels of education. Consequently, the electorate may be becoming more polarized as a function of increasing education and political engagement in the electorate (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Abramowitz 2010). Likewise, there is some evidence that increased media choices have led Americans to forgo moderate, information-based news media sources in favor of more ideological, opinion-based media sources (Mutz 2006; Prior 2007). As a result of receiving more polarized information, Americans are adopting more polarized ideological positions.

In truth, it is possible and likely that all of these factors are working in concert to generate the polarization that we see in the electorate. While each of these theories make important contributions to our understanding of polarization, there is a common, implicit assumption in these theories that ought to be examined. Specifically, these theories assume constant effects across the electorate throughout time without considering how various subgroups or generations within the electorate might respond differently to similar stimuli. For example, many top-down theories of polarization assume that elite actions can substantially shift mass public opinion. However, scholars have consistently shown that a person's ideology is relatively stable later in life, and rarely shifts dramatically (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1969; Jennings and Markus 1984; Stoker and Jennings 2008). This suggests that macro-level changes in ideology are likely not due to many Americans changing their ideology at once, but rather by changes in the mixture in the electorate of Americans with certain ideologies.

Changes Through Generational Replacement

If small shifts in individual behavior are not responsible for changes in the ideology of the electorate,[7] what other kind of processes could result in changes over time? One potential source of change in an electorate might be the gradual entrance to and exit from the electorate of different age cohorts, commonly known as generational replacement. If older cohorts that exit the electorate are systematically different from younger cohorts, then the character of the electorate will gradu-

[7]For a unique argument on how micro-level changes may provide a substantial building block for mass polarization, see Levendusky (2009).

ally shift in accordance with those differences. In the past, generational replacement has been used to explain shifts in partisanship, such as in the case of secular realignment or the evolution of issue agendas (Andersen 1979; Carmines and Stimson 1986; Campbell 2002).

Generational replacement can be seen in the different birth cohorts that constitute the electorate in this different election years (Figure 3). For example, in the 1952 election, the modal generation of voters was born prior to 1900, and there are no voters born in the 1950s. However, in the 1980 election, voters born in the 1950s, the baby-boomers, constitute the modal category of voters. Inasmuch as the character of public opinion for baby-boomers differs from voters born in the 19th century, the character of the 1980 electorate should be different from the 1952 electorate. Comparing the 1980 and 2008 election, the modal category is still voters born in the 1950s, but the overall distribution of voters has shifted from voters born before 1950 towards those born after 1950. Again, these variations in the generational constitution of the electorate can be used to explain changes in the character of the electorate.

In looking to generational change as a significant mechanism for change in the electorate over time, the next important question to ask is how do generations differ? While there are numerous sources for variation in the public opinion of different generations, one understudied change with respect to polarization is that of change in the difference between the ideology of men and women.[8] Several past studies have shown that existing gender differences in participatory behavior and education have been shrinking over time (see e.g. Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler 1998). Given that higher levels of engagement and education generally translate to greater political sophistication and stronger ideological beliefs, it stands to reason that decreases in those gender gaps could translate into higher partisan-ideological polarization in women (Conover 1988). Furthermore, since much of the shrinkage in the gender gap has been women becoming more like men with respect to political engagement, employment, and education, this suggests that polarization among women is a contributing to mass polarization to a degree significantly different

[8] I'm referring here to a very specific component of gender differences in ideology. There have been numerous studies in the past addressing gender differences in the realms of partisanship (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Wolbrecht 2000), voting behavior (Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler 1998), and participation (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997).

than polarization among men.

Gender Differences in Ideology

How then does partisan-ideological polarization differ between men and women? A simple first cut at understanding these differences would be to look at how the distribution of ideology for men and women has changed over time.

Consider first the differences in the growth of ideological identification between genders over time (Table 1, Part I). Again looking at the standard deviation of ideological self placement as a measurement of polarization, both men and women have become more polarized over time. Between 1972 and 2008, the standard deviation of self-reported ideology for men grew from 1.289 to 1.472, and it grew for women from 1.274 to 1.594. As these numbers suggest, polarization grew for both men and women but to a greater degree for women. Comparing the ratio of growth for women to that of men (1.746), women polarized almost twice as much as men over the same period.

Another way to measure polarization is to compare the difference in party means of ideological self-identification (Table 1, Part II). The difference in ideological self-placement between Republican and Democratic men grew from 0.908 to 1.707 between 1972 and 2008. The same difference for women grew from 0.832 to 1.753. Again, the growth for women is higher than that of men. Specifically, the difference between Republican and Democratic women grew around 1.15 times that of men.[9] This evidence suggests that women are polarizing at a rate greater than of men.

What Explains Gender Differences in Polarization?

Given that there are differences in the rates of polarization between the two genders, what might explain these differences? Historically, there has been significant variation in the political socialization of men and women, but this variation has decreased over time. These changing trends in political socialization may explain why there are differences in polarization between genders.

[9] Graphs of these relationships can be found in an online appendix. Using bivariate linear regression to model both standard deviation and difference in party means as a function of time returns results comparable to those presented here.

Gender Roles & Political Socialization

Political socialization describes the individual's "learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal positions as mediated through various agencies of society" (Hyman 1959; Sapiro 2004). This education generally involves learning about how a citizen is expected to act as a member of the polity, and is tied to the formation of partisan affiliation and ideology (Jennings, Stoker and Bowers 2009). Considering that gender, too, can be conceptualized as a learned behavior, differences in the political socialization of genders are a potentially fruitful source of differential ideological development (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Through the earliest parts of American history, the American political sphere was divided along gender and other cleavages. Women were not guaranteed the right to vote until the 20th century, and prior to 1840, married women did not even have the right to own property. In general, women were considered as legally bound to their husbands (Sapiro 1983). This dependence on men for legal rights highlights a longstanding division in sex roles; men are assumed to be responsible for the public welfare vis-a-vis their families, and women are assumed to be responsible for the private welfare of their families (Baker 1984).[10] Thus, for much of the history of the United States, the majority of political behavior demonstrated by women did not involve public expressions of politics such as voting or campaigning, but rather around private persuasion and local community organizing (Sapiro 1983). These distinct gender roles in politics form the foundation for differences in changes in the political behavior of men and women.

This sexual division of politics along a public-private dimension shifted as changes in the legal environment in the 20th century began to recast gender roles. With the passage of the 19th

[10]This is not to say that women were not involved in politics absent the right to vote. Without a doubt, the suffrage movement could not have succeeded without the very public activity of women, and women were very involved in the temperance and progressive movements. However, these cases highlight how, even when they participated in politics, women were cast as moral reformers, which connects much closer to their roles as defenders of virtue than of public crusaders. These difference still persist today, inasmuch as women are more likely to be engaged with community organizing and school board participation than their male counterparts, who are more likely to vote or participate in national campaigns than participate at the community level (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Hardy-Fanta 1993). Furthermore, many so-called "women's rights" issues today, e.g. abortion, concern the reproductive labor of women and role of women as mothers.

Amendment, women were Constitutionally guaranteed the right to vote.[11] Although women's participation initially lagged behind that of men's rates of participation,[12] women's voting patterns began to match those of males by the middle of the 20th Century. This suggests a shift in norms away from distinct political gender roles, or a least a blurring of the boundary between "masculine" and "feminine" roles. However, even by the end of the century, women were less likely than men to engage in many "masculine" forms of participation, such as engaging in debate or donating to campaigns (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001).

Thus, while gender norms were changing during the 20th century, they did not change overnight; rather, gender norms were gradually changing. Prior to the 1920s, there had been a distinct boundary between men's and women's roles in the public realm, and "in order to alter that boundary women had not only to learn new habits, but to unlearn old assumptions about acceptable behavior" (Andersen 1996, pp. 68-69). This learning process could not take place overnight, and, thus, women were integrated gradually through the changing of gender norms rather than immediately through the creation of legal rights (Sapiro 1983). It is this gradual integration of women into the public political sphere that, I argue, is responsible for differences in the rates of change in the political ideologies of men and women. The shifting of norms and political behavior linked to these norms can thus be seen as a consequence of integration.

Gender Roles & Ideology

Shifts in gender roles following the passage of the 19th Amendment also led to shifts in the political behavior of new women voters. New political opportunities opened new participatory experiences to women, which, in turn, distinguished younger women voters from older ones. Furthermore, changes in the messages transmitted through political socialization altered beliefs about the role of women in politics. Finally, increases educational and job opportunities led to a more political adulthood socialization for women. These forces, in concert, led younger generations of women

[11] Some states granted women the right to vote in national elections prior to the passage of the 19th Amendment, but these were mostly low-population, western states and territories.

[12] This characterization varies greatly by region, class, and ethnicity depending on data availability. There is some evidence that, even in the 1920s, women's participation mirrored closely that of men's participation (Corder and Wolbrecht 2006).

to have more extreme ideologies than women of older generations.

One important difference between younger and older generations is a difference in the types of information passed through parental socialization. Children generally learn how to behave in society from their parents; this learning process includes the transfer of partisan identification between generations (Campbell et al. 1960).[13] Furthermore, parental interest in politics has been shown to lead to higher levels of political sophistication and more extreme ideologies (Luskin 1990). With the passage of the 19th Amendment, women in the 1920s became the first generation of mothers to be able to act as political role models for their daughters. As the participation rates for women increased with each successive generation, younger generations of women received stronger and stronger political cues from their mothers. Each successive generation of women was raised by more political mothers, and this shift in political socialization led to significant differences in political ideology among different generations of women.

Another important difference between younger and older generations of women is a difference in the types of socialization received in adulthood. For example, education has been shown to be an important source of political sophistication, inasmuch as it pertains to having a consistent, coherent set of political beliefs (Luskin 1990). Furthermore, with particular reference to women, higher education has been shown to be an important influence on beliefs about political gender norms, with women who receive higher education shown to be more likely to believe that they ought to participate in politics (Sapiro 1983). In the period following the passage of the 19th Amendment, changing gender roles led to a convergence in the educational experience of men and women. Thus, while older generations of women lagged behind their male counterparts with regard to education, younger generations of women did not. This convergence in educational attainment, and its concomitant effects on political sophistication and political gender norms, suggest that education is an important source of generational differences in the political ideology of women.

Finally, younger and older generations of women differed in the type of work in which they

[13]Despite this finding, there is a concern that such "recall" questions, i.e. questions based on the respondent's memory, are subject to bias and error. Respondents may recall their parents' politics as their own, regardless of the reality of the situation. With regards to such concerns, Jennings and Niemi (1975) present evidence supporting the validity of these measures.

participated. The workplace has been shown to be an important source of political socialization, in that it tends to provide the resources, e.g. political information, necessary for participating in politics (Almond and Verba 1965). Furthermore, in the case of women, homemaking has been shown to suppress beliefs about gender equality in politics, which are linked to increased participation (Sapiro 1983). While for many women of older generations, homemaking was a primary career[14], changing gender norms following World War II led many women to seek careers outside the home. As women sought employment outside the home, they were able to marshal civic resources unavailable to them inside the home. Inasmuch as these civic resources translated into increased political sophistication, younger generations of women who left the home workplace became more ideological than women of older generations.

A Theory of Gender Socialization and Polarization

These relationships between changing gender roles, political socialization, and increasing political sophistication among women outlines the contours of my theory of gender socialization and polarization. In general terms, the theory holds that changing gender norms following the passage of the 19th Amendment led to a shift in the political socialization of women. Women have increasingly been socialized to see politics less as a masculine endeavor and more as inclusive of both men and women. These changing beliefs among women about women's role in politics have translated to higher levels of political sophistication in the female electorate, which have manifested as women having increasingly stronger ideological beliefs over time. Thus, changes in gender socialization have contributed to the partisan-ideological polarization we see in the electorate today.

The effect of gender differences in political socialization on ideological development begins with the passage of the 19th Amendment. While partial to full suffrage existed for women in a number of states, the ratification of the 19th Amendment introduced into the electorate a number of women who, prior to the 1920s, had no institutional incentive to participate in politics, and who were in fact socialized to not participate public politics. Importantly, previous scholars have demonstrated that people with little interest in politics or knowledge of politics tend to be ideolog-

[14]This characterization fits white women to a much greater degree than women of other races.

ical moderates with inconsistent policy positions and weak partisan ties (Converse 1964; Jennings 1992; Miller and Shanks 1996; Saunders and Abramowitz 2004; Stimson 1975). Thus, the passage of the 19th Amendment likely doubled the electorate by adding millions of political moderates, and, consequently, the American electorate of the 1920s should look much more moderate than that of the 1890s or earlier generations.

Following the passage of the 19th Amendment, political gender norms began to change such that women could participate to a greater extent in public politics, such as voting and campaigning. However, norms and attitudes, once learned, do not change very much. Thus, traditional gender norms and moderate ideological identification in women likely persisted beyond the immediate, legal incorporation of women into the electorate in 1920.

As social gender norms began to change, women became increasingly likely to get a college education and work outside the home. These changes allowed for an alternative adult socialization that began to blur traditional distinctions in political gender roles. Thus, in terms of political beliefs, younger generations of women began to look more like men of their generation and less like women of older generations. Importantly, changes in education, work opportunities, and childhood socialization should lead to women of younger generations having stronger partisan affiliations and greater ideological consistency than women of older generations.

As older, moderate cohorts, who were socialized under traditional norms exited the voter pool, younger, more ideological cohorts made up an increasing share of the electorate. The overall effect of this generational replacement was increasing partisan-ideological polarization. It is through this logic that I argue changes in gender political socialization have contributed to a more polarized electorate.

Empirical Implications

The preceding analysis has several testable implications for polarization. First, younger generations of women should demonstrate stronger ideologies and higher levels of political sophistication than women of older generations. This prediction follows from the overall effect of changes in political socialization for women.

H1: Women of younger generations should be more likely to demonstrate higher levels of political sophistication and stronger ideologies than women of older generations.

Within the theory, differences in ideology are linked to differences in political socialization and the beliefs of women about political gender norms. Thus, there should be generational differences in political socialization, and these differences should translate to different beliefs about gender norms.

H2: Women of younger generations should experience a different political socialization (e.g. higher education, more political mothers, etc.) than women of older generations.

H3: Women of younger generations should be more likely to hold progressive political gender norms than women of older generations due to different political socialization experiences.

Finally, my theory speaks to how these changing political gender norms relate to the ideological development of women in the electorate. According to my theory, belief in more egalitarian political norms should be associated with stronger ideological beliefs in women. This is the final linkage between differences in political socialization and polarization.

H4: Women with more egalitarian beliefs about political gender norms should be more likely to have stronger ideological beliefs than women with more traditional beliefs about political gender norms.

Analysis

To test the implications of my argument, we would ideally look for changes in the electorate over time. Specifically, if older birth cohorts of women differ, as theorized, from men of their same birth cohort and women of younger birth cohorts, then generational replacement provides a viable explanation for differences in polarization over time. Looking at national surveys, such as the ANES allows for such a comparison.

Data

My main source of data is the Cumulative American National Elections Studies data set, which pools ANES surveys from between 1948 and 2008. As such, my unit of analysis is the individual. I pool the studies together, which is appropriate in this case because the operative comparison in the data is between voters of different generations and not different elections. Thus, in all the following analysis, respondents are grouped by birth year or birth cohort. This allows me to make the comparisons across generations needed to support my theory.

Generational Differences in Polarization

If my theory of gender socialization and polarization holds, then the first test should show gender and generational differences in polarization. Following earlier analysis using the 7-point ideological self-identification question in the ANES, a first-cut approach to look for differences in polarization is look for how ideological extremity varies by generation. To that end, Model I (Table 2) presents ideological extremity modeled as a function of a respondent's birth cohort and age. Ideological extremity is measured by folding the 7-point ideological self-identification such that 1 represents a "moderate" response and 4 represents an "extreme" response in either a conservative or liberal direction. Cohort is measured using an indicator variable of the birth decade in which the respondent was born, e.g. the 1910s or 1950s.

In looking at the relationship between birth cohort and ideological extremity, successive birth cohorts of both men and women seem to be more ideologically extreme than older birth cohorts. Moreover, the relationship between birth cohort and ideological extremity is nearly twice as strong for women as it is for men. This comports with the evidence presented in Table 1 that polarization is happening faster for women than it is for men. Substantively speaking, a woman is around 35% less likely to self-identify as a moderate than a woman born twenty years earlier, and around 52% more likely to identify as extremely ideological. Compare this men, who are only 27% more likely to identify as extremely ideology and 20% less likely to identify as moderates.

Another way of understanding partisan-ideological polarization is to look at the consistency

between a respondent's ideology and their party affiliation. A "consistent" ideology is one in which a liberal respondent would identify with a liberal party, and a conservative respondent would identify with a conservative party. Having a consistent ideological-partisan identification is an indicator of ideological sophistication, and has been used as a measure of polarization in the past (Abramowitz 2010).

If there are gender differences in polarization, then we should see gender differences in the proportion of respondents with a consistent[15] ideology over time (Figure 4a). While the proportion of men that have consistent partisan-ideological identifications has increased with each successive cohort, this growth has flattened out following the cohort born in the 1940s. Women, on the other hand, have continued to grow in consistency such that the 1970s cohort of women matches the 1970s cohort of men. Furthermore, the proportion has grown at a faster rate for women than men.[16] Cohorts of men born in the 1940s and later demonstrate fairly stable levels of partisan ideological consistency; conversely, women of the same cohorts continue to exhibit growth in partisan ideological consistency, which suggests a disproportionate effect on polarization.

A more nuanced measurement of political sophistication is the correlation between between partisan and ideological identification. To see how this relationship has changed over time, I examine the Spearman correlation between 7-point partisan self-identification[17] and 7-point ideological self-placement grouped by birth cohort (Figure 4b). Women from earlier cohorts tend to have a lower correlation between partisan identification and ideology than both women of later generations and men of their same generation. This suggests that women of that generation exhibited lower partisan-ideological consistency than women of later generations and men of their same generation. Furthermore, this gender gap appears to be shrinking over time.[18] The correlation for

[15]Having a consistent partisan-ideological identification consists of being a liberal and identifying as a Democrat, being a conservative and identifying as a Republican, or being moderate and identifying as a independent. Note that only respondents after 1972 are included.

[16]The difference between men and women respondents is statistically significant at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level for the 1920s through 1960s cohorts. By the 1970s, this difference is null.

[17]Scale values are 1="Strong Democrat", 2="Democrat", 3="Independent Leaning Democrat", 4="Independent", 5="Independent Leaning Republican", 6="Republican", & 7="Strong Republican"

[18]Comparing the slopes on the lines of best fit indicates that the rate of correspondence for women is growing 1.55 times as fast as the same rate for men. This difference is significant at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level

successive generations of men as grown about 23%, and the correlation for the same generations of women has grown around 48%. This, again, suggests that the more rapid growth of polarization in women contributes disproportionately to the growth of polarization in the electorate.

Another measure of political sophistication is the proportion of respondents not able to place themselves on a 7-point ideology scale. In looking at this proportion over time, early generations of women were not able or willing to place themselves ideologically (Figure 5). Upwards of 60% of females born before 1900 could not place themselves ideologically compared to roughly 25% of women born in the 1960s. Consider also the comparison between the genders. For the generation born before 1900, there is a 19-point gap between the genders. Contrast this with the generation born in the 1960s, where the gap is around 5 points.[19] Finally, the decreasing difference between men and women demonstrates how the gender gap in political sophistication is shrinking over time.[20] This evidence, and that showing increasingly extreme ideological self-identification (Tables 1 & 2), supports H1, that younger generations of women exhibit higher political sophistication and stronger ideologies than women of older generations.

Generational Differences in Socialization

Furthermore, I expect that, with these changes in ideology, there should be shifts in gender socialization as well. With respect to childhood socialization, I expect to see changes in the political character of parents. Specifically, I expect to see each subsequent generation to have more politically involved mothers than the last generation. We can examine this trend by looking at the proportion of respondents within a birth cohort who identified their parents as being politically active (Figure 6). This measure defines parents as politically active if they identify with one of the major parties and were considered by their children to be politically active. Respondents born in later cohorts are much more likely to have a politically active mother than those born in earlier cohorts. Furthermore, there appears to be little growth in the level of political activity of fathers.[21] The

[19] All of these differences are statistically significant at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level.

[20] Additional evidence in the appendix about the ability of respondents to correctly identify the ideological tenor of the party further supports the conclusion about a shrinking gender gap in political sophistication.

[21] The rate of growth in mothers is roughly 24 times that of fathers, and this difference is significant at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level.

proportion of respondents with political fathers has stayed constant across generations at around 75%, but the proportion with political mothers has greatly increased from around 40% to nearly 60%. This suggests that successive generations of respondents were getting stronger signals about political engagement from their mothers when compared to older generations. Additionally, these differences between mothers and fathers suggest that any differences in political socialization between generations would be conditioned on differences in the political activity of mothers and not fathers. This supports the argument that, if women are socialized more by their mothers than their fathers (as suggested in, e.g., Rinehart (1992)), differences in gender socialization could explain differential ideological polarization between the genders.

In addition to the childhood socialization process, adult socialization has also occurred outside the home at work and at school. Decreasing differences between the genders in work force participation and education would indicate that adult socialization process is becoming more uniform across the genders. One venue for adult socialization is the workplace, and we can look for differences in the difference in the proportion of female and male respondents answering that they work outside the home to measure differences in workplace environments (Figure 7). In general the trend shows a marked decrease in the difference between the genders beginning with the age cohort born in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Consequently, this is the same cohort that would be entering the workforce in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which supports the earlier argument that opportunities for women for political socialization outside the home really began in the 1960s. Also, this graph supports prior research that the gender differences in employment are decreasing over time.

Another process of adult socialization occurs during adult education experiences, such as college. Looking at generational differences in college education[22] between the two genders could provide insight into gender differences in partisan-ideological polarization (Figure 8). Cohorts born before 1910 appear to have very similar, low levels of college education. However, beginning with respondents born in the 1910s, a greater proportion of men receive a college education when

[22]College education here refers respondents to having answered as having a BA level degree or higher when asked about education.

compared to women. At the widest point in the gap, that of the 1940s cohort, men were 83% more likely to have a college degree than women. The education gap then begins to shrink in successive generations until in the 1970s cohort, when women again match their male counterparts in levels of education.[23] Inasmuch as college socializes citizens politically, these differences in education suggest a differing level of socialization that has grown and then shrunk for successive generations. This evidence, along with that concerning political parentage and workplace differences provide support for hypothesis H2, that women of younger generations are receiving different political socialization experiences than their mothers.

Linking Differences in Socialization to Polarization

Another important linkage within my theory of political gender socialization and polarization concerns changes in beliefs about political gender norms. The changes in political socialization described in the previous section should lead to changes in beliefs about political gender roles and the extent to which women feel as though they belong in public life. As a first cut at examining this relationship, consider a model of the relationship between generational change and beliefs about women's role in society (Table 3). Here the dependent variable measures, on a 7-point scale, the extent to which the respondent believes women should have an equal role in running society.[24]

Model IV indicates that, among both men and women, beliefs about women's role in society have become more egalitarian over time. This comports with general knowledge about the progress women have made in breaking down traditional gender divisions. Model V increases our understanding of this development by including information about how changing political socialization has influenced this development. Including variables about the political nature of mothers and fathers indicates that some of the growth in support of progressive gender norms can be tied to the growth in numbers of political mothers depicted in Figure 6. Women with political mothers are

[23]The difference in education for men and women is statistically significant at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level for the 1910s, 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s cohorts.

[24]Higher values indicate less egalitarian beliefs. The text of the question reads "Recently there has been a lot of talk about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that a women's place is in the home. And of course, some people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale or haven't you thought much about this?"

around 50% more likely to believe in equal gender roles than women with non-political mothers, and around 35% less likely to believe that women's place is in the home. Furthermore, in looking at Model VI, these results seem to hold even including other socialization factors used to explain this growth, such as education and work outside the home. Finally, while a college education can increase progressive beliefs for both men and women, having political mothers and working outside the home appears to only affect the gender norm beliefs of women. This suggests that women have been influenced by a greater number of changes in political socialization than men, which would be expected given the different starting places for both genders.[25]

Another measure of beliefs in political gender norms asks respondents to agree or disagree with the statement "Women should stay out of politics." Supporters of progressive gender norms would likely disagree with this statement, and, thus, it offers another measure of beliefs in political gender norms. In looking at how this measure has changed over time, Model VII seems to indicate that women of younger generations are more likely to disagree with this statement than women of older generations, a sign of generational differences in support of traditional political gender norms (Table 4). Including information about political socialization helps us to understand what might be causing these differences over time. Model VIII supports the conclusion from Table 3 that having a political mother makes a significant difference in the support for traditional political gender roles. Furthermore, this effect seems robust to including other political socialization measures, such as education and working outside the home (Model IX). As was the case in Table 3, having a political mother seems only to influence the beliefs of women and not those of men, while a college education seems to affect both men and women. These models lend support to hypothesis H3, in that differences in political socialization seem to have led to differences in beliefs about political gender roles.

Finally, returning to polarization, these differences in beliefs about political gender roles should translate to stronger ideological beliefs among women. As described in my theory, women who

[25]In both Table 3 and Table 4, many observations are dropped due to missingness, which is a function of when each representative question for each relevant dependent variable was asked. The resultant small sample size may explain why age and cohort are not good predictors in these models.

have adopted more egalitarian political gender norms as a consequence of changes in political socialization should be more likely to adopt stronger ideological positions than older generations of women socialized into traditional gender norms. To test this prediction, I model the extremity of ideological self-placement, in either a liberal or conservative direction, as a function of different beliefs about gender norms (Table 2). Model II models the extremity of ideological self-placement as a function of the political gender beliefs described in Table 3 & Table 4. Having progressive beliefs about the role women play in society seems to increase the probability of identifying as a extreme ideologue. Women with egalitarian beliefs about gender roles are 63% more likely to self-identify as extreme than women with traditional beliefs about gender roles. Furthermore, these results seem robust to including other factors that influence ideology extremity, such as education.

Importantly, as shown in Model III, progressive beliefs about gender roles seems to influence the ideological self-identification of only women, and not men. This evidence supports hypothesis H4, that women with more egalitarian beliefs about gender roles with have stronger ideological beliefs than women with traditional beliefs. This, in conjunction with evidence about the changes in political socialization for women and their influence on beliefs about political gender norms, suggests that it is the changing political socialization of women that is driving difference in the rate of polarization between men and women.

As the preceding analysis has suggested, the changing political socialization of women following suffrage led to the growing ideological extremity of women over time, and this, in turn, has contributed directly to the polarization we see in the general public. Opportunities available to women of younger generations have led to a different socialization into politics, which in turn has led to greater polarization in those generations. As younger generations with stronger ideological positions make up a larger segment of the population through generational replacement, there is an overall increase in polarization. As such, this paper has argued and presented evidence that the political integration of women has contributed directly to the growing polarization in the American electorate.

Conclusion

Mass polarization is an important phenomenon in American politics, with important implications for the functioning of American democracy. I have argued that the increasing political incorporation of women in the electorate following a shift in political gender norms has led to the increasing political sophistication of women. As more politically sophisticated women replace less sophisticated women through generational replacement, the electorate as a whole becomes more polarized. Thus, the political integration of women has contributed to the mass polarization we now see in the electorate.

In fitting these findings with the current polarization debate, this paper has offered a novel argument for the growing partisan-ideological polarization in the American electorate. It presents a strong case for revaluation of assumptions about the stability of gender differences over time. Furthermore, it highlights the need for more cohort-based analysis in understanding change over time. This original research should contribute significantly to the current polarization conversation, and provide several interesting avenues for future research.

Moving measurement beyond the 7-point ideological self-placement scale would also allow for extending analysis beyond the time frame presented in this paper. Since the 7-point ideological self-placement question was not asked until the 1972 ANES Time Series study, there may be polarization before this point that cannot be assessed with the data at hand. Indeed, the theory I present above has implication for polarization occurring before 1972, but the data limitation only allows for analysis after 1972.

One interesting implication of this paper is that polarization seems here to stay. While other mechanisms may allow parties to manipulate polarization for electoral reasons, the argument of this paper hinges on one structural change that can never happen again. While the vote may be extended to other members of population, such as felons, in time, the electorate will never effectively double again as it did in the 1920s. As such, this paper has strong implications for the prospects of moderation in the near future.

While there is strong evidence that the shrinking gender gap has led to increased polarization,

this paper is not arguing that this is the only mechanism for growing polarization. As was in the case in several graphs, men appear to be becoming more polarized as well; the paper just argues that the rate is much faster for women than men. Consequently, this argument leaves room for other explanations as to the growing polarization among men and women. Furthermore, there is some evidence that the gender differences here apply only certain subsets of the population. For example, partisan-ideological consistency has not increased over time for blacks of either gender, and the gender differences in ideological self-identification abilities persist for lower-income Americans. This potential for intersectional differences in integrations provides an interesting avenue for future research.

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Tables

Table 1: Difference in Polarization by Gender

Gender Differences in Polarization, 1972-2008				
I. *Standard Deviation of Ideological Self-Identification*				
	1972	2008	Growth	Ratio
Men	1.289	1.472	0.183	-
Women	1.274	1.594	0.320	1.746
II. *Difference in Party Means of Ideological Self-Identification*				
	1972	2008	Growth	Ratio
Men	0.908	1.707	0.799	-
Women	0.832	1.753	0.921	1.152

Table 2: Predictors of Ideological Self-Identification

	Dependent variable:					
	Ideological Self-Identification, 1=Moderate, 4=Extremely Ideological					
	I.		II.		III.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Cohort	0.074***	0.137***	0.207	0.250	0.269	0.122
	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.238)	(0.221)	(0.240)	(0.240)
Age	0.008***	0.016***	0.017	0.035	0.025	0.027
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.024)	(0.022)	(0.024)	(0.024)
What is Women's Role in Society?			−0.023	−0.072**	−0.015	−0.081**
			(0.036)	(0.032)	(0.036)	(0.035)
Should Women Participate in Politics?			−0.470*	−0.099	−0.331	0.082
			(0.248)	(0.213)	(0.250)	(0.230)
College					0.756***	0.494***
					(0.173)	(0.187)
Homemaker					–	−0.096
					–	(0.145)
N	11,215	12,418	677	805	677	700
LR χ^2	22.08	91.54	6.72	12.68	24.44	22.80
df	2	2	4	4	5	6
prob > χ^2	0.000	0.000	0.152	0.013	0.000	0.001
log-likelihood	−14079.769	−15398.934	−817.175	−949.436	−640.550	−820.950
BIC	30845	44309.89	1679.975	1945.707	1331.433	1700.86

Note:Ordinal Logit Results — *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: Source of Beliefs About Women's Equality

	Dependent Variable:					
	Beliefs About Women's Role in Society: Progressive → Traditional					
	IV.		V.		VI.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Cohort	-0.384^{***}	-0.487^{***}	-0.154	-0.054	-0.291	-0.057
	(0.017)	(0.015)	(0.183)	(0.144)	(0.214)	(0.155)
Age	-0.026^{***}	-0.027^{***}	-0.011	0.015	-0.023	0.012
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.019)	(0.015)	(0.022)	(0.016)
Political Dad			-0.184	0.072	0.026	0.141
			(0.228)	(0.203)	(0.265)	(0.222)
Political Mom			0.165	-0.559^{***}	0.045	-0.507^{**}
			(0.199)	(0.174)	(0.230)	(0.190)
College					-0.673^{***}	-0.751^{***}
					(0.162)	(0.156)
Homemaker					–	0.590^{***}
					–	(0.117)
N	11,166	14,168	832	1,211	650	1,025
LR χ^2	652.90	1531.12	2.68	67.67	21.80	118.68
df	2	2	4	4	5	6
prob $> \chi^2$	0.000	0.000	0.612	0.000	0.001	0.000
log-likelihood	-17940.301	-22116.708	-1453.167	-2091.616	-1129.505	-1749.108
BIC	35955.17	44309.89	2973.573	4254.224	2336.734	3581.405

Note: Ordinal Logit Results $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$

Table 4: Sources of Beliefs About Women's Role in Politics

	Dependent variable:					
	Should Women Stay Out of Politics? Disagree=0, Agree=1					
	VII.		VIII.		IX.	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Cohort	−0.106	−0.226***	0.573	−0.121	0.450	−0.005
	(0.086)	(0.073)	(0.405)	(0.341)	(0.525)	(0.375)
Age	−0.004	0.005	0.066	0.013	0.040	0.028
	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.041)	(0.034)	(0.055)	(0.038)
Political Dad			−0.547	−0.289	−0.249	−0.088
			(0.427)	(0.371)	(0.524)	(0.411)
Political Mom			0.041	−0.634*	0.195	−0.802**
			(0.397)	(0.330)	(0.489)	(0.363)
College					−2.311***	−2.821***
					(0.730)	(1.015)
Homemaker					–	−0.059
					–	(0.237)
Constant	−0.799	−0.646	−6.612*	−0.975	−5.181	−1.977
	(0.733)	(0.600)	(3.576)	(2.997)	(4.679)	(3.314)
N	1,376	1,788	518	724	414	624
Log likelihood	−684.845	−913.946	−228.039	−308.386	−163.809	−250.169
AIC	1,375.691	1,833.892	466.078	626.773	341.619	514.339
Note: Logit Results						*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figures

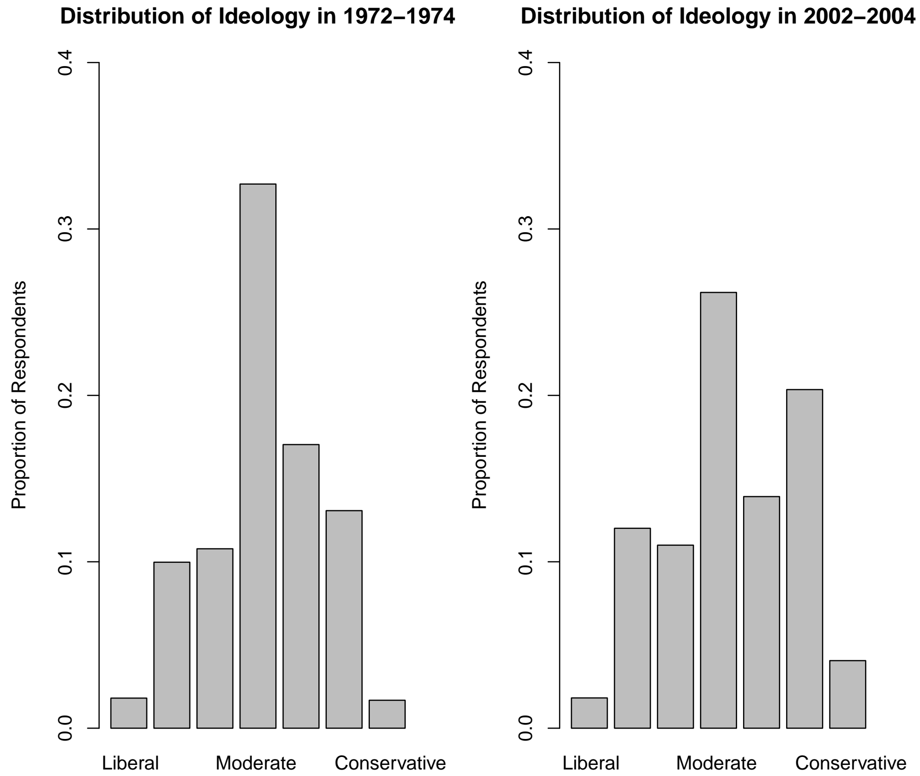


Figure 1: *Histogram of ANES 7-point Respondent Ideology, for 1972 & 1974 and 2002 & 2004.* The categories represented here range from "very liberal" to "very conservative," with "moderates" representing the middle category. Respondents answering "Don't Know" or "Haven't Thought About it Much" are excluded from this analysis.

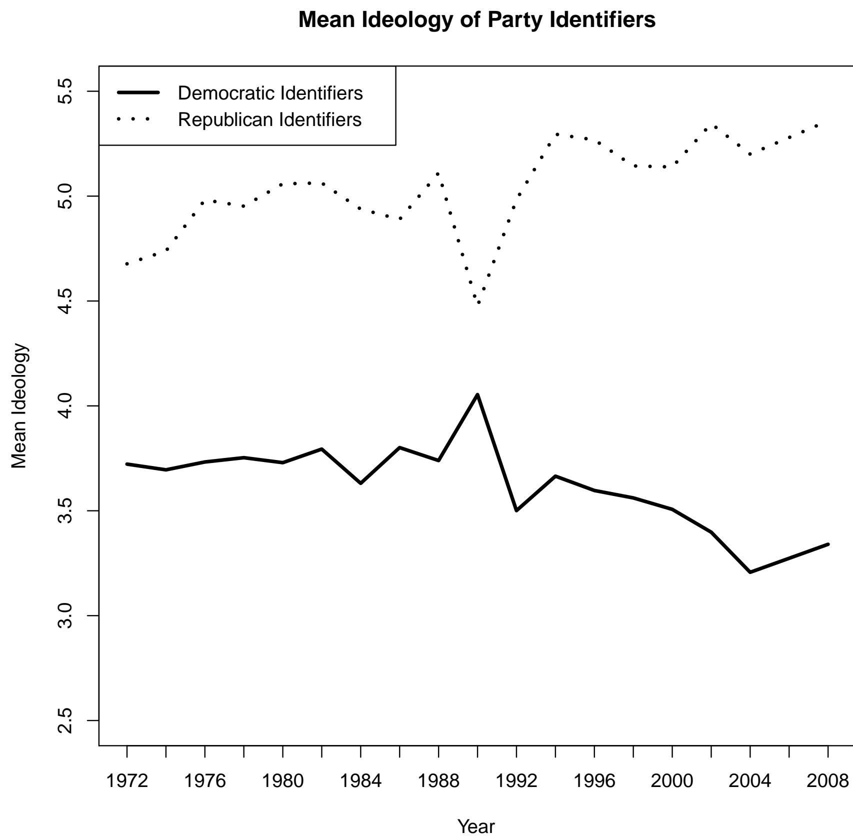


Figure 2: *Mean Ideology of Party Identifiers over Time.* Each line represents the mean ideology for respondents who identified with either major party and who responded as voting in the last election. Respondents answering as "leaning" toward either party are included as identifying with that party.

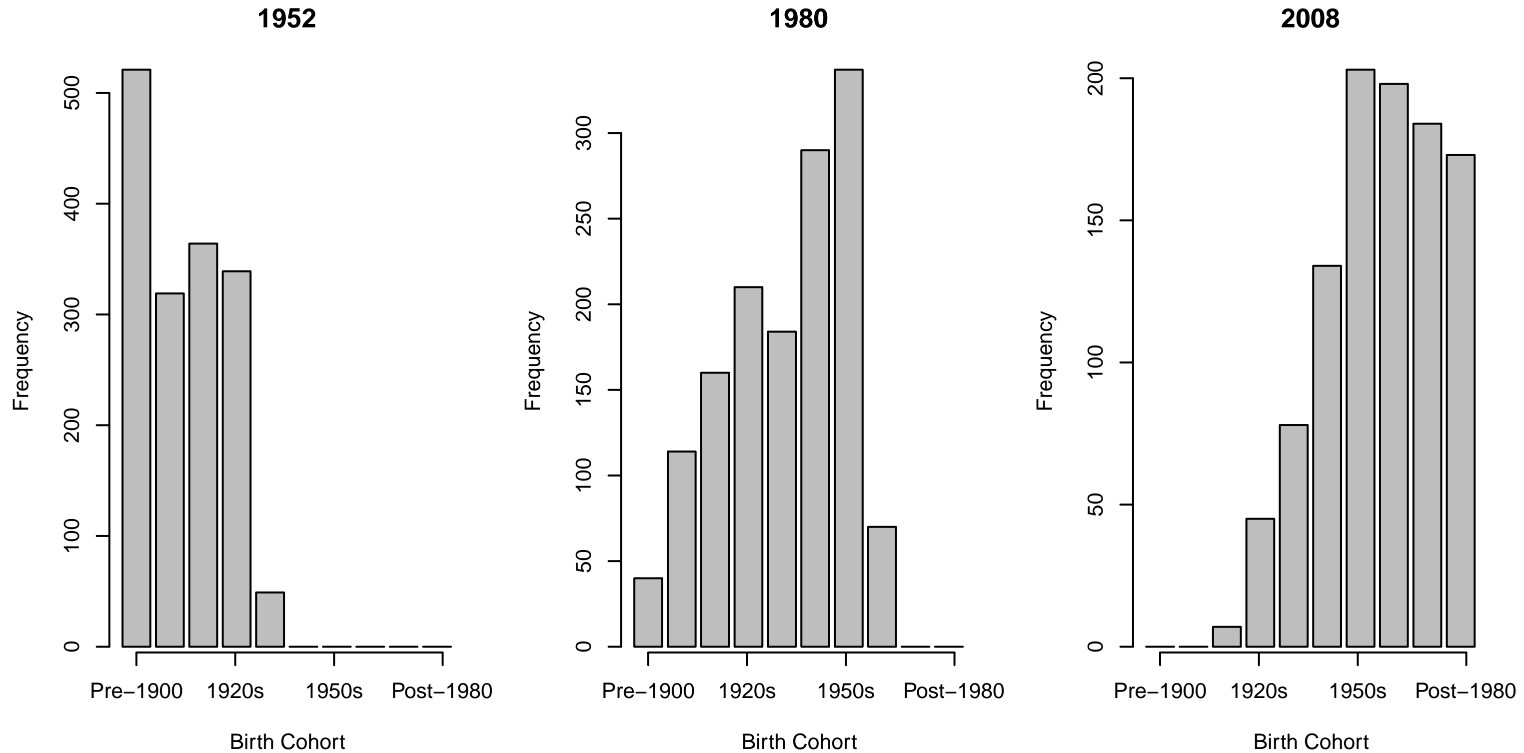
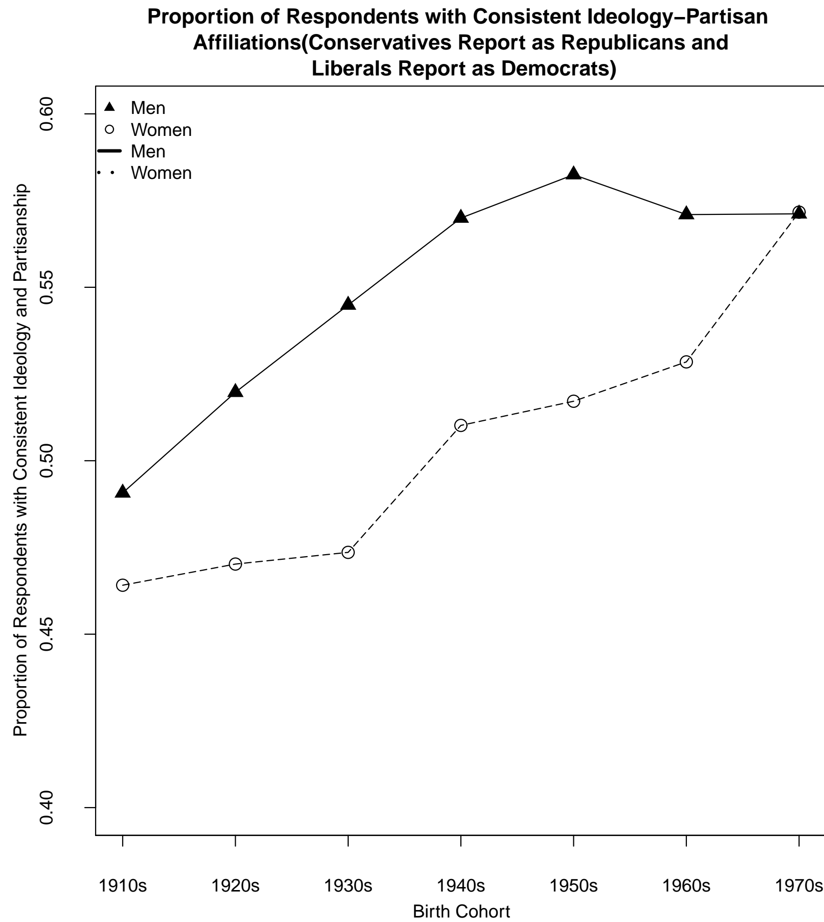
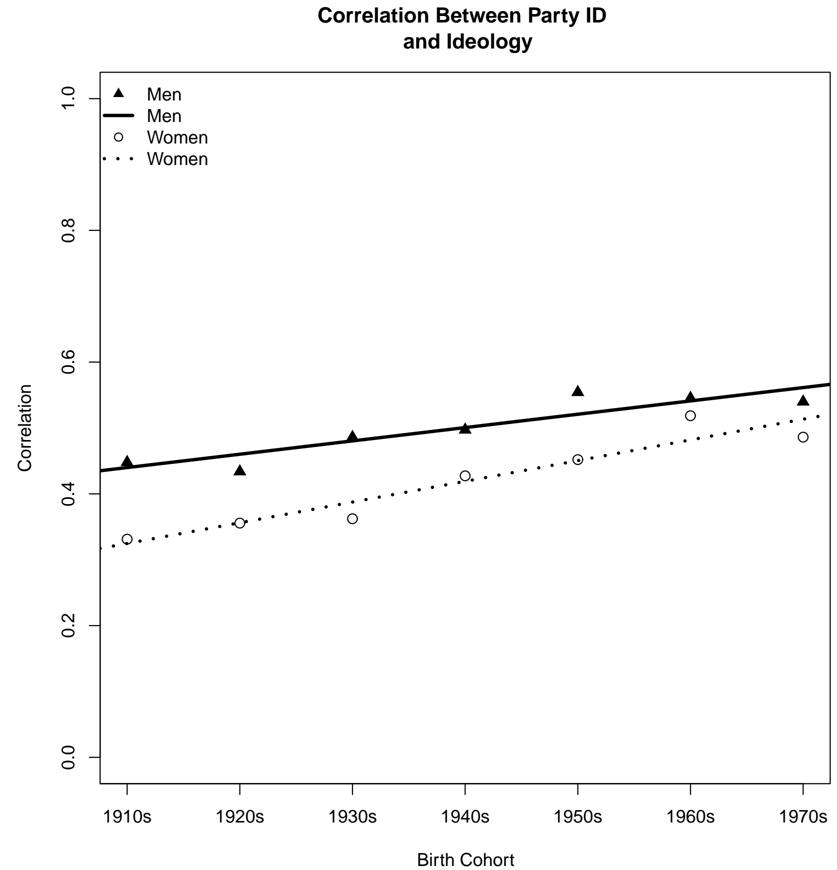


Figure 3: *Frequency of Voters for Presidential Elections in 1952, 1980, & 2000, Organized by Birth Cohort.* Each bar plot represents the number of respondents in each ANES survey reporting voting in that year's presidential election. Each bar in each plot represents a categorization of voters by the decade in which they were born. Only the x-axis is constant between all three bar plots.



(a) *Proportion of Respondents with Consistent Partisan-Ideological Identification, Organized by Birth Cohort.* Each dot represents the proportion of respondents with a self-reported ideology that matches the ideology of the party with which they identify.



(b) *Correlation Between Partisan Self-Identification and Ideological Self-Placement, Organized by Birth Cohort.* Each dot represents the Spearman correlation between partisan and ideological self-identification. Lines indicate lines of best fit.

Figure 4: Each of these figures show two different measures of partisan-ideological sophistication. The left figure shows the proportion of respondents with consistent partisan and ideological identifications. The right panel shows the growth of the correlation between party and ideology over time.

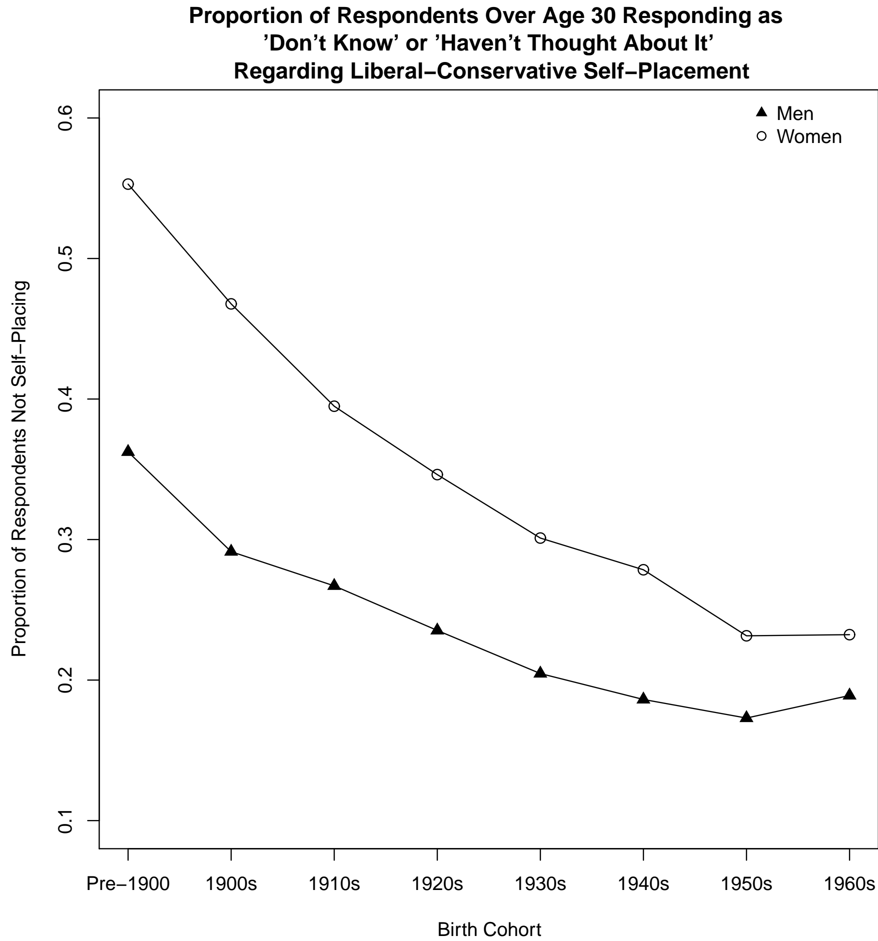


Figure 5: *Proportion of Respondents Unable to Place Themselves on a 7-Point Ideology Scale, Organized by Birth Cohort.* Each point represents the proportion of respondents able to place themselves on a 7-point ideological self-identification scale.

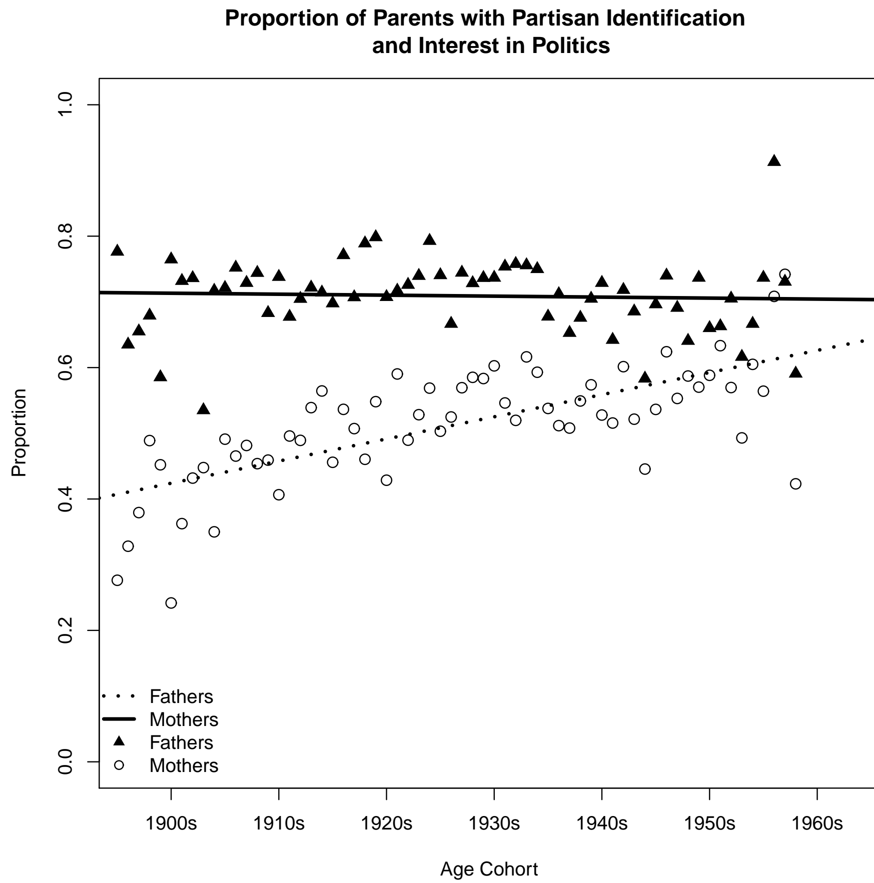


Figure 6: *Proportion of Respondents with Politically Active Parents, broken down by parent and birth year.* Each dot represents the proportion of respondents with political mothers or fathers in each birth year.

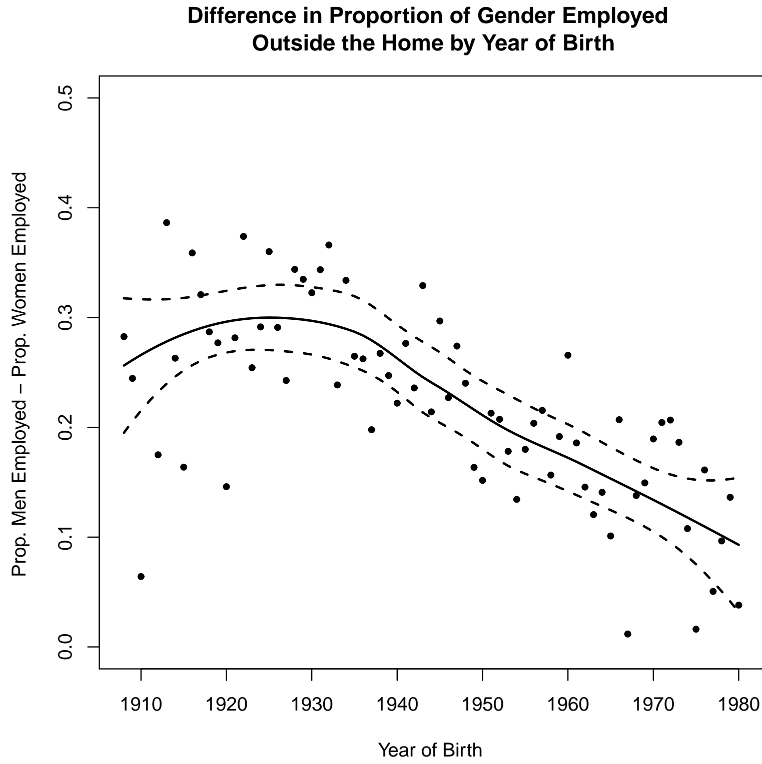


Figure 7: *Difference in the Proportion of Women and Men Employed Outside the Home, Organized by Birth Year.* Each point represents the difference between males and females in the proportion of respondents answering that they work outside the home. The solid line represents a loess smooth of the data, and the dashed lines represent a 95 % confidence interval around that smoothed line.

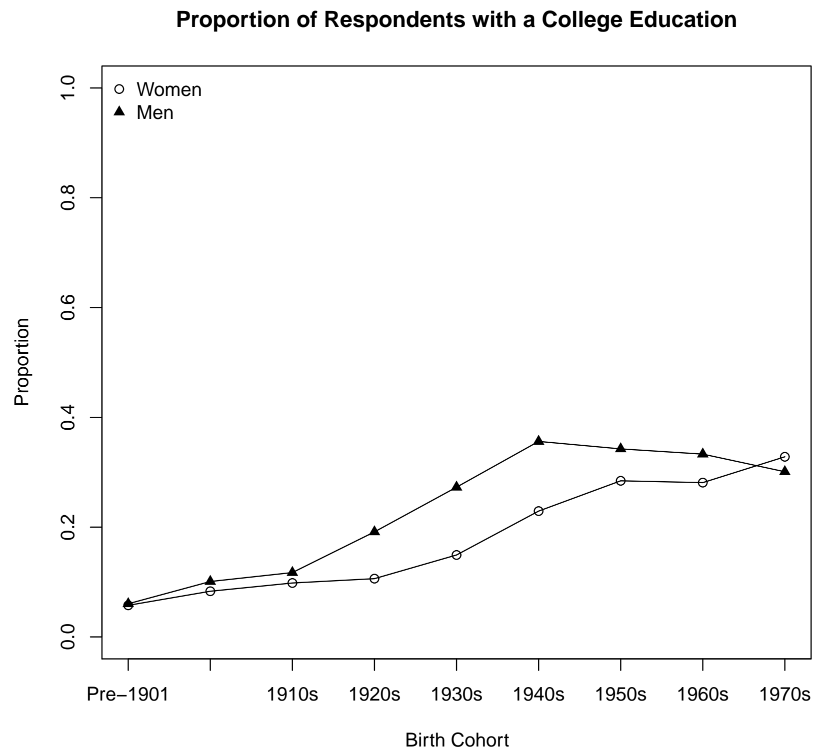


Figure 8: *Proportion of Respondents with a College Education, by Gender and Birth Cohort* Each dot represents the proportion of respondents identifying as having received a college education or higher.

Online Appendix

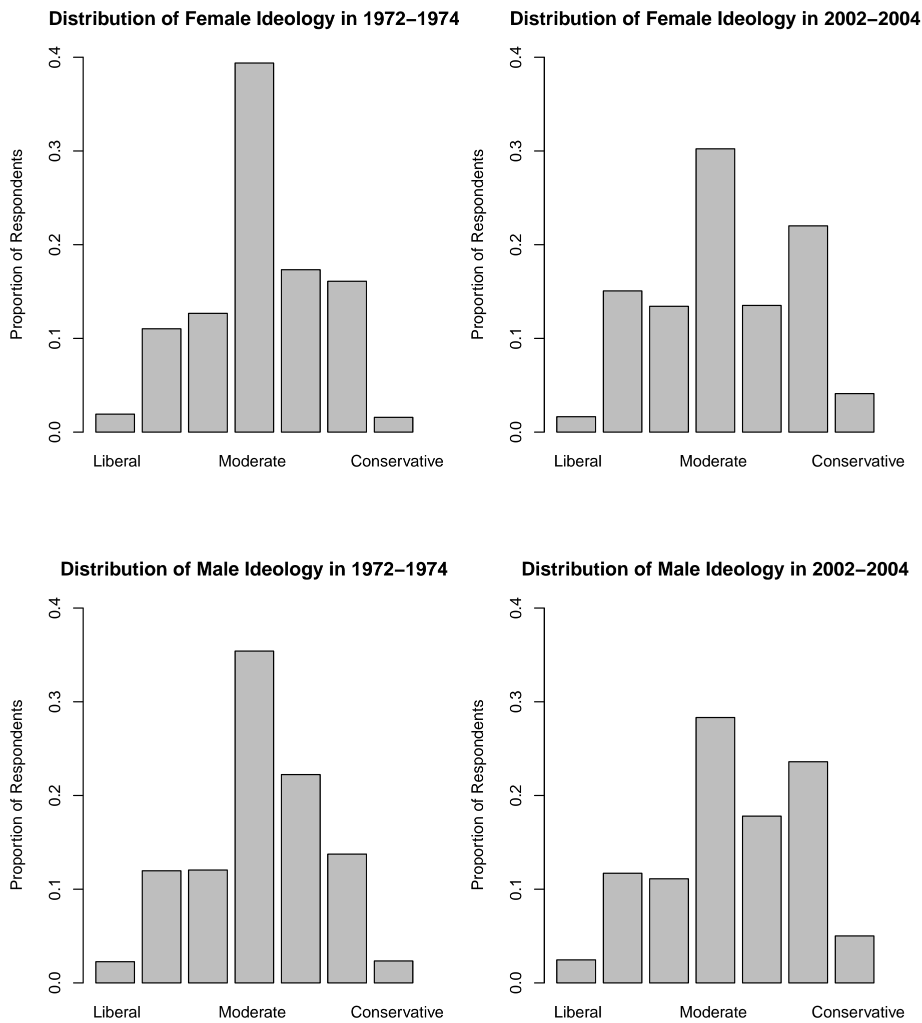


Figure 9: *Histogram of ANES 7-point Respondent Ideology, for 1972 & 1974 and 2002 & 2004 ANES Surveys, separated by gender.* The categories represented here range from "very liberal" to "very conservative," with "moderates" representing the middle category. Respondents answering "Don't Know" or "Haven't Thought About it Much" are excluded from this analysis.

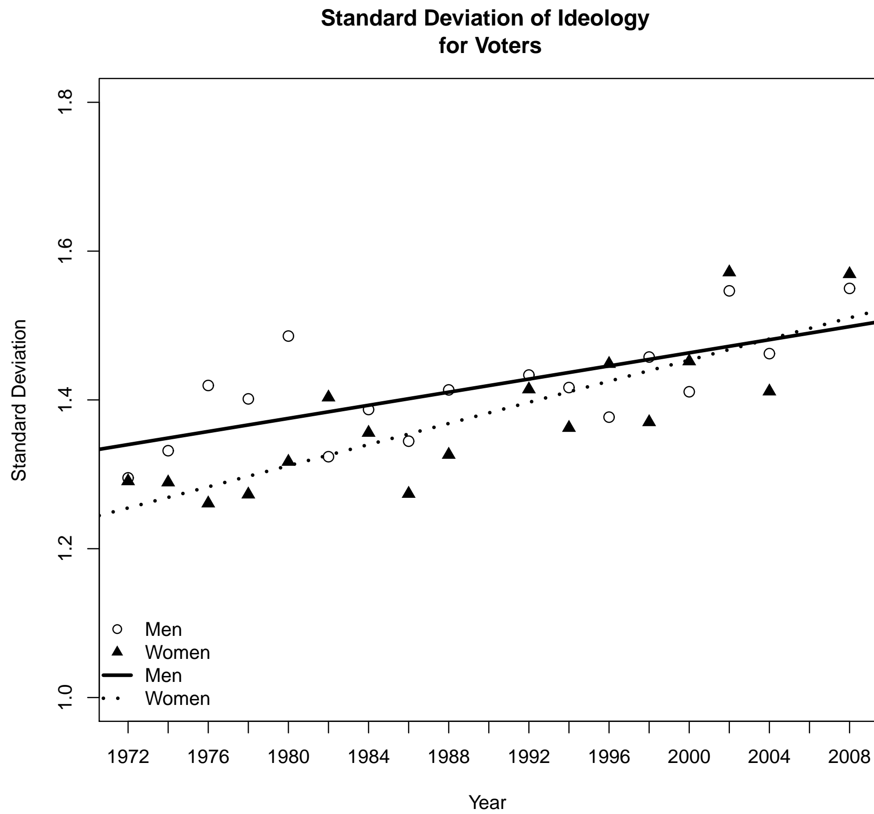


Figure 10: *Standard Deviation of Ideology for Voters over Time, Broken Down by Gender.* Each dot represents the standard deviation of ideological self-placement for men and women. Lines of best fit are included to aid interpretation. Respondents identifying as ”Don’t Know” or ”Haven’t Thought About It” are excluded from this graph.

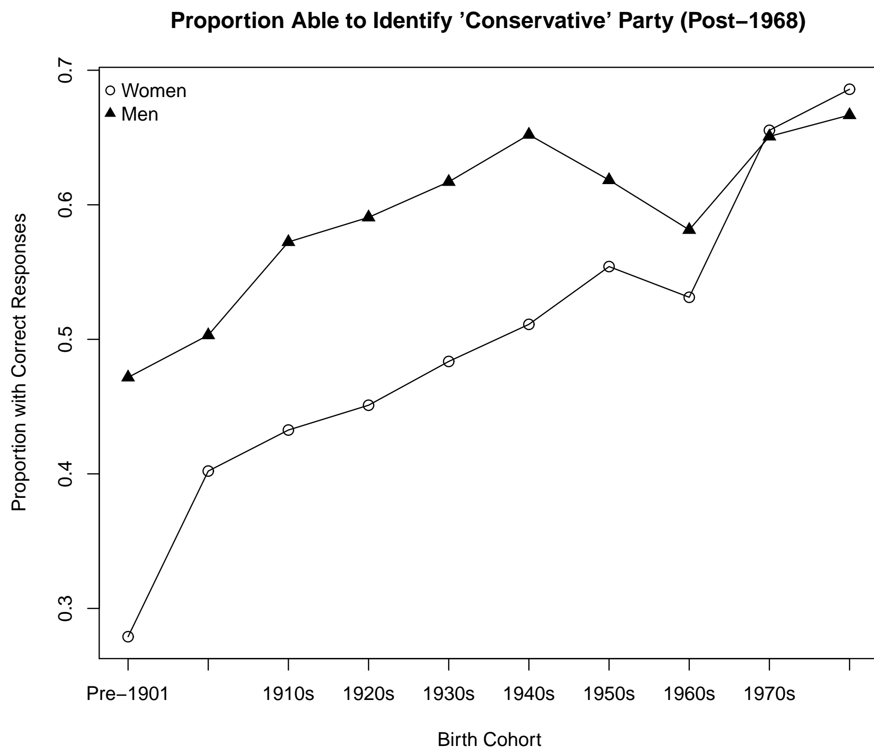


Figure 11: *Proportion of Respondents Correctly Identifying Republicans as the Conservative Party, Organized by Birth Cohort.* Each point represents the proportion of respondents able to correctly identify Republicans as the conservative party.

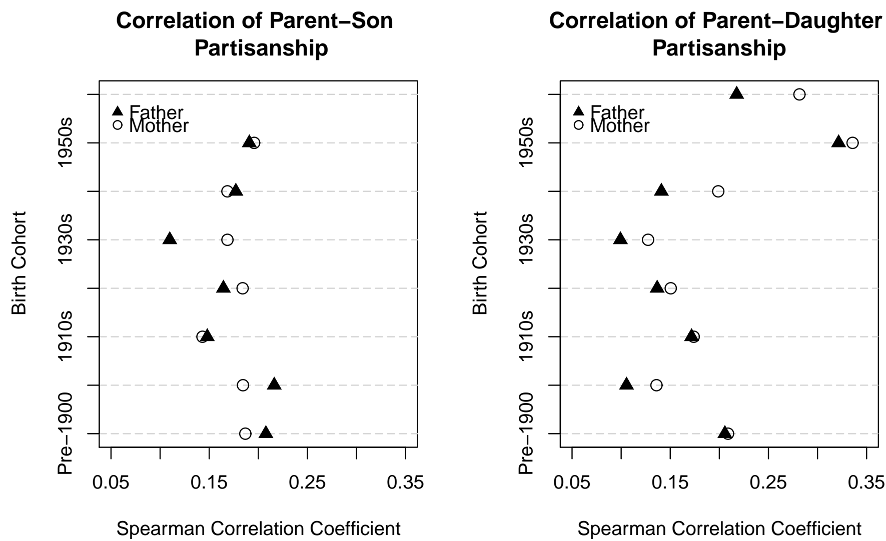
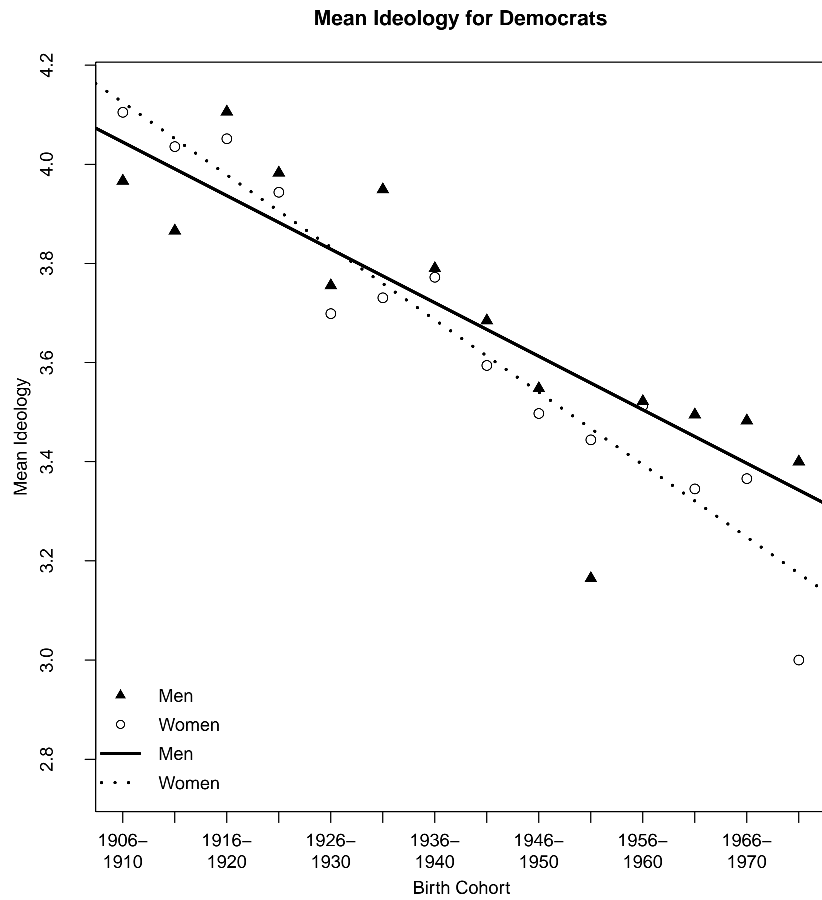
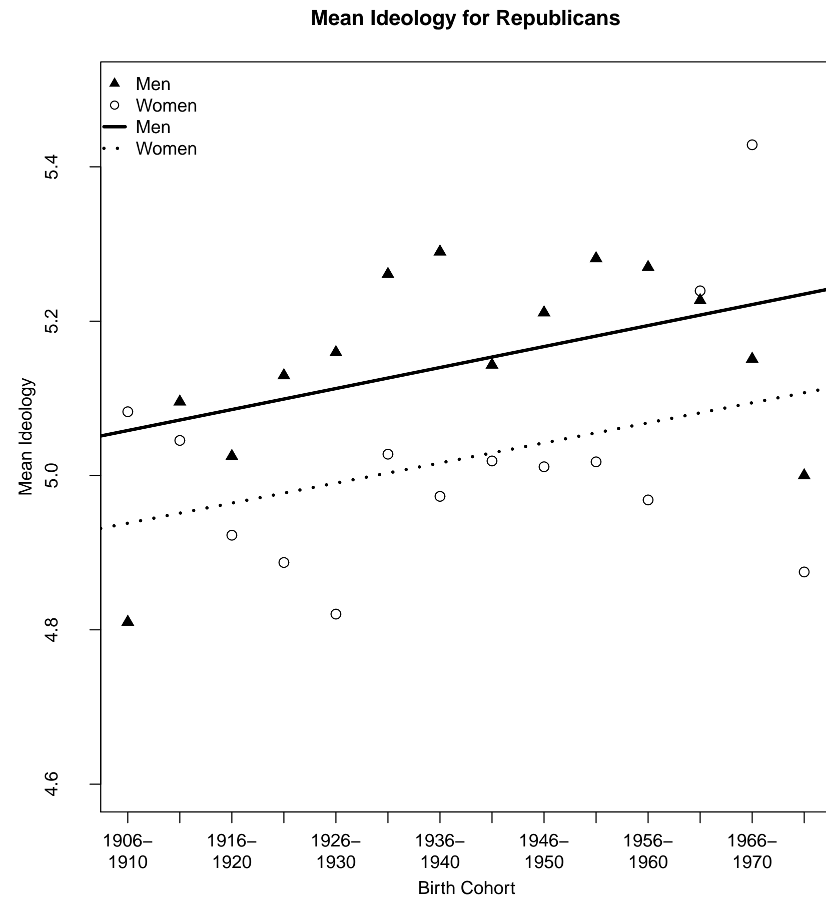


Figure 12: *Correlation between Strength of Parent's Partisanship and Strength of Respondent's Partisanship, Organized by Birth Cohort, Parent, and Gender.* Each point represents the average correlation within each birth cohort between the strength of a parent's partisanship and the strength of a respondent's partisanship. The circles represent the average correlation with a mother's partisanship, and the triangles represent the average correlation with a father's partisanship.

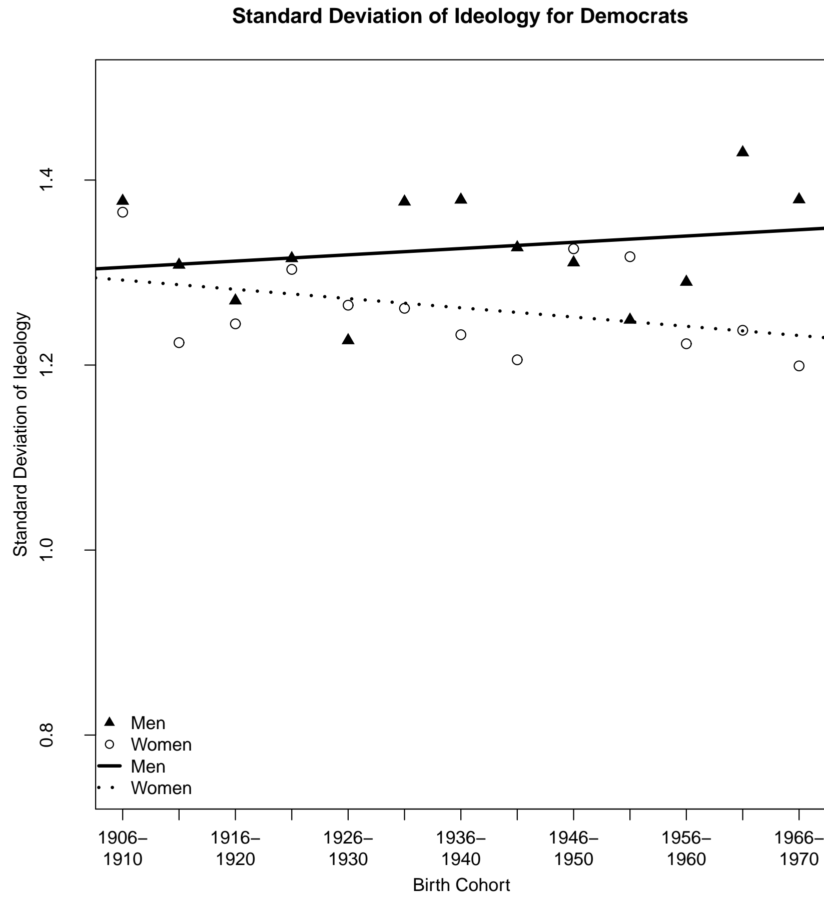


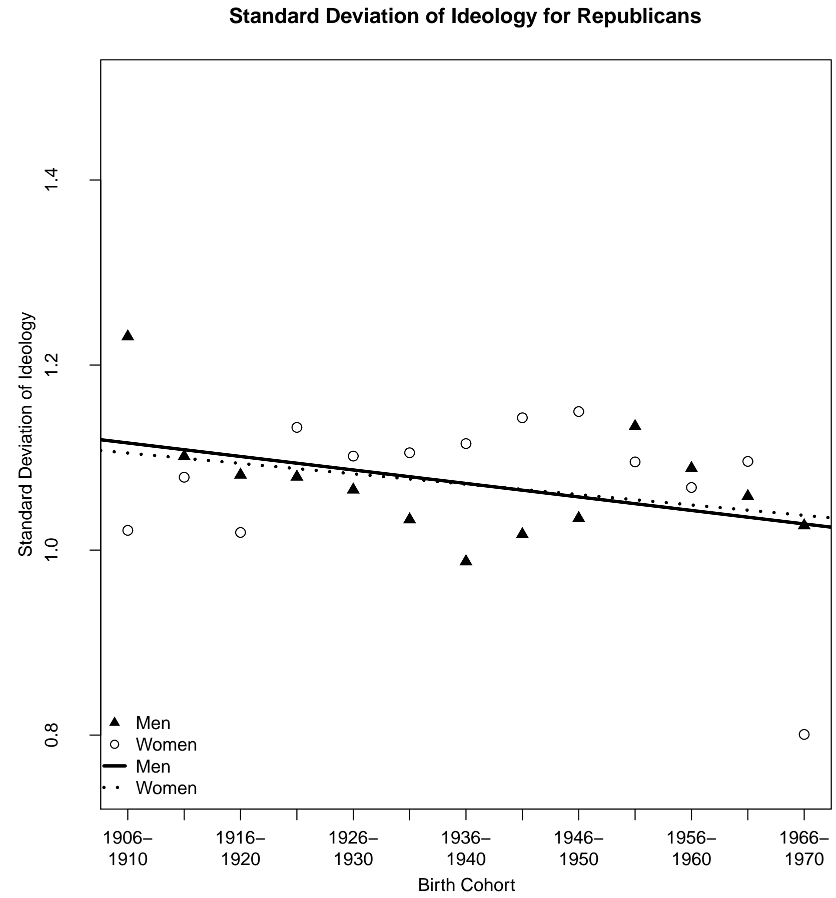
(a) *Mean Ideology of Democrats, By Gender and Birth Cohort*



(b) *Mean Ideology of Republicans, By Gender and Birth Cohort*

Figure 13: These figures present the mean ideology for Democrat and Republican voters broken down by birth cohort and gender. Birth cohorts pooled by half decade. Lines represent lines of best fit.





(a) *Standard Deviation of Ideology for Democrats, By Gender and Birth Cohort*

(b) *Standard Deviation of Ideology for Republicans, By Gender and Birth Cohort*

Figure 14: These figures present the standard deviation of ideology for Democrat and Republican voters broken down by birth cohort and gender. Birth cohorts pooled by half decade. Lines represent lines of best fit.