PARTIES AND PARTISANSHIP:

A FORTY YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The study of political parties and voter partisanship has come full circle in four decades. During the 1960s and 1970s numerous scholars advanced the thesis of party decline, contending that party organizations had disintegrated, party influence in government had plummeted, and voter partisanship had eroded. The 1980s and 1990s saw a turnaround in scholarly judgments, however, as first party organizations, then party in government, and finally voter partisanship appeared to strengthen. This essay reviews the evidence for the downs and ups of parties, suggesting that the evidence of party resurgence is more equivocal than often realized. The parties subfield currently lacks the theory and theoretical sensitivity that enables us to interpret ambiguous empirical evidence. This contrasts with the congressional subfield where the issues now confronting the parties subfield were recognized a decade ago.

Keywords: parties, partisanship, party identification

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The study of parties and partisanship is enjoying a resurgence today. The existence of this special issue reflects that resurgence and the articles it contains testify to it. The contributions that follow explore a number of specific topics relating to parties and partisanship, many using state of the art methods and models. This essay differs from the succeeding ones in offering a broad-ranging, high-altitude appraisal of the field as seen from one (perhaps contrarian) perspective.[1]

For more than three decades I have worked in two partially overlapping subfields of American politics—legislative processes and policy-making, and parties and elections. On various occasions I have asserted that these were the most scientifically advanced subfields of American politics, and *ipso facto*, of political science. I confess that in some part such claims were just intended to get a rise out of colleagues in other subfields, but in considerable part I believed they were true. During the decade of the 1990s a number of other projects pulled me away from the parties and elections subfield, but I returned to it full-time in 2001, mainly out of the desire to understand why so many political scientists had been so wrong in predicting an easy victory for Al Gore in 2000.[2] Re-immersion in the subfield, however, leaves me with the impression that the parties and elections subfield has fallen behind the legislative subfield; it is grappling with many of the same issues that emerge in the legislative subfield but it is a decade or so behind in thinking about them. Developing that argument is the main task of this paper. I begin by

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[1] This essay is adapted from the keynote address at the Vanderbilt Conference where the papers in this issue were first presented.

reviewing in very broad outline forty years of research on parties and partisanship. Following that review I will point to problems in the interpretation of evidence that suggest avenues of research that should have a place on the agenda of the subfield.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF PARTIES AND PARTISANSHIP: THE DOWN DECADES

Since the days of V.O. Key, party scholars have organized their discussions in terms of the three aspects of party—party organizations, party in government, and party in the electorate. During the 1960s and 1970s the story was the same no matter which aspect of party was at issue—it was a story of decline. "D-words" enjoyed great popularity. Parties were deteriorating, decomposing and disappearing. The country had entered a period of electoral disaggregation, an era of dealignment.

Party organizations, already weak in the 1950s, were getting weaker. The causes were well understood and part of the standard material taught to 1960s undergraduates. In brief, public policies and socio-economic change undermined party control of the two principal resources parties historically relied on—material benefits and control of access to office. The spread of civil service (later reinforced by the rise of public sector unionization) removed most public sector jobs from party control, and the growth of the welfare state made government benefits a matter of entitlement not political payoff. Meanwhile, adoption of the direct primary and other progressive reforms broke the party monopoly on nominations. Compared to their counterparts of the late 19th century, the parties of mid-century controlled neither the nominating process nor the resources needed to mobilize large numbers of party workers behind their nominees. As time went on conflict of interest and sunshine laws further weakened the parties' control of material resources—contracts and various forms of what once was called "honest graft" (Riordan

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[2] For an attempt to explain Gore's under-performance see Fiorina, Abrams and Pope (2003).

1963). And the suburbanization and education of the population probably contributed to the growth of a more modern political culture that rejected the party practices of an earlier era.

Given the accepted explanations for organizational decline, there was no indication that the decline would abate. Rather, it likely would continue until party organization reached some kind of theoretical lower limit. For example, Anthony King wrote in 1978 (395),

> Direct primaries mean the end, as they were meant to, of old-fashioned party organization. Since it seems unlikely that primaries will be abolished, it seems unlikely that political parties can ever exist again in the United States as they did in the century and a half up to about 1968.

Despite their policy differences with Mayor Richard Daley, I recall that many political scientists of the 1970s had a soft spot in their hearts for Chicago, where an old-time party organization continued to exist. The Chicago machine offered a last chance to see a nearly extinct creature in its native habitat.

The 1960s and 1970s portrait of the declining party in government bore a strong resemblance to the portrait of party organizations. For all practical purposes studies of the party in government focused on the congressional parties—their differences, their unity, their support for the president, and so forth (eg. Turner and Schneier 1970).[3] Of course, the congressional parties never had compared to the parties of Great Britain, as anglophilic American professors of the early 20th Century had complained (Polsby and Schickler 2002), but all signs indicated that the congressional parties were growing still weaker. Party unity declined to historically unprecedented levels (Figure 1) and party differentiation (Figure 2) blurred to the point that sometimes it seemed that the real

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[3] And "congressional parties" generally meant House parties.

decisive force in Congress was a bipartisan conservative coalition of Republicans and southern Democrats (Manley 1973; Shelley 1983).

As with party organizations few political scientists saw any reason to believe that the decline of party in government would abate. The incumbency advantage was on the rise (Erikson 1972; Mayhew 1974), the leading edge of developments that soon would be summarized under the label "candidate-centered politics." Later, the evolution of the mass media reinforced this trend. TV became a more prominent part of campaigns, and TV favored individuals, not abstractions like parties. Along with the old-time party organizations, the party in government had no future: as Mayhew remarked in 1974 (27), "The fact is that no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytic units will go very far."

Developments in the third arena—party in the electorate--completed the decline of party trifecta. Political scientists regarded party identification in the 1950s as relatively strong, although the baseline for such judgments never was entirely clear. After all, there were suggestions in the literature that party ID must have been stronger in the late 19th century and probably in the aftermath of the New Deal realignment. But whatever the strength of party ID in the 1950s, developments in the mid-1960s indicated that party in the electorate was following the downward slide shown by party organization and party in government. The proportion of strong party identifiers dropped during the political turmoil of the 1960s, and the number of self-identified independents rose (Figure 3).

Party in the electorate is the category of party studies with which I have been most closely associated. During the late 1960s I was an undergraduate political science major just as the trends in Figure 3 were seizing the attention of the profession. As I recall, at least three of my undergraduate courses assigned *The American Voter* (Campbell, et. al. 1960) and one of them *Elections and the Political Order* (Campbell, et.

al. 1966) as well.[4] By the time I headed off to graduate school I was sufficiently tired of Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes that I decided to concentrate on Congress.

In truth, that was only part of the reason. The larger part is that during the late 1960s it became increasingly difficult to square inside-the-classroom readings with outside-the-classroom realities. The literature of the time maintained that ordinary Americans (the mass public) were poorly informed, that their issue attitudes—if they had any at all--were unstable, disorganized, and polluted by selective perception and partisan bias, and that ultimately their votes were largely driven by an apolitical party identification.

Some parts of this portrait rang true enough. I knew strong identifiers--at least strong Democrats: my grandfathers were members of the United Mine Workers who believed that Franklin D. Roosevelt sat at the right hand of God. But other parts of the portrait clashed with reality. During the summers I worked at a local steel company. Twice a shift the men would carry their lunch pails outside and snack and talk for twenty minutes. What struck me was how these men differed from their portrait in the voting literature of the time. These blue collar workers were not the uninformed, uninterested, and inarticulate cases that populated the pages of our books and articles. Their conversations were highly political. They were informed about the events of the time—especially Viet Nam war protests and urban riots, their views didn't seem to change much from day to day, and partisan bias was absent: union Democrats all, they blamed the Democrats for what was going on.

As a graduate student at Rochester I began to learn the ideas and tools that would enable me to deal with these contradictions. We read V.O. Key (1966), and his arguments about retrospective voting hit home. We read Anthony Downs (1957) whose

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[4] My undergraduate mentor, John Kessel, was extremely interested in these developments.

arguments about information costs, rational ignorance, and cost-saving decision rules like party ID and ideology clarified puzzling areas of political behavior. And we read Burnham (1970) whose discussion of party systems seemed to be the substantive realization of theoretical concepts taught in other courses. A party system was an equilibrium of issues, candidates, and voters in which candidates and voters continued to follow their previous strategies until events or creative politicians disrupted the equilibrium and precipitated a realignment.[5]

Ultimately, I wrote *Retrospective Voting*, an attempt to bring the accepted findings of voting behavior studies in line with the realities of the time. I wanted to give party ID a political component as well as a mechanism for change. Other scholars were working along similar lines—John Jackson (1975), Ben Page and Calvin Jones (1979), and later, on the macro-level, Mike McKuen, Robert Erikson, and Jim Stimson (1989, 1992). Probably all of us shared a common motivation—observations about politics that seemed impossible to square with the literature of the 1960s to mid-1970s. Looking back, the revisionists clearly changed the way in which the subfield interpreted partisanship, from "unmoved mover" to an evolving indicator of an individual's relationship to the parties.

The revisionist studies that treat partisanship as in part endogeneous to elections and governance have not gone unchallenged. Green and Palmquist (1990, 1994) have critiqued the individual level studies, and Abramson and Ostrom (1991) and Green and Palmquist (1998) have critically re-examined the macro-level studies. Much of the debate revolves around methodological issues that I will leave to political scientists who are better trained than I am. But from the beginning the debate has struck me as

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[5] Macro-arguments like Burnham's seem somewhat out of fashion in the parties subfield today, but let's be fair: other than Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, who had more impact on the research agenda of the 1970s and 1980s than Burnham?

reminiscent of the classic anecdote, the punchline of which is "Madame, we are only quibbling about the price."[6] Jackson, Page and I were trained in an era when party ID was considered the "unmoved mover." I can distinctly remember a feeling of mild anxiety the first time I submitted an SPSS program deck with party ID on the left-hand side of a regression. In that context the goal was to establish that party ID moved, and moved in ways that were not purely random—how much was an empirical question. In particular, despite my use of the phrase "running tally" I made no specific assumptions about the relative weights given to past party ID and current performance evaluations, specifically allowing for the fact that because of socialization or trauma some individuals might have a party ID so heavily skewed that no amount of future experience would change it (Fiorina, 1981: 90-1). Thus, even if 1980-ish statistical estimates of the responsiveness of individual level party ID ultimately prove to be too high, the 1990s critiques fall short of convincing me that party ID is an unmoved mover.[7] Similarly, whether the ultimate verdict on the macro responsiveness of partisanship goes to Abramson, Ostrom, Green and Palmquist, or to McKuen, Erikson, and Stimson, the fundamental point seems well-established. Party ID may move slowly, but it moves.

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[6] Variously attributed to George Bernard Shaw and Winston Churchill, among others.

[7] In the most recent contribution to the debate Green, Palmquist and Schickler (in press) demonstrate that when individual partisanship is "shocked" by events and conditions it tends to return to its previous value. This is a significant finding that the authors convince me is real, but there are multiple interpretations of this finding. The authors accept the most obvious one—that individual partisanship doesn't change permanently but is only pushed and shoved temporarily away from its equilibrium value. An alternative interpretation is that seeing losses among their partisans the hemorrhaging party acts to stem those losses. Thus, we have the emergence of law and order Democrats after the social disorders of the late 1960s, Atari Democrats after the stagflation of the 1970s, centrist Democrats after the Democratic presidential losses of the 1980s, and compassionate Republicans after the Clinton victories in the 1990s. Rational party leaders and candidates adjust their positions to counteract the negative impact of issues, events, conditions, and candidacies on the partisanship of their mass base. Similar logic probably underlies the finding that elections are not a random walk (Stokes and Iversen, 1962).

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF PARTY: THE UP DECADES

Research in the 1980s and 1990s suggested that trends that showed no sign of abating in fact did abate. Inexorable declines were arrested and in some cases reversed. Today, D-words no longer are in fashion. R-words have replaced them: the parties have returned, have revived, been reborn, been resurrected, been reinvigorated. The parties are resurging. We have entered an era of party renewal.

The scholarly reversal began in the mid-1980s. Observers noted that during the Carter Administration the Republican National Committee under the leadership of Bill Brock became much more active in fund-raising and recruiting and training candidates. Indeed, observers noted that the efforts of the national party to affect local nominations was unprecedented in American politics. Moreover, the RNC began to use some of its funds (what is today maligned as "soft money") to revive local party organizations. Studies by Cotter et. al. (1984) and others reported that judged by standard indicators such as budgets, number of offices, size of staffs and activity levels local and state party organizations were in better shape than they had been in at least a generation. Seemingly, party organization was back.

Students of party in government soon reported similar findings (Rohde, 1991). Indeed, in retrospect the resurgence of party in government occurred while scholars were still writing obituaries for the congressional parties. Party differences and party unity hit bottom in the early-1970s and clearly were on the rise by the election of Ronald Reagan (Figures 4-5). By the 1990s these measures suggested that the party in government was significantly stronger than it had been in the 1950s. Moreover, qualitative observation of party strength seemed equally as impressive as quantitative time series. For example, congressional leaders in the 1960s were colorless legislative tacticians and managers, men like John McCormack and Carl Albert in the Democratic

House and Mike Mansfield in the Democratic Senate. In the 1990s congressional leaders were men like Dick Gephardt and Newt Gingrich in the closely-balanced House and Tom Daschle and Trent Lott in the nearly-tied Senate—hard-edged partisans who led their troops into fierce battle and served as the congressional faces of the national parties in the media. Speaking of faces, a common attack ad in today's campaigns "morphs" a candidate's visage into that of a controversial congressional leader. Try to imagine a 1960s attack ad that morphed a Democratic candidate's visage into that of Carl Albert!

By the mid-1980s scholars began to remark on a so-called paradox—diverging trends in party strength at the elite and mass levels. Party organizations and the party in government, both the province of elites, were stronger while party in the electorate--partisanship--was weaker. In 1970 Burnham had posited two alternative scenarios—a classic realignment that would reinvigorate partisanship or "the onward march of party decomposition" that would eventuate in the demise of partisanship. Two decades later the decomposition scenario appeared to have won out. As James Q. Wilson (1984) characterized the situation, it was "realignment at the top, dealignment at the bottom."

But then some scholars began to argue that party ID too was following the earlier path of party organization and party in government. At the very least the decline in partisanship had stopped. Independence surged in the late 1960s but the trend soon stabilized, albeit at a level half again as high as in the 1950s. And the late-1960s decline in strong identification recovered a bit in the 1980s and stabilized at about 30 percent of the age-eligible electorate (Figure 6)

Moreover, a few scholars soon made a bolder argument: although Americans in the 1990s remained somewhat less partisan than Americans in the 1950s, their voting in presidential elections actually was more partisan. I believe that Warren Miller (1991) was the first to argue that the relationship between party ID and presidential vote in the

elections of the 1980s was stronger than during Converse's (1976) "steady state" era, based on correlations between party ID and presidential vote (Figure 7). And more recently Bartels (2000) reports a methodologically more sophisticated extension of Miller's analysis that fully confirms it. The relationship between party ID and the vote rose monotonically from 1972 to 1996 and in the last three elections of the series—1988, 1992, 1996—the relationship was higher than in the elections of the 1950s (Figure 7). Bartels notes that much of the contemporary literature continues to state the partisanship decline thesis:

> *The two major parties are no longer as central as they once were in tying people's everyday concerns to their choices in the political system.* (Greenberg and Page 1997).
>
> *For more than four decades the American public has been drifting away from the two major political parties.* (Wattenberg 1996).
>
> *"The interregnum state that has emerged on the ruins of the traditional partisan regime seems chiefly to be associated with … massive decay of partisan electoral linkages to the population* (Burnham 1989)*.*

Bartels takes these authors to task, asserting that the quoted remarks "would have been mere exaggerations in the 1970s; in the 1990s they are outright anachronisms" (Bartels 2000: 44).

Thus, in four decades the subfield has come full circle. The thesis of party decline was accurate until approximately the mid-1970s when unforeseen signs of resurgence began to appear. These signs were apparent earliest to students of party organizations and parties in government, later to students of party in the electorate. But today the thesis of party decline lies discredited. Or does it?

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE UPS

In my view the evidence for the resurgence of party is problematic, at best. That is not to deny that parties have resurged. I believe that in some respects they have, but widely held beliefs about party resurgence rest more on impression than on systematic analysis. The research on party resurgence suffers from problems of conceptualization, measurement, and inadequate attention to theory which cumulate to undercut its conclusions. Each of these problems emerges in studies of party organization.

Consider first, conceptualization. Aldrich (1995) favors a malleable conception. He argues that parties are institutions that candidates and office-holders invent and reinvent to solve problems that face them at particular times in history. Today's parties are organizations "in service" to their candidates. Facing a dealigned electorate contemporary office-holders have reconstructed parties as repositories of modern campaign expertise—on polling, media, and strategy, and increasingly as fund-raising operations. Traditionalists, however, favor conceptual stability, objecting that the organizations operating under the party labels today are not parties in the classic sense--mass mobilization organizations that existed during Silbey's (1991) "party era" (roughly 1838 to 1948). Indeed, party strategies today include the deliberate demobilization of the electorate (Schier 2000). What we call parties today are giant campaign consulting firms or super-PACs, not classic parties. This argument has no obviously right or wrong answer, but an important implication is that comparing the strength of local, patronage-based organizations in the 1950s with that of the DNC and RNC in the 1990s is inherently difficult, if not impossible. The names have something in common, but the structures and functions of the organizations are different.

Discussions of organizational resurgence also encounter problems of measurement. What do we mean by party strength? How do we measure party importance? Consider evidence that today's parties employ more people, rent more office space and raise more money. Does this mean that they are more important, or in the pithy phrasing of John Coleman (1996), only that they are "just busy?" What is the impact of their expenditure of resources? The analogy is to policy studies that measure the financial and personnel resources devoted to some particular government function (eg. education) but fail to measure whether these resources make any difference in outcomes. Studies of party organization have provided new measures of independent variables, but their effects on dependent variables of interest are not so well studied, in part because they have not been measured.

Finally, a subtle theoretical issue arises in that the various aspects of party may be negatively related. For example, Schlesinger (1985) and Aldrich (1995: 252-260) argue that party organizations are stronger today than in the recent past precisely because party in the electorate is weaker—organization is an attempt to compensate for declining partisanship. Similarly, Brady observes that in the days of the Solid South, the Democrats had no need for a party organization in many states—the electorate would elect the proverbial yellow dog if it were running as a Democrat. Organization only became necessary when the Democratic Party's hold on the electorate began to weaken and when the competing Republicans began to organize.[8] As Coleman (1996) points out, arguments like these indicate a problem in inferring party resurgence from studies of the different aspects of party; judgments about party resurgence require that the three senses of party be treated in combination.

Turning now to party in the electorate, problems of conceptualization and measurement seem less obvious than the lack of adequate theorizing. Consider Figure 7

again. The statistical relationship between the standard measure of party ID and a dichotomous variable, presidential vote, clearly has increased. Does this mean that partisanship now is a stronger influence on presidential voting than in the past? By no means.

The simple spatial model depicted in Figure 8 arrays a hypothetical electorate of 100 voters along a simple left-right dimension. Twenty liberal Democrats anchor the left and twenty conservative Republicans anchor the right. Twenty more moderate Democrats on the left correspond to twenty more moderate Republicans on the right. A small minority in each party is out of place: ten Republicans are slightly to the left of center and ten Democrats are slightly to the right. Let us call the former group Rockefeller Republicans and the latter group Southern Democrats.

Assume the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates take positions slightly on their party's side of the center, reminiscent of, say, Kennedy and Nixon in 1960. If each voter supports the closer candidate, the election ends in a dead heat with 50 votes for each. A cross-tabulation of the vote by party ID shows a strong relationship: 40 of 50 Democrats support the Democrat, and 40 of 50 Republicans support the Republican. But note that we assumed that voters support the closer candidate—they are issue or ideological voters, despite the appearance of party voting. If partisanship is correlated with another determinant of voting--ideology, an issue (eg. racial atittudes), or a characteristic (eg. income), then the uncontrolled relationship between party ID and the vote will be in part spurious—a reflection of the uncontrolled factor(s). This is the most basic of methodological points but it has serious implications for temporal comparisons of the importance of partisanship.

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[8] David Brady, personal conversation, October, 2001.

To demonstrate, let us complicate the model a bit. Assume voters take into account both their party ID and their ideology. Specifically, they calculate as if they compute the weighted sum

$$\alpha \text{ (party loyalty)} + (1 - \alpha) \text{ (ideological affinity)}$$

To make things as simple as possible, assume that the psychic benefit of affirming loyalty to one's party is +1, and the cost of disloyalty is –1. Similarly, the benefit of remaining true to one's ideological principles is +1, and the cost of ideological inconsistency is –1. In the real world, of course, voters differ in their degrees of party loyalty and their distances from the respective candidates. Allowing the benefits and costs to vary continuously would complicate the inequalities that follow, but it would not change the qualitative implications; hence I opt for simplicity.

Under the preceding assumptions, if a voter's own party is ideologically closer, she certainly supports it. If the other party is closer, however, she remains loyal if $\alpha > .5$, defects if $\alpha < .5$, and is indifferent if $\alpha = .5$. The theoretical quantity of interest is α, the weight the voter gives to her party identification.

Consider now Figure 9, which is intended to represent Figure 8 forty years later. The figures differ only in that partisans are now more neatly separated—Rockefeller Republicans have been driven out of the Republican Party and the southern Democrats have been replaced by Republicans. Under the voter decision rule posited above the relationship between party ID and presidential vote now is perfect: all 50 Democrats support the Democratic candidate and all 50 Republicans support the Republican candidate. But while the relationship between party ID and the vote is stronger than in Figure 8, this does not indicate that the importance of party ID has increased. In this

example α could have risen, stayed constant, or fallen without affecting the outcome.[9]

For example, the same voting splits would have resulted from an α of .49 in the voter

alignment of Figure 8 and a miniscule α of .01 in the alignment of Figure 9! The stronger

statistical relationship between party ID and the vote in Figure 9 reflects the underlying

change in voter positions, not voters giving greater weight to their party identifications.

There is a great deal of empirical evidence to suggest that exactly the kind of

voter sorting depicted in Figures 8-9 has occurred during the past forty years. The

earliest evidence appears in Nie, Verba and Petrocik (1976). A decade ago Carmines

and Stimson (1989) traced the relationship between partisanship and the racial issue.

More recently, Adams (1997), Carsay, and Layman (this issue), Kaufman (this issue),

Wolbricht (2000) and Sanbonmatsu (2002) describe the closer relationship between

partisanship and various social and cultural issues. McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal

(1997) show that partisanship has become more closely linked to income. Others argue

that party ID and religion now are more closely intertwined (Layman 1999). In short,

there is a wealth of empirical evidence indicating that party identification now works in

concert with voting considerations that once were independent of it or even at odds with

it. Thus, any attempt to trace the importance of party ID on the vote over time must

control for these known changes. That is easy enough to do in a comprehensive

multivariate analysis with identical indicators, of course, but there are further

complications as well.

Consider now Figure 10, which differs from Figure 8 not in changing the positions

of voters, but in changing the position of one of the candidates. Whether from personal

principle or the pressure of his core supporters the Democrat decides to avoid the

mushy middle and run on traditional Democratic principles. As a result, he loses. But the

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[9] In this particular example the vote is independent of α. Every voter votes consistently with her
partisanship and her ideological principles.

vote—a 40:10 split among Democrats and a unanimous vote among Republicans-- shows a stronger relationship between party ID and the vote than in Figure 8 even though nothing at all about the voters changed!

Again, there is empirical evidence that candidate positions vary, and that candidates periodically abandon the center. Zaller (1998) shows that candidate moderation is an important contributor to post-World War II presidential outcomes, and Stimson (this volume) presents estimates of presidential candidate positions and how they changed over the second half of the 20th Century. The important point is that without explicitly incorporating candidate positions statistical analysis will not produce accurate estimates of how much party ID affects the vote. Certainly party ID remains a very important correlate of votes in presidential elections, as analyses that incorporate numerous other covariates suggest, but without controlling for candidate positions temporal comparisons of coefficient size are suspect.[10]

WHAT ABOUT GEORGE WALLACE, JOHN ANDERSON, ROSS PEROT, ETC.?

Academics are prone to lose sight of the forest. The preceding section takes a close look at a lot of trees, so to speak, but a look at the forest raises even more serious questions about party resurgence. Imagine the reaction to Figure 7 of an intelligent, informed layperson untutored in the arcane ways of political science. It might well be something along the lines of "Professors, I don't know anything about spatial models or statistical analysis, but you're telling me that in the forty years between 1952 and 1992 inclusive, partisanship exerted its maximum impact on the vote in 1992, the year that Ross Perot took 19 percent of the national vote!?"

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[10] Something I too had been guilty of (Fiorina 1994) until Bartels' provocative paper made me rethink the issue.

The numbers in the figure are correct, of course, but they reflect two coding conventions that however commonplace are peculiar in the context of discussions of party resurgence. In the first place, our analyses typically exclude respondents who vote for a minor party candidates; the Perot voters do not contribute to the 1992 estimate. However common this practice in voting studies, in the context of measuring the importance of partisanship it seems odd to omit all cases whose votes manifestly are not explained by partisanship. The practice might be defensible if the number of such voters is constant over time, but it is not. The practice might be more defensible if third party candidates were random occurrences exogeneous to the political system, as if the heavens periodically opened and dropped out a Ross Perot, but that is a dubious assumption.

Why no George Wallace in 1952? Perhaps because potential supporters tried it in 1948 with Strom Thurmond who got only 2.5 percent of the vote, mostly in states where he was listed as the official Democratic candidate. Why no Ross Perot in 1952? Wacky rich guys did not just suddenly appear on the scene in the 1990s. In general insurgent candidates enter a race because they see an opening and have the resources to contend. The opening consists of unattached or disaffected voters who provide a market for a new appeal—racial conservatism in the 1960s, political reform and balanced budgets in the 1990s. The resources consist of money and access to the media, considerations that are important now in a way they were not in the 1950s when the parties enjoyed a monopoly of electoral resources and state laws restricted ballot access. In sum, more frequent third party challenges indicate that the major parties are weaker today than at mid-century—they incorporate less of the potential electorate among their supporters and they no longer monopolize electorally valuable resources.

Analyses like those summarized in Figure 7 also omit non-voters. Again, this is common practice in analyses of voting behavior, but in the context of arguments about

party resurgence, it too seems a questionable convention. The practice might be acceptable if turnout were completely exogeneous, as if citizens were born with "voter" or "nonvoter" stamped on their foreheads. But *The American Voter* contains a chapter on the interrelationship between partisanship and turnout, and research shows that turnout relates in some part to citizen evaluations of the candidates and their positions (Teixeira 1992: 47). Thus, lower turnout suggests that the parties have a weaker hold on the electorate. Certainly, from the standpoint of anyone who holds a traditionalist view of parties as mobilizing agents, low turnout is a *prima facie* indicator of weak parties.

Table 1 illustrates the effect of incorporating both turnout and third-party candidates. The first column lists presidential turnout as calculated by McDonald and Popkin (2002).[11] The second column lists the proportion of the popular vote that was captured by the Republican and Democratic candidates in each election. The third column is the product of the first two—the proportion of the eligible electorate that supports a Republican or Democratic candidate.

In the four elections (1952-1964) that Converse calls the steady state period 62 percent of the eligible electorate supported a Republican or Democrat for president. During the Viet Nam-Watergate period (1968-1976) that proportion plunged to 54 percent, where it stayed through the Reagan years (1980-1988). Then in the 1990s the figure dropped again. Today a bit less than half the eligible electorate participates in two-party presidential politics, a decline of 20 percent across these four decades.[12] In this light the previously quoted comments of Greenberg and Page, and Wattenberg do not

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[11] The McDonald-Popkin figures correct for age-eligible but otherwise ineligible people—noncitizens and felons. Their figures record higher turnout than Census Bureau figures and the discrepancy increases during the two most recent decades.

[12] If Census Bureau turnout estimates are substituted, the decline is closer to 25 percent.

seem like exaggerations. Even Burnham's claim of "massive decay of partisan electoral linkages" seems to me a fair rendering of Table 1.

In sum, whether one looks at specific trees or takes a broad look at the forest, I see no persuasive evidence that party in the electorate is stronger today than in the 1950s.

LESSONS FROM STUDIES OF PARTY IN GOVERNMENT

The two preceding sections raise questions about the resurgence of party organizations and party in the electorate. They deliberately omit mention of party in government. The reason will be obvious to students of party in government. The issues raised in the two preceding sections are issues that students of party in government have grappled with for more than a decade, with some progress, or at least improved understanding of the issues.

On first noticing that the relationship between party membership and roll call voting had grown stronger, congressional scholars drew the natural conclusion that the congressional parties were growing stronger (eg. Rohde, 1991). But soon skeptics appeared. Krehbiel (1993) objected that the stronger relationships might only reflect a clearer sorting of members into parties. If members of Congress voted their own preferences, but the Republicans had shed many of their more liberal members and the Democrats many of their more conservative members, both larger party differences and greater party cohesion would result without any party pressure at all. As in Figure 9 a high correlation between party membership and roll call voting could reflect either party or preference voting or any mix of the two.[13]

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[13] An analogous demonstration of the difficulty of separating constituency and party influence on roll call voting appears earlier in Fiorina (1975).

In a different line of questioning, Snyder's (1992a, 1992b) work raised the possibility that neither preferences nor party strength had changed. Rather, a change in the agenda can produce different patterns of voting. If party leaders had changed the kinds of proposals they brought to a vote, perhaps to embarrass the other party or try to build a record for their own, then voting patterns could change while underlying preferences and party strength had not. This possibility is analogous to Figure 10 where a shift in a candidate's positions produces a change in voting behavior with no change in voter preferences.

Moreover, if party influence in Congress was stronger today than in previous decades, what were the mechanisms by which parties exerted influence? Did party cohesion reflect the sticks and carrrots approach of leaders like "the hammer," Majority Whip Tom DeLay, or did it reflect pressure from activist constituents and interest groups with intense views on issues?

For more than a decade students of Congress have struggled with such issues. While no consensus exists, the discussion has produced greater conceptual clarity, increased attention to research design, and better theoretical accounts than we had a decade ago. I think that the parties subfield needs more effort on these fronts.[14] Party is a multifaceted concept, so it makes little sense to divide up the facets and have separate research communities organized around each of them. Indeed, I think the reason the congressional subfield was faster to appreciate and deal with the issues raised in this essay is that it is better integrated—scholars talk regularly across their individual specialties. Theoretically, the congressional subfield appreciates that what elites do and what voters do is connected; the behavior of each is conditioned on that of the other. So

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[14] A good step in this direction is a recent study of Hetherington (2001) who includes the positions of the congressional parties in his analysis of perceptions of party differences.

it makes no sense to have a congressional voting behavior subfield distinct from the larger congressional subfield. Methodologically, the congressional subfield is more catholic. Formal modellers, data analysts and qualitative observers interact freely with mutual gains.

In contrast, my observations of the parties and elections subfield lead me to believe that too many capable empirical analysts are atheoretical, running data with little thought to the substantive processes that the data reflect. And for my part I concede that too many able theorists are model-driven, engaging in technical work not motivated by uniformities and patterns in the real world. And probably neither camp pays sufficient attention to those who have a great deal of substantive knowledge but lack hi-tech methodological or theoretical skills.

Why these differences between the subfields? That is a more difficult question. Part of it may be as simple as size: the congressional subfield is much smaller--it would be difficult to organize thriving research communities around specific topics like committees, leadership, elections, and procedures. A more substantive reason may be that congressional elections occur every two years and congressional operations transparently reflect electoral considerations. It is difficult to think of one without thinking about the other. Almost from the beginning congressional elections researchers posed their central question as "what are incumbents doing that makes voters vote for them?"[15] Congressional elections scholars tend to define themselves more as members of the congressional field than of the voting behavior field, thus reinforcing the perspective that elites and mass are both parts of the equation.

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[15] The beginning being 1978, when ANES turned to the study of congressional elections in a serious way after the growth in the incumbency advantage had become a prime scholarly concern. But even the 1950s Miller and Stokes (1963) representation study explicitly included the candidates.

Spreading that perspective would be a productive first step in the parties and partisanship subfield, a step the macro-partisanship scholars have taken and others now are beginning to follow, as the contributions to this issue attest. John Geer and Brad Palmquist brought together a heterogeneous group from the various clans and tribes of the parties subfield that produced a very productive conference. The articles that follow in these pages run the gamut from the theoretical to the statistical to the qualitative, and they consider both elite activity and voter response. They are a good start on getting the conversation going and catching up with the congress people.

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Table 1. Decline in Support for the Two Major Parties

Election	M-P Turnout	% Major Party Among Voters	% Major Party Among Age-Eligible	
1952	62.3	99.5	62.0	
1956	60.2	99.4	59.8	
1960	63.8	99.2	63.3	61.9
1964	62.8	99.6	62.5	
1968	61.5	86.1	53.0	
1972	56.2	98.2	55.2	54.0
1976	54.8	98.1	53.8	
1980	54.7	91.7	50.2	
1984	57.2	99.4	56.9	53.6
1988	54.2	99.0	53.7	
1992	60.6	80.4	48.7	
1996	52.6	90.0	47.3	49.6
2000	55.6	94.7	52.7	

Figure 1. The Decline of Party in Government: Party Unity
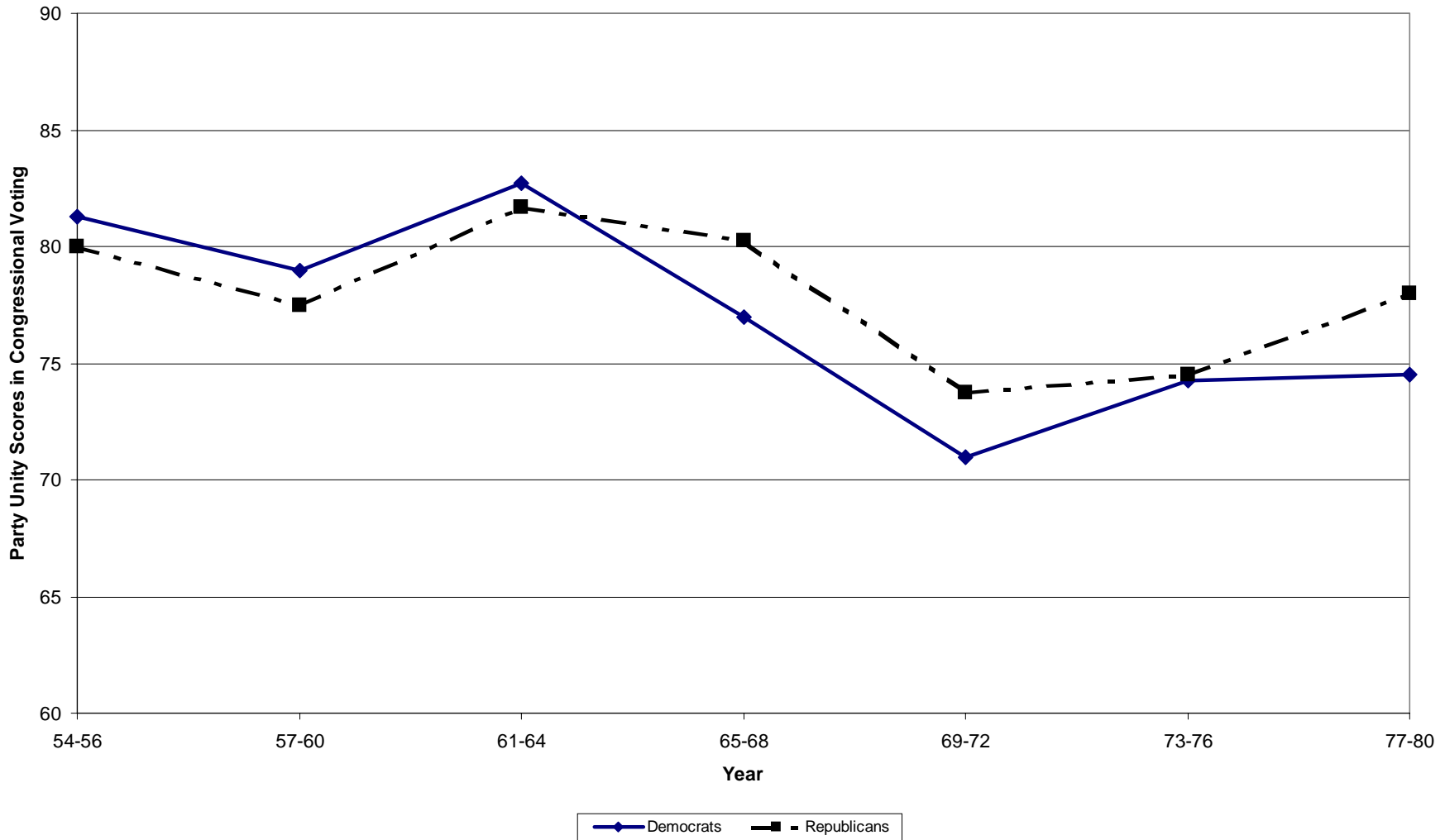
Figure 2. The Decline of Party in Government: Party Votes
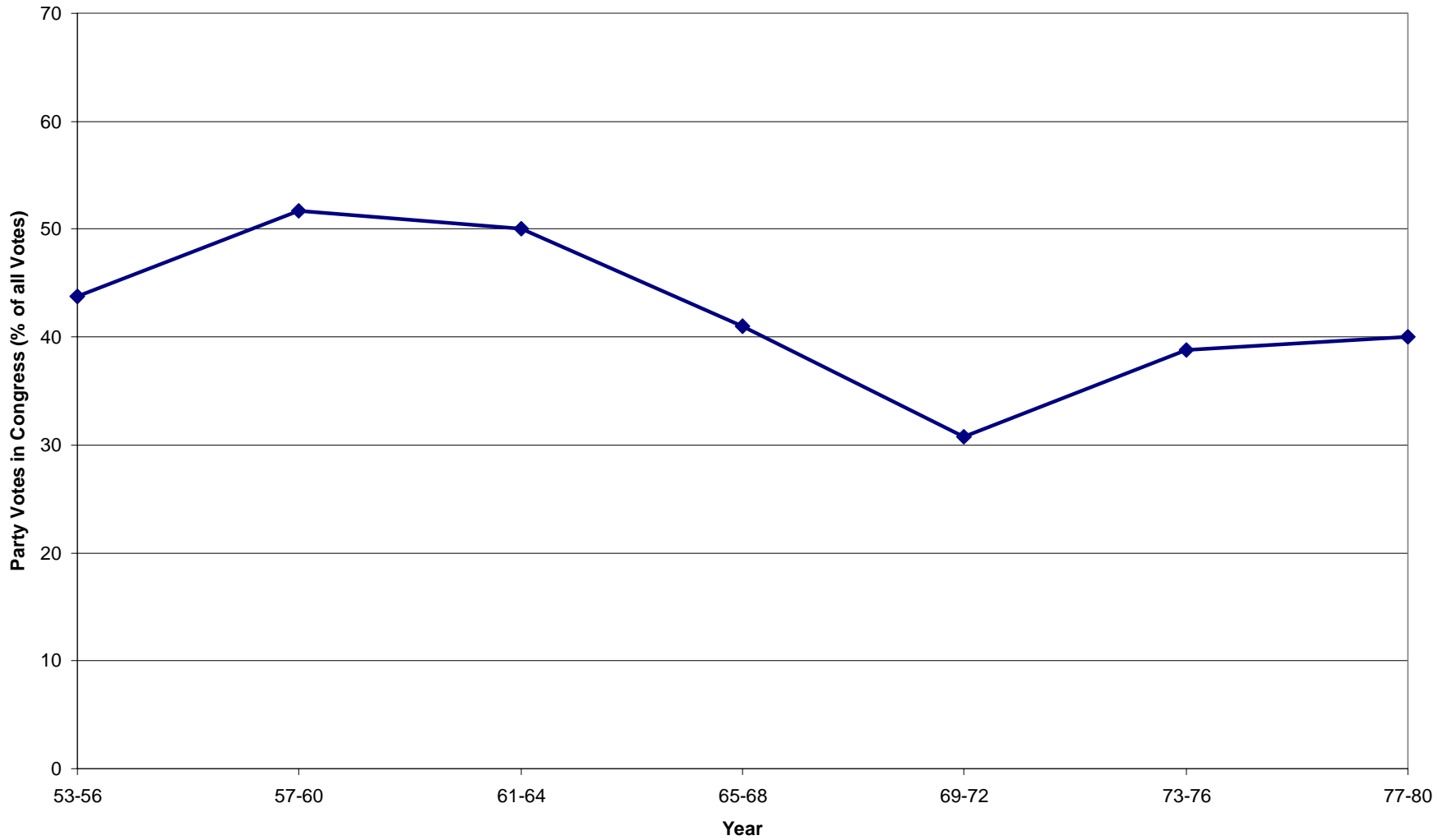
Figure 3. The Decline of Party Identification
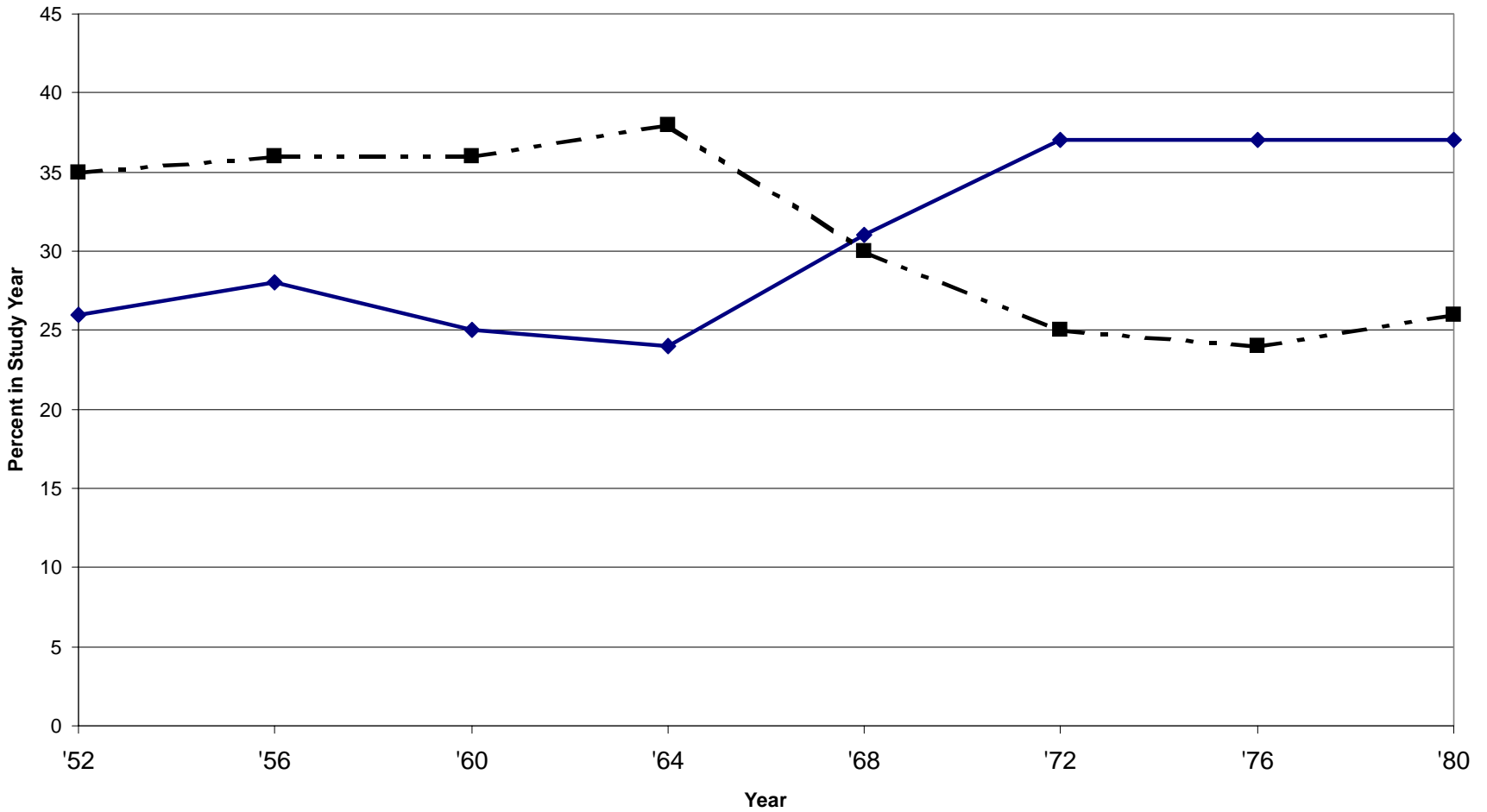
Legend: ◆ Independent Leaning, Independent or Apolitical: ■ Strong Partisan :
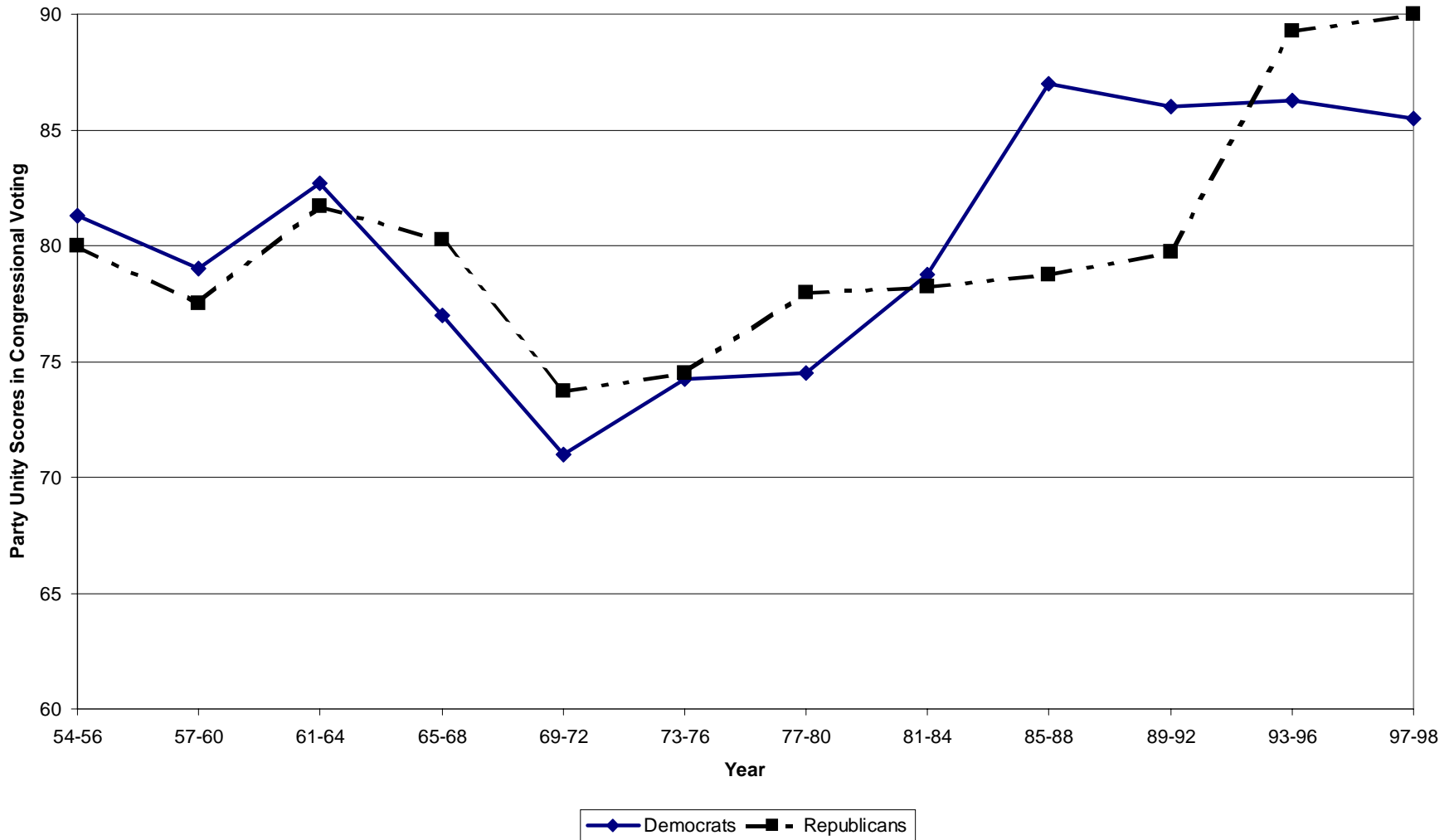
Figure 4. The Resurgence of Party in Government: Party Unity

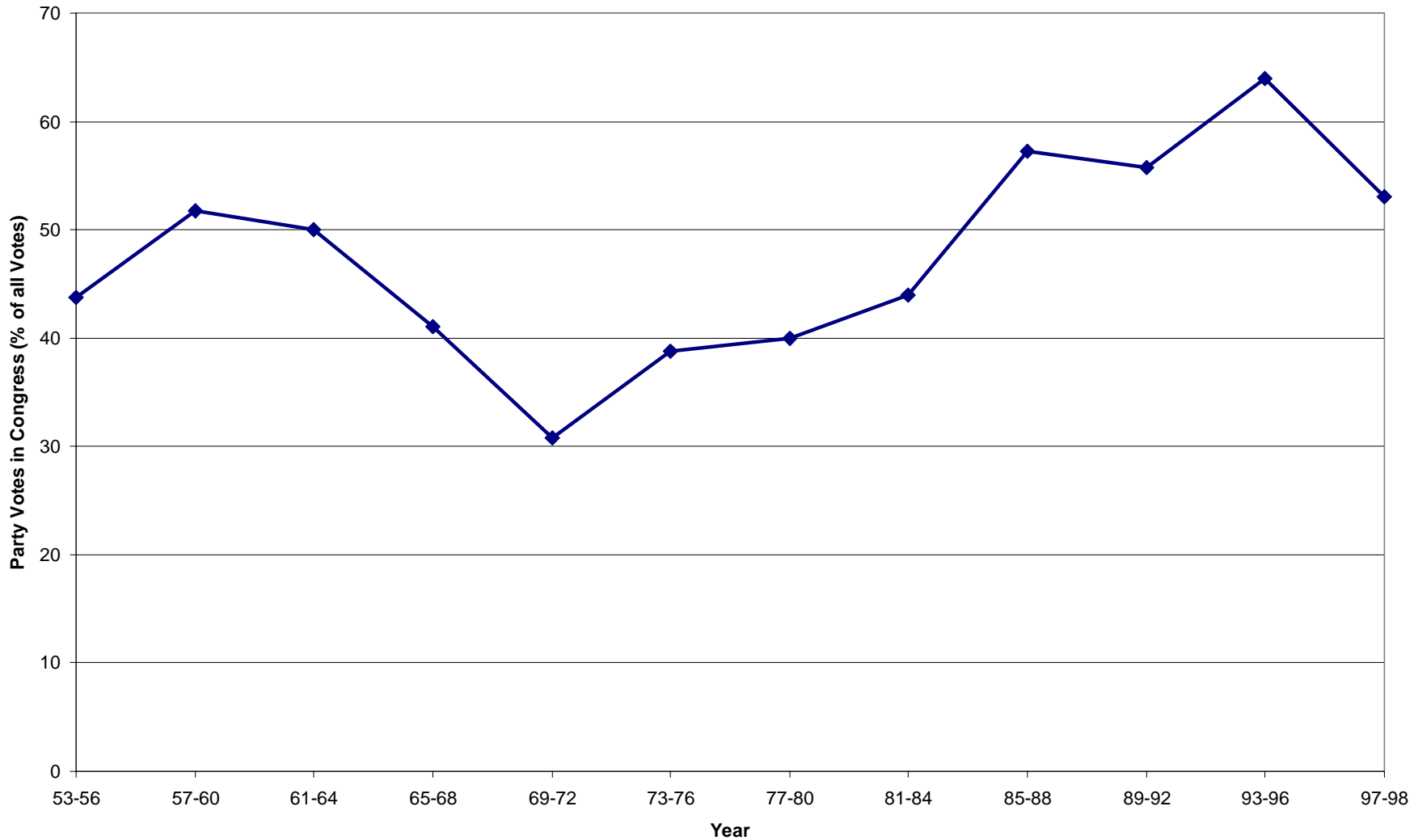# Figure 5. The Resurgence of Party in Government: Party Votes
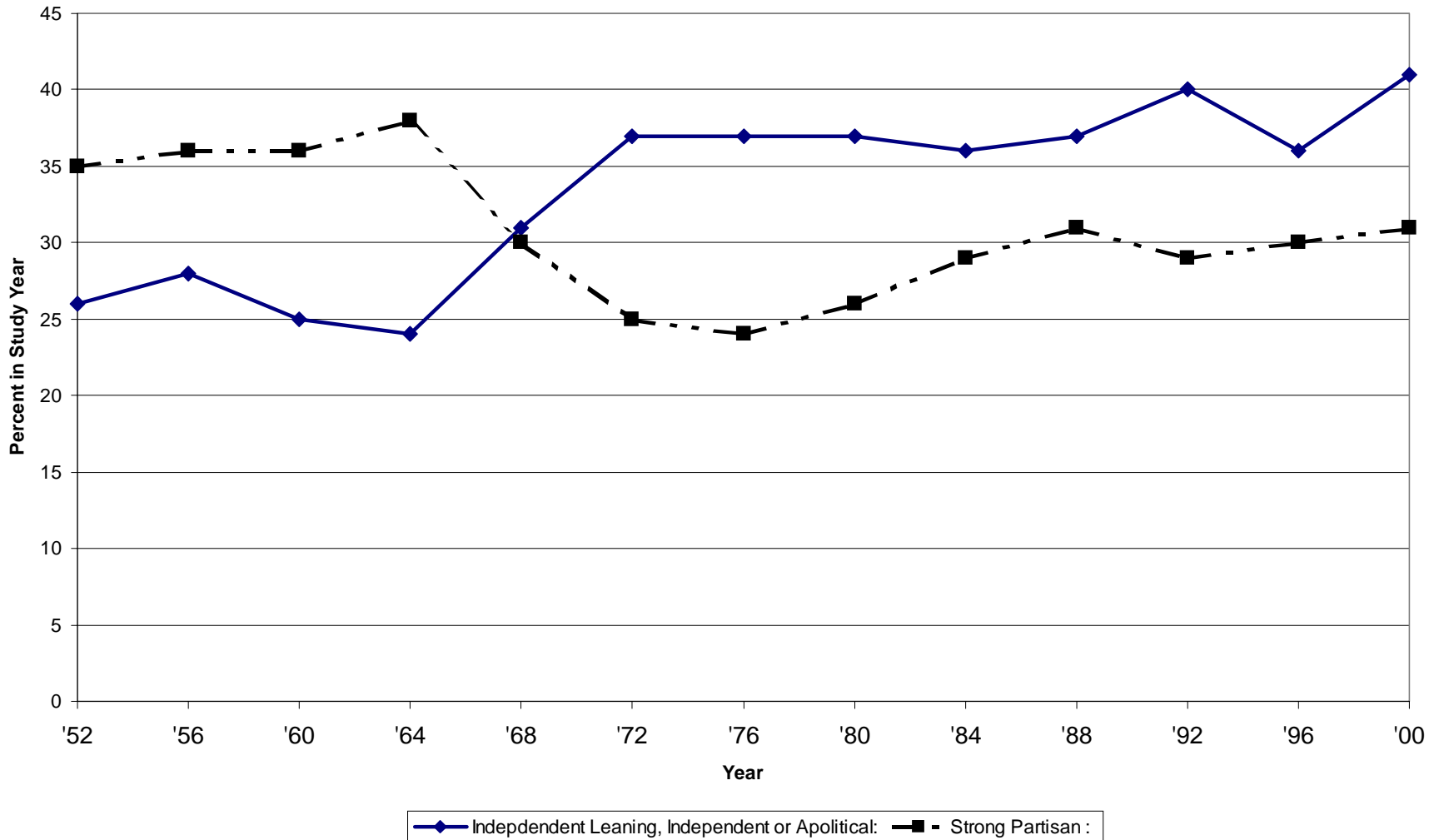
Figure 6. The Resurgence of Party Identification

Legend: Independent Leaning, Independent or Apolitical: ◆ Strong Partisan: ■

Figure 7. Electoral Behavior is Becoming More Partisan?
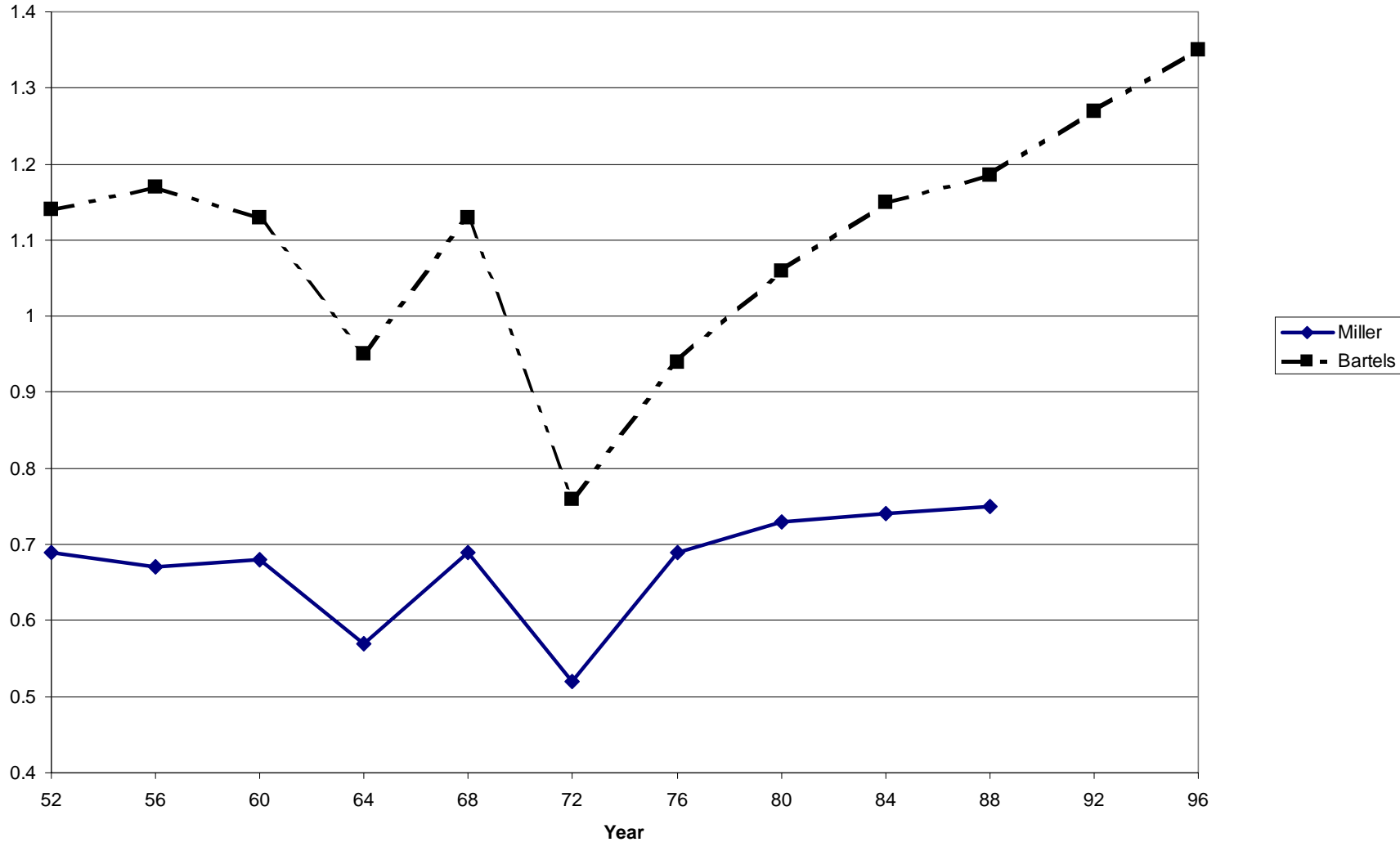
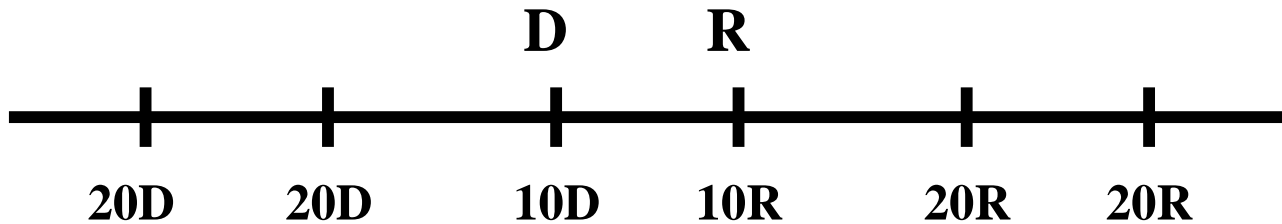# Figure 8. Simple Spatial Model

D   R

20D   20D   10R   10D   20R   20R
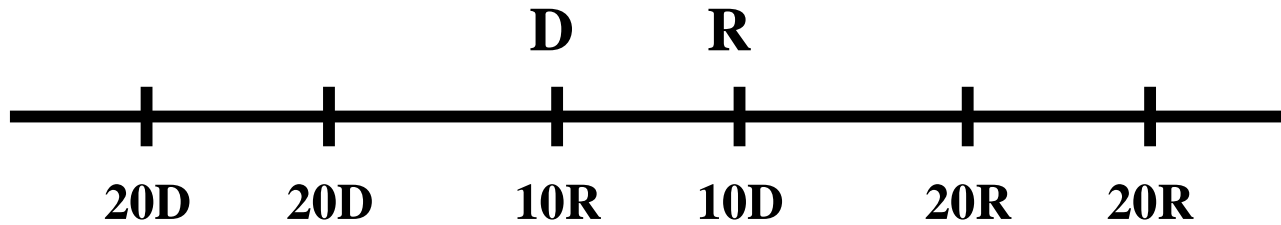
		Candidate	
		D	**R**
V	**D**	40	10
	R	10	40

Figure 9. Voter Sorting

D R

20D 20D 10R 10D 20R 20R

		Candidate	
		D	**R**
V	**D**	40	10
	R	10	40

D R

20D 20D 10D 10R 20R 20R
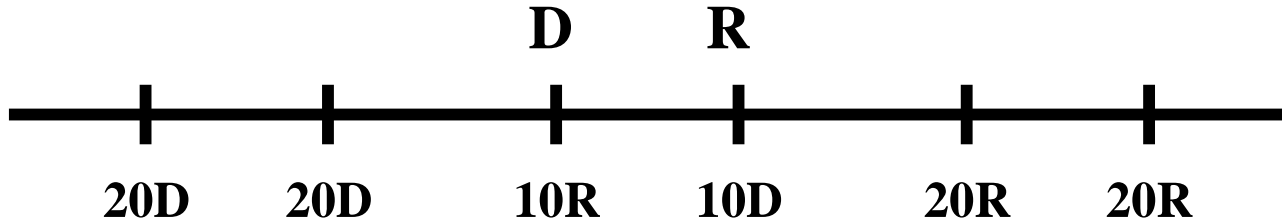
		Candidate	
		D	**R**
V	**D**	50	0
	R	0	50

Figure 10. Candidate Movement

D   R

20D   20D   10R   10D   20R   20R

	Candidate		
		D	**R**
V	**D**	40	10
	R	10	40

D   R

20D   20D   10R   10D   20R   20R

	Candidate		
		D	**R**
V	**D**	40	10
	R	0	50