

Purple America

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1. Introduction

America, we are told, is once again a divided nation.

Maps of the electoral votes cast by the states, ubiquitous on the walls of political consultants, journalists, and political scientists, reveal a striking pattern. The base of the Democratic Party is firmly rooted in the northeast and upper Midwest – a region stretching from Maine to Minnesota – and the Pacific west, anchored by California. Over the past five Presidential elections, the Democratic nominee has regularly won these states. The Republicans own an L-shaped region covering the South, Breadbasket, and Mountain West, extending from the Carolinas to Arizona and up to Montana and Idaho.¹ Maps of county election returns show a further split within the states. Democrats win the cities; Republicans win the rural counties; and the suburbs swing either way. Year after year, the maps are largely the same, and the cartographers who draw up the maps of U.S. election results have inadvertently branded a new division in American politics: Republican Red versus Democratic Blue.

What is the source of this division? In a provocative article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, David Brooks (2001) explored the roots of Red and Blue America. People in small towns and rural counties have fundamentally different values than those in cities. They buy different consumer goods; they have different relations with their neighbors; they have different outlooks on life. His observation has inspired a broad search, among academics, political pollsters, and popular writers, for the source of the new political division in America. Most observers point not to the bread and butter economic issues of the New Deal alignment but to a Culture War. America, it is argued, is torn by a struggle over issues such as abortion, gay marriage and school prayer that has transformed the geography of American elections and has eclipsed the traditional political questions of peace and prosperity.²

If correct, this view of American politics, and the politics of many other countries, constitutes a direct challenge to economic theorizing about elections and government

¹ The pattern is almost the mirror image of the famed election of 1896 in which William McKinley fended off the monetary populism of William Jennings Bryan. In that election and in the electoral alignment it cemented, the South and West were solidly Democratic and the Northeast and Midwest solidly Republican.

² See, for example, Hunter (1991), Wattenberg (1995), Walsh (2000), Shogan (2002), Frank (2004), and Greenberg (2004), and the essays in Green *et al.* (1996), and Williams (1997).

policymaking. Most models in political economy and public choice are built on the assumption that voters care first and foremost about economic issues – taxation, public goods, regulation, income redistribution, unemployment, economic growth.³ Many models focus on income redistribution, making the natural assumption that voters with higher incomes favor lower tax rates and less redistribution. This leads to a simple understanding of politics in the U.S. and throughout much of the industrial world since the Great Depression. The Republican Party is a coalition of business and upper income voters, who favor lower taxes, less government spending, and minimal economic regulation. The Democratic Party is the party of labor and lower income voters, and favors economic redistribution via higher taxes, social welfare spending, and regulation. Other issues, to the extent that they matter to voters, are brought in line with this cleavage.

Students of the culture war argue that the economic models have it wrong, because most Americans now set economic issues aside when thinking about politics. Thomas Frank offers perhaps the most biting and ironic critique of the politics of the culture war in his book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* He argues that low-income Americans living in rural areas and small towns vote strongly Republican because of their moral convictions, even though the Republican Party's economic policies cut strongly against their economic interests.⁴ As Shapiro (2005) points out, in many places the flip side of this is also true – high-income citizens in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Upper West Side of New York City vote overwhelmingly Democratic even though the tax policies of the Republican Party treat them much more favorably.⁵ Why do they vote this way? Because moral issues, such as abortion, gay marriage, and school prayer, dominate economic self-interest. Citizens' attitudes on moral issues may even shape their beliefs about what policies best serve their economic interests. As a result, the main

³ See Myerson (1995), Persson and Tabellini (2000), and Mueller (2003) for surveys of this large literature. A sampling includes: Bergstrom and Goodman (1973), Romer (1975), Roberts (1977), Meltzer and Richard (1981), Alesina (1987), Alesina and Rodrick (1994), Persson, Roland and Tabellini (2000), Peltzman (1976), Grossman and Helpman (2001), Barro (1973), Rogoff (1990), Alesina, Londregan and Rosenthal (1993), and Besley and Coate (2003).

⁴ Variants of this argument go back at least to Karl Marx, and also appear in the writings of Schumpeter (1942), Lipset and Rokkan (1967), and others.

political cleavage in the United States today cuts across both income and economic liberalism.

The culture war also has real consequences for economic policy. One of Frank's (2004) main conjectures is that the culture war, because it swamps traditional economic interests and policy preferences, leads significantly lower economic redistribution from rich to poor and lower levels of government spending, taxes, and regulation. In essence, the rural poor of Kansas give in to the economic interests of corporate America in order to influence policies on abortion, gay marriage, and other moral issues of the day. This argument is familiar in economics as well – it is Karl Marx's argument as to why democracy does not redistribute income. The logic is captured in several papers in political economy, including Roemer (1998), Lee and Roemer (2005), and Hacker and Pierson (2005). If citizens care only about income, then the median voter – whose income will be below average because of skewed distribution of income – will typically demand a large amount of redistribution, and political parties will respond (as in Romer, 1975; Roberts, 1977; and Meltzer and Richard, 1981). But, if citizens also care about cross-cutting issues – moral, religious, racial, ethnic – then the equilibrium amount of distribution will shrink, as parties compete for votes on these other issues.⁶

In addition, the culture war may lead to economic policies that are harmful to economic growth. If citizens vote on the basis of matters of morality first, then elections may not serve as an instrument to check politicians' economic policy decisions simply because citizens are not paying enough attention. In addition, if the electorate is sharply polarized on moral issues, then democratic accountability may suffer because politicians with "captured audiences" can shirk freely, and engage in rent-extraction from citizens on behalf of themselves or narrow special interests. This is similar to arguments applied to politics in ethnically divided societies (e.g., Padro i Miquel, 2004).

In this paper we challenge the culture war argument. As we read the works in this vein there are three key assumptions. First, voters are divided or polarized over issues, especially moral issues. There are few moderates on abortion, gay marriage, and similar

⁶ The models by Lindbeck and Weibull (1987) and Dixit and Londregan (1995, 1996) also incorporate non-economic issues, and show how these issues affect distributive politics. In particular, these models highlight the importance of "swing" voters.

public questions, and the divisions on these questions map into important demographic categories, especially religion and type of community. Second, moral issues have more salience or weight in the minds of voters than economic issues. Third, the division maps into geography. Red state voters are more morally conservative and put more weight on moral issues.

Such claims are readily tested empirically. In an exhaustive assessment of three decades of data collected by the American National Election Survey, Fiorina *et al.* (2005) find scant evidence that there are deep divisions among the American public on economic and moral issues. To the extent that there are any differences across social groups, they conclude that Protestants, particularly fundamentalists, are somewhat more conservative.

Fiorina *et al.* (2005) offer the first round of critique, and we have every reason to believe that their assault on the first of the conjectures of the culture warriors is correct. But, they offer only a partial picture. It is difficult to make sense of the apparently slight differences across social groups and geographic areas without knowing the weight that voters put on various issues. An issue on which there are only slight differences in the average preferences of, say, Red-State and Blue-State voters might in fact weigh extremely heavily on voters minds. In such cases, small differences can produce political chasms. Likewise there may be wide differences of opinion between groups on some issues (such as which color is better, red or blue) that do not influence the vote.

In this paper we estimate the weight that voters put on moral and economic issues, as well as measure distributions of voters' moral and economic policy preferences and the relationship of such preferences to geography and social groups. We analyze election results at the state and county level, and survey data from American National Election Studies and General Social Surveys. The data reject the first two assumption of the culture war thesis. Specifically, we find the following.

First, one of the basic facts of the Red and Blue America is simply wrong. The partisan division across states and counties has, in fact, shrunk over the last 100 years, and the divisions are quite small. Today, America is Purple (section 2).

Second, at the individual level most Americans are ideological moderates rather than extremists, on both economic and moral issues.

Third, voters' decisions are driven more by their preferences on economic issues than by their preferences on moral issues, even today. The relative weight of moral issues has grown over the past two decades, but economic issues still carry more weight. Moreover, this pattern does not vary across social groups. Rural voters do not vote on the basis of moral issues any more than urban voters. The same is true of Red-State voters versus Blue-State voters. Evangelical Protestants and regular churchgoers place more weight on economic issues than moral issues, just like everyone else.

What, then, explains why relatively poor states like Montana or Mississippi vote Republican while rich states like Massachusetts and Connecticut go Democratic? The answer is not a simple one. The electorate is pulled in two directions at once. Voters tend to hold centrist views on economic issues, and differences across Red and Blue states on economics are slight. By contrast, the electorate may be somewhat more polarized on moral issues, and in any case the differences across Red and Blue areas are more substantial. On the other hand, economics have much more weight in voters' minds. As a result, differences in economic preferences across Red and Blue states, although smaller in their means, explain at least as much of the divisions of American political geography as moral issues do. The Red States are Republican in large part because their electorates are economically more conservative, even after controlling for the effects of religion and income and other social indicators.

2. The Electoral Divide across States and Counties

The popular rhetoric describes a bipolar politics. Within the electorate, there is thought to be little middle ground, especially on moral questions such as abortion and gay marriage. Partisan politics have divided along these lines to a much greater extent than in the past also. Conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans – fixtures of the two parties for the better part of the 20th Century – have vanished, leaving a wide ideological gap between the parties. And the new partisan fault line reputedly adheres closely to geography – liberal Massachusetts and California against conservative Utah and Texas, liberal cities against conservative counties. As a result, Republicans firmly control the Red states, and Democrats firmly control the Blue.

While popular, the rhetoric of Red and Blue America is a better description of the divisions of the early 1900s, and perhaps the 1950s, than the present. Compared to the past, the political geography of the U.S. today is purple.

To see this clearly, we construct four variables measuring the degree to which U.S. states are solidly controlled by one party or the other. Three of these measures, *Average Overall Margin*, *Average Presidential Margin*, and *Lopsided States*, are based on votes. To compute these we first calculate nine-year moving averages ($t-4$ to $t+4$, covering 3 Presidential elections) of the Democratic share of the two-party vote in each state. For the *Average Overall Margin* and *Lopsided Races* variables, we use all available statewide and national races.⁷

The last measure, *Unified State Governments*, is based on victories rather than votes. Specifically, we say that a state has unified government in each year if one party controls the governorship and also controls a majority of the seats in both houses of the state legislature.⁸ We define *Unified State Governments* in year t as the fraction of states with unified governments in that year. Note that we do not take a moving average in constructing this variable.

Figure 1 presents all four variables over the past 100 years. To fit these trends neatly in one graph, we standardize each variable to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. Negative values on the graph mean that the electoral division in that year was below the average value of the specific variable for the entire century and positive values mean that the variable was above the century's average value. The data reveal that the partisan division across states has shrunk sharply over time. For example, *Average Overall Margin* averaged .12 during the period 1900-1940, but only .05 over the period 1970-2000. Similarly, the fraction of *Unified State Governments* fell from an

⁷ Denote state j 's average in year t as by D_{jt} . Next, we calculate the average absolute margin of D_{jt} from .5, $M_{jt} = |D_{jt} - .5|$. Finally, we average the M_{jt} across states in each year to obtain the average margin variables. To compute *Lopsided Races*, we count the fraction of states in each year in which $M_{jt} > .05$ (so, a state is "competitive" if D_{jt} is between .45 and .55). In calculating for the *Average Presidential Margin* variable, we only use presidential elections to compute D_{jt} . See Ansolabehere and Snyder (2002) for more details about the data and sources. We could also use a more elaborate measure, in which we estimate candidates' incumbency advantages and short-term state and national tides, and subtract these from their vote shares to construct the "normal vote" in a each state for a given time period. This more refined measure follows the same pattern as the curves in Figure 1.

⁸ We drop NE and MN during the periods when these states had non-partisan state legislatures.

average of .76 during 1900-1940 to .47 during 1970-2000. The practical importance of the compression of the distribution is that since the 1960s in nearly all states neither party has held a solid edge in the votes. Nearly everywhere, the party division is smaller than 60–40 percent.

Examining the control of state legislatures provides other insights into these divisions. During the period 1900-1928, Republicans held more than 65% of the seats in more than half of the legislative chambers in the United States. Democrats had more than 90% of the seats in more than 25% of the states. There was little middle ground. In only 12% of all state legislatures did the two major parties hold between 40% and 60% of the seats. Today, the distribution of party divisions of state legislatures follows more of a normal curve. Typically, neither party holds more than 60% of the seats. In no chamber today, does one party hold 90% of the seats.

The South is particularly interesting in this regard. Casual accounts and current political punditry commonly describes the South as the bastion of Republicanism. This confuses changes with levels. Republican representation in Southern state governments has grown massively since the 1960s, but that increase came literally from a floor of zero. Several southern states had Democratic governors and *not one* Republican state legislator in the late 1950s. Today, Republicans have wrested control of at least one chamber of the state legislature from the Democrats in almost every Southern state. But, the division of seats in the southern state legislatures is almost exactly even. The South is perhaps the most evenly divided region in terms of state politics.

Figure 2 shows a similar decline in one-party dominance across counties. The curves labeled *Average Overall Margin* and *Average Presidential Margin* are the county-level analogues to the state-level measures described above for Figure 1. The curve labeled *Average Margin Relative to State* is a within-state measure. It is the average deviation of a county's Democratic vote share from the state's Democratic vote share.⁹

Figure 2 shows that the decline in vote margins holds both across all counties, and across counties within states. Counties capture much of the urban-rural divide (though

⁹ Specifically, the within-state measure is calculated as follows. Let D_{ijt} be the Democratic share of the two-party vote in county i in year t , where county i is in state j (computed using all the three available offices – president, senator, and governor – and in a moving average fashion as in Figure 1 above). Let D_{jt} be the average value of D_{ijt} across all the counties in state i in year t , and let $M_{ijt} = |D_{ijt} - D_{jt}|$. We calculate *Average Margin Relative to State* by averaging across the M_{ijt} in each year.

they are not particularly good at distinguishing suburban areas). The figure therefore suggests that what many observers see as an enormous urban-rural difference – Democratic dominance of cities and Republican dominance in many rural areas – may be relatively small when viewed in historical perspective.

At least in terms of the distribution of votes and of political control of state governments, the American states and counties do not cleanly sort into Democratic and Republican camps. The parties can compete almost everywhere. That does not mean that they always do. With scarce resources in a presidential election, the parties may focus on the dozen or so most closely divided states. However, even the governorships of state like California or Kansas or the mayoralty of New York City are not out of reach for either party.

The electoral divisions in the United States are hardly stark. The states and counties do not sort easily into Republican and Democratic strongholds. Precisely because of this, many elections today are highly competitive, and control of federal and state government may hinge on modest differences in public preferences. Positions on moral and economic issues therefore take on heightened political importance.

3. Issue Preferences of Individual Americans

Purple America describes the geographic division of partisanship in the country. It is evenly split between the parties – more evenly than at any time in the last century – and in almost every state either party can and does win. But, what sort of electorate underlies aggregate election returns? Although the differences in partisan vote shares across states maybe modest, the divisions within the electorate may run deep. The notion of a culture war suggests that the public as a whole has very divided preferences, that there are substantial cleavages across states and sociological groups, and that the divisions on moral issues have widened in recent years.

The bulk of the empirical political science literature suggests the opposite. Most Americans hold middle-of-the-road positions on most important issues of the day (see, e.g., Page and Shapiro, 1992). Here we offer our own assessment of the distribution of public preferences on economic and moral questions and of the intensity of those preferences. We use two independent academic surveys, the American National Election

Study (ANES) and the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS has been conducted annually since 1973, and the ANES has been conducted in every national election since 1952. Because of changes in content in the ANES we focus on the elections from 1992 to 2004. Each of these surveys provides measures of respondents' attitudes on questions concerning economic, moral, social, and foreign policy. Questions on economics cover topics such as the size of government, spending in particular areas, business regulation, environmental protection, social security and unemployment insurance. Questions on moral issues cover topics such as abortion, school prayer, women's role in society, and the rights of homosexuals.

It is difficult to get an overall sense of the distribution of preferences, or to analyze their impact on voting behavior, by sifting through a battery of individual questions. Alternatively, picking particular survey items leaves too much room for interpretation and manipulation. For example, the wording of questions related to abortion or homosexual rights may have a dramatic impact on the appearance of polarization. Another problem with analyzing individual survey questions is that many items are plagued with measurement error (e.g., Achen, 1975).

To address these problems, we aggregate as many questions as possible to create two scales, to capture economic and moral dimensions of preferences. While the basic idea underlying these scales is straightforward, there are a number of technical details – including the exact questions used – which we describe in Appendix A. We first classify the questions into two sets according to issue type, economic or moral. We drop questions that are difficult to classify, such as items on crime. We then perform factor analyses on each set of questions. In both surveys the factor analysis on each set of questions uncovers a dominant issue dimension. We use the factor loadings to assign factor scores for each respondent on the main issue dimensions.

We call these scores the *Economic Issues Scale* and the *Moral Issues Scale*. Because of limitations on the questions asked, when using the ANES we must confine attention to the most recent few elections (1992 to 2000, and, separately, 2004). With the GSS we can cover a longer 25-year period, 1977-2002. The scales are only modestly correlated, indicating that at least two issue dimensions are necessary to account for voters' issue preferences. In the ANES the correlation is .44 (for the period 1992-2000),

and in the GSS it is .04. We standardize each scale to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

While our focus is on the relative weight of these indexes, the interested reader may wish to know more about the meaning of these scales. Appendix A shows the economic and moral issue preferences of several types of hypothetical respondents would be located on each scale, as well as more detail about the relationship of particular issues to these scales. Suffice it to say that what one may commonly think of as a person who is an Economic Liberal – favoring stronger government regulation, higher taxes, and more economic redistribution – lies somewhere around the 25th percentile of the distributions and an Economic Conservative lies somewhere around the 75th percentile. The scores in the GSS and ANES are difficult to compare, but in both cases someone who is strongly pro-choice and supports homosexual rights lies near the 25th percentile, while someone who does not support gay rights and who would allow abortion only in the case of rape or incest lies at the 75th percentile of the Moral Issues distribution.

3.1. Moderation and Extremism

What does the distribution of public preferences look like across these issue dimensions? If Americans are polarized, we should see a distribution of scores with peaks on each side and a valley in the middle. Figure 3 graphs the kernel density estimate of the *Economic Issues Scale* and the *Moral Issues Scale* using the GSS over the entire period 1977-2002. The density along the economic policy choices is shown with a solid line and the density along the moral issue choices is shown with a dashed line.

Consistent with Fiorina *et al.* (2005), we find that Americans are not polarized on economic issues. The distribution of economic policy preferences in Figure 3 follows a bell-curve, with a very high density of respondents expressing moderate opinions. This shape is not a result of pooling many years – similar distributions arise in each year of the GSS. Individual issues, such as whether the respondent favors more government regulation, show similar patterns of moderation. The ANES results produce almost the same picture as well.

On moral issues, there is apparently more heterogeneity of preferences, though hardly a deep division. In contrast with economic issues, there is a smaller density of

voters in the middle, and higher densities closer to the extremes. We hesitate to infer much from this distribution because the analogous histogram for moral issues using the ANES looks more like the economic issues in Figure 3.

Importantly for the Culture war argument, though, the “polarization” that is evident in the GSS is driven by a single issue – abortion. The GSS has measured attitudes on abortion consistently since the mid-1970s, shortly after the Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*. The GSS presents seven different scenarios and asks the respondent to state when abortion should or should not be allowed (risk to the life of the mother, rape, etc.). We scaled these items to extract a single measure of policy preferences on abortion. Over one-fourth of the electorate adheres to the most liberal position on this question, providing for the legality of abortion in all circumstances. The other pole in public opinion would allow the practice to continue but only in the cases of rape, incest, and where the health of the mother is in jeopardy. Few people choose the middle ground on this issue, and few want an outright prohibition.

3.2. Group Differences

Divided America, it is argued, reflects differences in preferences across social and economic groups and geographic regions as much as it does the distribution of preferences among the population as a whole. The high degree of moderation on economic issues might readily be undone if all people in Red states hold conservative attitudes and all people in Blue states hold liberal views.

Examining our two issue scales, we find that across most demographic categories in question there are statistically significant differences in voters’ economic and moral policy preferences. Table 1 presents these differences for a variety of groups. Each row gives the average response on each of the issue scales for voters in the group in question (*In Group*) and for the voters not in the group in question (*Not in Group*). Statistically significant differences are denoted with asterisks.¹⁰

¹⁰ Importantly, Table 1 only includes voters (self-identified). In both surveys, voters are significantly more conservative than non-voters on the economic dimension. In the ANES (1992-2000), for example, the average position of voters on the *Economic Issues Scale* is -.07 and the average position of non-voters is .22. Voters are slightly more liberal than non-voters on the *Moral Issues Scale*. In the ANES the average position of voters is .02 and the average position of non-voters is -.05. The relatively large difference on economic issues merits further investigation, but we not here.

Consider, first, Blue states versus Red states. In the GSS, we contrast Blue Regions (census regions of about 5 states each) and Red Regions. In the ANES, which has state identifiers, we contrast Blue and Red states.¹¹ Both show significant differences on both economic and moral issues, and the differences are approximately the same in both surveys. On the *Economic Issues Scale*, respondents who live in Blue states are approximately .15 units more liberal than respondents who live in Red states. On the *Moral Issues Scale*, respondents who live in Blue states are approximately .32 more liberal than respondents who live in Red states. (Recall that both scales are standardized to have a standard deviation of 1.)

Comparisons of urban and rural areas – Blue counties and Red counties – show even larger differences. Respondents who live in urban areas are approximately .4 units more liberal on economic policy and .2 units more liberal on moral policy than other respondents. Suburban voters exhibit an interesting cross-pressure. On economics they are slightly more conservative than others, but on moral issues they are much more liberal than others. Consistent with Frank's (2004) argument, rural voters are more conservative on both moral issues than other voters. Importantly, and in contrast to Frank, rural voters are also more conservative on economic policies. Rather than their moral policy preferences trumping their economic preferences, these voters are simply more conservative across the board.

These geographic differences in preferences remain, though they shrink considerably, when we introduce control variables like income, gender, race, and so on. We will revisit these differences later when we turn to the question of what explains the peculiar political geography of the United States in section 5. For now, it is worth noting that there are substantial differences in preferences across geography and at least some of the differences remain after controlling for the usual demographic suspects.

Roemer (1998), Frank (2004), and others point to income as another variable of particular interest. Here we see an important cross-cutting cleavage in the electorate that

¹¹ Blue states are those in which the average share of the two-party vote cast for the Democratic presidential candidate in 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004 was .51 or greater. Red states are those for which the average was .47 or less. This leaves 8 states – AR, CO, FL, LA, MO, NH, NV, OH – which we do not classify either as Blue or Red. In this case the *In Group* voters are those from Blue states and the *Not in Group* voters are those from Red states.

is consistent with the culture war arguments. High income voters in both surveys are much more conservative on economic policies, and more liberal on moral policies than other voters. Low income voters in both surveys are much more liberal on economic policies. Whether they are more conservative on moral policies, however, depends on the survey. In the GSS, the low income respondents indeed offer more conservative answers on moral issues. However, in the ANES, the differences are trivially small, even with the large sample size gained by pooling several years of surveys. We do not know what explains this difference, though we suspect that it lies, in part, in the differences between the abortion questions asked. In any case, the ANES results cast doubt on the claim that low income voters vote against their economic interests because of moral issues.

Religious orientations and union membership also divides the electorate. Religion groups and unions are key organizations behind each of the two political parties. Unions have long supported the Democrats, and the decline in union membership and differences across states is a strategic concern for that party. Evangelical Protestant groups have lined up behind the Republicans, especially since the 1980s, and the organization of evangelical Protestants is argued to be one of the main sources of the political divisions in the United States today. The survey data are consistent with these notions. Protestants and regular churchgoers are much more conservative on both scales, and especially so on the *Moral Issues Scale*. In fact, the religious divide in the United States is perhaps the most substantial. Protestants and non-Protestants differ by as much as a full standard deviation on the moral scale and by more than a half of a standard deviation on the economic scale. Union membership works in quite a different manner. Union members are more liberal on the *Economic Issues Scale* but identical to non-union members on the *Moral Issues Scale*. The religious differences are of particular importance, since a central tenet of the culture war argument is that the entrance of religious groups into the political arena in the late 1970s produced the polarization we see today. While these surveys do not allow us to go back before that time, they do reveal that group memberships correspond with some of the most fundamental divisions over economic and moral policies.

3.3. Trends

The Red-Blue division of the American electorate, with its apparent roots in the culture war, is as much about changes as it is about differences. Many observers argue that the rising geographic division in U.S. politics lies with an increasing division across the states in the voters' preferences on moral policies.

The GSS data suggest otherwise. Figure 4 graphs the difference between Red-Region and Blue-Region voters in GSS for the moral issues dimension and the economic dimension for each year from 1977 to 2002.¹² The differences between Red-Region and Blue-Region voters were noticeably larger on moral issues than on economic issues in the 1970s and early 1980s. The difference on moral issues was about two-tenths of one standard deviation on the scale, and the difference on economic issues was about 0.

There was an important change over time, but it was in the distribution of economic policy preferences across the states. The division between Red and Blue regions on moral issues remained unchanged over the quarter century from 1977 to 2002. Even on the polarizing issue of abortion, the differences between the regions have remained steady since the 1970s. What changed were preferences on the economic policies across states. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, preferences on economic policies differed little between the regions that by the 1990s became the Red and Blue regions. However, by the 1990s, a gap had emerged. Those in Blue regions were on average .1 units more liberal on economics than those in Red regions. The trends in preferences, then, run wholly counter to the common observation that morals are an increasing division in American political geography.

The results in Table 1 are notable because, with sufficiently large samples, we have found statistically significant differences across social groups and political geography in the economic and moral policy preferences of American voters. Whether these are meaningful differences, though, depends on how much salience these issues have among voters. An issue on which there are small differences will matter greatly if voters weigh that issue heavily.

¹² We continue to define Red and Blue states as above, using the elections of 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004. The vestiges of the southern Democrats and northern Republicans remained in 1976 and 1980. Recall that the GSS does not identify states but census regions.

4. Economics, Morals, and the Vote

The argument that America is especially divided along moral issues depends on more than just the distribution of voter preferences on questions such as abortion, display of religious icons on public property, and homosexual rights. It depends on whether people's preferences on those issues in fact influence their voting behavior. Even if the electorate cares about moral issues, they may be deemed inappropriate for the public sphere. It was with much fanfare that in the late 1970s Jerry Falwell created the Moral Majority, and argued that in reaction to a long string of Supreme Court decisions, conservative Christians could no longer separate moral questions from their public lives.

The relative importance of moral and economic questions of the day depends on a variety of aspects of choice. First, the salience of an issue might grow. As a result, the dimension on which that issue loads will increase in importance in the voters' mind. Second, the intensity of voters' preferences on a particular issue, or even on all issues, might increase. Third, the positions of the parties determine whether their election in fact presents the voters with clear alternatives. If the parties take very similar positions on an issue, then that issue will not matter explicitly in vote choice, as the parties are indistinguishable. By contrast, if the parties are far apart on an issue, then there will be clear electoral choices on that issue and it will divide the electorate. Any of these aspects of choice might make one of the dimensions more important.

4.1. The Relative Salience of Economic and Moral Issues

To measure the relative weight of the two issue dimensions we conduct a regression analysis in which the probability of reporting to have voted for the Democrat presidential candidate over the Republican is a function of the voters' economic and moral policy preferences. This approach allows us to determine the relative weight of these two dimensions of political choice and whether they have changed. It does not allow us to determine why the change has occurred.

Also, as noted above, we focus on just these two dimensions because we are following the line of argumentation developed by various writers who have described the polarization of the American electorate in terms of economic and moral issues. Other factors, such as race, foreign policy, and candidate traits, matter as well. In this analysis,

however, we focus only on the economic and moral dimensions in voting behavior. We do include year-specific fixed-effects in our analysis, which may capture much of the voting based on retrospective evaluations of the economy.

Table 1 presents the estimated effects of economic and moral conservatism on the likelihood of voting Democratic in various elections and on party identification. More complete details of the analysis are in Appendix B. Here, we consider the basic findings and their implications.

The numbers in the column labeled dP/dX give estimates of the change in the probability of voting for the Democrat, or the change in party identification, for an infinitesimal change in the voters' preferences along the relevant policy dimension. The numbers in the column marked Conservative versus Liberal correspond to the comparison of someone at the 75th percentile of the relevant scale – a *Liberal* – and someone at the 25th percentile of the relevant scale – a *Conservative*. (See Appendix A for examples of hypothetical respondents who would be near these percentiles.) The numbers in these columns are the differences in the estimated probabilities that a *Liberal* and a *Conservative* on the relevant scale vote Democratic (or identify themselves as Democrats), holding all other variables at their mean values.

Table 1 shows striking and clear evidence that economic policy preferences are more important than moral policy preferences in accounting for voting behavior and party identification. Compared with the *Moral Issues Scale*, the *Economic Issues Scale* is roughly twice as important, even in the most recent elections. Consider the relationship between presidential voting and the two issue dimensions using the GSS for the period 1993-2002. The difference in the rate of Democratic voting between an economic *Liberal* and an economic *Conservative* is 33 percentage points, while the difference between a moral *Liberal* and a moral *Conservative* is only 14 percentage points.

Table 1 also shows that the results for presidential voting are not an anomaly. The pattern of coefficients is similar for a variety of other dependent variables, including party identification, voting for U.S. senator, and voting for U.S. House representative. In fact, the relative importance of economic liberalism is even larger on these items than it is for presidential voting.

Those who sense a growing culture war in American elections have tapped an important trend: Moral issues have become increasingly important over the past 30 years. Such issues have grown from insignificance to a clear second dimension in American elections. As the GSS results in Table 1 show, voters' positions on the *Moral Issues Scale* had no discernable impact on partisan voting decisions or party identification in the 1970s, and were of little importance in the 1980s. This could be because the parties were nearly converged on these issues, or it could be because the campaigns chose not to emphasize abortion and other questions. In the 1990s, however, the weight that voters placed on *Moral Issues Scale* grew sharply.

Interestingly, moral issues have not supplanted economic policy preferences. Instead, Table 1 shows that voting decisions *also* depend more on the *Economic Issues Scale* than in the past. The difference in Democratic voting between an economic *Liberal* and an economic *Conservative* was just over 20 percentage points in the late 1970s, corresponding to an electoral split of 60% of liberals for Democrats and 40% of conservatives for Democrats. Today, that division has grown to nearly 40 percentage points, almost a 70–30 split.

The growing weight of these two issues does suggest a sort of reorientation of voting behavior. Those who take liberal positions on economics and moral and religious questions are becoming more Democratic and those who take conservative positions have come more in line with the Republican Party. Such a shift may have emerged because politics have become more issue oriented, because voters' preferences have become more intense, or because the parties have become more distinctive.¹³

Rather than polarization, the data suggest that the American public is being pulled in two directions at once. Both moral and economic issues have grown in importance in American elections. Economic issues pull voters in the direction of voting consistent with their income, because higher income voters are more conservative economically. But, moral issues pull voters away from their economic self-interest, because higher income voters tend to be more liberal on moral issues. To date, the influence of economic policy preferences has dominated the divisiveness of moral issues.

¹³ Also, other factors that are omitted from our analysis, such as the Cold War and foreign affairs, racial issues, and retrospective voting on the economy, may have declined in importance.

4.2. Do Rural Voters or Protestants Vote More on Moral Issues?

On average, economic policy preferences dominate moral policy preferences in accounting for the vote. But are there large segments of the population for which the opposite is true? For example, Frank (2004) suggests that the votes of low-income Americans are influenced primarily by moral issues, while those of high-income Americans are shaped by economic issues. Another reading of this argument is that moral issues dominate the vote in Red states like Kansas, in rural areas, or among evangelical Protestants. Frequent churchgoers may be exposed to political messages on moral issues by an increasingly politicized clergy, making them more inclined to vote on moral issues (Hunter, 1991; Layman, 2001; Layman and Green, 2006). Union members might be socialized in the workplace to place more emphasis on economic issues.

To examine these possibilities, we return to the probit analysis conducted earlier, but this time we estimate the combined effects of the *Moral Issues Scale*, the *Economic Issues Scale*, indicator variables for each of these population sub-groups, and their interactions on the likelihood of voting for a Democratic presidential candidate. Table 2 presents the key results (again, the details are in Appendix B). The bottom line is clear: whether we use the GSS or ANES there is not a single group for which the coefficient on the *Moral Issues Scale* is nearly as large as the coefficient on the *Economic Issues Scale*, and the coefficients are strikingly stable across groups.

The results are not at all what one would expect given recent discussions about “moral values” voters. The impact of moral issues on vote choice is actually slightly *smaller* for Protestants (GSS), evangelical Protestants (ANES), and regular churchgoers (GSS and ANES) than for the rest of the population. The impact of economic issues on voting is slightly *larger* for these groups than other voters. And, evangelical Protestants who attend church regularly appear to place more weight on the *Economic Issues Scale*, and less on the *Moral Issues Scale*, in voting. Geographic groups also vote the “wrong” way. Moral issues even have a slightly *larger* impact on the vote choices of Blue State residents than Red State voters, and a slightly *smaller* impact on the vote choices of rural residents than urban and suburban residents.

Perhaps the most interesting results have to do with income. The higher a voters income the more inclined he or she is to vote on issues. The coefficients for both issue scales are larger among high-income groups than low-income groups using both data sets. Contrary to the Marxist line of thinking, the GSS reveals that low-income Americans are significantly *less* inclined to vote based on moral values than are high-income groups.

Even among Red state, rural, and religious voters, economic policy choices have much greater weight in their electoral decisions than moral issues do.

5. Accounting for Red States and Blue States

The culture war argument at first blush tastes of an old wine in a new bottle. The old wine is the argument of Karl Marx and others critical of the ability of democracy to adequately reflect the economic preferences of voters. The new bottle is the political geography of the United States. Evangelical Protestants in the United States, concentrated in South, Bread Basket, and Mountain West as well as in rural counties, reputedly are led by their moral convictions to ignore their economic policy preferences and vote Republican, even though that party does not represent their economic interests.

That argument strikes us as more wrong than right. The divisions among the public, both on policy preferences and voting behavior, are modest. They certainly exist, but they are not large and deep, as often suggested. Most striking, as we showed in section 2, the geographic differences in party voting today are much smaller than they were 50 or 100 years ago.

When viewed in terms of voters' preferences and reasoning, the culture war argument leaves much to be desired. Rural voters, Evangelical voters, and Red state voters are indeed much more conservative on moral issues than other voters. But, they are also more conservative on economic issues, and when it comes to voting economic policies have much more weight than moral issues, even for these groups of voters.

The culture war argument, however, may still be correct as an explanation of the modest differences across states that we observe, but for a somewhat subtle reason. The behavior of voters in Red and Blue states may still be traced to moral issues, but these differences may be attributed not to the way voters think but to an accident of geography.

Even though voters put more weight on economic matters, the distribution of people across areas might imply that moral issues account for most of the divisions across states or counties. In essence, this argument holds that the differences in mean preferences across states is such that more of the difference in predicted vote shares across Red and Blue states is attributable to moral issues, even though such issues have less salience in voters minds.

5.1. Explaining Votes

Tacitly, the culture war argument – indeed, all of the arguments about Red and Blue America – assumes that preferences in fact account for geographic differences in voting behavior. Do they? Surprisingly (to us), the answer is yes.

To examine whether and how geographic differences in voting behavior reflect preferences we conducted three simple analyses. We begin with a probit regression predicting whether respondents voted for the Democratic presidential candidate using only indicators of geography – the political leanings of the state and the type of area the individual lived in. This is analogous to calculating the simple differences in means above. We then included in the analysis the survey respondents’ economic and moral policy preferences. If preferences explain geographic differences in voting behavior, then there should be little or no observable differences in the effects of geography once we control for the individual’s economic and moral liberalism. Finally, we included a battery of other variables, including income, race, gender, religion, and unionism.

As Table 4 shows, voters’ preferences on economic and moral issues account for a large part of the observed political geography. In other words, differences in voting between urban and rural counties and between Red and Blue states are largely a function of the distribution of voters’ preferences. In both the GSS and ANES, respondents from Blue states report voting for Democratic presidential candidates in the 1992, 1996, and 2000 elections at a rate 8 percentage points higher than respondents from red states. This is reflected in the first column of Table 4 (see the dP/dX coefficients in the Blue State row). Note that this is approximately the same difference observed in the aggregate data discussed in Section 2. When we include the *Economic Issues Scale* and *Moral Issues Scale* in the regressions, this difference falls to 3 percentage points. The difference in the

probability of voting Democratic between urban and rural respondents is 17 points, again consistent with the observed differences in aggregate election returns. But, when we include the issue preference scales, the difference falls to just 5-10 percentage points. Thus, differences in preferences account for much of the variation in the Red-Blue maps.

Interestingly, issue preferences also explain several other well known political schisms. The gender gap, a 5 to 10 percentage point difference between men and women in their support for Democratic candidates, becomes statistically insignificant using the ANES once we control for the *Economic Issues Scale* and *Moral Issues Scale*. Religious differences also vanish – for any given values of the issue scales, Protestants vote Democratic at the same rate as others (or, in the GSS, perhaps at even higher rates). Substantial differences in party voting along racial and economic lines remain (see the rows for blacks, union members, and income), though they too are reduced somewhat. Thus, many of the documented differences in voting patterns across social and demographic groups may simply reflect differences in policy preferences of the groups.

Returning to our main concern – electoral geography – we see that roughly two-thirds of the 8 percentage point difference in voting behavior between Red and Blue states reflects different views of what economic policies and moral legislation the government should pursue.

Which issue dimension does more of the work accounting for differences in voting? It is not clear. On the one hand, the preferences of Red State and Blue State voters differ more on moral issues than on economic issues. However, voters put more weight on economic issues in deciding how to vote.

In the GSS, the *Economic Issues Scale* and the *Moral Issues Scale* are nearly uncorrelated, so it is straightforward to decompose the vote. In the ANES the scales are noticeably correlated, especially among voters (the correlation is .49), making it difficult to decompose the geographic differences according to each of the issues.

Focusing on the GSS, we find that while both dimensions matter, the economic dimension matters more. This is shown in Table 5. The total effect to be explained is the difference in the Democratic share of the vote between the Red and Blue states, or between urban and rural areas (column 1 of the table). Columns 2 and 4 show the differences in mean preferences on the *Economic Issues Scale* and the *Moral Issues*

Scale, respectively (taken from Table 3). Multiplying these by the appropriate regression parameters from Table 1 gives the predicted difference in the vote that is accounted for by each issue dimension. These are shown in columns 3 and 5, respectively.

The first row of Table 5 covers Red states versus Blue states. Preferences over economic issues can account for nearly 50% of the difference in voting between these two groups of states (.038/.08), while preferences over moral issues can only account for about 30% of the difference (.024/.08). The next three rows cover different urban, suburban, and rural breakdowns. Urban versus non-urban differences depend much more by economic preferences than moral preferences. By contrast, both issue dimensions seem equally important in accounting for rural versus non-rural differences.

If we ignore the correlation between the *Economic Issues Scale* and the *Moral Issues Scale* in the ANES we can perform an analysis similar to that in Table 5. In the ANES, moral preferences are slightly more important than economic preferences in accounting for differences between Red and Blue state presidential voting and U.S. senate voting, but economic preferences are slightly more important for U.S. House voting. As in the GSS, economic preferences clearly dominate in accounting for urban versus non-urban and suburban versus non-suburban differences (for all three offices).

Economic and moral policy preferences, then, help us understand most of the variation in the vote across geographic areas. And, of the two factors, the economic dimension is generally more important in accounting for this variation. The clearest evidence – from the GSS – suggests that Red states are red not so much because they are morally conservative, but because they are economically more conservative.

5.2. Explaining Preferences

These findings lead to an even more difficult question: Why do voters in Red states have more conservative policy preferences? Why are they economically more conservative?

We have little to offer by way of theories, and instead will focus here on what characteristics of voters may account for variations in preferences across geography. Our analysis in Table 1 already suggests that many factors, such as income, cannot possibly explain the behavior observed. Religions and unions, however, might help explain the

economic conservatism of rural areas and Red states (or, equivalently, the economic liberalism of the Blue states). To address this question we regressed the *Economic Issues Scale* or *Moral Issues Scale* separately on the geographic indicators of interest and other demographic and sociological indicators.

Do geographic differences vanish once we control for demographic characteristics of the respondents? Not entirely.

Table 6 presents the results. The *Economic Issues Scale* is the dependent variable in columns 1-3, and the *Moral Issues Scale* is the dependent variable in columns 4-6. Consider the bottom half of the table, which uses the ANES data. Comparing columns 1 and 3, we find that adding the demographic and socioeconomic variables reduces the estimated effect on *Blue State* by almost 60%, and that with full set of controls the coefficient on *Blue State* is no longer statistically significant. Comparing columns 2 and 3 we see that including these variables also sharply reduces the estimated effect of *Urban*, although it remains fairly strong. Columns 4-6 show similar reductions for the *Moral Issues Scale*, although all of the geographic indicators are statistically significant even when the demographic and socioeconomic variables are included.

The top half of that table shows that the results using GSS data are similar for the *Moral Issues Scale*, but not for the *Economic Issues Scale*. Including the demographic and socioeconomic variables sharply reduces the effect of *Urban*. However, it does nothing to account for the *Blue Region* effect.

For the moment, then, we cannot rule out the possibility some geographically-based “cultural” factors have an independent influence on voters’ economic and moral issue preferences. The ANES data suggest that we are free to ignore such factors, but the GSS indicate that we cannot.

The coefficients in Table 6 yield other insights about why Red state voters are more conservative than Blue states voters. Several variables would make Red states more liberal. Red states have a higher proportion of blacks than Blue states (.14 to .08) and lower average income (.08 to .25 on a normalized scale). Other variables are more promising in helping us account for differences. Red states have a lower share of union members (.10 to .23), a higher share of evangelical Protestants (.43 to .21), and higher rates of church attendance (.12 to -.11 on a normalized scale). But the overall picture

remains quite puzzling. None of the variables in the analysis can explain the variation in party voting across geography, and those that seem likely to do so, such as churches and unions, are only a small part of the story. Thus, even controlling for religion – from which the culture war is said to emanate – much of the ideological and partisan division that exists across the American landscape remains unexplained.

6. Conclusion

The juxtaposition of the red and blue electoral maps and the 2004 presidential election exit polls suggested an obvious implication. A culture war over moral issues has created electoral schisms between the states and between urban and rural counties. That argument represents a substantial challenge to political economic models of policy making, as it suggests that voters in the U.S., and perhaps elsewhere, vote against their economic interests and preferences for the sake of policies on moral issues, such as abortion and gay rights.

We have subjected that argument to careful empirical scrutiny by measuring the electoral division in the states over time, measuring the economic and moral policy preferences of the electorate, and estimating of the salience of those issues in voters' minds. Many aspects of the culture war argument appear correct, at least in their direction, but perhaps not the magnitude. Those in Red states and rural counties are more conservative on moral issues than those in Blue states and in cities. Moral issues, as Thomas Frank, John Roemer, and others have argued, create a cleavage that cuts against economic preferences and income. And, moral and economic policy preferences together account for almost all of the differences in voting patterns across states.

A more appropriate characterization of the American electorate is, as the subtitle to David Brooks' article suggests, one nation, slightly divided. The fundamental facts behind the culture war argument that America is deeply divided and the electoral divide rests on moral issues are simply incorrect.

First, the electoral divisions across geography are shrinking, not growing, in the United States. The difference between a typical strongly Republican state and a typical strongly Democratic state is just 8 percentage points 54 percent for the dominant party; 46 percent for the weaker. This is hardly a great divide.

Second, voters, even those who hold strong religious convictions, place much more weight on economic policy than they do on moral issues when they choose their presidents, members of Congress, and preferred party.

Third, when accounting for differences across states, at least half of the systematic variation in America's political geography stems from economic policy preferences. Those in Kansas tend to be economic conservatives and those in Massachusetts tend to be economic liberals, and, at least according to the General Social Survey, that accounts for the lion's share of the difference between Red states and Blue states.

Rather, the relevance of moral policy in America's political geography appears to be more of an accident of geography. Moral issues have less weight in voters choices – their salience is about one-half to one-third that of economic issues. Nonetheless, moral issues account for a noticeable share of the differences in voting across states because there are larger differences in moral policy preferences across Red and Blue states. Why these differences in preferences exist is a deep question that remains unanswered. The usual demographic and sociological indicators, including religion, only partially account for these differences. Interestingly, then, it appears that the geographic roots of American electoral institutions the Electoral College, the U.S. Senate, and the structure of U.S. House districts have inflated the prominence of moral values in American political discourse beyond the weight that voters themselves place on issues. Red and Blue America is not a case of false consciousness so much as it is a case of electoral institutions altering the aggregation of preferences.

For the economics profession this portrait of American elections carries some comfort and caution. On its face, the standard model of public finance and political economy has held up reasonably well. Preferences over economic policies are of significant importance, and income is clearly correlated those preferences. However, our accounting of elections suggests that the institutions of representation can distort the voter's calculus. Economic theories of democracy must be attentive to the welfare implications of electoral institutions. Spatial voter models cannot move from theory to data without careful consideration of geography and institutions of representation. And, at least in the United States, the geographic distribution of voters' preferences may be as much an accident as the product of identifiable social forces and organizations.

Appendix A

Tables A.1-A.4 present the results of the four factor analyses (two groups of issues times two surveys), including the eigenvectors, factor loadings, and scoring coefficients. Note that before conducting the factor analyses we standardize each variable to have a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one.

ANES:

The *Economic Issues Scale* is constructed from the following 26 items:

Six 7-point scales, as follows: A scale on government spending and services, where 1 = “Government should provide many fewer services: reduce spending a lot,” and 7 = “Government should provide many more services: increase spending a lot.” A scale on government health insurance, where 1 = “Private insurance plan,” and 7 = “Government insurance plan.” A scale on government and jobs and standards of living, where 1 = “Government let each person get ahead on his own,” and 7 = “Government see to job and good standard of living.” A scale on defense spending, where 1 = “Greatly increase defense spending,” and 7 = “Greatly decrease defense spending.” A scale on environmental regulations vs. business, where 1 = “Regulations to protect environment already too much of a burden on business,” and 7 = “Tougher regulations on business needed to protect the environment.” A scale on environmental protection vs. jobs, where 1 = “Jobs and standard of living more important than environment,” and 7 = “Protect environment, even if it costs jobs and standard of living.”

Nine 3-point spending scales, where 1 = “spending should be decreased or cut out entirely,” 2 = “spending should stay the same,” and 3 = “spending should be increased.” The items are: child care, welfare, the poor, homelessness, food stamps, public schools, social security, environmental protection, and foreign aid.

Five feeling thermometers for the following groups or institutions: welfare recipients, poor people, labor unions, environmentalists, the federal government.

Six 5-point scales on statements about equality and equal opportunity, where the choices are: “agree strongly,” “agree somewhat,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree

somewhat,” and “disagree strongly.” The statements and codes are: “Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed” (1 = disagree strongly... 5 = agree strongly). “One of the big problems in this country is that we don’t give everyone an equal chance” (1 = disagree strongly... 5 = agree strongly). “If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems” (1 = disagree strongly... 5 = agree strongly). “We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country” (1 = agree strongly... 5 = disagree strongly). “It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others” (1 = agree strongly... 5 = disagree strongly). “The country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are” (1 = agree strongly... 5 = disagree strongly).

The *Moral Issues Scale* is constructed from the following 16 items:

One 7-point scales on women’s role in running business, industry and government, where 1 = “Women’s place is in the home,” and 7 = “Women and men should have an equal role.”

Four feeling thermometers for the following groups or institutions: feminists, the women’s movement, gays and lesbians, and Christian fundamentalists.

Four 5-point scales on statements where the choices are: “agree strongly,” “agree somewhat,” “neither agree nor disagree,” “disagree somewhat,” and “disagree strongly.” The statements are: “The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes” (1 = disagree strongly... 5 = agree strongly). “We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own” (1 = disagree strongly... 5 = agree strongly). “The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society” (1 = agree strongly... 5 = disagree strongly). “This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties” (1 = agree strongly... 5 = disagree strongly).

Two 5-point questions on homosexual rights, as follows: “Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?” The options are: 1 = “oppose strongly,” 2 = “oppose not strongly,” 3 = “don’t know,” 4 = “favor not strongly,” and 5 = “favor strongly.” “Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United

States Armed Forces or don't you think so?" The options are: 1 = "feel strongly should not be allowed," 2 = "feel not strongly should not be allowed," 3 = "don't know," 4 = "feel not strongly should be allowed," and 5 = "feel strongly should be allowed."

One question on gay child adoption: "Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?" The options are 1 = no, 2 = don't know, and 3 = yes.

One question on abortion, with the following options: 1 = "By law, abortion should never be permitted," 2 = "The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger," 3 = "The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established," and 4 = "By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice."

One question on school prayer, with the following options: 1 = "By law, public schools should schedule a time when all children would say a chosen Christian prayer," 2 = "The law should allow public schools to schedule time when children as a group can say a general prayer not tied to a particular religious faith," 3 = "The law should allow public schools to schedule time when children can pray silently if they want to," and 4 = "By law, prayer should not be allowed in public schools."

One question on how much guidance religion provides in the respondent's daily life, with the following options: 1 = "a great deal," 2 = "quite a bit," 3 = "some," and 4 = "religion not important."

One question on the authority of the bible, with the following options: 1 = "The Bible is the actual Word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word," 2 = "The Bible is the Word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word," and 3 = "The Bible is a book written by men and is not the Word of God."

GSS:

The *Economic Issues Scale* is constructed from the following 20 items:

Eleven 3-point spending scales, where 1 = "too much spending," 2 = "about right," and 3 = "too little spending." The items are: the environment, space exploration,

health, the problems of big cities, crime, drug addiction, improving the condition of blacks, defense, foreign aid, and welfare.

One question asking whether taxes are 1 = “too high,” 2 = “about right, or 3 = “too low.”

One 7-point scale where 1 = “government should not concern itself with income differences” and 7 = “government should do something to reduce income differences between rich and poor.”

Four 3-point scales about confidence in institutions, where 1 = “hardly any confidence,” 2 = “only some confidence,” and 3 = “a great deal of confidence.” The institutions are: financial institutions, business, labor, and the army.

Three 5-point scales about the welfare state: In the first, 1 = “I strongly agree that people should take care of themselves,” 3 = “I agree with both answers, and 5 = “I strongly agree that government should help improve living standards of the poor.” In the second, 1 = “I strongly agree that government is doing too much,” 3 = “I agree with both answers,” and 5 = “I strongly agree that government should do more to solve our country’s problems.” In the third, 1 = “I strongly agree people should take care of themselves,” 3 = “I agree with both answers,” and 5 = “I strongly agree it is the responsibility of government to help in paying for doctor and hospital bills.”

One *Moral Issues* scale is constructed from the following 12 items that are present in each survey:

One question asking whether the respondent favors or opposes the death penalty: 1 = “oppose,” 2 = “favor.”

One question asking whether in the matter of religion, the respondent was a 1 = “fundamentalist,” 2 = “moderate,” or 3 = “liberal.”

One question asking the respondent about the strength of his/her religion ranging from 1 = “strong” to 4 = “no religion.”

Seven questions asking whether it should be possible for a pregnant woman to legally obtain an abortion under various circumstances. In all cases, 1 = “no” or 2 = “yes.” The circumstances are (a) there is a strong chance of a serious defect, (b) “she is married and does not want any more children,” (c) “the woman’s own health is seriously

endangered by the pregnancy,” (d) “the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children,” (e) “she became pregnant as a result of rape,” (f) “she is not married and does not want to marry the man,” (g) “the woman wants it for any reason.”

The second *Moral Issues* scale imputes values for sporadically missing questions, allowing for the inclusion of the following 11 questions in addition to the 10 listed above:

Six questions about whether limitations should be placed upon people whose ideas are considered bad or dangerous by other people. The first question asks whether such a person should be allowed to make a speech in the respondent’s community (1 = “yes,” 2 = “no”). A second question asks whether such a person should be allowed to teach in a college or university, and a third question asks whether a book written by such a person should be removed from the public library. The categories for these three questions are atheists and homosexuals.

A question asking “Do you think the use of marijuana should be made legal or not? (1 = “yes,” 2 = “no).

Two questions asking about sexual attitudes. The first asks “What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner? And the second asks “What do you think about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex?” For both questions, the options are, “it is always wrong” = 1, “almost always wrong” = 2, “wrong only sometimes” = 3, or “not wrong at all” = 4.

One question about laws related to pornography, where 1 = “There should be laws against the distribution of pornography whatever the age,” 2 = “There should be laws against the distribution of pornography to persons under the age of 18,” and 3 = “There should be no laws forbidding the distribution of pornography.”

One 3-point scale about confidence in the clergy, where 1 = “a great deal of confidence,” 2 = “only some confidence,” and 3 = “hardly any confidence.”

What do different values of the *Economic Issues Scale* mean? First, consider a respondent with the following profile: She wants to increase spending (score = 3) on child care, the poor, homelessness, public schools, social security, and environmental protection, and hold spending the same on all other items. She has a “one-point left of

center” score of 5 on the following 7-point scales: government spending and services, government health insurance, and government and jobs/standards of living. She has the average score on all other items (not literally possible, of course, but approximately possible). Then the respondent would have a score at the 74th percentile on the *Economic Issues Scale* – i.e., 74% of the respondents would be more conservative than her, and 26% would be more liberal.

Next, consider another respondent with the following profile: She wants to decrease spending (score = 1) on food stamps, welfare, and foreign aid, and hold spending the same on all other items. She has a “one-point right of center” score of 3 on the following 7-point scales: government spending and services government health insurance government and jobs/standards of living; and environmental regulations vs. business. She has the average score on all other items. Then the respondent would have a score at the 20th percentile on the *Economic Issues Scale*.

What about different positions on the *Moral Issues Scale*? Consider a respondent with the following profile: She favors laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination (but not strongly, score = 4). She believes that gays should be allowed to serve in the military (but not strongly, score = 4), that homosexual couples should be legally permitted to adopt children (score = 3), that by law a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice (score = 4), and that the law should allow public schools to schedule time when children can pray silently if they want to (score = 3). She agrees somewhat with the statement that the world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes, and disagrees somewhat with the statement that newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of society. She has the average score on all other items. Then the respondent would have a score at the 76th percentile on the *Moral Issues Scale*.

Finally, consider a respondent with the following profile: She opposes laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination (but not strongly, score = 2). She believes that gays should not be allowed to serve in the military (but not strongly, score = 2), that homosexual couples should not be legally permitted to adopt children (score = 1), that the law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman’s life is in danger (score = 2), and that the law should allow public schools to schedule time

when children as a group can say a general prayer not tied to a particular religious faith (score = 2). She disagrees strongly with the statement that the world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes, and agrees strongly with the statement that newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of society. She has the average score on all other items. Then the respondent would have a score at the 24th percentile on the *Moral Issues Scale*.

Table A.1
Factor Analysis for Economic Issues Scale, NES 1992-2000

	Factor Loadings		uniqueness	Scoring Coefficients	
	1	2		1	2
Gov spending & services	.62	-.12	.60	.10	-.08
Gov health insurance	.48	.02	.77	.06	.01
Gov & jobs/standard of living	.52	-.11	.72	.08	-.05
Defense spending	.23	.22	.90	.02	.08
Environment vs. business	.61	.44	.44	.13	.27
Environment vs. jobs	.36	.56	.55	.04	.29
Spending: child care	.55	-.06	.70	.08	-.03
Spending: welfare	.54	-.26	.64	.09	-.14
Spending: the poor	.61	-.20	.59	.10	-.10
Spending: homelessness	.65	.01	.58	.11	-.00
Spending: food stamps	.52	-.25	.67	.09	-.12
Spending: public schools	.47	.01	.80	.06	.00
Spending: social security	.38	-.17	.83	.04	-.07
Spending: environment	.50	.32	.64	.07	.13
Spending: foreign aid	.32	-.12	.88	.04	-.05
Thermometer: welfare recipients	.43	-.32	.71	.07	-.15
Thermometer: poor people	.34	-.30	.80	.05	-.12
Thermometer: labor unions	.45	-.21	.76	.06	-.10
Thermometer: environmentalists	.53	.19	.68	.09	.07
Thermometer: fed'l government	.28	-.32	.82	.04	-.14
Equal opportunity	.39	-.02	.84	.05	-.01
Unequal chances, big problem	.44	.22	.76	.07	.10
Equal treatment, fewer problems	.51	-.02	.74	.08	-.00
Too far in pushing equal rights	.35	.26	.81	.05	.10
Unequal changes, small problem	.41	.27	.76	.07	.13
Should worry less about equality	.47	-.01	.78	.07	-.00

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of variance
1	5.75	.66
2	1.46	.17
3	0.96	.11
4	0.80	.09
5	0.62	.07
6	0.50	.06
7	0.36	.04
8	0.27	.03
9	0.13	.01
10	0.03	.00

Table A.2
Factor Analysis for Moral Issues Scale, NES 1992-2000

	Factor Loadings		uniqueness	Scoring Coefficients	
	1	2		1	2
Women's role	.46	-.01	.79	.07	.02
Thermometer: feminists	.55	-.54	.41	.13	-.31
Thermometer: women's move	.51	-.59	.40	.12	-.36
Thermometer: homosexuals	.67	-.17	.52	.15	-.08
Thermometer: fundamentalists	.47	.44	.59	.10	.20
Adjust moral views to change	.39	-.10	.84	.07	-.02
Tolerate others' moral standards	.51	-.11	.73	.09	-.04
Newer lifestyles, breakdown	.54	.11	.69	.11	.06
Traditional family ties	.48	.17	.75	.09	.08
Homosexual job discrimination	.55	-.17	.67	.09	-.07
Homosexuals in military	.59	-.09	.65	.11	-.04
Homosexuals & adoption	.65	.01	.58	.14	.01
Law on abortion	.54	.22	.66	.10	.11
Law on school prayer	.38	.26	.79	.06	.11
Guidance from religion in life	.46	.38	.65	.09	.17
Authority of bible	.55	.38	.55	.12	.22

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of variance
1	4.38	.76
2	1.35	.23
3	0.57	.10
4	0.38	.07
5	0.25	.04
6	0.03	.00

Appendix B

This will just have the complete tables. Alternatively, we can have these “available from authors on request.”

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Table 1
Differences across Groups of Voters in Mean Position on
Economic Issues Scale and Moral Issues Scale

Group	Mean Position on Economics Issues Scale		Mean Position on Moral Issues Scale	
	In Group	Not In Group	In Group	Not In Group
GSS, 1993-2002				
Blue region	-.01**	-.17**	.13**	-.21**
Urban	.23**	-.18**	.14**	-.08**
Suburban	-.13**	-.07**	.17**	-.10**
Rural	-.26**	.06**	-.42**	.03**
Democrat	.30**	-.51**	.02**	-.09**
High- income	-.19**	.03**	.15**	-.19**
Low- income	.20**	-.14**	-.34**	.05**
Female	.04**	-.26**	-.11**	.07**
Union	.10**	-.15**	-.04	-.03
Protestant	-.14**	.00**	-.20**	.26*
Attend church regularly	-.15**	-.05**	-.65**	.38**
ANES, 1992-2000				
Blue state	.00**	-.15**	.15**	-.17**
Urban	.23**	-.18**	.26**	-.11**
Suburban	-.00**	-.17**	-.02	-.01
Rural	-.20**	-.02**	-.25**	.09**
Democrat	.45**	-.60**	.38**	-.38**
High- income	-.29**	.06**	.09**	-.04**
Low- income	.23**	-.20**	-.03	.03
Female	.08**	-.24**	.08**	-.08**
Union	.14**	-.11**	.07	-.01
Evangelical protestant	-.13**	-.04**	-.52**	.24**
Attend church regularly	-.22**	.04**	-.48**	.37**
Swing state	-.09	-.05	-.03**	.05**

* = difference in mean for “In Group” voters vs. “Not In Group” voters is statistically significant at the .05 level.

** = difference in mean for “In Group” voters vs. “Not In Group” voters is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 2				
Relative Impact of Economic Issues Scale and Moral Issues Scale				
On Voting and Party Identification				
	Economics Issues Scale		Moral Issues Scale	
	dP/dX	Liberal vs. Conservative	dP/dX	Liberal vs. Conservative
Presidential Vote, GSS				
All Years	.24	.31	-.04	.06
1977-1980	.18	.23	.01	.02
1981-1992	.24	.31	.02	.03
1993-2002	.26	.33	.10	.14
Presidential Vote, ANES				
1992-2000	.31	.39	.18	.24
2004	.38	.46	.18	.26
U.S. Senate Vote, ANES				
1992-2000	.23	.30	.13	.17
2004	.27	.34	.26	.24
U.S. House Vote, ANES				
1992-2000	.22	.28	.09	.12
2004	.28	.35	.15	.22
Party ID, GSS				
All Years	.73	.95	.03	.05
1977-1980	.56	.73	-.06	-.09
1981-1992	.73	.95	-.05	-.08
1993-2002	.76	1.00	.15	.23
Party ID, ANES				
1992-2000	.95	1.27	.27	.36
2004	1.02	1.33	.40	.60

All coefficients are statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 3
Differences across Groups of Voters in the Relative Impact of
Economic Issues Scale and Moral Issues Scale on Presidential Voting

Group	Estimated Coefficient on Economics Issues Scale		Estimated Coefficient on Moral Issues Scale	
	In Group	Not In Group	In Group	Not In Group
GSS, 1993-2002				
Blue region	.26	.25	.12*	.07*
Urban	.30**	.24**	.09	.09
Suburban	.25	.26	.12*	.09*
Rural	.21**	.26**	.04**	.10**
Democrat	.13**	.17**	.07	.10
High-income	.28**	.21**	.13**	.06**
Low-income	.21*	.26*	.04**	.11**
Female	.25	.26	.11**	.08**
Union	.25	.26	.11	.10
Protestant	.27**	.23**	.08*	.11*
Attend church regularly	.25	.26	.08	.08
ANES, 1992-2000				
Blue state	.29	.33	.20	.16
Urban	.35	.30	.19	.17
Suburban	.31	.31	.19	.18
Rural	.28	.33	.16	.19
Democrat	.16	.19	.16	.18
High-income	.34*	.28*	.20	.20
Low-income	.25*	.31*	.18	.21
Female	.29*	.34*	.18	.18
Union	.28	.31	.15	.19
Evangelical protestant	.34	.30	.18	.20
Attend church regularly	.33	.30	.17	.19
Swing state	.31	.31	.16	.21

* = difference between coefficient for “In Group” voters and coefficient for “Not In Group” voters is statistically significant at the .05 level.

** = difference between coefficient for “In Group” voters and coefficient for “Not In Group” voters is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 4
Impact of Other Variables on Presidential Voting,
With and without Controls for Issue Positions

	dP/dX when Issue Scales Not Included	dP/dX when Issue Scales Included
GSS, 1993-2002		
Blue region	.08**	.03*
Urban	.18**	.11**
Suburban	-.02	-.04**
Rural	-.10**	-.02
Protestant	-.12**	.04*
Income	-.39**	-.33**
Female	.10**	.05*
Black	.41**	.34**
Union	.11**	.09**
ANES, 1992-2000		
Blue state	.09**	.03
Urban	.17**	.05
Suburban	-.08**	-.06**
Rural	-.07**	.02
Protestant	-.12**	-.02
Income	-.05**	-.04**
Female	.10**	.01
Black	.44**	.34**
Union	.15**	.10**

* = estimated coefficient is statistically significant at the .05 level.

** = estimated coefficient is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Table 5
Accounting for Red and Blue Differences in Presidential Voting
GSS, 1993-2002

	Actual Democratic Vote Share Difference	Economic Issues Scale		Moral Issues Scale	
		Mean Preference Difference (voters)	Predicted Democratic Vote Share Difference	Mean Preference Difference (voters)	Predicted Democratic Vote Share Difference
Blue – Red region	.08	.16	.042	.34	.034
Urban – non-urban	.18	.41	.107	.22	.022
Suburb – non-suburb	-.02	-.06	-.016	.27	.027
Rural – non-rural	-.10	-.20	-.052	-.45	-.045

Note, the numbers in column 3 are equal to the numbers in column 2 times .26 (dP/dX for *Economic Issues Scale* from Table 2), and the numbers in column 5 are equal to the numbers in column 4 times .10 (dP/dX for *Moral Issues Scale* from Table 2).

Table 6						
Predicting Positions on the Economic Issues Scale and Moral Issues Scale						
	Economics Issues Scale			Moral Issues Scale		
GSS, 1993-2002						
Blue state	.19**	.18**	.17**	.29**	.23**	.11**
Urban		.46**	.12**		.24**	.14**
Suburban		.01	-.05		.22**	.06**
Rural		.01	-.04		-.22**	-.04
Education			.03			.22**
Income			-.17**			.03*
Black			1.07**			.03
Female			.38**			-.03
Union			.16**			-.05
Protestant			-.28**			-.21**
Jewish			.29**			.22**
Attend church regularly			-.11**			-.54**
R-square	.01	.04	.21	.03	.05	.46
Number of observations	4,407	4,407	4,407	4,407	4,407	4,407
ANES, 1992-2000						
Blue state	.12**	.12**	.05	.31**	.30**	.08*
Urban		.41**	.18**		.32**	.19**
Rural		-.02	-.03		-.14**	-.08*
Education			.04*			.23**
Income			-.21**			-.07**
Black			.91**			.43**
Female			.30**			.30**
Union			.33**			.08*
Evangelical protestant			-.30**			-.62**
Mainline protestant			-.20**			-.21**
Jewish			.20*			.42**
Church attendance			-.11**			-.40**
R-square	.04	.08	.24	.03	.06	.36
Number of observations	2,842	2,842	2,842	2,832	2,832	2,832

Year fixed-effects included in all specifications.

* = estimated coefficient is statistically significant at the .05 level.

** = estimated coefficient is statistically significant at the .01 level.

Figure 1: Decline in One-Party Dominance in U.S. States, 1900-2000

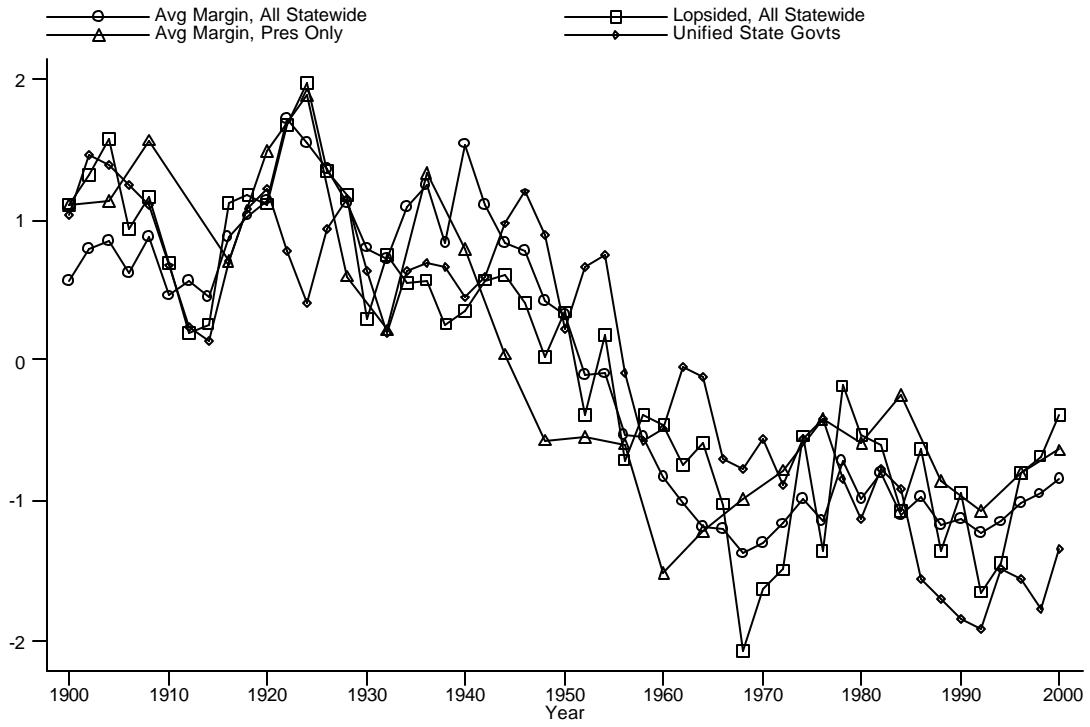


Figure 2: Decline in One-Party Dominance in U.S. Counties, 1900-2000

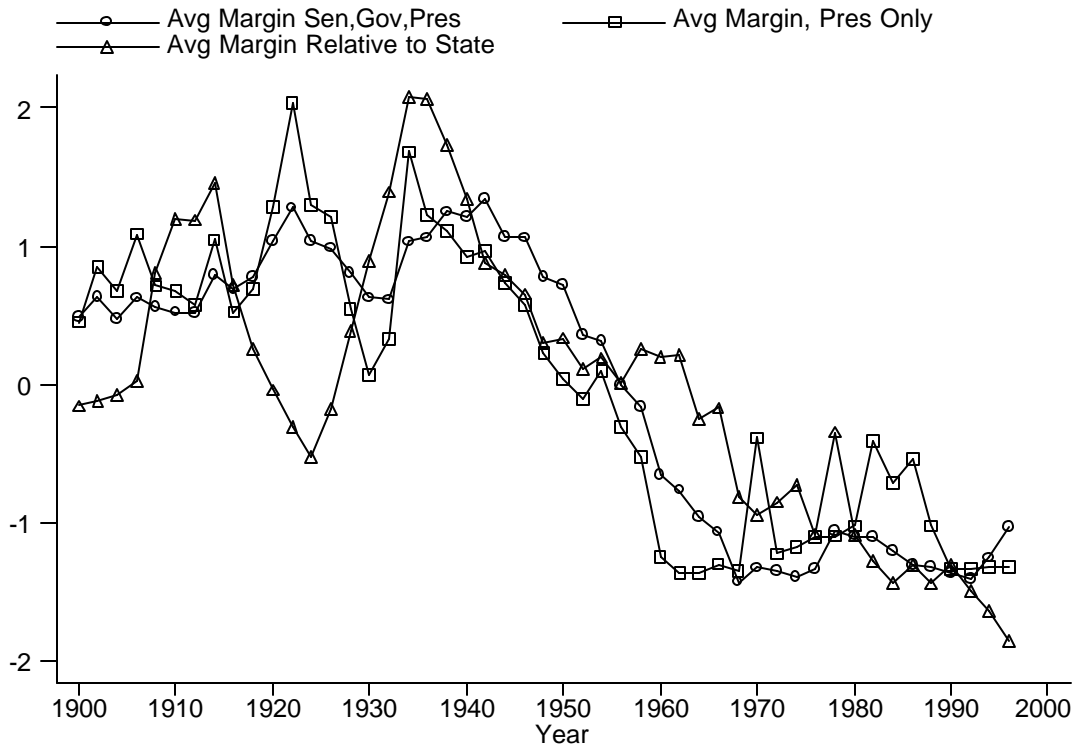


Figure 3: Distribution of Voter Preferences on Economic Issues Scale and Moral Issues Scale, 1993-2002

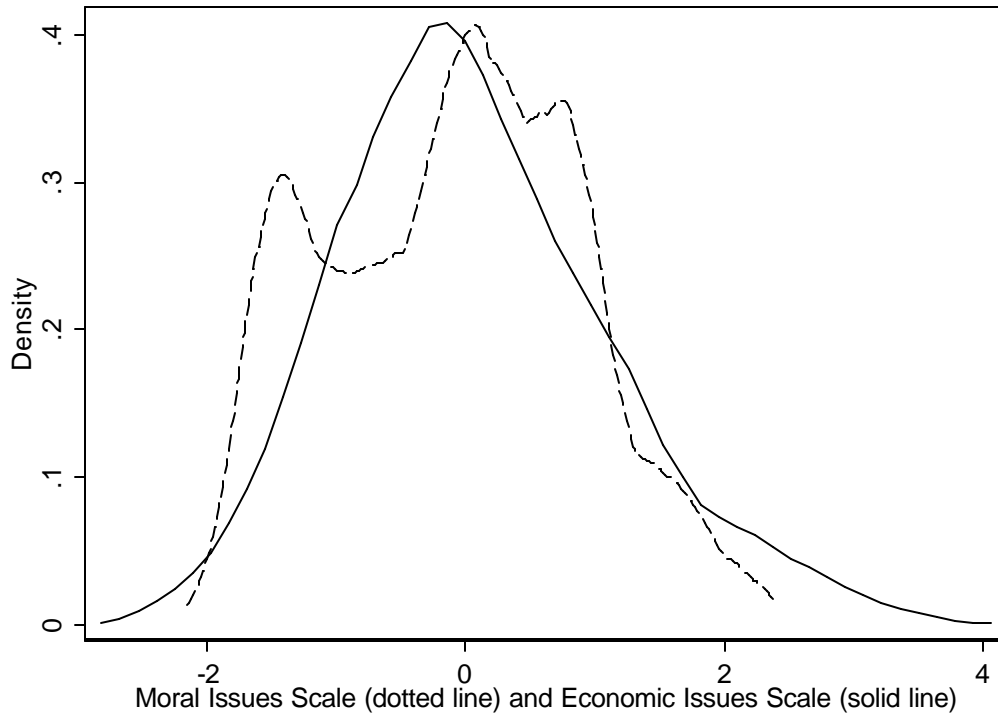


Figure 4: Trends in Blue-Region vs. Red-Region Differences on Economic Issue Scale and Moral Issues Scale

