

# The New American Electorate: Partisan, Sorted and Polarized



# Major Characteristics of the Current Era of Electoral Competition

- Intense two-party competition for control of Congress and the White House
- Increasing one-party domination of many states and congressional districts
- A high degree of consistency in the results of elections at different levels and over time

## Competition in U.S. Presidential Elections Since 1952

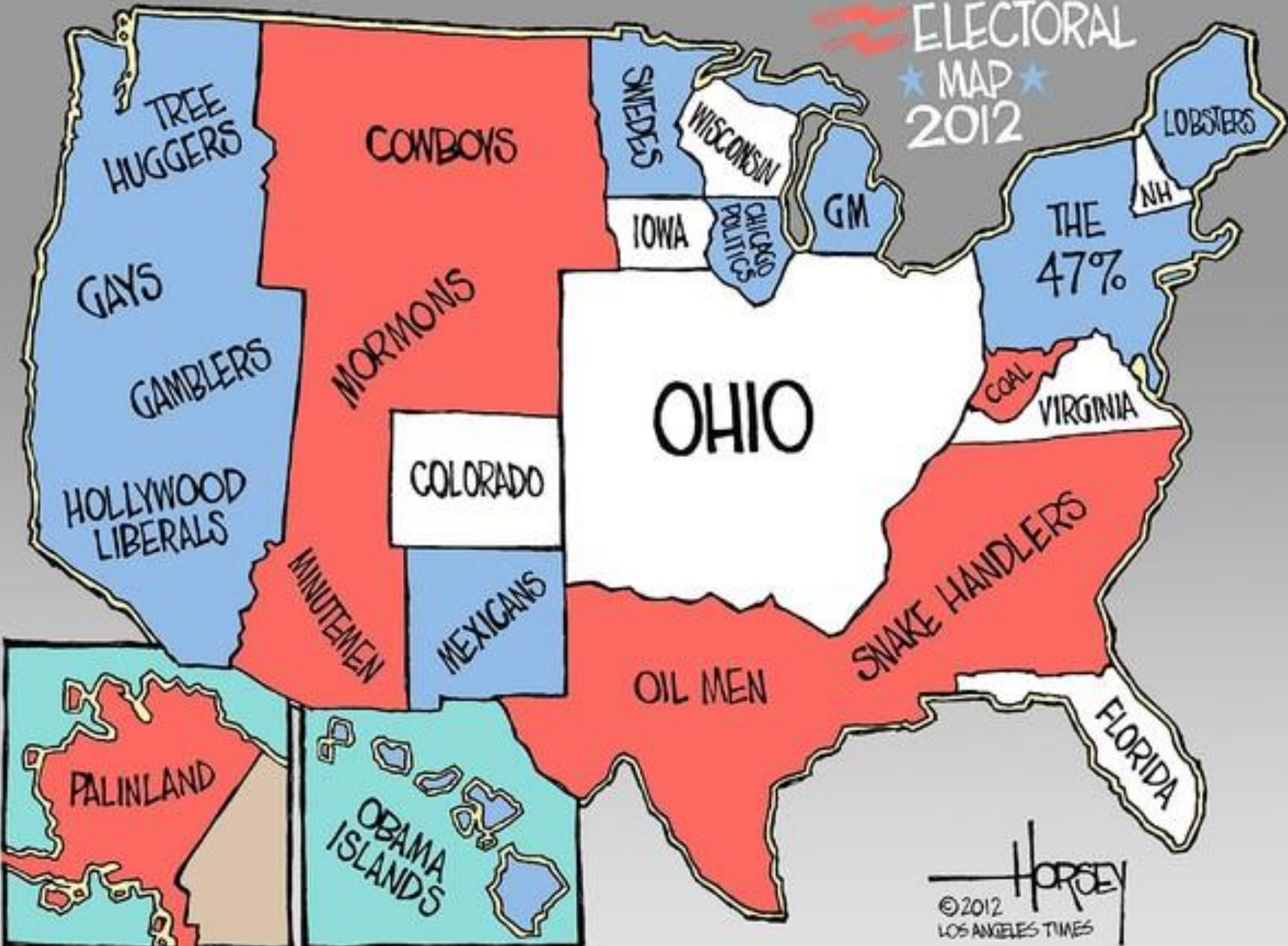
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Elections	Average Winning Margin	Standard Deviation
1952-1964	12.5%	17.3%
1968-1980	9.0%	11.9%
1984-1996	9.8%	12.1%
2000-2012	3.5%	4.4%

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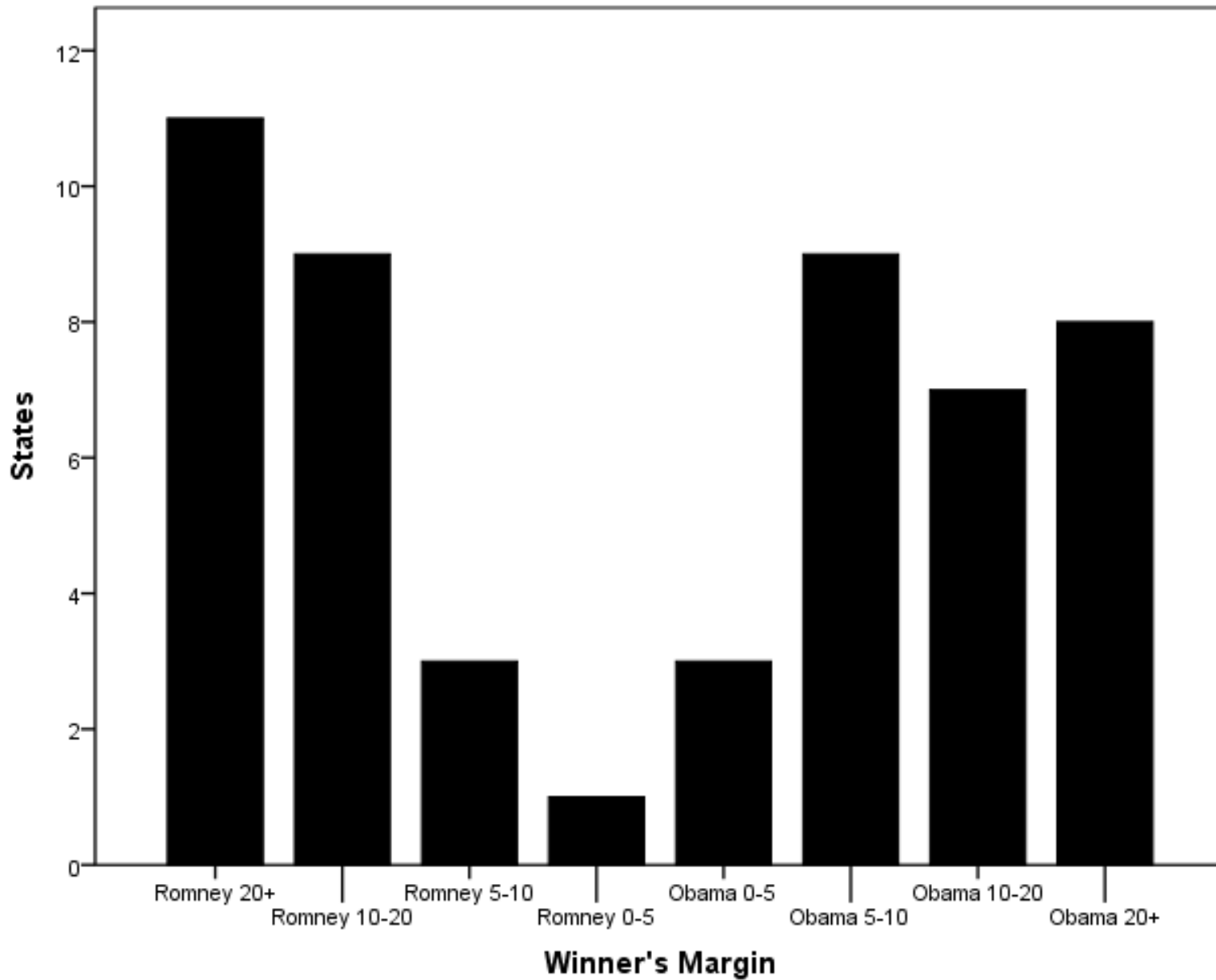
Source: [uselectionsatlas.org](http://uselectionsatlas.org)

ELECTORAL  
MAP  
2012



HORSEY  
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LOS ANGELES TIMES

# Winner's Margin in the States in 2012



## Winning Candidates' Margin in the States: 1976 vs. 2012

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Winner's Margin	1976	2012
Under 5%	20	4
5-10%	11	12
10-15%	9	16
Over 15%	11	19

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Source: [www.uselectionatlas.org](http://www.uselectionatlas.org)

## Electoral Votes by Margin of Victory: 1976 vs. 2012

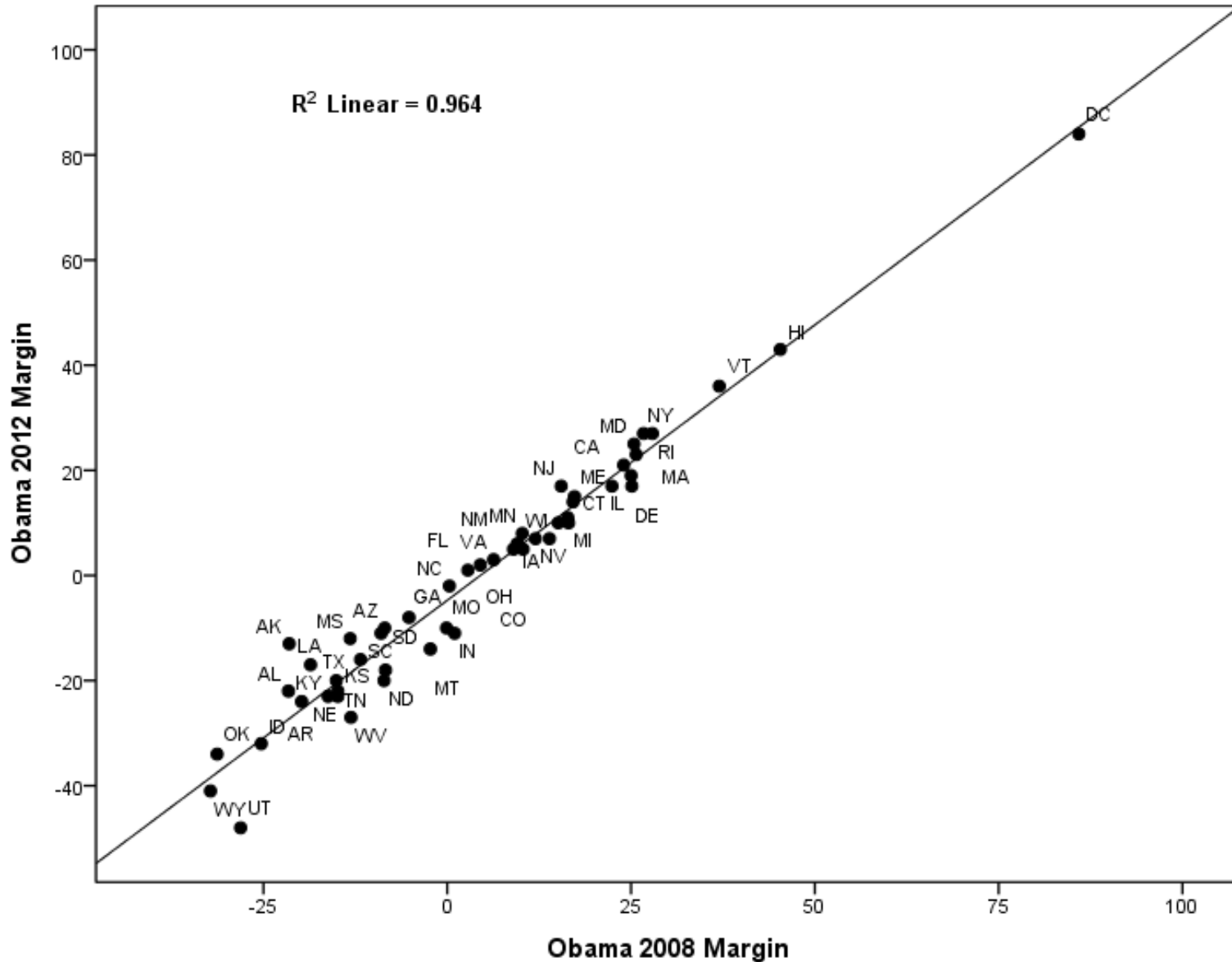
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Winner's Margin	1976	2012
Under 5%	299	75
5-10%	105	118
10-15%	68	56
Over 15%	66	289

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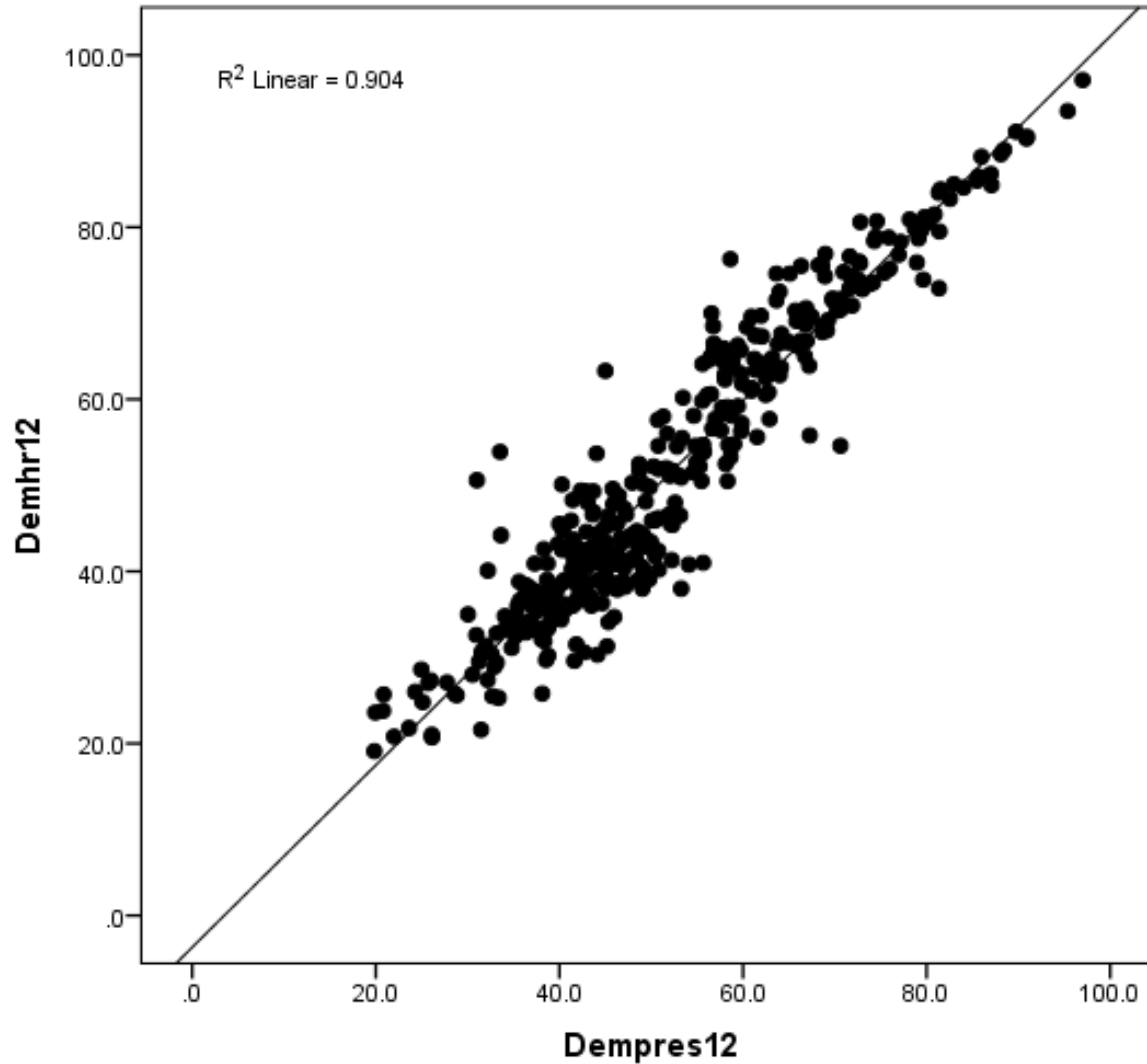
Source: [www.uselectionatlas.org](http://www.uselectionatlas.org)

# Obama 2012 Margin by Obama 2008 Margin





# Democratic Share of 2012 U.S. House Vote by Democratic Share of 2012 Presidential Vote



# Why?



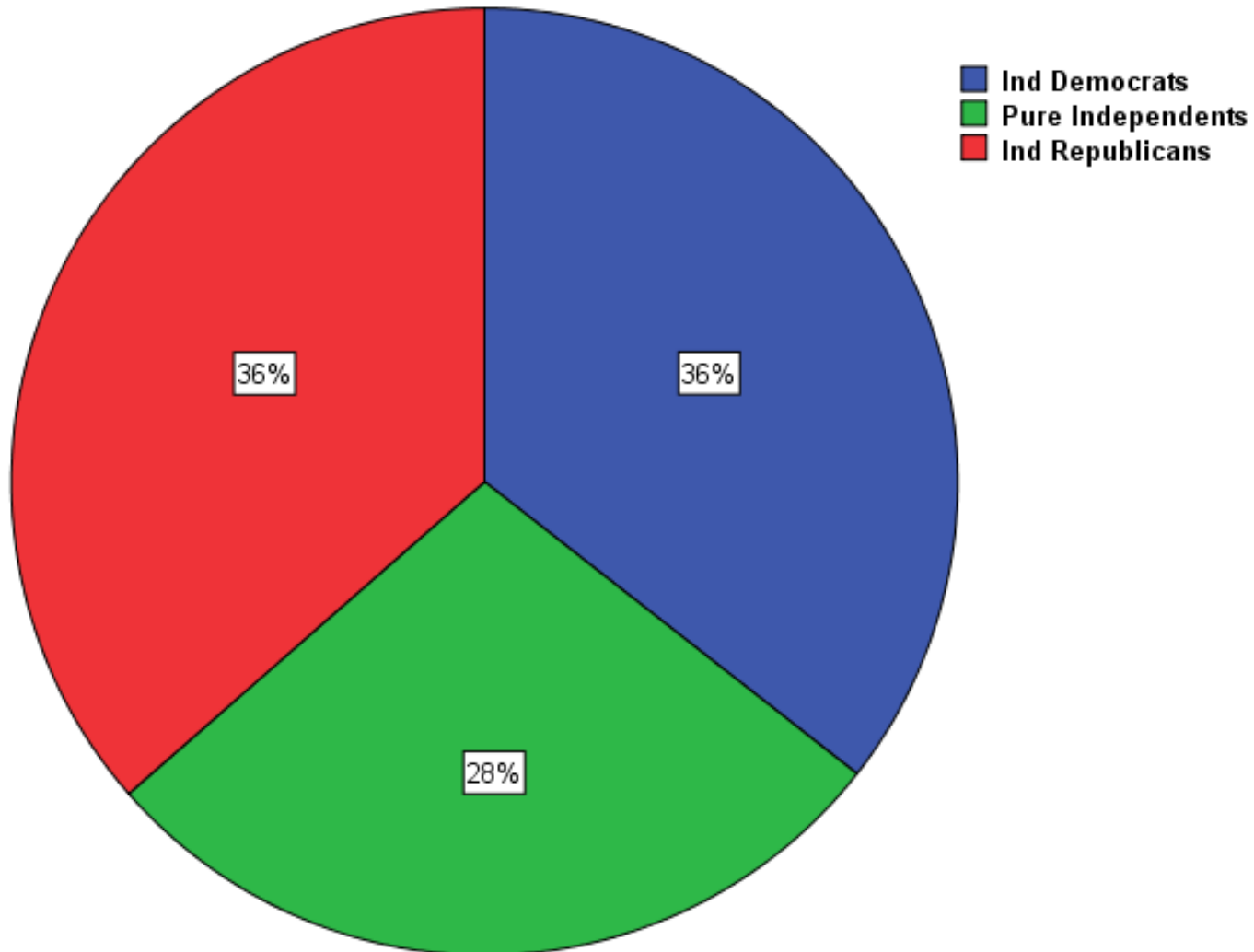
# A Strongly Partisan Electorate

- The highest party loyalty in the history of the ANES
  - 93% of Democrats voted for Obama
  - 93% of Republicans voted for Romney
- The lowest rates of ticket-splitting in the history of the ANES
  - 90% voted for same party for President and U.S. House
  - 89% voted for same party for President and U.S. Senate
  - 87% voted for the same party for U.S. House and U.S. Senate

**What about all those voters who describe themselves as independents or register as independents?**

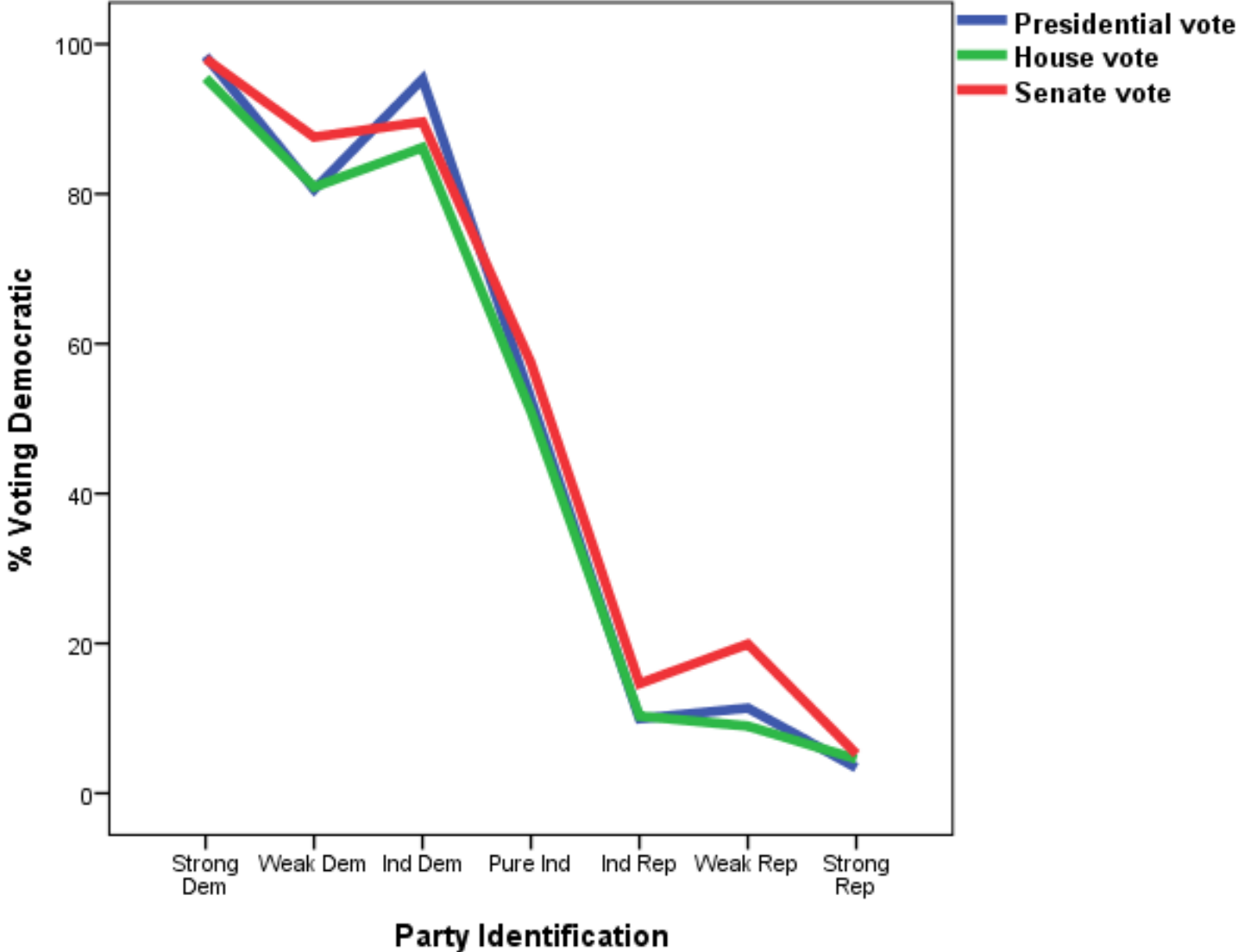


# The overwhelming majority of independent voters lean toward a party



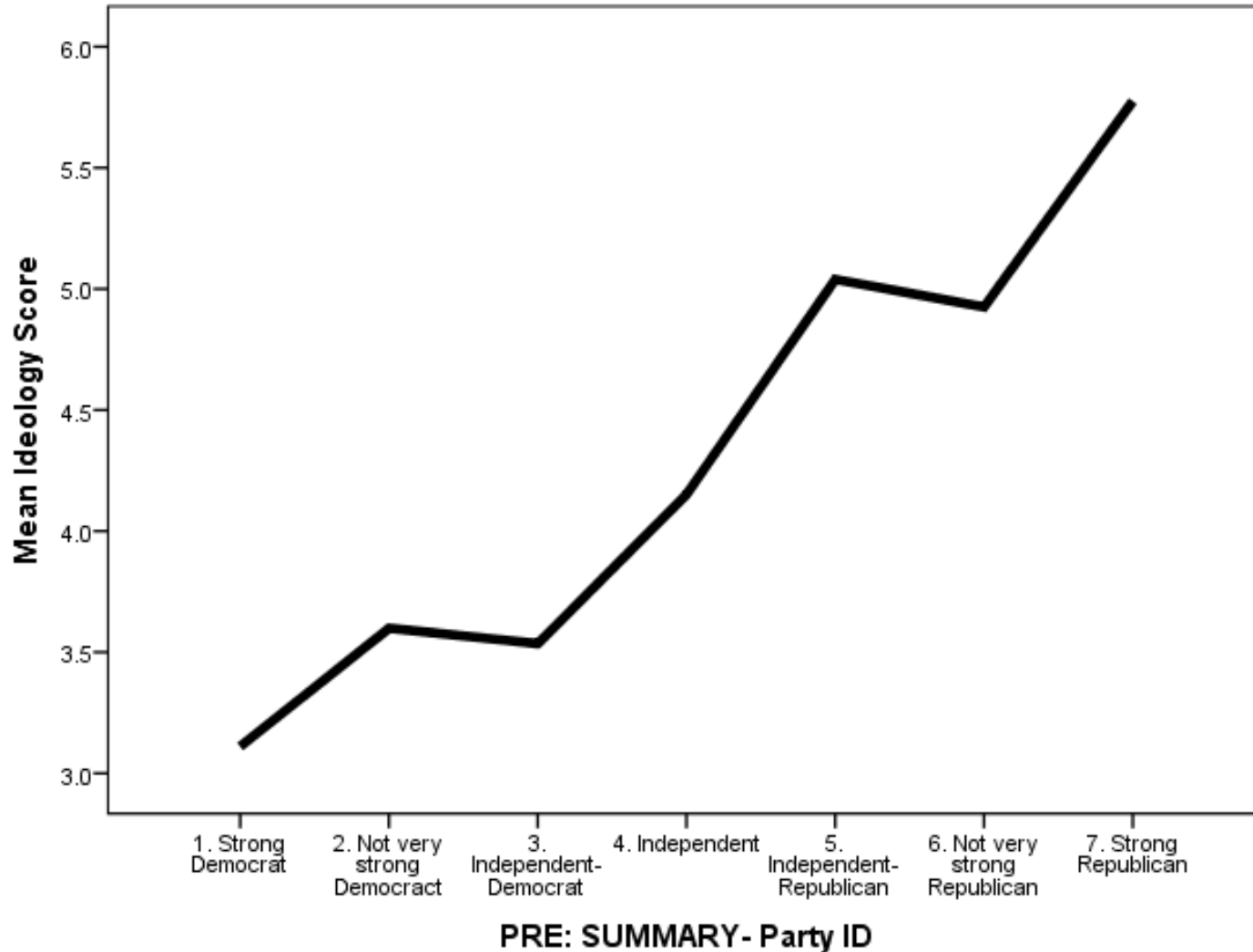
Source: 2012 ANES

# Leaning independents voted very similarly to regular partisans in 2012

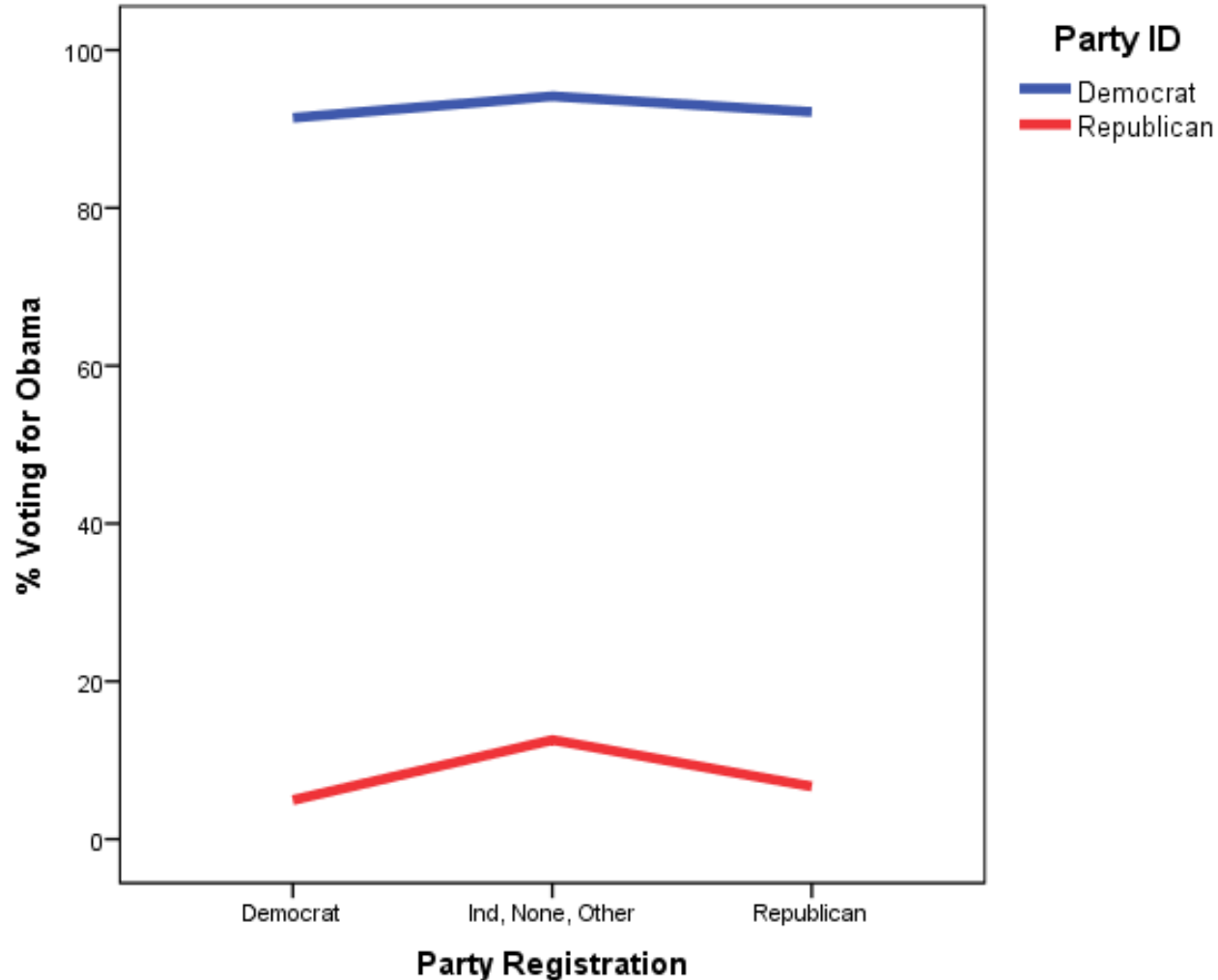


Source: 2012 ANES

# And held opinions very similar to those of regular partisans



# Party registration had no effect on vote choice after controlling for party identification



Source: 2012 ANES



# Partisan Divide Reflects Deeper Divisions in American Society

- The Racial Divide: As the nation has grown more diverse, the parties have diverged along racial lines
- The Cultural Divide: A deep divide over lifestyles, values and morality
- The Ideological Divide: Democrats and Republicans differ sharply on a wide range of issues, especially the proper role and size of government

# **A Growing Racial Divide Between The Parties**

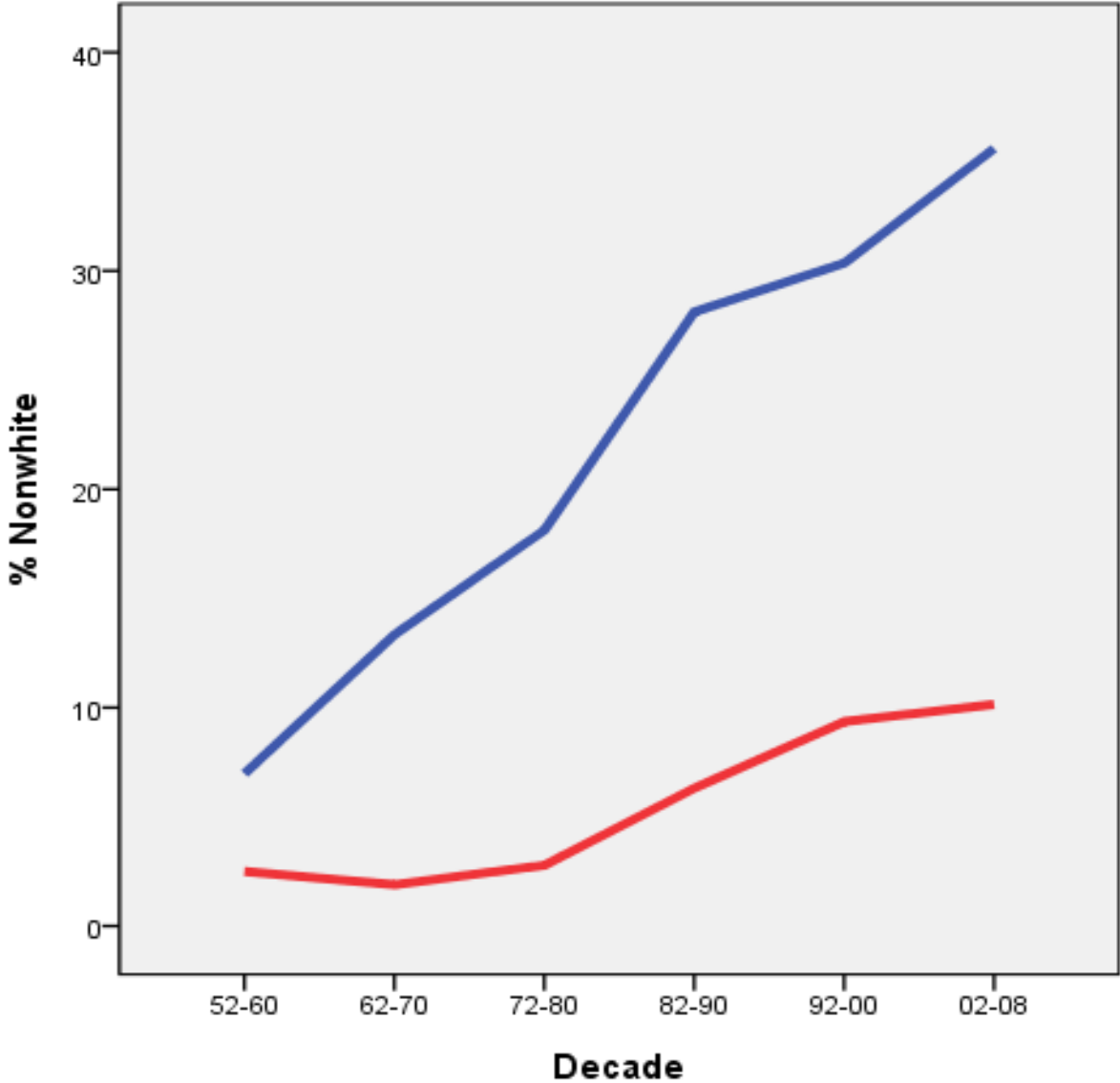








# Nonwhite Share of Democratic and Republican Voters by Decade

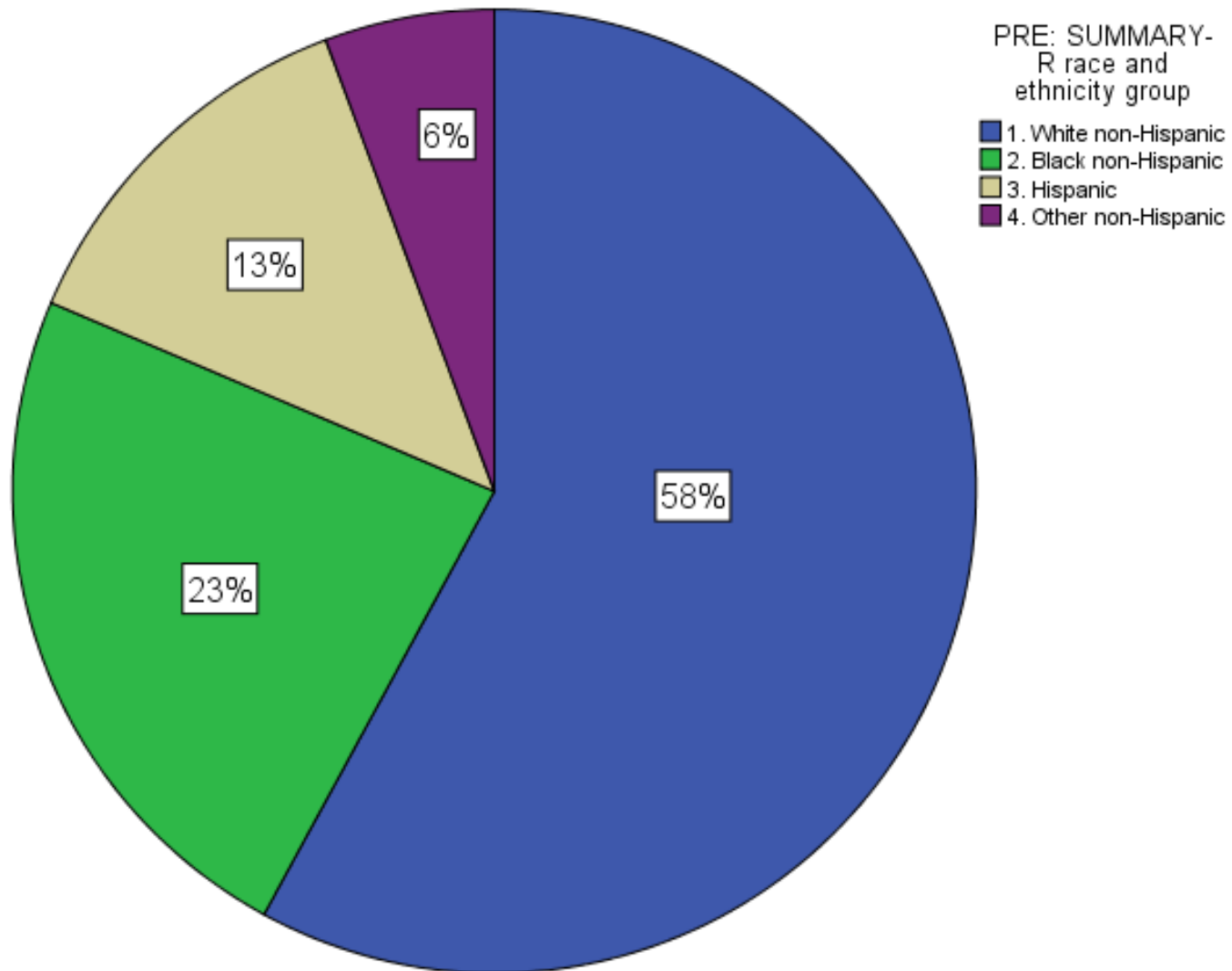


Source: ANES Cumulative File

# The Racial Divide in 2012

- Nonwhites made up 28 percent of the electorate, up from 13 percent in 1992
- Romney won the white vote by a margin of 20 points—59 percent to 39 percent
- Obama won the nonwhite vote by a margin of 62 points—80 percent to 18 percent
- Nonwhites made up 45 percent of Obama voters vs. 11 percent of Romney voters

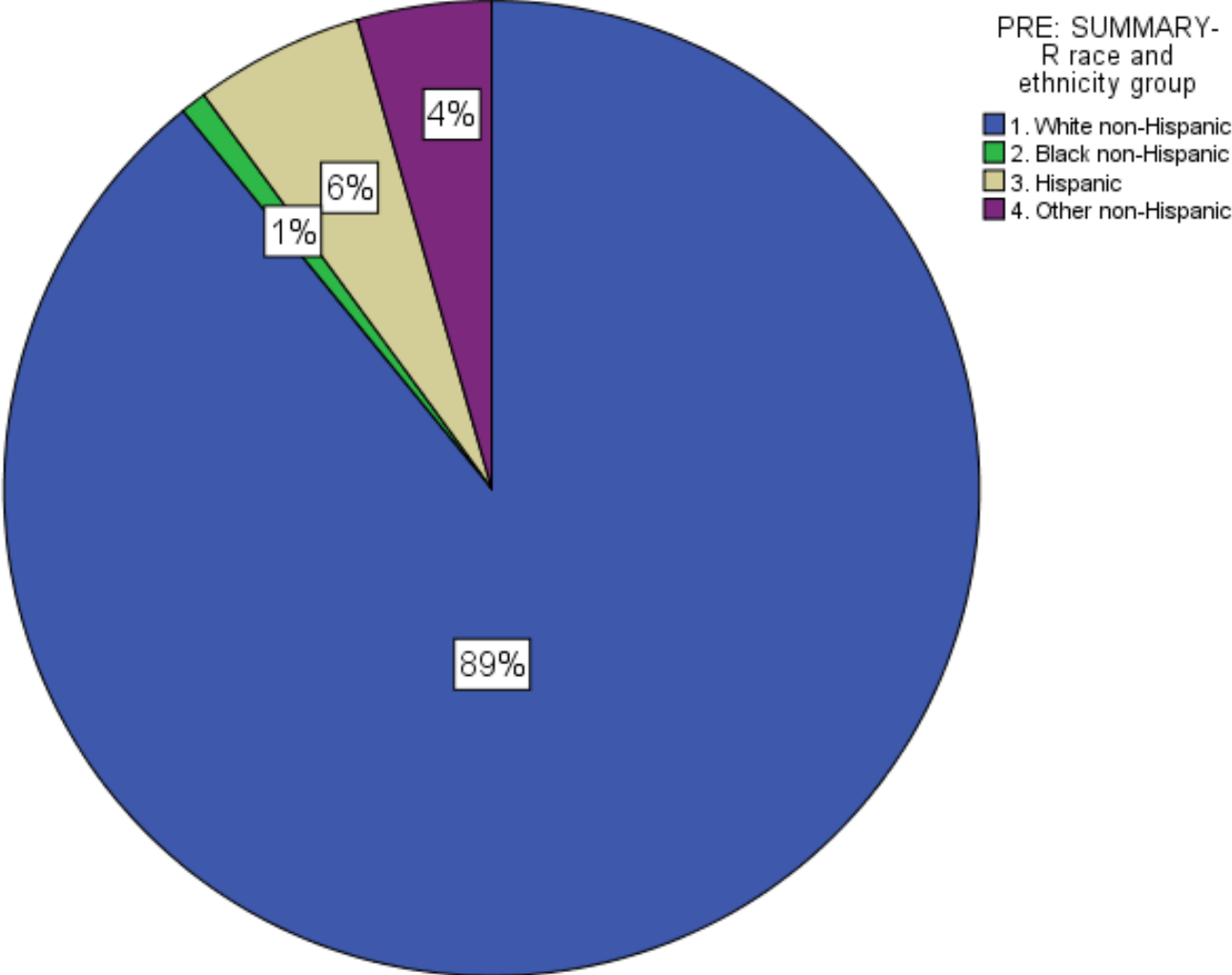
# Racial Composition of Obama Vote in 2012



Source: 2012 ANES



# Racial Composition of Romney Vote in 2012

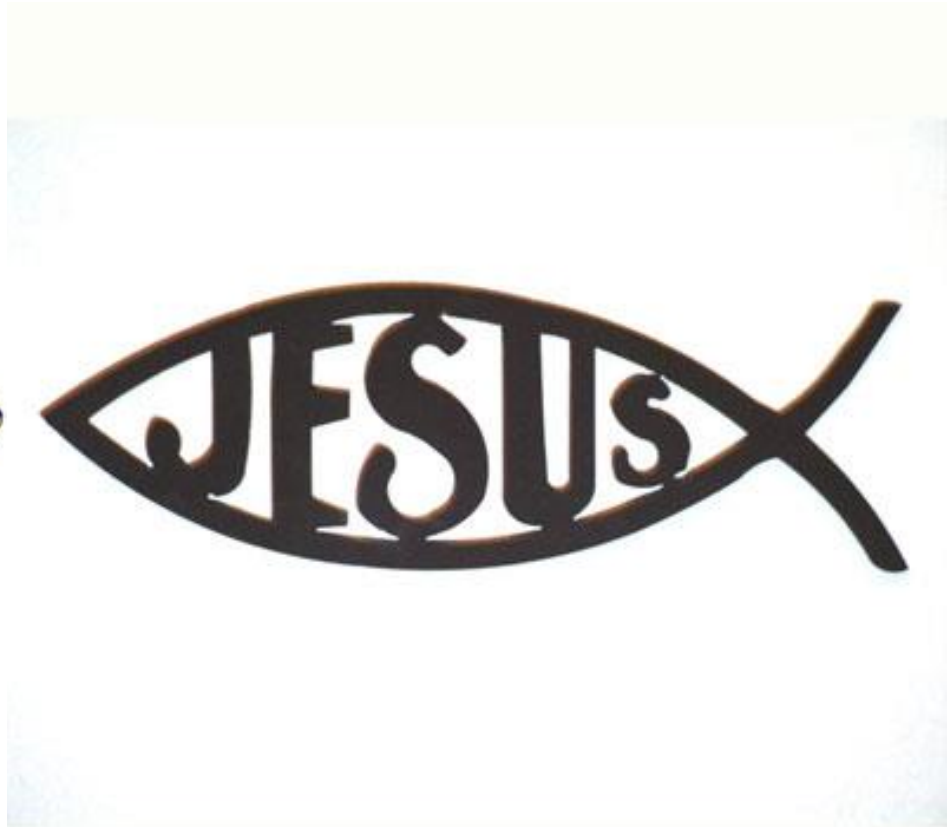


Source: 2012 ANES

# The Ideological Divide

- 81% of those favoring a larger role for government voted for Obama
- 74% of those favoring a smaller role for government voted for Romney
- 87% of those wanting the health care law preserved or expanded voted for Obama
- 83% of those wanting the health care law partially or completely repealed voted for Romney

# The Cultural Divide in 2012



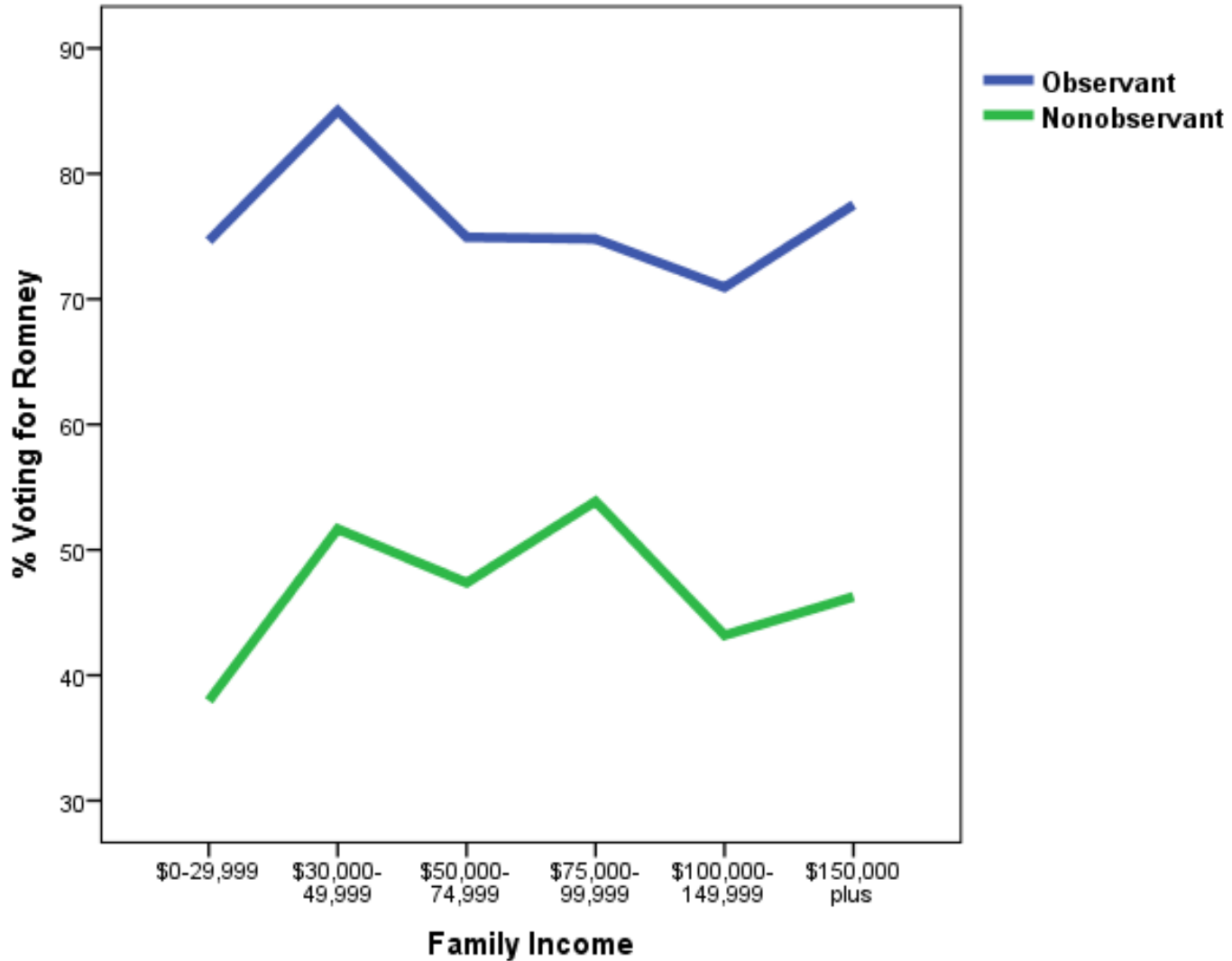
# The Cultural Divide in 2012

- White evangelical or born-again Christians made up 26% of the electorate—they voted for Romney over Obama by 78% to 21%
- Voters whose religious affiliation was “something else” or “none” made up 19% of the electorate—they voted for Obama over Romney by 72% to 25%
- Gay, lesbian and bisexual voters favored Obama over Romney by 76% to 22%

# The Cultural Divide (continued)

- Pro-choice voters favored Obama over Romney by 67% to 31%
- Pro-life voters favored Romney over Obama by 77% to 21%
- Supporters of same-sex marriage favored Obama over Romney by 73% to 25%
- Opponents of same-sex marriage favored Romney over Obama by 74% to 25%

# Romney Vote by Religious Observance and Family Income among Whites



Source: 2012 ANES

## Diverging Party Coalitions, 1972-2012

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	Democratic Voters		Republican Voters	
	1972	2012	1972	2012
Nonwhites	17%	42%	3%	12%
White Liberals	22	32	10	2
White Moderates	43	21	42	18
White Conservatives	18	6	45	68

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Note: Respondents who opted out of ideology question coded as moderates.

Sources: American National Election Studies surveys

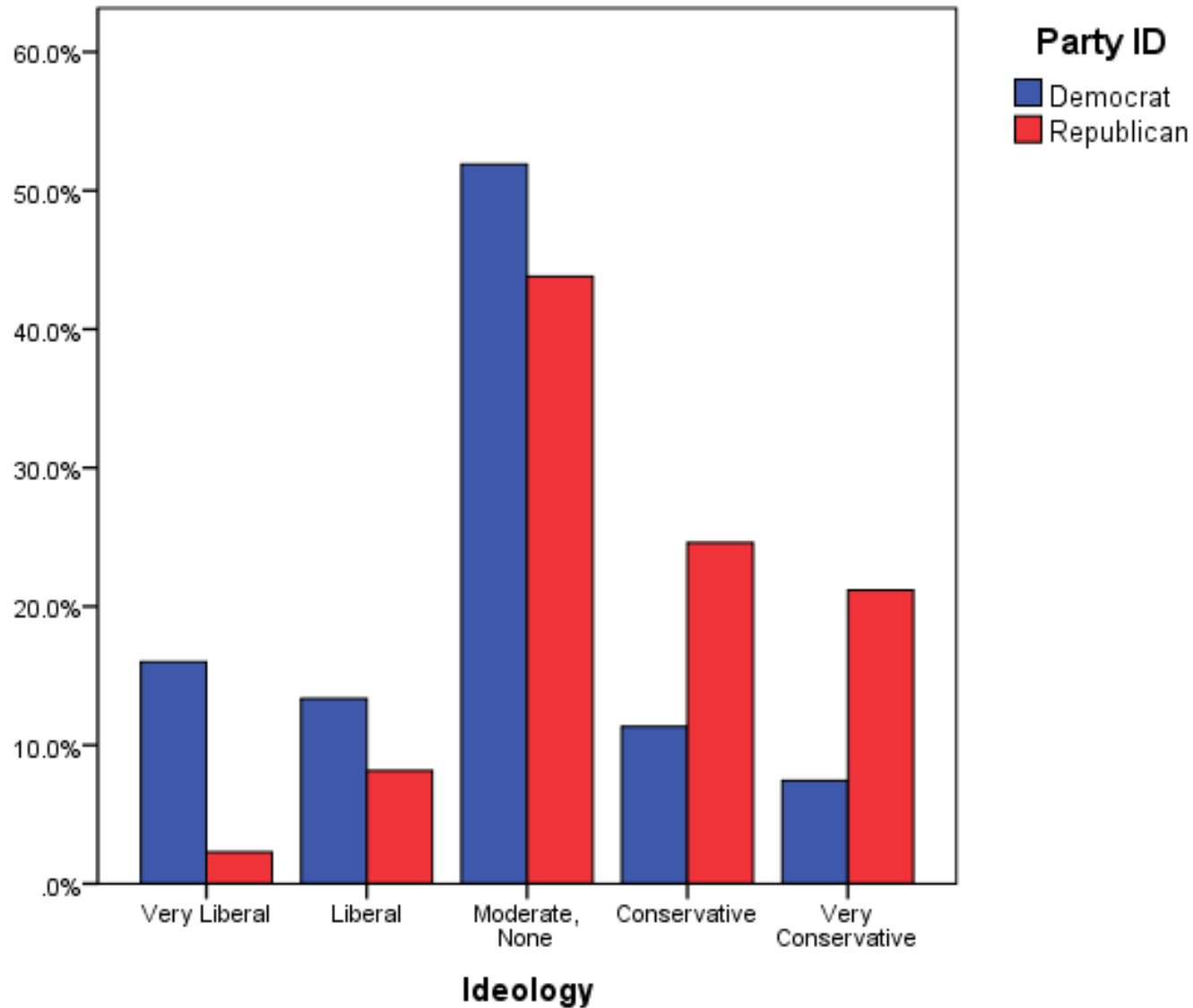
# Are we just better sorted?



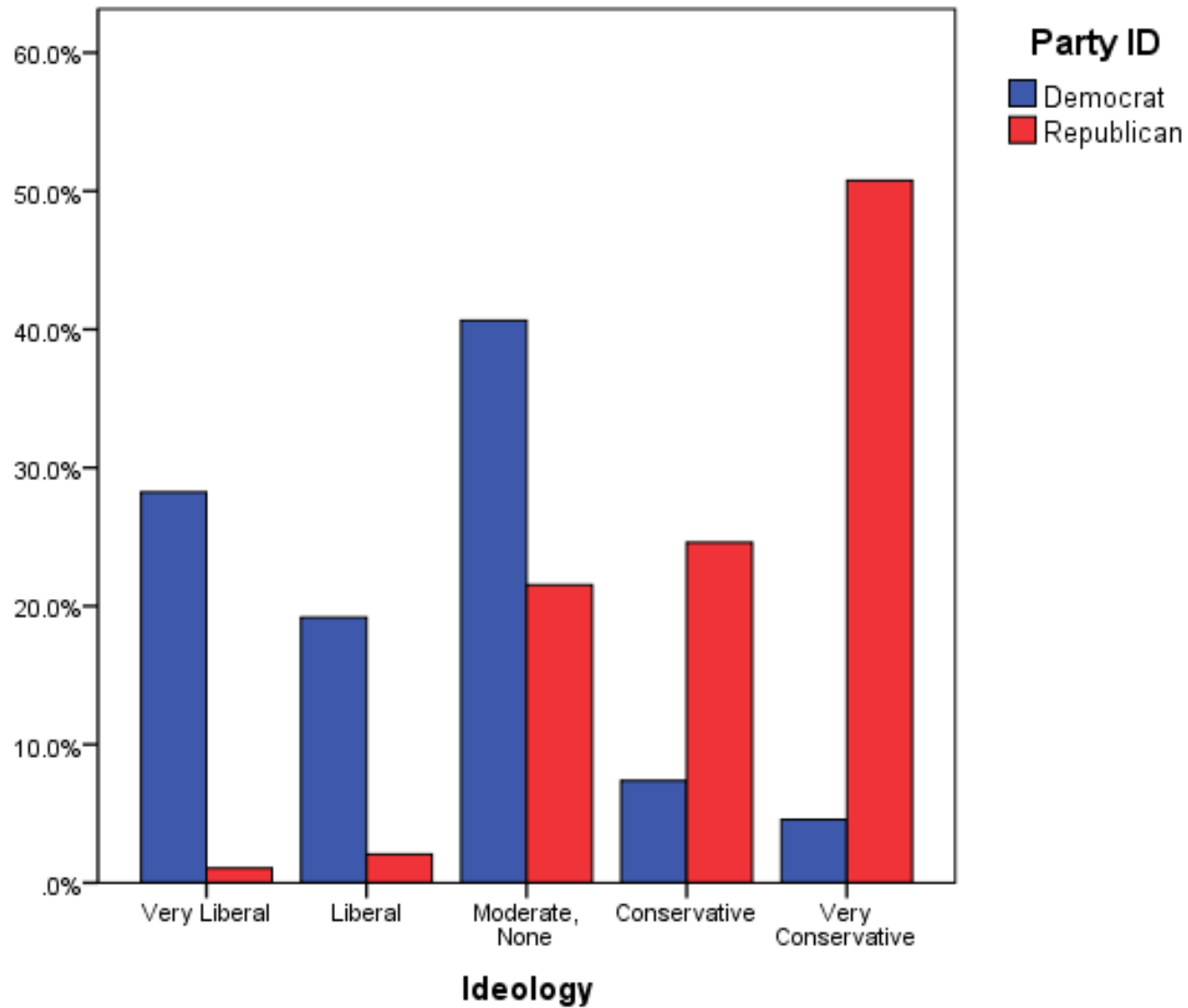


**NO!**

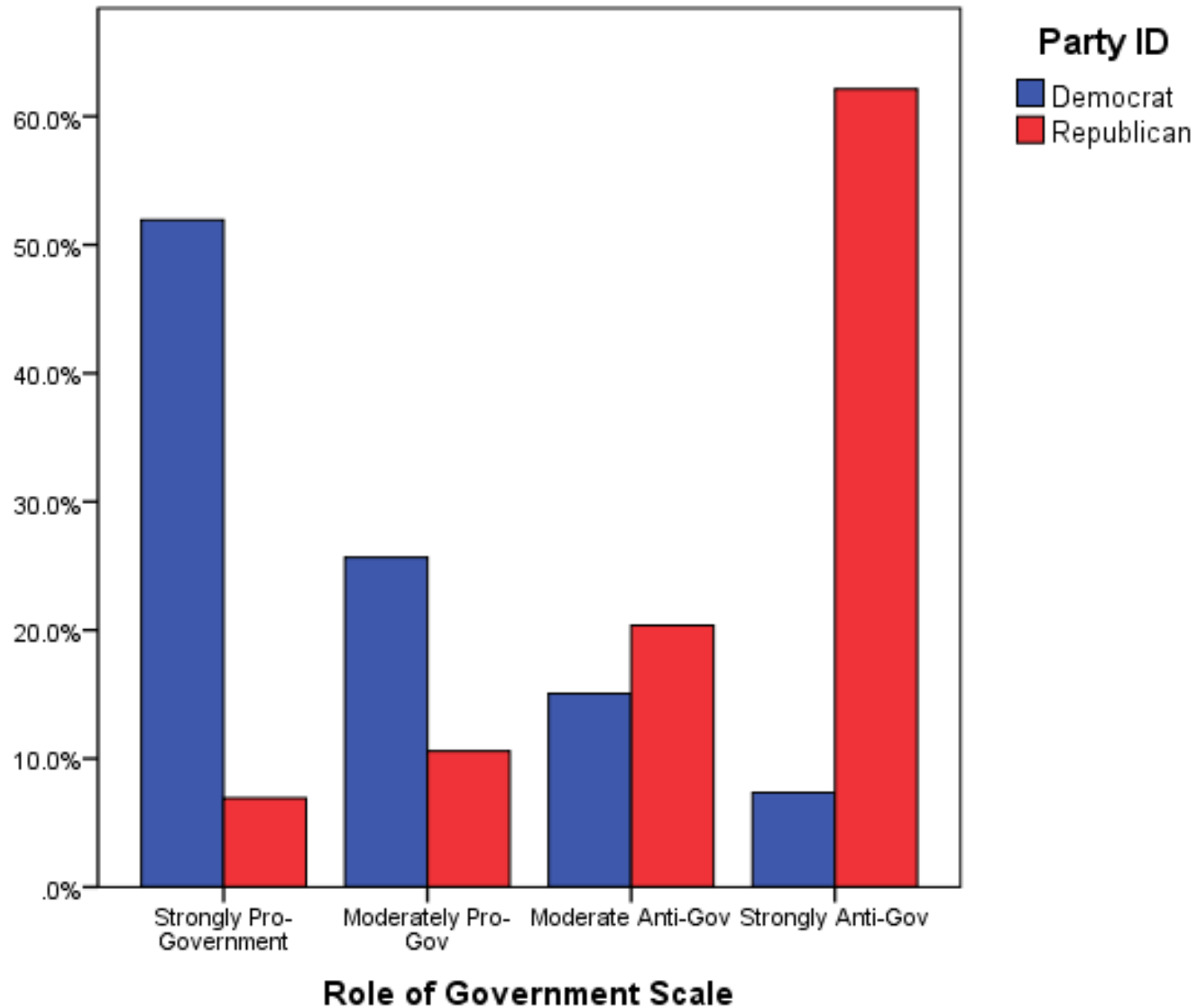
# Asymmetric Polarization: Ideology by Party ID 1972



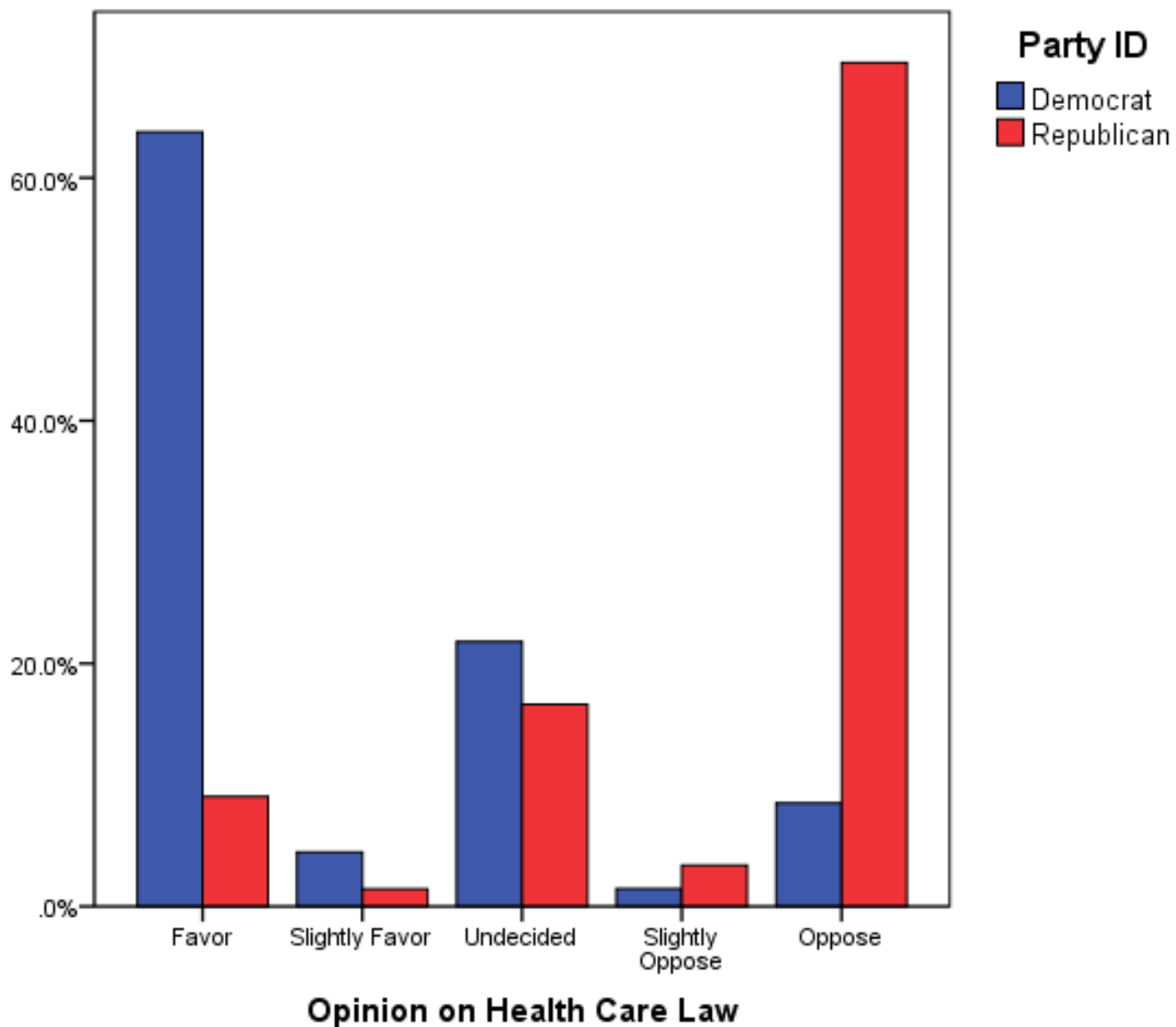
# 2012



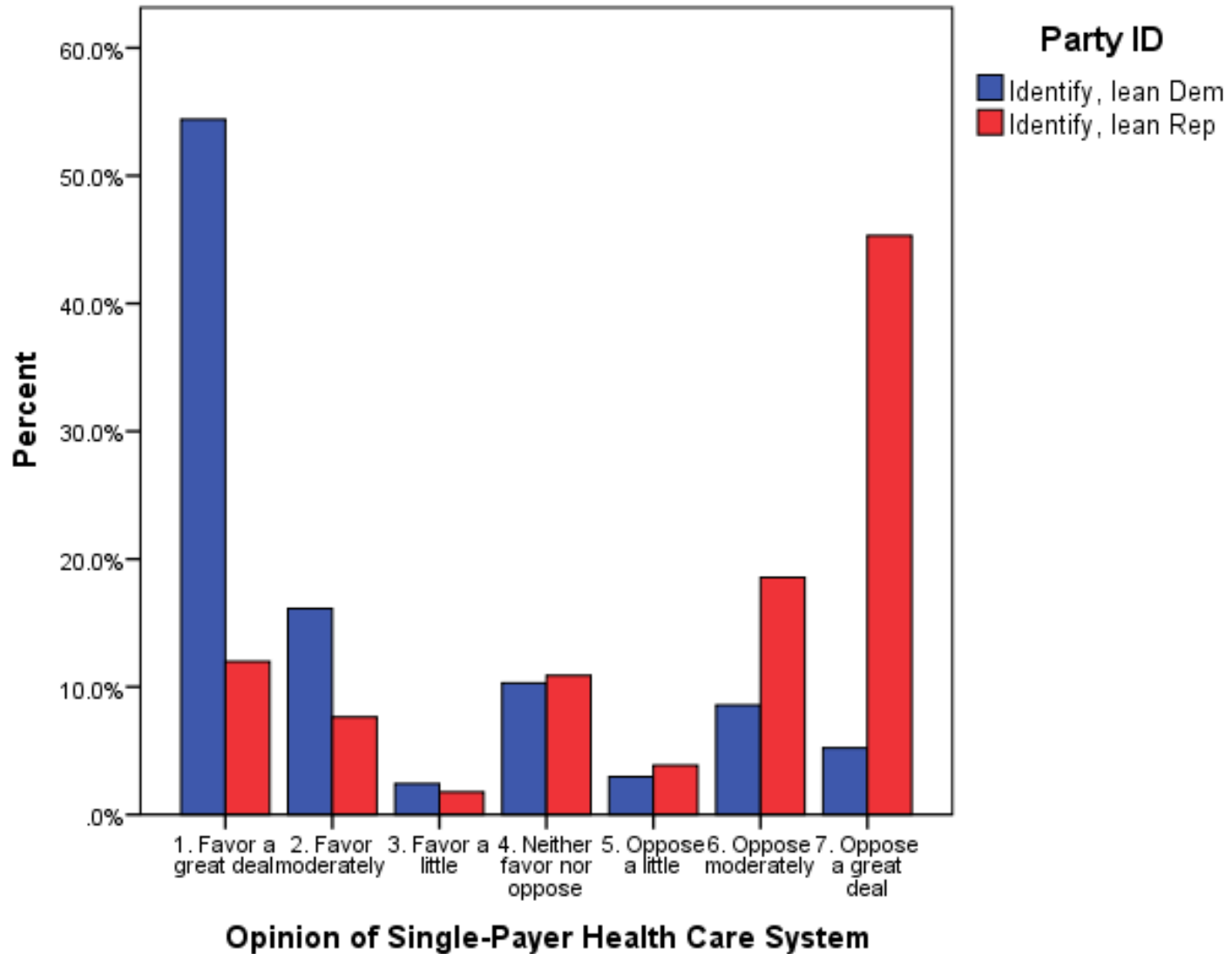
# More Symmetric Polarization: Role of Government Scale by Party ID in 2012



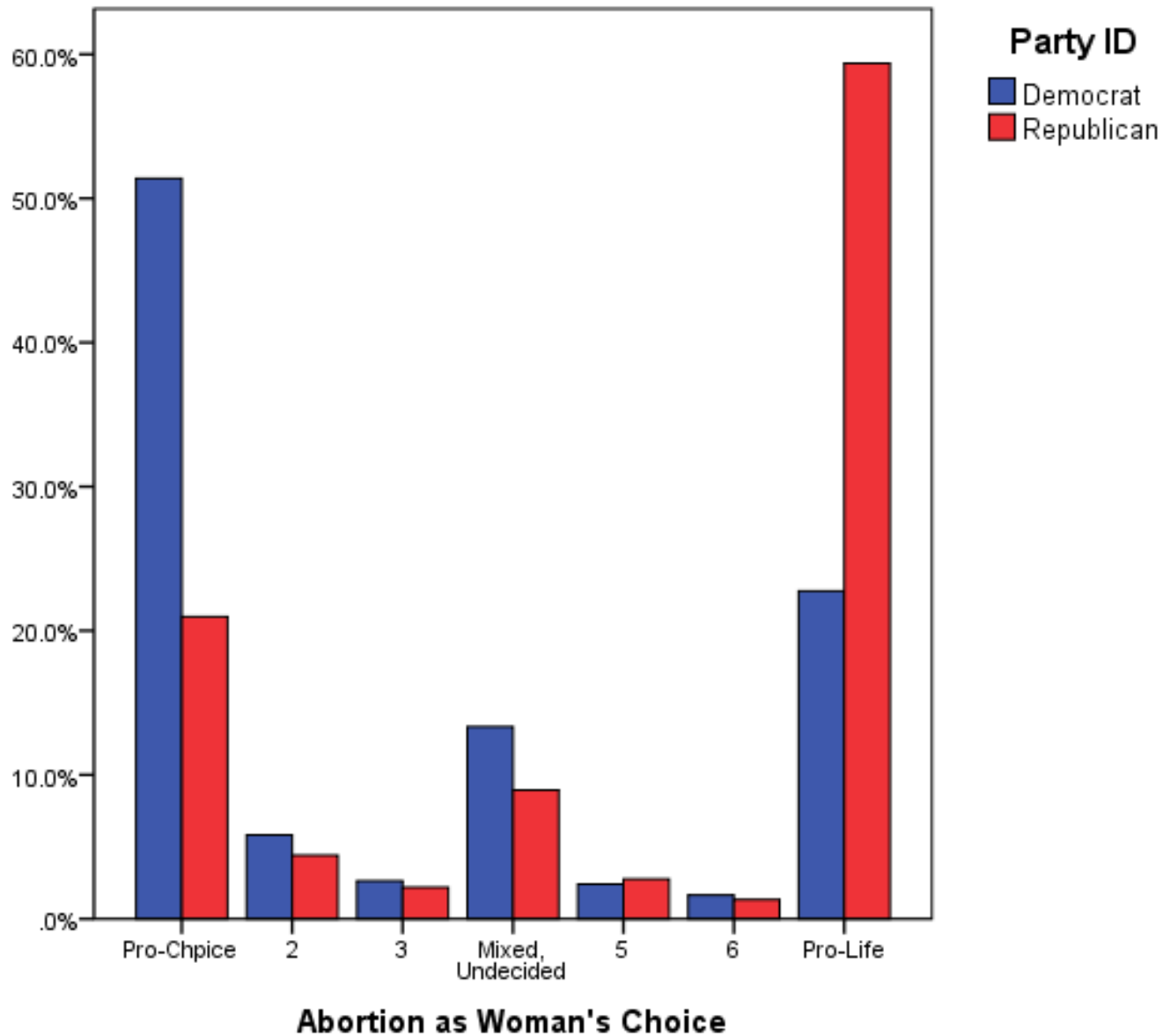
# Opinion on ACA by Party ID in 2012



# Opinion on Single-Payer Health Care System in 2008



# Opinion on Abortion as Woman's Choice in 2012



# Growing Consistency of Opinions

## Correlations of Social Welfare Policy Attitudes in 1984

		aidblks7new	ghins7new	gspend7new	gjobs7new	libcon7new
aidblks7new	Pearson Correlation	1	.132**	.273**	.384**	.246**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1457	715	1455	1455	1455
ghins7new	Pearson Correlation	.132**	1	.287**	.295**	.204**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	715	718	715	714	716
gspend7new	Pearson Correlation	.273**	.287**	1	.389**	.282**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	1455	715	1455	1453	1453
gjobs7new	Pearson Correlation	.384**	.295**	.389**	1	.282**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	1455	714	1453	1456	1454
libcon7new	Pearson Correlation	.246**	.204**	.282**	.282**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	1455	716	1453	1454	1457

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Average correlation among issues = .29

Average correlation with ideology = .25



## Correlations of Social Welfare Policy Attitudes in 2012

		aidblks7new	ghins7new	gjobs7new	gspend7new	libcon7new
aidblks7new	Pearson Correlation	1	.447**	.513**	.475**	.405**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	4258	4244	4249	3891	4242
ghins7new	Pearson Correlation	.447**	1	.498**	.555**	.534**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	4244	4269	4261	3901	4253
gjobs7new	Pearson Correlation	.513**	.498**	1	.524**	.441**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	4249	4261	4275	3906	4262
gspend7new	Pearson Correlation	.475**	.555**	.524**	1	.518**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	3891	3901	3906	3912	3904
libcon7new	Pearson Correlation	.405**	.534**	.441**	.518**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	4242	4253	4262	3904	4268

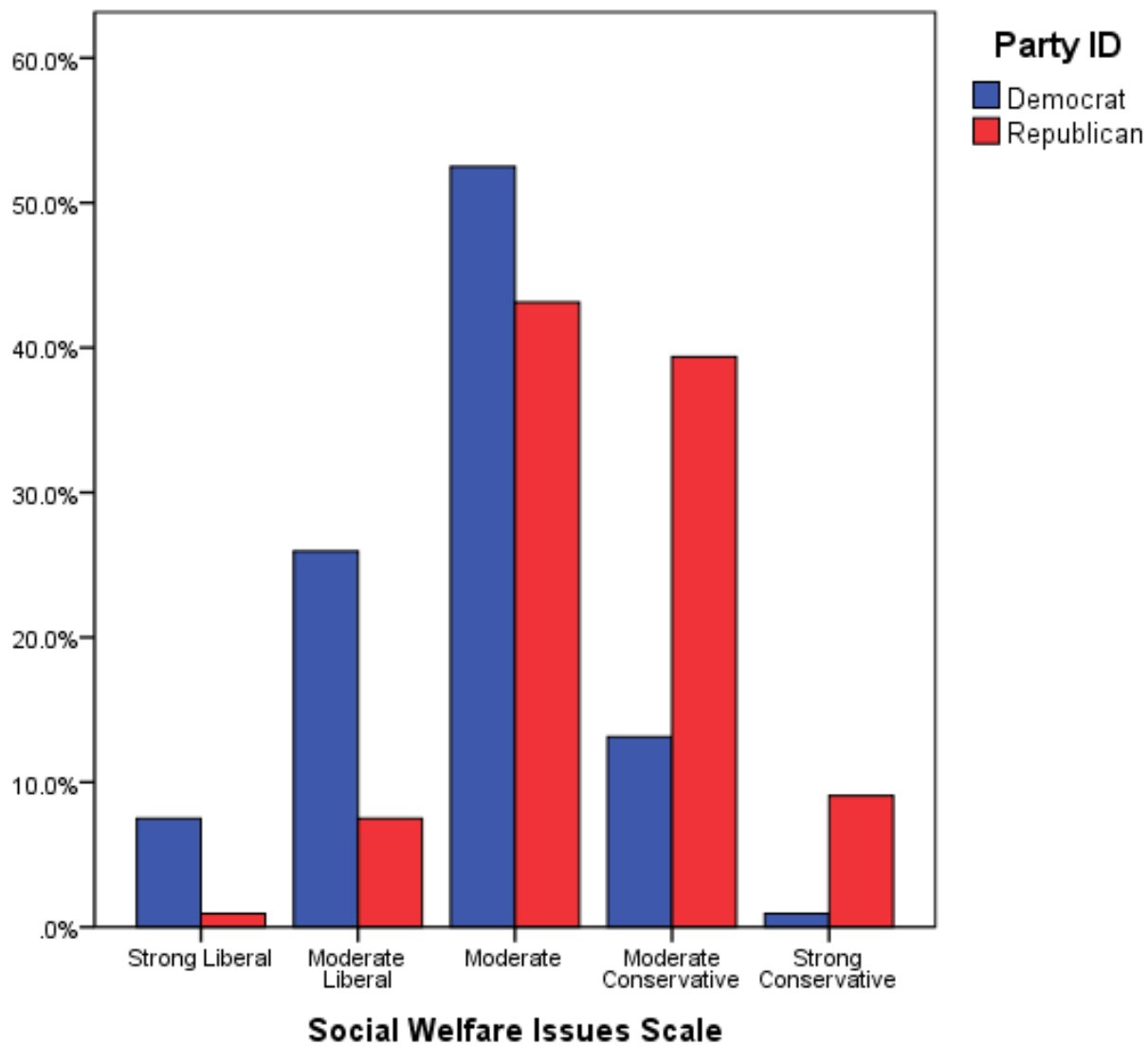
\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Average correlation among issues = .50

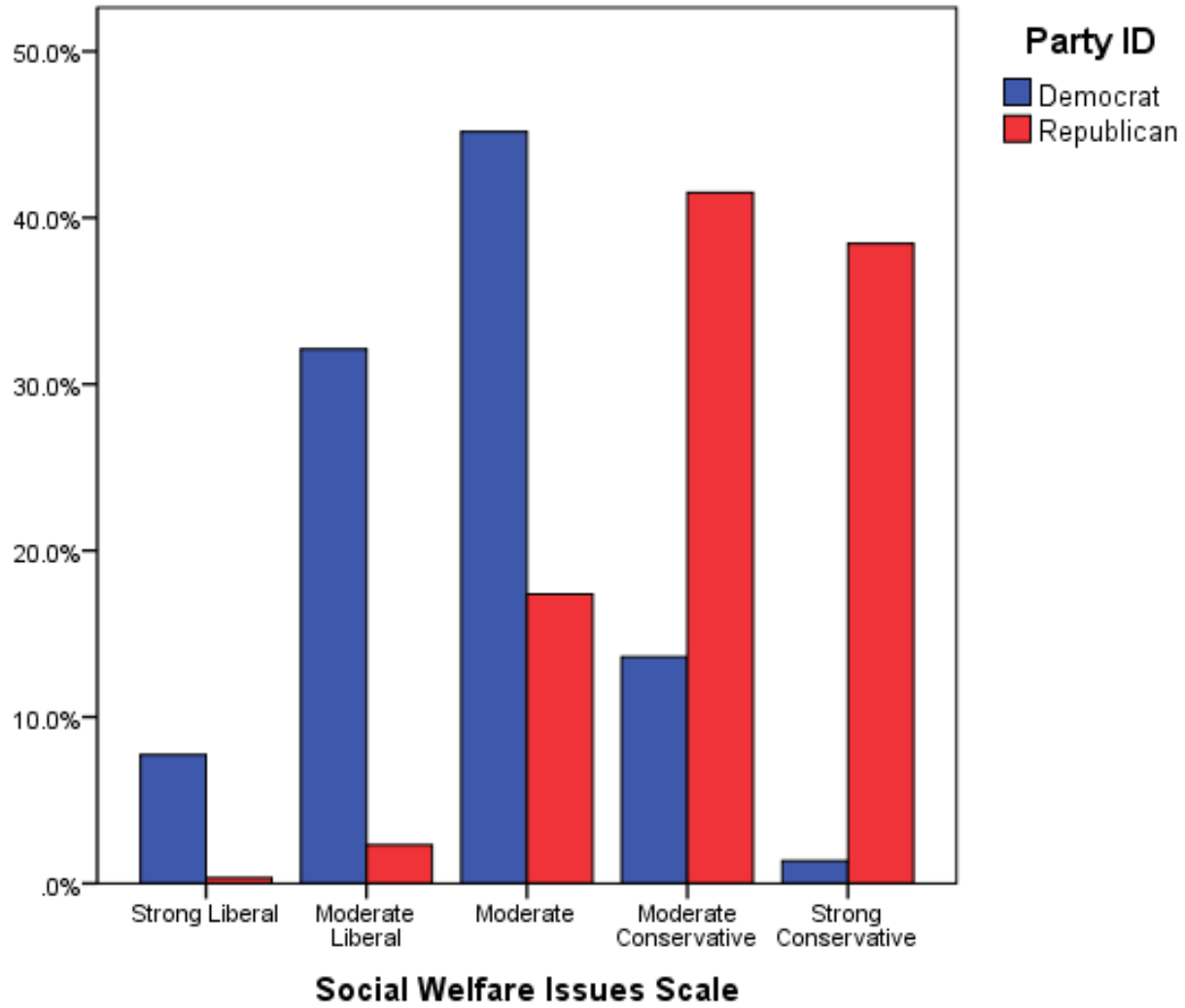
Average correlation with ideology = .47

# Asymmetric Polarization Again: Social Welfare Issue Scale by Party Identification

1984

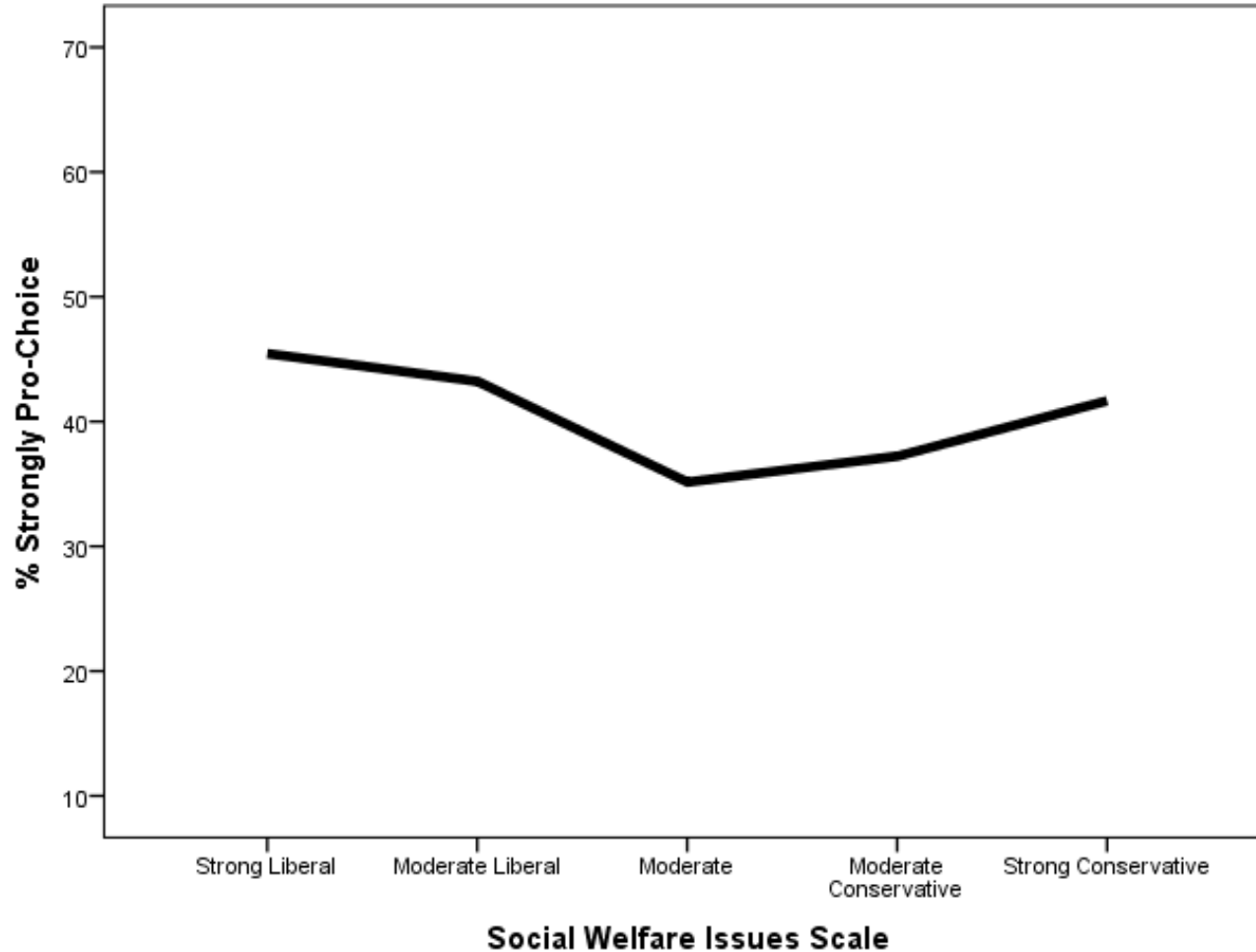


2012



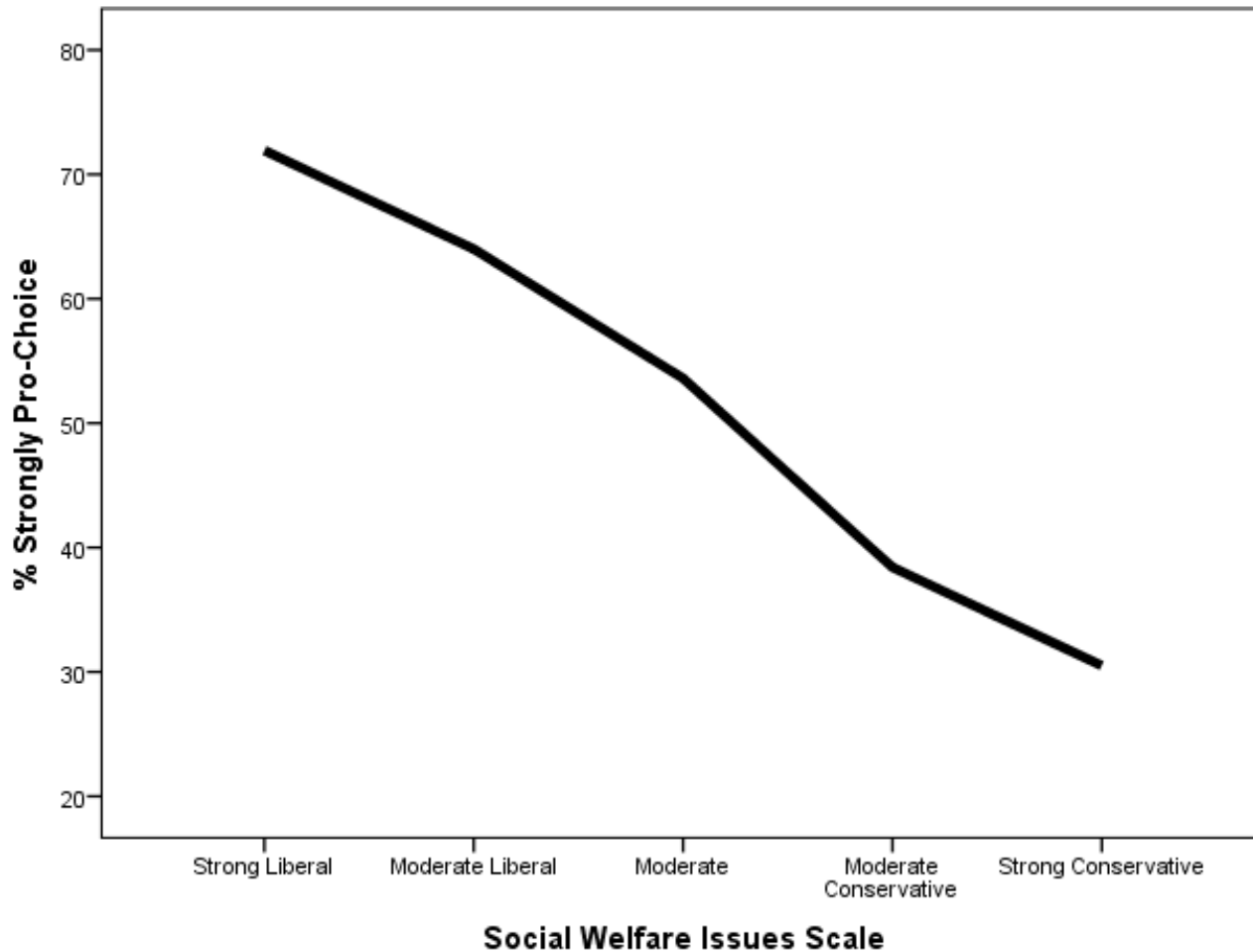
# And growing consistency between social welfare attitudes and cultural attitudes

1984

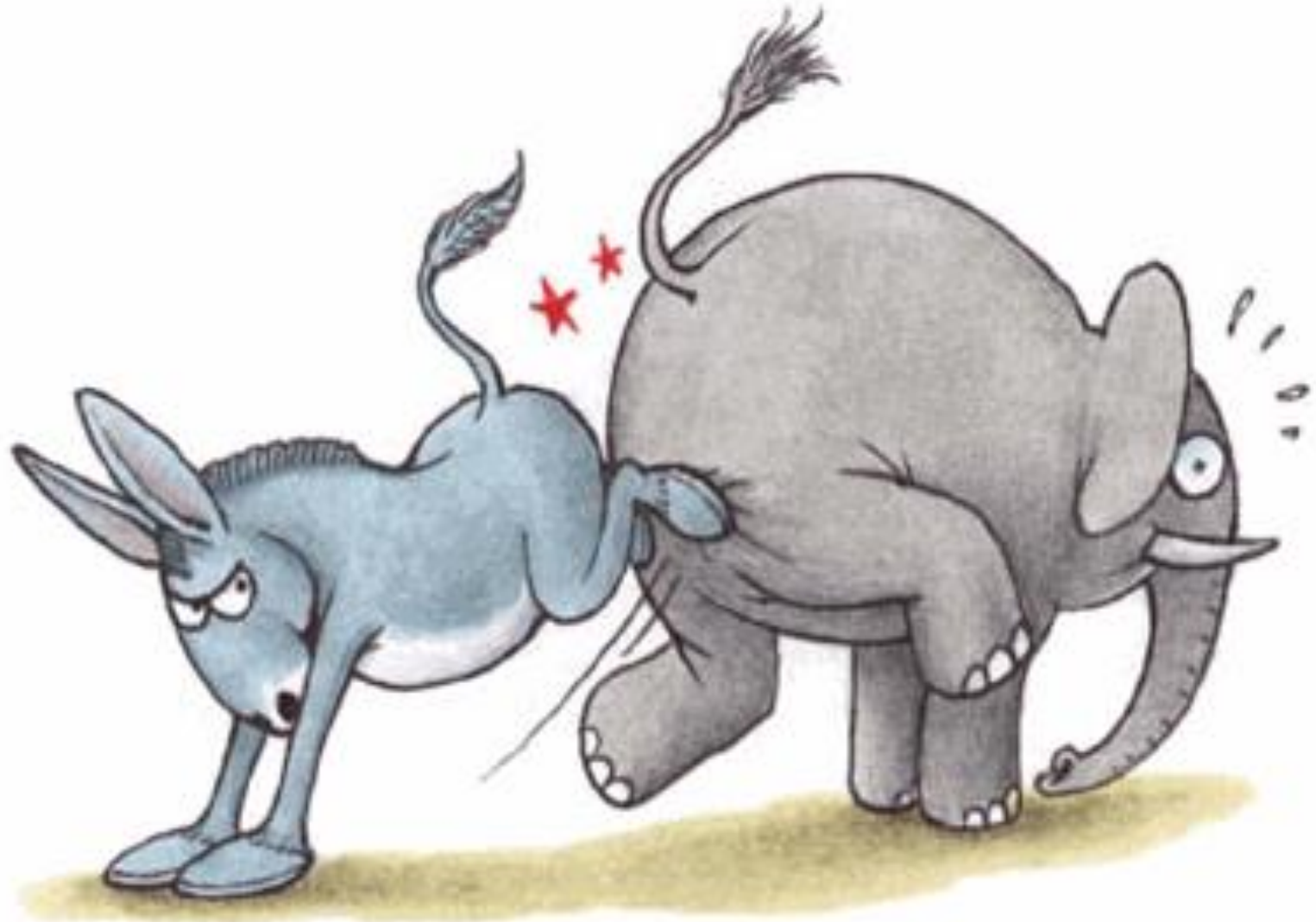


# And growing consistency between social welfare attitudes and cultural attitudes

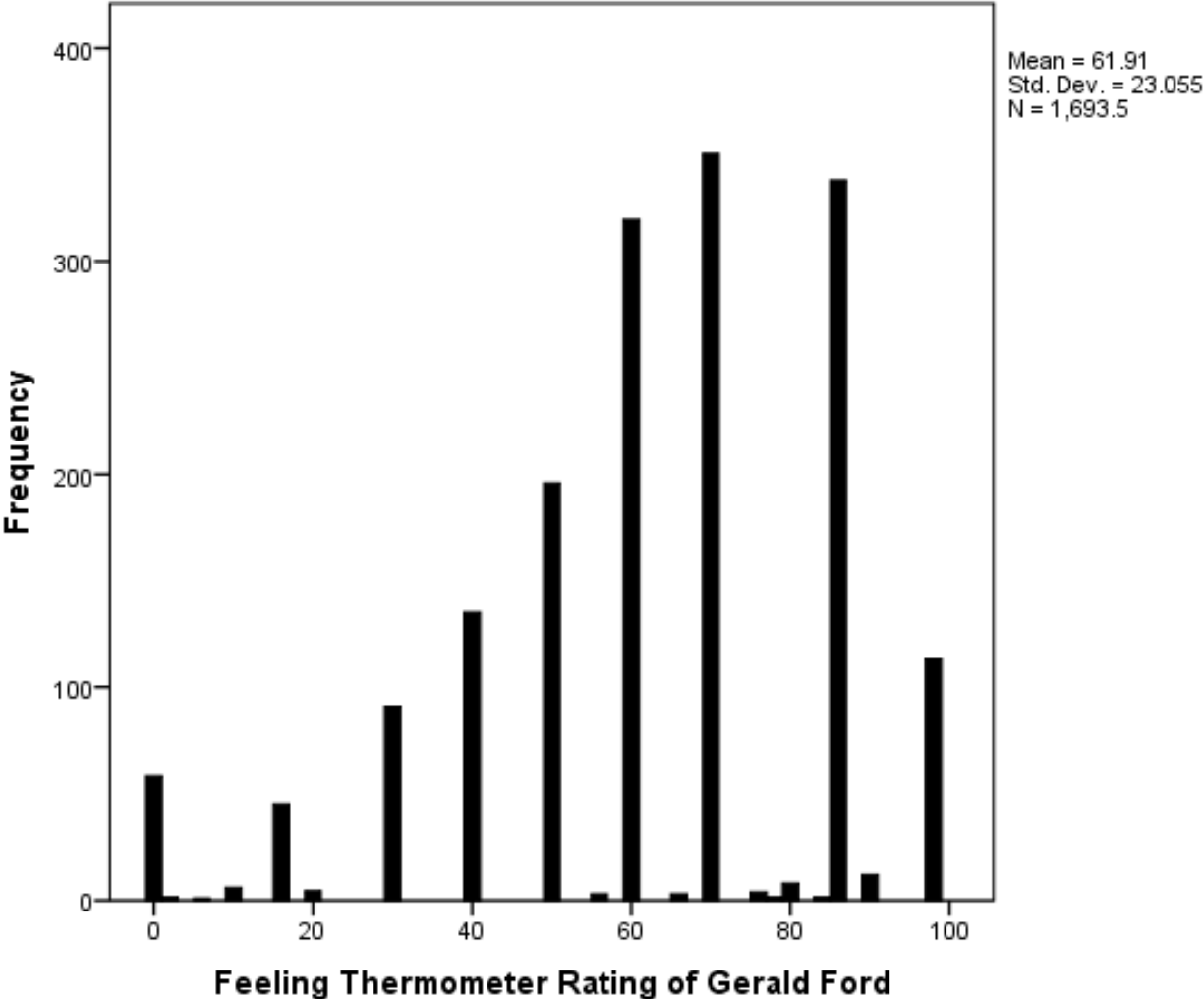
2012



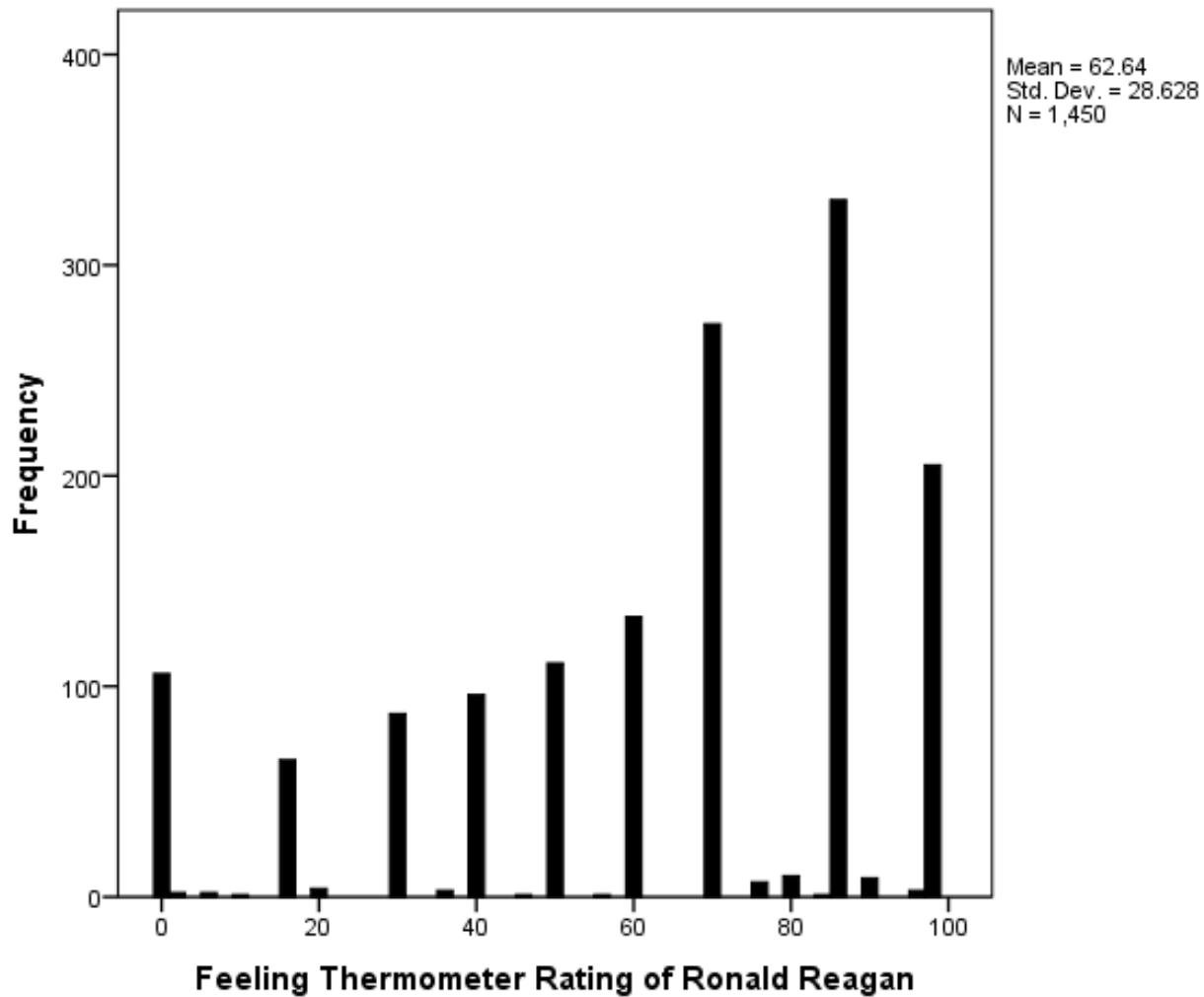
# Growing Affective Polarization



# Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Gerald Ford in 1976

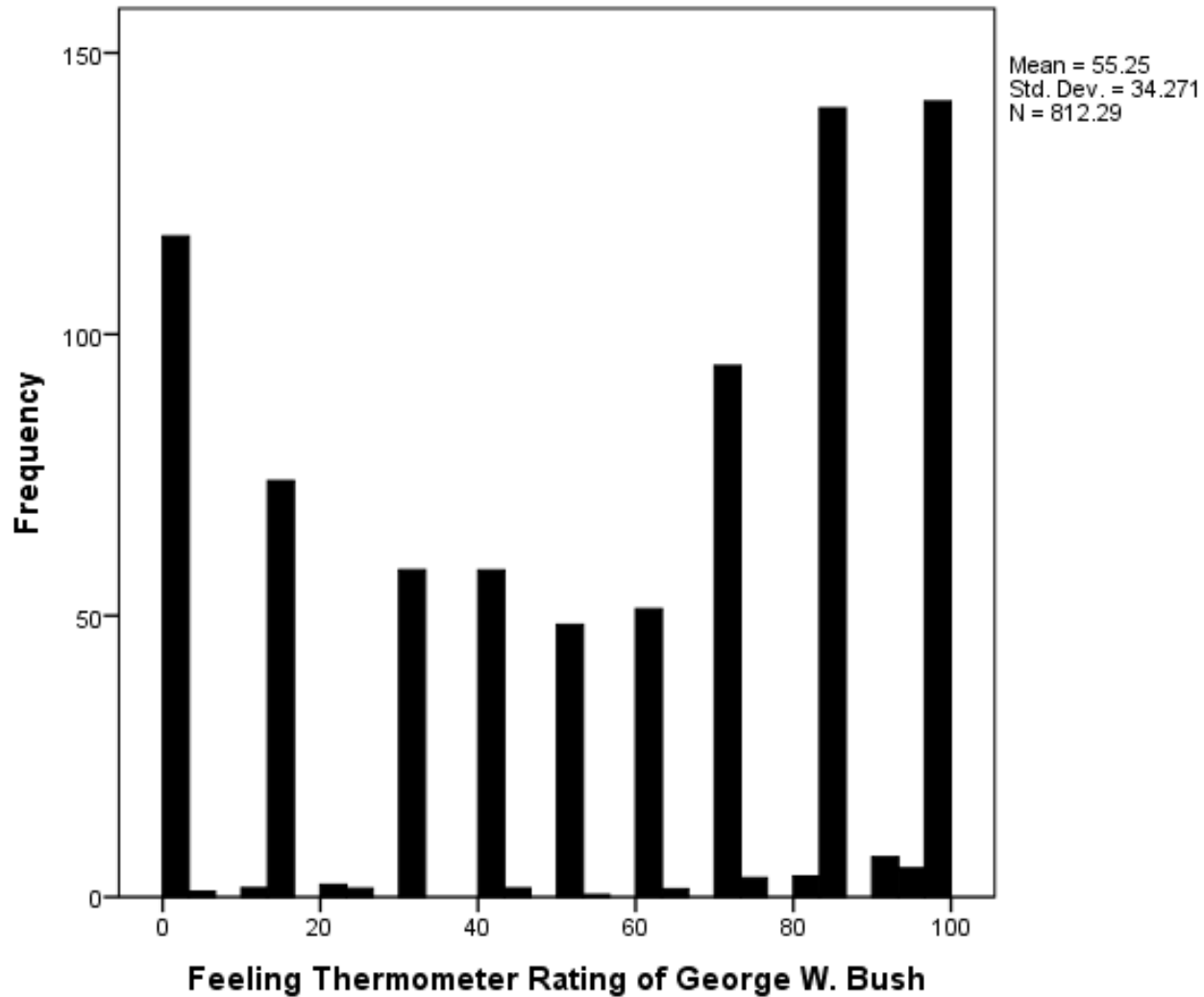


# Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Ronald Reagan in 1984

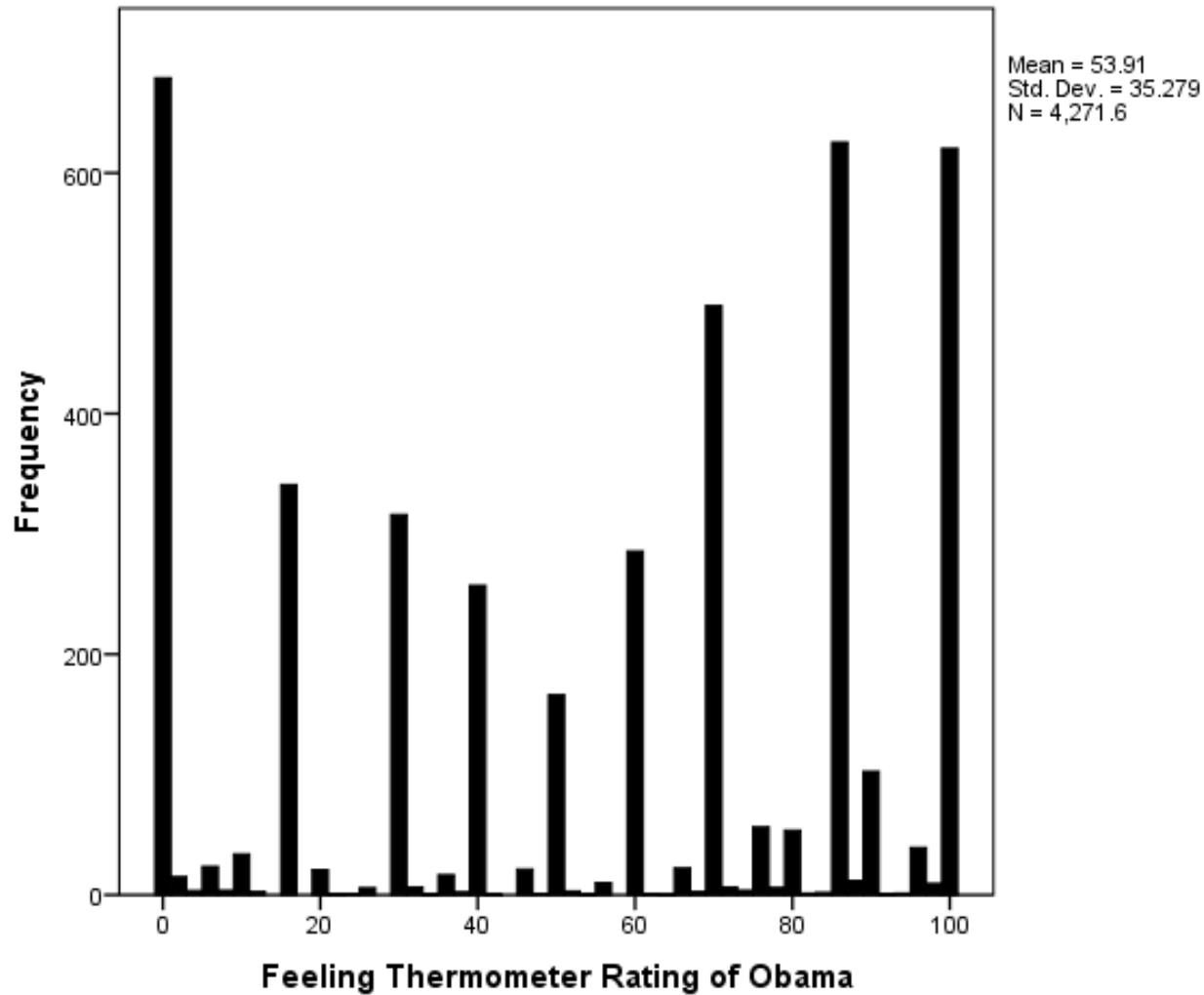




# Feeling Thermometer Ratings of George W. Bush in 2004



# Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Barack Obama in 2012



## Correlations of Presidential Feeling Thermometer Ratings with Party Identification and Ideology

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### Correlation of Feeling Thermometer with

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Year	President	Party ID	Ideology
1976	Ford	.47	.29
1984	Reagan	.65	.45
2004	Bush	.76	.60
2012	Obama	.77	.63

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Source: American National Election Studies

# Conclusions

- The U.S. has entered a new era of electoral competition characterized by a close divide between the parties in the nation, increasing nationalization of state and local elections, and one-party domination of many states and legislative districts
- These new patterns of electoral competition result from a strongly partisan and polarized electorate divided along racial, ideological and cultural lines
- The deep partisan divide in Washington reflects the deep partisan divide in the American electorate