The Polarized American Electorate: The Rise of Partisan-Ideological Consistency and Its Consequences

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POLITICAL PARTIES AND ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES have changed dramatically since the publication of Philip Converse's seminal work on ideological thinking in the American electorate in the 1950s and 1960s.[1] The ideological divide between Democratic and Republican elites in Washington and in most states has turned into a deep chasm in the twenty-first century. There is no longer any ideological overlap between the parties in Congress as liberal Republicans and

[1]Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 206–261.

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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY | Volume 137 Number 4 2022 | www.psqonline.org
© 2022 Academy of Political Science. DOI: 10.1002/polq.13388

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conservative Democrats have disappeared and moderates have become an endangered species.[2] At the same time, elections have become highly nationalized, with voters increasingly basing their House and Senate choices on their feelings toward the national parties and their leaders, especially the president.[3] As ticket splitting has fallen to its lowest level in decades, the electoral advantage of incumbency has shrunk considerably.[4]

These changes in the party system and elections have coincided with equally dramatic changes in the political attitudes of ordinary Americans. In recent years, a growing share of Americans have come to see politics as a form of warfare, with elections viewed as contests between the forces of good and evil. Partisans increasingly view supporters of the opposing party not as opponents but as enemies: bad actors who want to inflict harm on the nation and who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals.[5]

While Donald Trump did much to encourage this Manichaean view of politics, its growth can be traced back to at least the 1990s and the rise of a new generation of Republicans in Washington, led by Newt Gingrich, who introduced a no-holds-barred brand of competition to Congress and the nation. One of the main strategies employed by Gingrich and his allies was to demonize the political opposition by portraying Democrats as dangerous radicals seeking to undermine traditional American values

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[2]Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Ideology and Congress* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007); Sean M. Theriault, *Party Polarization in Congress* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Kathryn Pearson, "Rising Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Congress," in Zachary Courser, Eric Helland, and Kenneth P. Miller, eds., *Parchment Barriers: Political Polarization and the Limits of Constitutional Order* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 35–57.

[3]Gary C. Jacobson, "Partisan Polarization in American Politics: A Background Paper," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43 (December 2013): 688–708; Gary C. Jacobson, "Polarization, Gridlock, and Presidential Campaign Politics in 2016," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667 (September 2016): 226–246; and Alan I. Abramowitz and Steven W. Webster, "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections in the 21st Century," *Electoral Studies* 41 (March 2016): 12–22.

[4]Gary C. Jacobson, "It's Nothing Personal: The Decline of the Incumbency Advantage in U.S. House Elections," *Journal of Politics* 77 (July 2015): 861–873.

[5]Shanto Iyengar and Sean J. Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines: New Evidence on Group Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (July 2015): 690–707; Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation and the Rise of Donald Trump* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Shanto Iyengar, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra, and Sean J. Westwood, "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 129–146; and Eli J. Finkel, Christopher A. Bail, Mina Cikara, Peter H. Ditto, Shanto Iyengar, Samara Klar, Lilliana Mason, Mary C. McGrath, Brendan Nyhan, David G. Rand, Linda J. Skitka, Joshua A. Tucker, Jay J. Van Bavel, Cynthia S. Wang, and James N. Druckman, "Political Sectarianism in America," *Science* 370 (October 2020): 533–536.

and impose socialism on the nation.[6] The rise of the Gingrich Republicans coincided with another key development—the growth of partisan and ideological media outlets that made it easy for Americans to find news and information aligned with their personal preferences.[7] Republicans, especially, have become heavily dependent on one such outlet: Fox News.[8]

Democrats and Republicans were deeply divided long before 2016. However, Donald Trump's candidacy and presidency raised the intensity of partisan conflict in Washington and the nation to a new level. Dislike and mistrust of the opposing party and its leaders set new records during Trump's presidency.[9] So did voter turnout in the 2018 midterm elections and the 2020 presidential election. Voters on both sides of the partisan divide sensed that the stakes in these contests were enormous.[10]

Despite Trump's defeat and banishment from social media and the efforts of his successor, Joe Biden, to tamp down the intensity of partisan conflict, the divide between Democrats and Republicans in Washington and the nation appears to be as deep as ever in 2022. The former president and many of his fellow Republicans have persisted in questioning the legitimacy of Biden's election—an effort that led to a violent insurrection in the nation's capital on 6 January 2021 and an unsuccessful effort by a large number of congressional Republicans to block the certification of the electoral vote.[11] In the aftermath of that insurrection, Donald Trump continued to play a dominant role in Republican politics—granting and withholding

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[6]Randall Strahan and Daniel J. Palazzolo, "The Gingrich Effect," *Political Science Quarterly* 119 (Spring 2004): 89–114; and Julian E. Zelizer, *Burning Down the House: Newt Gingrich and the Rise of the New Republican Party* (New York: Penguin, 2020).

[7]Matthew Levendusky, *How Partisan Media Polarize America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); and Glen Smith and Kathleen Searles, "Who Let the (Attack) Dogs Out? New Evidence for Partisan Media Effects," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 78 (Spring 2014): 71–99.

[8]Mark Jurkowitz, Amy Mitchell, Elisa Shearer, and Mason Walker, "U.S. Media Polarization and the 2020 Presidential Election: A Nation Divided," Pew Research Center, 24 January 2020, accessed at https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/01/24/u-s-media-polarization-and-the-2020-election-a-nation-divided/, 1 July 2022.

[9]Gary C. Jacobson, "Polarization, Gridlock, and Presidential Campaign Politics in 2016."

[10]Ella Nilsen, "The 2018 Midterms Had the Highest Turnout since Before World War I: How Trump Made Political Engagement Great Again," Vox, 10 December 2018, accessed at https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/12/10/18130492/2018-voter-turnout-political-engagement-trump, 1 July 2022; and William A. Galston, "Election 2020: A Once-in-a-Lifetime Massive Turnout?," Brookings Institution, 14 August 2020, accessed at https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2020/08/14/election-2020-a-once-in-a-century-massive-turnout/, 1 July 2022.

[11]Karen Yourish, Larry Buchanan, and Denise Lu, "The 147 Republicans Who Voted to Overturn Election Results," *New York Times*, 7 January 2021, accessed at https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/07/us/elections/electoral-college-biden-objectors.html, 1 July 2022.

endorsements based on support for his claims of widespread fraud in the 2020 election.[12]

It is common to observe that political conflict in the United States has reached a new level of intensity in the third decade of the twenty-first century. However, what many political observers and scholars have failed to recognize is that mutual hostility and mistrust reflect deep divisions between the policy preferences of ordinary Democrats and Republicans. In this article, I present evidence showing that one of the most important reasons why Democrats and Republicans intensely dislike each other is that they intensely disagree on a wide range of issues, including the size and scope of the welfare state, abortion, gay and transgender rights, race relations, climate change, gun control, and immigration. Moreover, I will show that, much like Democratic and Republican elites, ordinary Americans now tend to hold consistent beliefs across these issues. Those who favor liberal policies in one area tend to favor liberal policies in other areas. Likewise, those who favor conservative policies in one area tend to favor conservative policies in other areas. This is especially true among those who are the most attentive and politically active, but it is true to a surprising degree even among those who only intermittently pay attention to politics and who rarely participate beyond voting. The rise of partisan-ideological consistency is one of the most important developments in American politics of the past 50 years. Growing partisan-ideological consistency has had profound consequences for many aspects of public opinion and political behavior, including how Americans evaluate political parties and leaders and how they make their choices at the ballot box.

While recognizing the importance of growing partisan hostility and mistrust among ordinary citizens, with a few exceptions, students of American politics have not generally viewed policy disagreement as an important characteristic of polarization within the electorate.[13] Many scholars continue to view ideological polarization as largely confined to

[12]Ashley Parker and Marianna Sotomayor, "For Republicans, Fealty to Trump's Election Falsehood Becomes a Defining Loyalty Test," *Washington Post*, 2 May 2021, accessed at https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/republicans-trump-election-falsehood/2021/05/01/7bd380a0-a921-11eb-8c1a-56f0cb4ff3b5_story.html, 1 July 2022.

[13]Exceptions include John T. Jost, "The End of the End of Ideology," *American Psychologist* 61, no. 7 (2006): 651–670; Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James N. Snyder Jr., "The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint and Issue Voting," *American Political Science Review* 102 (May 2008): 215–232; and Alan I. Abramowitz, "Transformation and Polarization: The 2008 Presidential Election and the New American Electorate," *Electoral Studies* 29 (December 2010): 594–603. For a review of this literature, see Edward G. Carmines and Nicholas J. D'Amico, "The New Look in Political Ideology Research," *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 205–216.

political elites and perhaps a small minority of activists, much as Converse found in his research.[14] Indeed, some scholars have argued that policy disagreement has little or nothing to do with growing dislike of the opposing party. Instead, these ideology skeptics view growing partisan polarization as one aspect of the rise of identity politics—a tendency of Americans to views their partisan identity as connected to a larger set of social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, social class, and region. According to this social identity theory, a growing association between overlapping social identities and partisanship has led Americans to view the political world as divided into teams consisting of those on our side and those on the opposing side.[15]

In this article, I present evidence from American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys showing that correlations among ideological identification, issue positions, and party identification have increased dramatically within the electorate over the past half century. As a result, the divide between Democratic and Republican identifiers on the ideological identification scale has widened considerably. Then, using the extensive battery of issue questions included in the 2020 ANES survey, I show that the policy preferences of ordinary Americans on a wide range of issues can be mapped onto a single underlying liberal-conservative dimension. I show that the distribution of preferences on this liberal-conservative issue scale is highly polarized, with Democratic identifiers and leaners located overwhelmingly on the left, Republican identifiers and leaners located overwhelmingly on the right, and little overlap between the two distributions. Finally, I show that location on the liberal-conservative issue scale strongly influenced affective evaluations of the presidential candidates and political parties in 2020 and is a powerful predictor of voter decision-making. Ideologically consistent respondents

[14]George F. Bishop, *The Illusion of Public Opinion: Fact and Artifact in American Public Opinion Polls* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Donald R. Kinder, "Belief Systems Today," *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society* 18, nos. 1–3 (2006): 197–216; Morris P. Fiorina., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (Boston: Longman, 2010); and Donald R. Kinder and Nathan P. Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

[15]Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76 (Fall 2012): 405–431; Iyengar and Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines"; Lilliana Mason, "'I Disrespectfully Agree': The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization," *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (January 2015): 128–145; Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); and Emily A. West and Shanto Iyengar, "Partisanship as a Social Identity: Implications for Polarization," *Political Behavior* 44 (2022): 807–838.

are far more likely to have polarized evaluations of presidential candidates and parties and to cast a straight-ticket vote than ideologically inconsistent respondents. These findings suggest that the rise of ideological consistency in the American electorate has been a major contributor to the rise of affective polarization, party loyalty and straight-ticket voting in the twenty-first century.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PARTISAN-IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

Partisan-ideological consistency provides a theoretical framework for assessing the political attitudes of members of the public as well as political elites. This theory builds on the work of Converse and other scholars who have studied issue constraint and ideological thinking in the American electorate. However, the theory of partisan-ideological consistency views partisanship and ideology not as separate constructs but as interdependent in the current era of American politics. Indeed, the role of ideology in shaping assessments of political leaders and political behavior depends on its close connection to partisanship. This approach reflects the findings of research indicating that within a large segment of the American public, policy preferences now shape party identification as much as party identification shapes policy preferences.[16]

To measure partisan-ideological polarization among members of the public, I identify the liberal and conservative positions on issues based on the positions taken by leaders of the national parties. I identify liberal positions as those adopted by the large majority of Democratic Party leaders and conservative positions as those adopted by the large majority of Republican Party leaders. Thus, I identify support for abortion rights and opposition to building a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico as liberal positions and opposition to abortion rights and support for building a wall on the border as conservative positions because those are now the positions supported by the vast majority of Democratic and Republican elected officials and party leaders. Issues such as trade agreements and tariffs on which there are not clear differences between party positions are not included in my measure of liberal versus conservative ideology.

[16]Thomas M. Carsey and Geoffrey C. Layman, "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate," *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (April 2006): 464–477; Mitchell Killian and Clyde Wilcox, "Do Abortion Attitudes Lead to Party Switching?," *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (December 2008): 561–573; and Philip G. Chen and Paul N. Goren, "Operational Ideology and Party Identification: A Dynamic Model of Individual Level Change in Partisan and Ideological Predispositions," *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (December 2016): 703–715.

Partisan-ideological consistency is important because it is a key component of partisan conflict. The greater the number of issues on which partisans disagree, the more intense that disagreement is likely to be and the more likely it is to affect other opinions and behavior. When partisans agree with their own party's position on some issues while agreeing with the opposing party on others, they should be less likely to hold extremely negative opinions of the opposing party and to view its leaders as enemies who must be defeated at all costs. In contrast, when partisans agree with their own party on almost all issues and disagree with the opposing party on almost all issues, they should be more likely to hold extremely negative views of the opposing party and to view its leaders as enemies who must be defeated at all costs.

Of course, issue disagreement is not the only reason for dislike and mistrust of the opposing party. In the United States, supporters of the two major parties differ in terms of characteristics such as race, ethnicity, social class, religion, region, and urbanism. Reinforcing social cleavages can contribute to perceptions of those on the other side of the party divide as different, strange, or even threatening.[17] However, partisan-ideological polarization theory leads me to expect ideological disagreement to exert a strong influence on feelings toward the political parties and their leaders and therefore on voter decision-making.

THE RISE OF PARTISAN-IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

The rise of partisan-ideological consistency within the American electorate is readily observable in ANES surveys conducted between 1972, the first year that a question measuring ideological identification was included, and 2020. Table 1 displays Pearson product-moment correlations among party identification, ideological identification, and four issue questions—government aid to Blacks, government responsibility for health insurance, government responsibility for jobs and incomes, and abortion rights—at 12-year intervals between 1972 and 2020. The first three questions were added to the ANES survey starting in 1972. However, the abortion question was not added until 1980.

To avoid having a large share of respondents with missing data, I recoded responses on all ANES 7-point scales that include a screening question allowing respondents to opt out of placing themselves on the

[17]Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1967); Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology"; Iyengar and Westwood, "Fear and Loathing across Party Lines"; Mason, "'I Disrespectfully Agree'"; and Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*.

TABLE 1
Correlations among Party Identification, Ideological Identification, and Issue Positions by Year

Correlation Between	*1972*	*1984*	*1996*	*2008*	*2020*
Party ID * Ideological ID	.28	.36	.50	.56	.68
Party ID * Aid to Blacks	.13	.22	.28	.34	.55
Ideological ID * Aid to Blacks	.32	.21	.29	.29	.55
Party ID * Health insurance	.17	.18	.35	.38	.52
Ideological ID * Health insurance	.24	.14	.33	.38	.56
Party ID * Jobs/incomes	.18	.26	.32	.42	.52
Ideological ID * Jobs/incomes	.26	.24	.29	.34	.53
Party ID * Abortion	—	.06	.14	.22	.45
Ideological ID * Abortion	—	.17	.27	.34	.51
(Minimum *N*)	(2,149)	(2,211)	(1,702)	(2,285)	(7,646)

Sources: American National Election Studies Cumulative File and 2020 American National Election Study.
Note: All correlations are statistically significant at the .01 level or greater based on one-tailed *t*-tests with the exception of the correlation of party ID with abortion opinion in 1984.

scale by indicating that they "haven't thought about" the issue. These include the 7-point ideological identification scale as well as the questions on government aid to Blacks, government responsibility for health insurance, and government responsibility for jobs and living standards. Respondents indicating that they "haven't thought about" an issue were assigned to the middle position (4) on the 7-point scale. I chose this approach because simply excluding these respondents from the analysis would have biased the results in favor of finding greater partisan-ideological consistency. I used the same approach in later analyses of data from the 2020 ANES survey, which included a larger number of 7-point issue scales with an opt-out screening question. Respondents choosing the "haven't thought about it" option generally rated the parties and candidates similarly to those placing themselves in the middle position on these scales.

The results displayed in Table 1 show a dramatic increase in partisan-ideological consistency since 1972. As recently as 1984, during Ronald Reagan's presidency, the correlation between party and ideological identification was a rather modest .36, while the correlations of both party and ideological identification with preferences on social welfare

issues involving the size and role of government were far weaker, ranging from .14 to .24. Moreover, despite the fact that the Republican Party added a plank opposing abortion rights to its national platform in 1980, the relationships of both party and ideological identification to opinions on legalized abortion were very weak.[18] Abortion was not yet a partisan issue in 1984.

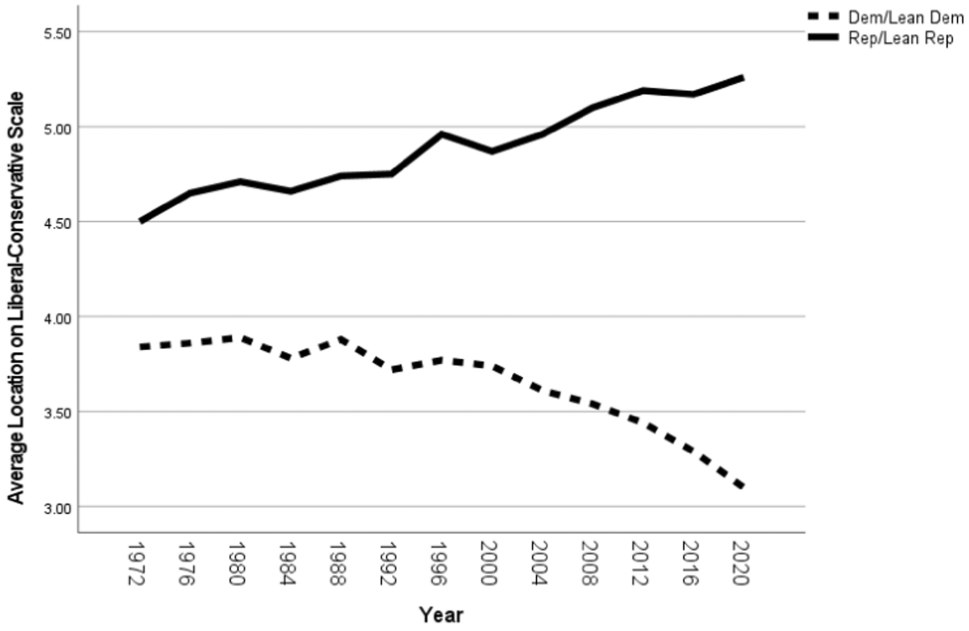
The picture with regard to partisan-ideological consistency was very different in 2020. First, the correlation between party and ideological identification was a very strong .68. In terms of shared variance, the relationship was almost five times stronger in 2020 than in 1984. Likewise, the relationships between both party and ideological identification and preferences on social welfare issues were far stronger in 2020 than in 1984, with correlations ranging from .52 to .56. In terms of shared variance, these relationships were at least five times stronger in 2020 than in 1984. Finally, in 2020, we see a much closer connection between both party and ideological identification and opinions on abortion than in 1984. In terms of shared variance, these relationships were more than five times stronger in 2020 than in 1984. Abortion was clearly an important partisan issue in 2020, dividing Democrats from Republicans and liberals from conservatives.

The dramatic increase in the strength of the relationship between party and ideological identification between 1972 and 2020 indicates a growing ideological divide between supporters of the two parties over those 48 years, at least in terms of liberal-conservative identification. This trend is evident in Figure 1, which displays the mean locations of Democratic and Republican identifiers, including independents leaning toward a party, on the 7-point liberal-conservative scale. Between 1972 and 2020, the gap between the mean locations of Democratic and Republican identifiers more than tripled, going from a modest 0.6 points in 1972 to 2.1 points in 2020, the largest divide in the entire series.

The sharp increase in the size of the ideological identification divide reflected shifts among supporters of both parties, with Democrats moving sharply to the left after 2000 and Republicans moving rather steadily to the right. The mean location of Democratic identifiers shifted from 3.9 in 1972 to 3.1 in 2020. At the same time, the mean location of Republican identifiers shifted from 4.5 in 1984 to 5.3 in 2020. At least in terms of ideological identification, the increase in partisan polarization within the electorate was symmetrical during these years, in contrast with

[18]Throughout this article, I report statistical significance levels based on one-tailed tests of significance. This reflects the fact that I am testing directional hypotheses concerning these relationships.

FIGURE 1 *Average Location of Democratic and Republican Identifiers on Liberal-Conservative Identification Scale, 1972–2020*



Sources: American National Election Study Cumulative File and 2020 American National Election Study.
Note: Differences in means between 1972 and 2020 are highly statistically significant ($p < .001$) for Democrats and Republicans based on one-tailed *t*-tests.

the situation in Congress, where Republicans shifted much further to the right than Democrats shifted to the left.[19]

MEASURING PARTISAN-IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY IN 2020

Our ability to analyze partisan-ideological consistency over time is limited by the number and variety of issues consistently included in ANES surveys. Although the trend in Figure 1 appears impressive, it is only based on a single measure of ideology: liberal-conservative identification. Moreover, some scholars have argued that this question measures ideological identity rather than preferences on public policy. According to this view, for most ordinary voters, thinking of oneself as liberal or

[19]Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); and Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

conservative is a symbolic identity that has little connection with preferences on policy issues.[20]

Fortunately, the 2020 ANES survey included a large number of questions on a variety of policy issues that allow us to examine the relationships between ideological identification and positions on specific issues, as well as the relationships among opinions on these issues. Data from the ANES survey indicate that in 2020, not only was there a very close connection between party and ideological identification, but both were closely connected with opinions on a variety of issues ranging from the size and scope of the welfare state to abortion, gay and transgender rights, immigration, race relations, climate change, and gun control. In addition, the 2020 data show that opinions across these six policy domains were closely connected. There was a high degree of consistency in opinions on social welfare issues, racial issues, climate change, cultural issues, immigration, and gun control. Respondents with liberal views in one policy area tended to have liberal views in each of the other areas, while those with conservative views in one policy area tended to have conservative views in each of the other areas. Opinions on issues in all these domains as well as ideological self-identification can be mapped onto a liberal-conservative issue scale, with Democratic identifiers located overwhelmingly on the liberal side of the scale and Republican identifiers located overwhelmingly on the conservative side of the scale.

To measure liberal-conservative preferences within each of the six policy domains (social welfare, cultural, racial justice, immigration, gun control, and climate change), I conducted a principal component factor analysis of all the questions that appeared to measure opinions within that domain. The number of questions within each domain ranged from 3 in the case of climate change to 11 in the case of immigration. For each policy domain, the results of the factor analysis indicate that all the questions were measuring a single, underlying issue dimension, with all the questions loading strongly on that dimension. A description of the questions included in each scale and the loadings of these questions on the first factor extracted by the principal component factor analyses can be found in Appendix A.

Table 2 displays the Pearson product-moment correlations among the six issue scales along with liberal-conservative identification. What clearly stands out in this table is the close connection among attitudes in all the issue domains. The correlations ranged from .48 between opinions on

[20]Pamela C. Conover and Stanley Feldman, "The Origins and Meaning of Liberal/Conservative Self-Identifications," *American Journal of Political Science* 25 (November 1981): 617–645.

TABLE 2
Correlations among Issue Scales in 2020

	Cultural Issues	*Immigration*	*Racial Justice*	*Gun Control*	*Climate Change*	*Social Welfare*
Ideological identification	.61	.63	.64	.49	.59	.72
Cultural issues		.62	.56	.48	.56	.60
Immigration			.70	.51	.60	.70
Racial justice				.52	.62	.76
Gun control					.60	.57
Climate change						.70

Source: 2020 American National Election Study.
Notes: All correlations are statistically significant at the .001 level based on one-tailed *t*-tests. Minimum *n* of cases is 5,645.

gun control and opinions on cultural issues and .76 between opinions on racial justice issues and opinions on social welfare issues. In addition, there were strong correlations between ideological identification and opinions in all these domains. Those correlations ranged from .49 with opinions on gun control to .72 with opinions on social welfare issues. These results indicate that ideological identification is much more than a symbolic identity. It is closely connected with preferences across a wide range of policy issues.

Previous research has identified two distinct dimensions of ideology within the American public—a social welfare dimension and a cultural dimension.[21] However, the strength of the correlations in Table 2 suggests that in 2020, opinions in all six policy domains as well as ideological identification largely reflect a single underlying liberal-conservative dimension, just as votes in Congress have been found to largely reflect a single underlying liberal-conservative dimension.[22] A principal component factor analysis of scores on the six issue scales along with ideological identification supports this conclusion.[23] The first and only factor extracted in the principal component analysis had an eigenvalue of 4.7 and accounted for 67 percent of the shared variance among the issue scales. Loadings on this first factor ranged from .72 for the gun control scale to .89 for the social welfare issues scale.

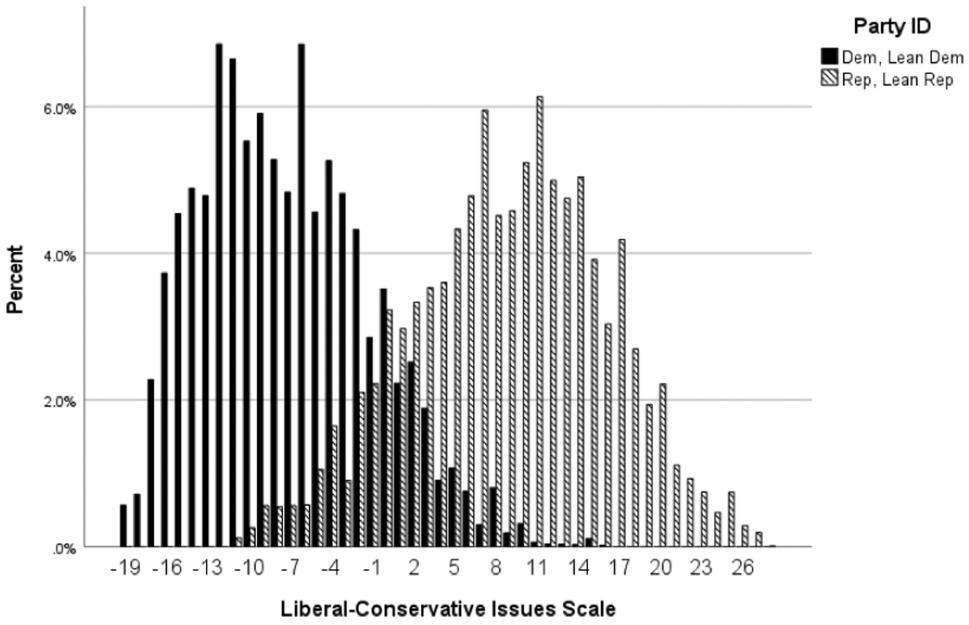
I used the results of the principal component analysis of the six issue scales and ideological identification to construct a liberal-conservative issues scale. Scores on this scale are measured in standard deviation units

[21]Stanley Feldman and Christopher Johnston, "Understanding the Determinants of Political Ideology: Implications of Structural Complexity," *Political Psychology* 35 (June 2014): 337–358.
[22]Poole and Rosenthal, *Ideology and Congress*.
[23]See Appendix B for details.

above or below the overall mean of zero. For clarity of presentation, I multiplied these scores by 10 and rounded them up to the nearest whole integer. As a result, scores on the adjusted scale ranged from –19 (1.9 standard deviations below the mean) to +27 (2.7 standard deviations above the mean), with an overall mean of zero and a standard deviation of 10. Figure 2 displays the distributions of Democratic and Republican identifiers, including leaning independents, on this scale.

There are a couple of striking features of the distribution of Democratic and Republican identifiers on this liberal-conservative issues scale. The most obvious and clearly the most important is that supporters of the two parties have sharply divided ideological preferences. Even though these results include nonvoters as well as voters, there is very little overlap between the two distributions. Eighty-five percent of Democratic identifiers were located to the left of center, while 86 percent of Republican identifiers were located to the right of center. The average Democratic identifier was located 0.7 standard deviations to the left of center, and 40 percent of Democratic identifiers were located one standard deviation or more to the left of center. Meanwhile, the average Republican identifier was located 0.9 standard deviations to the right of center, and 49

FIGURE 2 *Distribution of Democratic and Republican Identifiers on Left-Right Issues Scale in 2020*



Source: 2020 American National Election Study.

percent of Republican identifiers were located one standard deviation or more to the right of center.

Another interesting feature of the distributions of party identifiers on the liberal-conservative issues scale is that the share of Republicans on the far right end of the scale is greater than the share of Democrats on the far left end. Only 12 percent of Democratic identifiers were located at least 1.5 standard deviations to the left of center and no Democratic identifiers were located two or more standard deviations to the left of center. In contrast, 19 percent of Republican identifiers were located at least 1.5 standard deviations to the right of center, and 7 percent were located two or more standard deviations to the right of center. These findings indicate that among the public, just as among members of Congress, the potential impact of the far right on the Republican Party is considerably greater than the potential impact of the far left on the Democratic Party. We will see that this contrast is even greater when we focus on the most politically active supporters of each party.

Among all respondents in the 2020 ANES survey, the correlation between party identification and the liberal-conservative issues scale is a very strong .76. This correlation provides a striking indication of the high level of partisan-ideological polarization in the overall electorate. However, the extent of partisan-ideological polarization within the electorate should vary depending on a variety of characteristics that are associated with awareness of ideological differences between parties. Three factors, in particular, are typically associated with ideological awareness among the public: education, political interest, and political activism. In general, more educated, interested, and active citizens tend to be more aware of ideological differences between parties than less educated, less interested, and less active citizens.

Table 3 displays correlations between party identification and the liberal-conservative issues scale depending on level of education, interest in politics, and political activism. The findings are consistent with expectations based on previous research on ideological awareness in the public. Partisan-ideological consistency was greatest among those with more years of education, more interest in politics, and higher levels of political activism. What is somewhat surprising, though, is how high the levels of partisan-ideological polarization are even among the least educated, least interested, and least active members of the public. For example, the correlation of party identification with the liberal-conservative issues scale is a very robust .66 among respondents who did not complete high school and .70 among those with only a high school degree. Likewise, the correlation between party identification and the

TABLE 3
Partisan-Ideological Polarization by Education, Political Engagement, and Political Activism

	*Correlation of Issue Scale * Party ID*	*N of Cases*
All respondents	.755	6,525
Education		
Some high school	.656	518
High school graduate	.698	1,775
Some college	.773	1,,880
College graduate	.802	1457
Post-college	.792	814
Political interest/attention		
Very Low	.608	1,500
Low	.721	2,224
Moderate	.793	1,519
High	.850	1,278
Political activism		
Inactive	.524	927
Low	.691	2,031
Moderate	.750	1,935
High	.833	691
Very High	.877	932

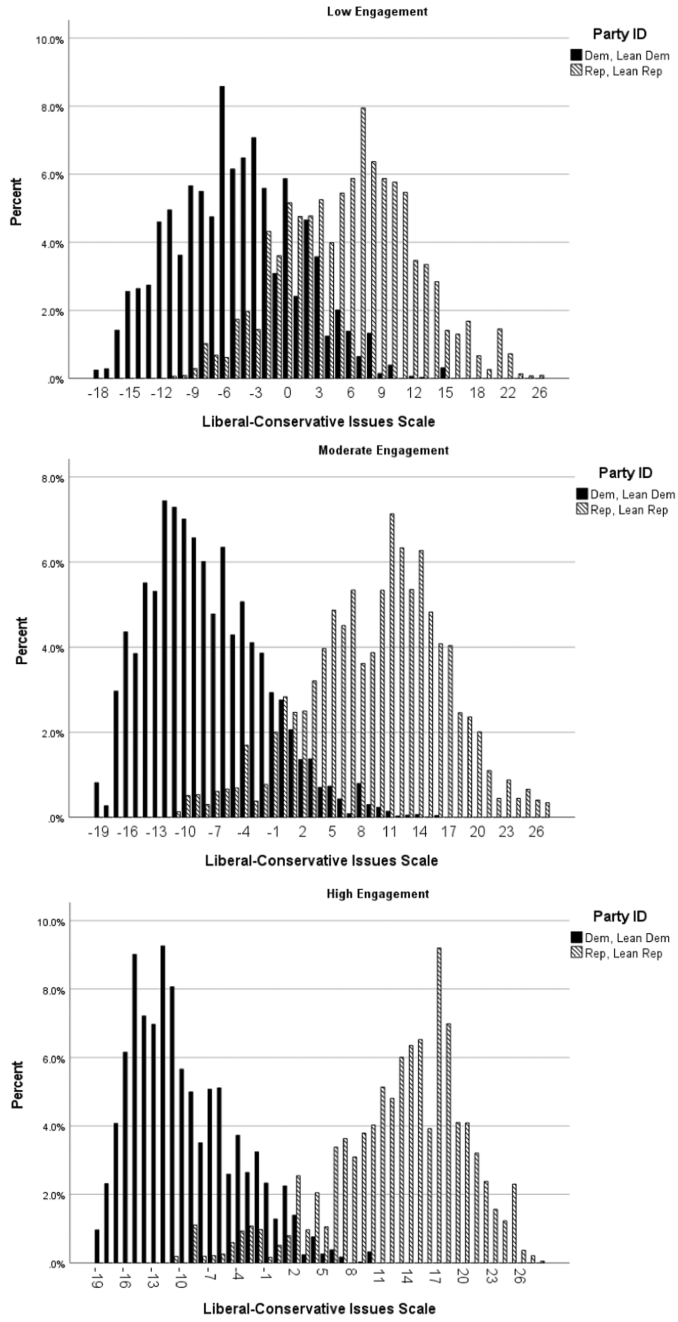
Source: 2020 American National Election Study.
Note: All correlations are statistically significant at the .001 level based on one-tailed *t*-tests

liberal-conservative issues is a very strong .69 among those classified as low on political activism, a group made up overwhelmingly of individuals who reported voting but not engaging in any other political activities in connection with the 2020 election.

In general, the results in Table 3 indicate that partisan-ideological polarization had penetrated very far into the American electorate in 2020, reaching even less politically aware and active segments of the public. The high levels of partisan-ideological consistency seen among even less educated, attentive, and active members of the public suggest that this consistency does not require a high degree of political sophistication or a well-developed philosophy of government. Rather, ideological cues are now so pervasive in the media that even the less sophisticated can easily figure out how ideological labels, policies, and partisan identities go together.

Of course, the more interested and attentive to politics citizens are, the more likely they are to understand the ways in which ideological labels, policies, and partisan identities go together. Figure 3 provides a graphical illustration of the extent of partisan-ideological polarization among three large segments of the voting public based on their levels of political activism: 36 percent who reported engaging in only one activity (almost

FIGURE 3 *Distribution of Democratic and Republican Identifiers on Liberal-Conservative Issues Scale by Political Engagement*



Source: 2020 American National Election Study.

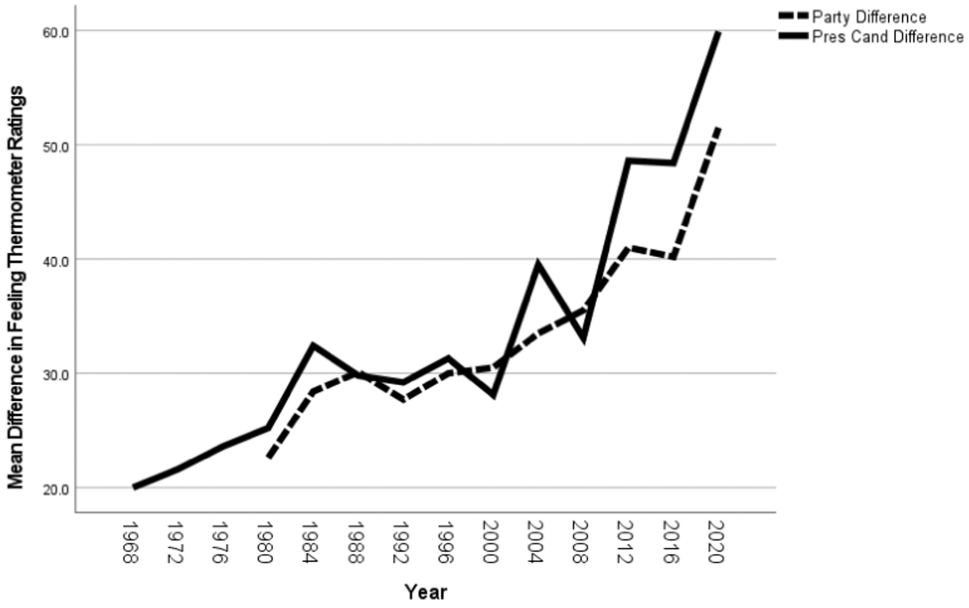
always voting), 35 percent who reported engaging in two activities, and 29 percent who reporting engaging in three or more activities. In addition to voting in the general election, the activities included in this political activism index included displaying a yard sign or button, giving money to a party, candidate or group, voting in a party primary, attending a political meeting or rally in person, attending a political meeting or rally online, and doing campaign work for a party or candidate.

It is easy to see in this figure that the level of partisan-ideological polarization was considerably greater among the more active segments of the public than among those who did nothing more than vote. In fact, the distribution of Democratic and Republican identifiers on the liberal-conservative issues scale among the most politically active group bears a striking resemblance to the distribution of Democratic and Republican members of Congress on a liberal-conservative voting scale. Among this group, which included almost 30 percent of all voters, there was almost no overlap in ideology scores: 95 percent of Democrats were located to the left of center, while 95 percent of Republicans were located to the right of center. Sixty-nine percent of politically active Democrats were located at least one standard deviation to the left of center, and 26 percent were located at least 1.5 standard deviations to the left of center. Meanwhile, active Republicans were skewed even further to the right than active Democrats were to the left: 73 percent were located at least one standard deviation to the right of center, 42 percent were located at least 1.5 standard deviations to the right of center, and 15 percent were located at least two standard deviations to the right of center. These findings indicate that politically active partisans are even more deeply divided in their policy preferences than ordinary voters are—a fact that certainly would not escape the attention of Democratic and Republican candidates and officeholders.

CONSEQUENCES OF PARTISAN-IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY: AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION

The theory of partisan-ideological consistency provides a framework for understanding two of the most significant changes in public opinion and voting behavior of the past 40 years—the rise of affective polarization and the dramatic increase in straight-ticket voting. Feelings of partisans toward the two major parties and their candidates are far more divided now than they were in the past. This trend is evident in Figure 4, which displays the average difference between partisans' ratings of their own party and presidential candidate and the opposing party and presidential

FIGURE 4 *Average Difference in Ratings of Own and Opposing Presidential Candidates and Parties on Feeling Thermometer Scale, 1968–2020*



Sources: American National Election Studies Cumulative File and 2020 American National Election Study.

candidate on the 0–100 feeling thermometer scale between 1968 and 2020. The feeling thermometer ratings were introduced for presidential candidates in 1968 and for the two major parties in 1978.

I chose to use feeling thermometer ratings to measure affect toward parties and candidates because respondents in the ANES survey are asked to use these scales to indicate feelings of warmth or coldness toward parties, candidates, and groups. Moreover, feeling thermometer ratings correlate strongly with other measures of emotional responses to candidates. In the 2012 and 2016 surveys, correlations between reported feelings of anger toward the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates and feeling thermometer ratings of those candidates ranged from .5 to .6 and were significant at the .001 level based on one-tailed *t*-tests. Unfortunately, the question about feelings of anger toward the candidates was not included in the 2020 ANES survey.

The data displayed in Figure 4 show a sharp increase in the average difference between partisans' ratings of their own party and presidential candidate and their ratings of the opposing party and presidential candidate, with most of the increase occurring since 2000. Between 1968

and 2000, the average difference in ratings was generally between 20 and 30 degrees. In 2020, the average difference in ratings was more than 50 degrees for the parties and 60 degrees for the presidential candidates. Interestingly, this increasing divide was almost entirely due to increasingly negative ratings of the opposing party and candidate. Ratings of one's own party and candidate have fluctuated within a rather narrow range, between 65 and 75 degrees, except for a brief dip in ratings of one's own candidate in 2016—a year in which both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton received subpar ratings from their own party's supporters. In contrast, ratings of the opposing party and candidate fell from the mid- to upper 40s between 1972 and 2000 to below 20 degrees in 2020. Clearly, what is driving the growing divide in affective ratings of the parties and candidates is growing dislike of the opposing party and its candidates.[24]

The gap between partisans' feeling thermometer ratings of their own party and candidate and the opposing party and candidate has widened considerably in the twenty-first century. Not coincidentally, during these years, the relationship between these feeling thermometer ratings and ideology has become much stronger. This trend is evident in Table 4, which displays the trend in the correlations between ideological identification and relative feeling thermometer ratings of the presidential candidates and parties since 1972. Between 2000 and 2020, the correlation between ideological identification and relative feeling thermometer ratings of the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates increased from .45 to .67, while the correlation between ideological identification and relative feeling thermometer ratings of the Democratic and Republican parties increased from .44 to .67. In terms of shared variance, these relationships were about twice as strong in 2020 as in 2000.

Of course, ideological identification is an imperfect measure of ideological orientations. It has the advantage that it has been included in every ANES survey since 1972. For the 2020 election, however, we have a measure of ideology, the liberal-conservative issues scale, based on a wide variety of issue positions along with ideological identification. Figure 5 displays the relationship between location on this liberal-conservative issues scale and relative feeling thermometer ratings of the two major parties and their presidential candidates. The results show a very strong relationship between feelings toward the parties and candidates and ideology—considerably stronger than the relationship with ideological

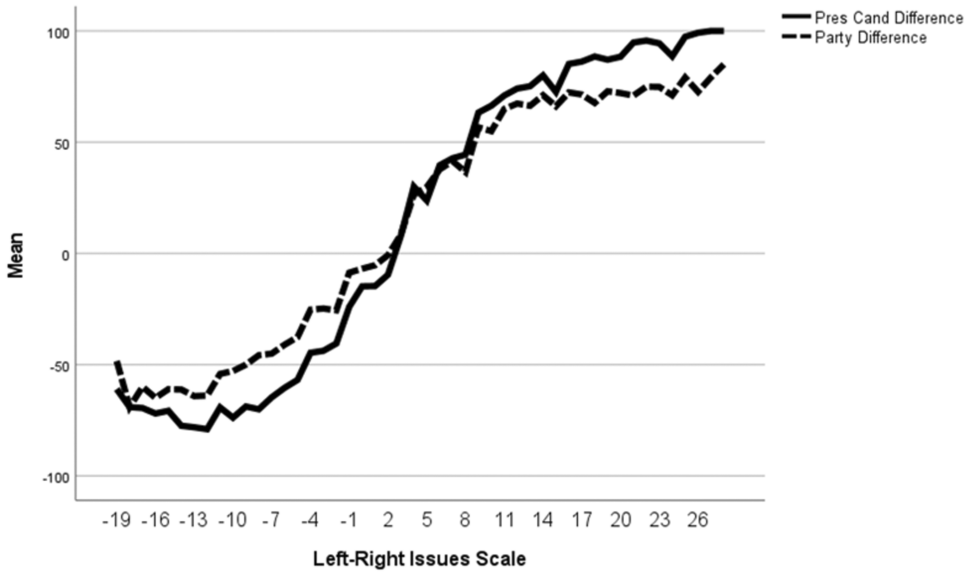
[24]Abramowitz and Webster, "The Rise of Negative Partisanship and the Nationalization of U.S. Elections."

TABLE 4
Correlation of Liberal-Conservative Identification with Relative Feeling Thermometer Evaluations of Presidential Candidates and Parties, 1980–2020

	Presidential		
Year	*Candidates*	*Parties*	*Minimum N*
1972	.41	—	2,078
1976	.34	—	2,706
1980	.33	.33	1,464
1984	.40	.38	2,118
1988	.38	.36	1,917
1992	.43	.42	2,338
1996	.50	.50	1,669
2000	.45	.44	811
2004	.50	.52	1,169
2008	.54	.54	2,257
2012	.61	.61	5,819
2016	.60	.63	3,550
2020	.67	.67	7,156

Sources: American National Election Studies Cumulative File and 2020 American National Election Study.
Note: All correlations are statistically significant at the .001 level based on one-tailed *t*-tests.

FIGURE 5 *Average Difference (R-D) in Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Parties and Presidential Candidates by Location on Left-Right Issues Scale in 2020*



Source: 2020 American National Election Study.

identification alone. The correlation between ideology and feelings toward the parties was .80, while the correlation between ideology and feelings toward the candidates was a slightly stronger .82.

The results displayed in Figure 5 show that members of the public with scores close to either extreme of the liberal-conservative issues scale had the most divided feelings toward the parties and candidates—rating their own party and candidate far higher than the opposing party and candidate on the feeling thermometer scale. At the far right end of the scale, in fact, the average difference between ratings of Trump and Biden was close to the maximum of 100 degrees. Extreme conservatives tended to rate Trump at 100 degrees and Biden at 0 degrees. On the far left, the difference was very large but not close to 100 degrees. While the average rating of Trump by extreme liberals was very close to the minimum of 0 degrees, the average rating of Biden was only between 60 and 70 degrees. This was slightly lower than the average rating of Biden by more moderate liberals. Extreme conservatives generally hated Biden and loved Trump. Extreme liberals generally hated Trump but were only lukewarm toward Biden.

Differences in feeling thermometer ratings of the presidential candidates and parties among those near the center of the liberal-conservative issues scale were generally much smaller than among those closer to the left and right ends of the scale. However, the presidential candidate ratings were somewhat asymmetrical: moderate liberals generally rated Biden far higher than Trump while moderate conservatives generally rated Trump only slightly higher than Biden. These patterns suggest that in 2020, Joe Biden had considerably more appeal to middle-of-the-road voters than Donald Trump.

What remains to be seen is whether ideology, as measured by the liberal-conservative issues scale, had a strong influence on feelings toward the presidential candidates and parties even after controlling for party identification and demographic characteristics such as race, age, sex, and education. According to partisan-ideological consistency theory, location on the liberal-conservative issues scale should have a strong influence on feelings toward the candidates and parties even after controlling for these other influences.

The data in Table 5 strongly support this hypothesis. This table displays results of regression analyses of relative feeling thermometer ratings of the presidential candidates and the two major parties. The dependent variable here is the raw difference in feeling thermometer scores between the Democratic candidate or party and the Republican candidate or party, which ranges from –100 to +100. However, I converted all the

TABLE 5
Regression Analyses of Relative Feeling Thermometer (FT) Ratings of Presidential Candidates and Parties

	Trump FT—Biden FT			
Independent Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*Sig.*
Constant	–8.77			
Age	–4.13	.44	–9.40	.001
Black	–6.06	.46	–13.12	.001
Latino	–2.44	.44	–5.56	.001
Other race	–0.83	.43	–1.93	.05
Sex/female	1.77	.42	4.19	.001
Christian	–1.36	.45	–2.99	.01
Evangelical	–0.57	.45	–1.29	n.s.
Non-college	1.57	.44	3.57	.001
National economy	–7.96	.50	–15.93	.001
Personal finances	0.38	.45	0.86	n.s.
Party identification	27.03	.66	40.88	.001
Issues scale	32.32	.70	46.12	.001
Adjusted $R^2 = .783$				
N of cases = 6,310				

B. Republican Party FT—Democratic Party FT

Independent Variable	*B*	*SE*	*t-ratio*	*Sig.*
Constant	–1.86			
Age	–1.52	.36	–4.26	.001
Black	–3.17	.37	–8.52	.001
Latino	–1.21	.35	–3.41	.001
Other race	–0.52	.35	–1.50	n.s.
Sex/female	1.39	.34	4.06	.001
Christian	–0.08	.37	–0.21	n.s.
Evangelical	–0.35	.36	–0.97	n.s.
Non-college	–0.09	.36	0.26	n.s.
National economy	–4.94	.40	–12.21	.001
Personal finances	–1.17	.36	-3.24	.001
Party identification	32.06	.54	59.97	.001
Issues scale	19.13	.57	33.60	.001
Adjusted $R^2 = .794$				
N of cases = 6,449				

Source: 2020 American National Election Study.

independent variables into standard deviation scores to allow direct comparisons of their effects. Each regression coefficient can be interpreted as the change in relative feeling thermometer scores associated with a change of one standard deviation on that independent variable.

The results in Table 5, Panel A show that the liberal-conservative issues scale had a stronger direct influence on feelings toward the presidential candidates than any other predictor including party identification. A change of one standard deviation on the issues scale

was associated with a change of more than 32 degrees in relative feeling thermometer ratings of the candidates; a change of one standard deviation on the party identification scale was associated with a change of just over 27 degrees in relative feeling thermometer ratings of the candidates. No other predictor had nearly as strong an impact although a few others were highly significant including ratings of the national economy.

The results in Table 5, Panel B show that party identification had the strongest direct influence on feelings toward the political parties of any predictor. However, ideology also had a powerful impact on these ratings. A change of one standard deviation on the party identification scale was associated with a change of more than 32 degrees in relative feeling thermometer ratings of the two major parties; a change of one standard deviation on the liberal-conservative issues scale was associated with a change of more than 19 degrees in relative feeling thermometer ratings of the parties. Again, no other predictor came close to having the influence of ideology or party identification.

Taken together, the results in Table 5 indicate that ideology, as measured by the liberal-conservative issues scale, had a powerful influence on feelings toward the presidential candidates and political parties in 2020, even after controlling for party identification. In fact, ideology had a stronger direct influence on feelings toward the candidates than party identification. The effects of ideology and party identification dwarfed the effects of social characteristics such as age, race, sex, and religion. In 2020, Americans' feelings toward the candidates and parties appeared to reflect their policy preferences much more than their social identities.

The powerful influence of ideological orientations on affect toward candidates and parties is nowhere more clear than in the case of Donald Trump, perhaps the most polarizing political figure in recent American history. To compare the impact of ideology and group memberships on feelings toward Trump, I divided all respondents in the 2020 ANES survey into three groups of roughly equal size based on their location on the liberal-conservative issues scale: those located at least .5 standard deviations to the left of center, those located between .5 standard deviations to the left of center and .5 standard deviations to the right of center, and those located at least .5 standard deviations to the right of center. Table 6 compares the mean ratings of Trump on the feeling thermometer scale based on ideology and several politically salient group memberships—first race and then, for White respondents, education, evangelical identification, LGBT identification, and party identification.

TABLE 6
Average Feeling Thermometer Ratings of Donald Trump by Ideological Orientation and Group Memberships

	Ideological Orientation		
	Left of Center	*Center*	*Right of Center*
All respondents	4.5	34.2	81.9
Race			
White	3.3	39.0	84.3
Black	5.1	17.1	45.1
Latino	7.0	34.4	76.1
Asian	6.3	35.5	78.7
White			
College graduate	2.3	33.6	79.8
Non-college	4.6	42.1	85.7
Evangelical	4.2	41.2	88.2
Nonevangelical	3.2	38.5	81.9
LGBT	4.6	34.9	78.7
Straight	3.1	39.4	84.3
Dem, Lean Dem	2.3	21.5	62.4
Rep, Lean Rep	19.9	55.9	86.6

Source: 2020 American National Election Study.
Note: Differences between means of those on the left, in the center, and on the right are highly statistically significant for all subgroups based on one-tailed *t*-tests.

The data in Table 6 show that ideology strongly influenced feelings toward Trump even among members of groups whose members were generally very pro- or anti-Trump. For example, White evangelicals overall were highly supportive of Trump, giving him an average rating of 69 degrees on the feeling thermometer. However, liberals, who made up about 10 percent of all White evangelicals, gave him an average rating of only 4 degrees. Similarly, LGBT Whites were generally quite hostile toward Donald Trump, giving him an average rating of only 21 degrees on the feeling thermometer. However, conservatives, who made up about 7 percent of all White LGBT respondents, gave him an average rating of 66 degrees. Most impressively, ideology even had a strong influence on feelings toward Trump among White Democratic and Republican identifiers. Although White Democrats gave Trump an average rating of only 8 degrees on the feeling thermometer, centrist White Democrats gave him an average rating of 21 degrees and the very small group of conservative Democrats (just over 2 percent of all White Democratic identifiers) gave him an average rating of 62 degrees. Likewise, while White Republicans gave Trump an average rating of 78 degrees, centrist White Republicans gave him an average rating of only 56 degrees, and the very small group of liberal White Republicans (just under 3 percent of all White Republicans) gave him an average rating of only 20 degrees.

The results in Table 6 show that group memberships mainly affected feelings toward Donald Trump indirectly—through ideology. Thus, the reason White college graduates rated Trump considerably lower than Whites without college degrees was largely because White college graduates were much more liberal, on average, than Whites without a college degree: 48 percent of Whites with a degree were located to the left of center compared with only 23 percent of Whites without a degree. After controlling for ideology, there was little difference in feelings toward Trump among Whites with and without a college degree. Similarly, the main reason White evangelicals were more supportive of Trump than nonevangelical Whites is that they were much more conservative, on average, than nonevangelical Whites: 67 percent of White evangelicals were located to the right of center compared with only 34 percent of nonevangelical Whites. However, there was little difference between White evangelicals and nonevangelical Whites in feelings toward Trump after controlling for ideology.

There is one important exception to this rule, however. Even after controlling for ideology, African Americans had much more negative feelings toward Trump than members of other racial groups, including members of other non-White groups. Thus, conservative African Americans gave Trump an average rating of only 45 degrees, much higher than the ratings given by liberal and moderate African Americans but much lower than the ratings given by conservative Whites, Latinos, and Asians. African Americans are the one group for which we see clear evidence of the influence of social identity over and above the influence of ideology.

CONSEQUENCES OF PARTISAN-IDEOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY: VOTING BEHAVIOR

We have seen thus far that the rise of ideological consistency in the American electorate has had important consequences for affective evaluations of the presidential candidates and parties—contributing to the growth of affective polarization. Location on the liberal-conservative issue scale powerfully shaped feelings toward Donald Trump and Joe Biden as well as the Republican and Democratic Parties. The more consistent respondents' opinions were on ideological identification and a wide range of issues, the more polarized their evaluations of the parties and candidates became.

Along with increasing affective polarization, there has been a marked increase in party loyalty and straight-ticket voting in recent elections. Elections have become increasingly nationalized, with votes for the House of Representatives and Senate tied closely to opinions of the

TABLE 7
Percentage Voting for Own Party for President, House and Senate in 2020 by Party Identification and Ideological Orientation

	Ideological Orientation		
	Left of Center	*Center*	*Right of Center*
Dem, Lean Dem	93	66	32
Rep, Lean Rep	18	42	88

Source: 2020 American National Election Study.
Note: Differences between percentages for those located on the left, in the center, and on the right are highly statistically significant ($p < .001$) for Democrats and Republicans.

national parties and their leaders. According to the partisan-ideological consistency theory, there should be a close connection between straight-ticket voting and the degree of consistency between one's party identification and one's ideology. Democrats with consistently liberal views and Republicans with consistently conservative views should display much higher levels of party loyalty and straight-ticket voting than Democrats with moderate to conservative views and Republicans with moderate to liberal views.

Table 7 displays the relationship between location on the liberal-conservative issues scale and party loyalty among Democratic and Republican identifiers, including leaning independents, in 2020. As in the analysis of affective polarization, I divided voters into three ideological groupings: those located at least .5 standard deviations to the left of center, those located between .5 standard deviations to the left of center and .5 standard deviations to the right of center, and those located at least .5 standard deviations to the right of center.

The data in this table provide strong support for the partisan-ideological consistency hypothesis. More than 90 percent of liberal Democrats and close to 90 percent of conservative Republicans voted for their party's candidates for all three offices. In contrast, moderate to liberal Republicans and moderate to conservative Democrats were far more likely to defect in at least one of these contests. Although moderates and conservatives made up only 28 percent of all Democratic identifiers, they made up 68 percent of Democrats who defected in at least one contest. Likewise, although moderates and liberals made up only 21 percent of all Republican identifiers, they made up 57 percent of Republicans who defected in at least one contest.

This pattern is even clearer when we examine voter decision-making in the presidential election by itself. According to the 2020 ANES survey, ideologically conflicted partisans made up 30 percent of Democratic

identifiers and 25 percent of Republican identifiers who voted for a presidential candidate. However, they made up 91 percent of Democratic identifiers who voted for Donald Trump and 89 percent of Republican identifiers who voted for Joe Biden. Evidence from the 2020 ANES survey suggests that Biden received a disproportionate share of the votes from these ideologically conflicted partisans. Only 11.5 percent of ideologically conflicted Democrats voted for Trump. In contrast, 40.5 percent of ideologically conflicted Republicans voted for Biden. While the ANES survey, like many surveys of the 2020 electorate, substantially overestimated Biden's victory margin, these results suggest that that his appeal to moderate voters was a key factor in his decisive popular vote victory over Trump, whose hard-line conservative positions appear to have alienated many moderate voters in both parties.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Deep partisan divisions, mutual mistrust, and outright hostility toward opposing partisans are the hallmarks of American politics in the third decade of the twenty-first century. Importantly, mutual mistrust and hostility are widespread among ordinary Americans, not just among members of the political elite and a small minority of activists. Because of this growing affective polarization, party loyalty and straight-ticket voting have set new records in recent elections. Crossing party lines, even to vote for an incumbent officeholder, has become much less common than in the recent past because partisans view any politician on the other side as a threat to their way of life and an enemy to be defeated at all cost.

In this article, I have shown that one of the most important factors in the rise of affective polarization and party loyalty in the American electorate has been growing partisan-ideological consistency. One of the most important reasons that so many Americans intensely dislike those on the other side of the partisan divide is that they consistently disagree with those on the other side of the partisan divide on a wide range of issues. Americans' preferences on issues as diverse as government responsibility for health care, gay and transgender rights, police reform, climate change, immigration, and regulation of firearms are now strongly correlated with each other and with their partisan and ideological identities. On a liberal-conservative issues scale that combines ideological identification with preferences across all these issues, the overwhelming majority of Democratic identifiers are found on the left while the overwhelming majority of Republican identifiers are found on the right.

When it comes to feelings toward political leaders and parties, ideology dominates membership in social groups. Liberals, regardless of

their group identities, tend to view the Democratic Party and Democratic leaders positively and the Republican Party and Republican leaders negatively. Conservatives, regardless of their group identities, tend to view the Republican Party and Republican leaders positively and the Democratic Party and Democratic leaders negatively.

Intense mistrust and dislike of the opposing party and its leaders help explain another key feature of American politics in the current era: record levels of party loyalty and straight-ticket voting. Like feelings of mistrust and hostility, party loyalty and straight-ticket voting reflect ideological conflict. One of the most important reasons so many Democrats and Republicans are unwilling to cross party lines in elections is that they disagree with almost everything that the opposing party stands for. However, a minority of ideologically conflicted Republicans and Democrats display much lower levels of party loyalty. In closely contested elections, this relatively small group of center-right Democrats and center-left Republicans can play a crucial role in deciding the outcome. Along with "pure independents," they make up a large share of the true swing voters in American politics and their votes appear to have been a key factor in Joe Biden's decisive popular vote victory in the 2020 presidential election.

The findings presented in this article indicate that partisan-ideological polarization is not confined to members of the political elite and a small sliver of activists. It is deeply embedded in the American public. Moreover, while polarization has led some Americans to believe lies and wild conspiracy theories promoted by political leaders, especially former president Trump, it has a rational foundation. Hostility toward the opposing party and its leaders reflects strong disagreement with the policies of the opposing party and its leaders. As long as the parties remain on the opposite sides of almost all the major issues facing the country, feelings of mistrust and animosity are unlikely to diminish regardless of Donald Trump's role in the Republican Party.

APPENDIX A

Questions Included in Issue Scales and Factor Loadings of Questions on Scales

Scale	*Question*	*Factor Loading*
Social welfare scale	Business/environment trade-off	.771
	Government aid to Blacks	.780
	Health insurance	.796
	Jobs/living standards	.819
	Spending and services	–.767
Gun control scale	Ban on assault rifles	.810
	Mandatory buyback	.816
	Background checks	.655
	Stricter federal gun laws	.797
Immigration scale	Birthright citizenship	.655
	Children brought illegally	.672
	Path to citizenship	–.616
	Illegal immigrants cause crime	.715
	Illegal immigrants take jobs	.668
	Immigration levels	–.687
	Return to native country	.803
	Separating children	.561
	Policy toward unauthorized	.680
	Wall on Mexican border	.801
Racial justice scale	Police use of force	–.672
	Police treat Blacks/Whites better	.816
	Protestors violent/peaceful	–.766
	How to deal with unrest	.840
Cultural issues scale	Abortion	–.698
	Same-sex marriage	.795
	Same-sex couple adoption	.729
	LGBT job discrimination	.607
	Businesses serve LGBT	–.694
	Transgender bathroom use	–.745
	Transgender military service	.725
Climate change scale	Regulate greenhouse gases	–.832
	Importance of climate change	.916
	Climate change affects weather	.918

APPENDIX B

Factor Loadings of Ideological Identification and Individual Issue Scales on Liberal-Conservative Issues Scale

Question/Scale	*Factor Loading*
Ideological identification	.825
Social welfare scale	.890
Cultural issues scale	.772
Racial justice scale	.849
Gun control scale	.722
Climate change scale	–.820
Immigration scale	.837

Source: 2020 American National Election Study.