Does Ideology Matter?*

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Objective. This study revisits the idea that the American public is moderate or nonideological. In this longstanding view, only informed elites maintain consistent ideologies that constrain their political attitudes and behaviors; the mass public is driven instead by partisan identities that they are socialized into. The study explores whether the public's liberal-to-conservative self-placement is temporally stable, and whether it is predictive of political attitudes when pit against partisanship. *Methods.* The study examines data from the 2010 American National Election Survey and the 2008–2012 General Social Survey longitudinal panel. *Results.* The American public today maintains coherent and consistent ideologies that systematically divide them in their sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences. *Conclusion.* While partisanship is a powerful top-down driver of the American public's attitudes and policy preferences toward overtly partisan issues and behaviors like Obamacare and voting, on broader sociopolitical issues like abortion, ideology is a powerful bottom-up driver of attitudes.

Since the publication of *The American Voter* in 1960, the "Michigan model" of voting behavior, with its focus on partisanship, has dominated the study of American public opinion. The ideologies of the American people, by contrast, have largely been treated more skeptically if at all. The authors of the *American Voter* first lamented the public's "impoverishment of political thought" (Campbell et al., 1960:543), and in "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," Phillip Converse (1964) famously argued that the political attitudes of the vast majority of the American people lacked "ideological constraint."

While there have been critiques (e.g., Pierce, 1970; Treier and Hillygus, 2009; Abramowitz, 2010; Feldman and Johnston, 2014), over half a century later scholarship in American public opinion largely continues to uphold the "common wisdom" (Nie and Anderson, 1974:541) of the 1960s that the American public today is either not divided by political ideology, or "innocent" of it altogether (e.g., Jacoby, 2011:442; Federico, 2012:79).

First, Stanford's Morris Fiorina has recently and repeatedly claimed that that the American public, unlike highly ideological political and media elites, is moderate. "The simple truth is that there is no culture war in the United States," Fiorina declares in *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2011:127). "There is little evidence that the country is polarized even on 'hot button' issues like abortion." While scholars like Alan Abramowitz (2010; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008) have worked hard to debunk Fiorina's argument, that *Culture War?* is now in its third edition attests to the continuing influence of the view that a polarized political elite is disconnected from a moderate American public (see also Fiorina and Levendusky, 2006; Fiorina, 2009).

Second, two recent Cambridge University Press books on American ideology go even further, declaring the political attitudes and behaviors of the American public today to be unconstrained by ideology at all. In *Ideology in America,* Christopher Ellis and James

Stimpson (2012:99, 153) argue that many Americans are operationally liberal but symbol-ically conservative. Yet they also claim that "citizens generally do not think about politics in ideological terms." Indeed, the attitudes revealed in surveys are "not real political beliefs at all, but instead random guesses." In other words, ideology neither constrains nor structures the political attitudes of the American public.

Hans Noel (2013:183, 196) focuses on the intellectual elites who craft American politi-cal ideologies in *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America.* While these ideologies may have some top-down impact on "politically sophisticated" and "attentive voters," the broader American public is another matter altogether: "Ordinary citizens are not ideo-logical." Noel therefore concludes pessimistically: "The picture of democracy as between elected officials and ordinary citizens is naïve." Both recent books cite Converse to support their claim that ideology does not shape the political attitudes of the American public.

Two ideas are central to these prevailing views. First, many scholars hold that while po-litical and media elites may be polarized ideologically, ordinary citizens lack the knowledge and sophistication necessary to maintain coherent ideologies. We have already seen that Noel's book focuses on elite "men of ideas" who create ideologies that are disseminated top down to only the most attentive of voters (Noel, 2013:2). Similarly, Thomas Wood and Eric Oliver (2012:637) have recently repeated the longstanding claim that the traditional unidimensional liberal-conservative measure of ideology used in public opinion surveys lacks temporal stability and suffers from "notoriously poor reliability." The ordinary Amer-ican, in this predominant view, is incapable of structuring his or her beliefs into coherent ideologies.

Second, the "common wisdom" also holds that unstructured ideology cannot rival the more stable partisanship as a predictor of the general public's broad sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors. The *American Voter* first proposed a "funnel model" in which parents socialize their children into partisanship, which becomes a psychological attachment shaping sociopolitical attitudes and behaviors like voting (Campbell et al., 1960). Over half a century later, Marc Hetherington (2012:115) has taken this view to its logical extreme, declaring partisanship to be the "most important" variable shaping not just voting but also "a person's political behaviors, positions on issues, or feelings about groups." This is a sweeping claim for the unrivaled power of partisanship as a predictor. With partisanship omnipotent, ideology is impotent, incapable of shaping political attitudes.

This article argues that the American public *today* is decidedly *not* "innocent of ideology." Converse's argument that American voters do not reason in explicitly ideological terms is likely as true today as it was then. But survey evidence today clearly reveals that among the broad American public (not just elites), liberal-to-conservative ideological self-placement is nonetheless not only temporally stable and internally reliable, but also powerfully structures sociopolitical attitudes.

Ideology, furthermore, holds its own when pit against partisanship to predict political attitudes and behaviors. When questions are framed in overtly partisan terms (e.g., "What do you think of the Republican bill . . . "), partisanship, unsurprisingly, is usually the primary driver of our attitudes. The same is true if the attitude object itself is highly partisan, like "Obamacare," or for overtly partisan behaviors like voting. However, ideology is usually the more powerful driver of our attitudes and policy preferences toward broader sociopolitical issues like gender equality and abortion.

Longstanding survey question wordings and designs will be central to these arguments. Traditional measures of ideology have produced an overly moderate view of the American public, and reduced its predictive power. The derived measure of partisan identification, by contrast, has created an acute case of kurtosis, putting partisanship on steroids.

Study 1 demonstrates that the American public both possesses coherent and consistent ideologies, and that they are divided by them. Study 2 then turns to the predominant view that partisanship best explains all political attitudes and behaviors, arguing that scope conditions are needed: while partisanship does indeed best account for some overtly partisan attitude objects (like Obama) and behaviors (like voting), ideology better explains many other sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences. The conclusion briefly addresses policy implications that flow from this analysis.

Study 1: Ideologically Innocent?

Is the American public too apathetic or ignorant to possess coherent ideologies? As noted above, Wood and Oliver (2012:637) have recently claimed that the traditional unidimensional liberal-conservative measure of ideology continues to lack temporal stability and suffer from poor reliability. However, their analysis used 25-year-old American National Election Survey (ANES) data that cannot tell us anything about ideological consistency today. Greater measurement error in such old surveys, furthermore, likely reduced observed correlations among their ideological variables, contributing to the possibility of type II error, or a false negative.

Is the American public today divided by ideology? In *Culture War?* Fiorina asserts that if the American public were ideologically divided, the distributions of responses to the standard ideology question should be bimodal: "To claim that Americans are polarized is to claim that the distribution has a U-shape rather than the familiar bell-shape: when the public is polarized, the middle is smaller than the extremes" (Fiorina, 2009:69). Fiorina thus sets an impossible standard: a truly U-shape is statistically rare. He raises an important question, however: What does the distribution of responses to the standard ideology question look like? Is the American public ideologically moderate or polarized?

Data

To explore whether the American public today is innocent of ideology and/or moderate, we analyze recent data sets that include the traditional unidimensional liberal-to-conservative measure of ideology. Specifically, we examine the 2008–2012 General Social Survey (GSS) longitudinal panel and the 2010 ANES.

Analyses and Results

These two Internet surveys reveal that the American public today maintains very consistent liberal-conservative ideologies. The 2008–2012 GSS longitudinal panel asked the same 1,214 participants an identical liberal-to-conservative ideology question every two years over a four-year period. The intercorrelations between their responses were all over $r = 0.60$, producing an excellent internal reliability, $\alpha = 0.83$.[1]

The 2010 ANES similarly included two very slightly different versions of the standard ideology question, asked to the same respondents at two separate times. The questions differed only in whether the ends of the seven-point scale were described as "very" (C1_V1A)

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[1]Cronbach's α ranges from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater internal consistency.

FIGURE 1

Diluting Ideology: "Extreme" Wording Reduces Dispersion from the Mean
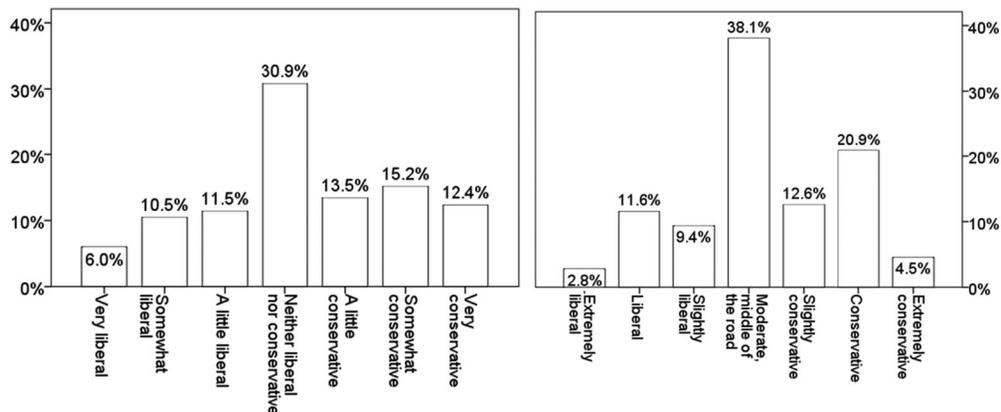
NOTE: Weighted distributions for questions C1_V1A "very" ($M = 4.31$; $SD = 1.69$) and C1_PP012 "extremely" ($M = 4.27$; $SD = 1.45$). The latter wording significantly reduces dispersion from the mean. Kolmogrov-Smirnov test for differences between distributions, goodness of fit $= 1.90$, $p < 0.001$. Levene's test for homogeneity of variance $= 39.17$, $p < 0.001$.
SOURCE: 2010 ANES.

or "extremely" (C1_PP012) liberal or conservative. Although asked at distinct times, with different answer choices, these two items nonetheless also intercorrelated ($N = 1,147$) at a remarkable $r = 0.71$, producing an internal reliability of $\alpha = 0.82$, excellent for a two-item measure.

Wood and Oliver's reexamination of quarter-century-old ANES data notwithstanding, more recent GSS and ANES data thus demonstrate that the ideological self-reports of the American public today do *not* suffer from "poor reliability"; instead, they appear to be both remarkably stable and internally reliable.

But is the American public divided by ideology, or is it moderate as Fiorina suggests? ANES and GSS single-item measures of ideology have long suffered from a pair of wording choices that have contributed to an artificially moderate or nonideological picture of the American public. First, the ideology question has long been preceded by language that both questioned the very idea of ideology ("We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives") and legitimated nonresponse (" . . . or haven't you thought much about this?"). Such question wording may well have inflated the numbers of respondents choosing the "don't know" and "haven't thought much about it" responses, helping produce a false picture of a nonideological public.

Second, the standard ideology question asks respondents to place themselves on a seven-point scale from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative." To be "extreme" may not be normatively desirable, however, pushing respondents *away* from the edges of the distribution and toward the center. As noted above, in 2010 ANES substituted "very" for "extreme" in its ideology question to address this issue, while also reporting the results from Knowledge Network's public profile ideology question (asked at a separate time), which retained the "extreme" wording.

As can be seen in Figure 1, while only 7.4 percent of Knowledge Network respondents in 2010 were willing to describe themselves as "extremely" liberal or conservative, 18.4 percent of the *very same respondents* were willing to describe themselves as "very" liberal or

conservative. The "extreme" wording even swelled the numbers of respondents choosing the neutral (4) position, from 30.9 percent to 38.1 percent, possibly because of a negative exemplar effect (e.g., Moskowitz and Skurnik, 1999): some people may associate "extremely liberal" and "extremely conservative" with celebrities they find distasteful, like Bill Maher or Rush Limbaugh, so distance themselves from any ideology at all by choosing the "moderate, middle of the road" option.

A poor choice of diction—"extremely"—has thus contributed to producing an artificially moderate picture of the American ideological landscape for decades. As can be seen in the note to Figure 1, while the means for the two ideology questions in the 2010 ANES data are similar, the variance for the "very" wording question is significantly larger than with the "extremely" wording. "Extremely," in short, has artificially reduced dispersion from the mean for decades, making the American public look more moderate and less ideologically divided than it actually is.

Study 2: Partisanship > Ideology?

Taking the 1960 "Michigan model" to its logical extreme, Marc Hetherington (2012:115) has recently claimed that partisanship is the "most important" variable shaping our sociopolitical feelings, attitudes, and behaviors. Does this broad claim for the omnipotence of partisanship (and implicit claim that ideology is impotent) withstand empirical scrutiny? Or are scope conditions needed? Morris Fiorina similarly uses GSS data to argue that the American people are not even ideologically divided over "hot button" culture war issues like abortion. Is he right that ideology does not divide the American people in their political views? Are political and media elites the only Americans divided over the culture wars?

Data

To explore the relative predictive power of partisanship and ideology, we again examine recent ANES and GSS survey data.

Analyses and Results

The 2010 ANES data suggest that partisanship (C1_PID7) trumps ideology (C1_V1A) in accounting for overtly partisan attitude objects like Obama or the Republican Party and political behaviors like voting. For instance, one question (C1_PP016) asked respondents how favorably they felt toward Barack Obama. Regression analysis revealed that partisanship (14.4 percent) accounted for over five times as much unique variance as ideology (2.6 percent) did.[2] Similarly, when pit against each other, partisanship (17.6 percent) accounted for over six times as much variance in liking the Republican Party (C1_K1B) than ideology (2.8 percent) did. Finally, partisanship (17.6 percent) accounted for almost eight times as much unique variance in reported 2008 presidential vote choice (C1_PP06, McCain vs. Obama only) than ideology (2.3 percent) did.

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[2]All 2010 ANES and 2008 GSS regressions reported here control for age, gender, education, income, and being Hispanic, black, and from the U.S. South.

FIGURE 2

Deriving Partisanship: Creating an Acute Case of Kurtosis
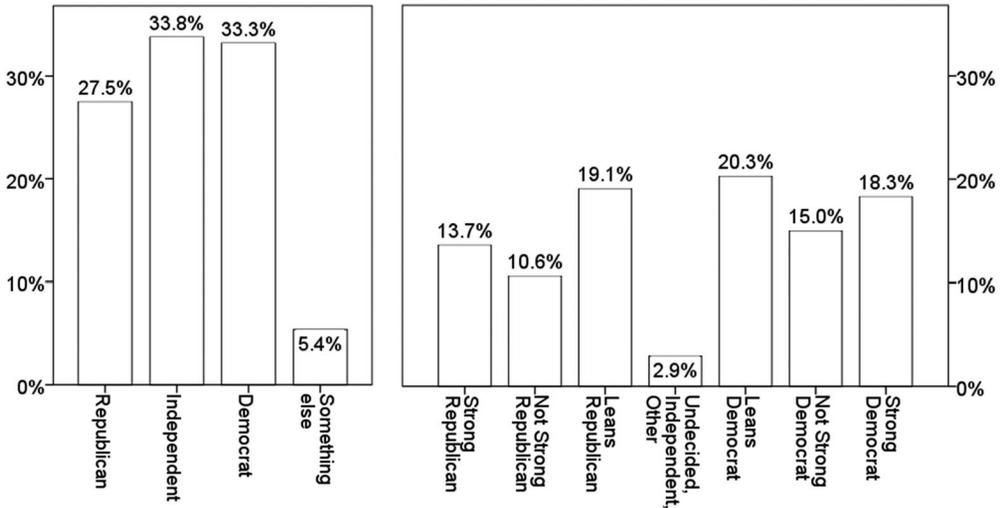
NOTE: Weighted distributions for questions C1_H1, *"Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an independent, or what?"* and C1_PID7, derived based upon follow-up questions like C1_H5, *"strong or not very strong"* Democrat or Republican? Kurtosis statistic $= -1.32$ ($SE = 0.14$).
SOURCE: 2010 ANES.

In addition to the partisan nature of these dependent variables, another reason that partisanship appears so powerful is that ANES has long measured partisanship with a branching question format that pushes respondents away from the center and toward the extremes of the distribution. Respondents are first asked if they think of themselves as a Republican, Democrat, independent, or something else. If they choose one of the two major parties, they are then asked whether they would call themselves a "strong" or "not very strong" Republican or Democrat. Since being "strong" is normatively preferable to being "not very strong," partisans are pushed to the far edges of the scale. Meanwhile, those who choose "independent" or "something else" are further asked whether they think of themselves as "closer to" the Republican or Democratic Parties. Because people generally wish to please their interlocutors by providing new information (the "Maxim of Quantity") (Grice, 1989), this follow-up question pushes independents into one of the two partisan camps.

These twin polarizing effects can be clearly seen in the 2010 ANES data. The left side of Figure 2 reveals that 39 percent of respondents chose independent (34 percent) or something else (5 percent) in response to the first question. But after the follow-up "closer to" question, less than 3 percent of respondents remained in the neutral "independent" or "undecided" position. Combined with a massive "strong" effect (a remarkable 32 percent of the 2010 ANES sample end up in the 1 and 7 tails of the distribution), which also pushed respondents away from the center of a normal bell curve, the derived PID7 variable suffers from a distribution so nonnormal that it is of questionable value for statistical analysis (the kurtosis statistic of –1.32 exceeds the conventional cutoff of an absolute value of 1). As can be seen on the right side of Figure 2, the distribution appears almost bimodal, with massive tails.

The derived PID7 is not just nonnormal; it also exaggerates the relative power of partisanship over ideology. For instance, in addition to the favorability question analyzed above, the 2010 ANES included the likability question (C1_K1C): "How much do you like or dislike . . . Barack Obama?" If the derived PID7 is pit against the single-item measure of ideology ("extremely" version, C1_PP012) as predictors of liking Obama, partisanship (11 percent) accounts for almost four times as much variance as ideology (3 percent) does. However, if the original partisanship question (C1_PP008) is treated as a three-point continuous variable from Democrat to independent to Republican and pit against the same ideology variable, partisanship (7 percent) and ideology (7 percent) become equally strong predictors of liking Obama.[3] So ideology can rival partisanship in accounting for even overtly partisan attitude objects like Obama. The derived PID7 variable thus distorts our understanding of the relative power of partisanship and ideology, putting partisanship on steroids.

"Extremely" also weakens the relative predictive power of ideology. As noted above, the 2010 ANES included a question (C1_K1B) about how much one liked the Republican Party, another clearly partisan attitude object. When the "extreme" format of the ideology question is pit against PID7, partisanship (16.8 percent) accounts for 6.7 times as much variance as ideology (2.5 percent) does. However, when the "very" ideology question is pit against PID7, partisanship (15.2 percent) accounts for just 4.2 times as much variance as ideology (3.6 percent). So by reducing variance, "extremely" makes ideology appear even weaker against the inflated partisanship, PID7.

Longstanding question wordings and designs thus stack the decks in favor of partisanship and against ideology. ANES and GSS data nonetheless reveal that ideology is usually the more powerful predictor of broader sociopolitical attitudes. For instance, one 2010 ANES item (C1_Z4E) asked for agreement with the statement: "Society has reached the point where women and men have equal opportunities for achievement." Only ideology ("extremely" C1_PP012, $\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$) and *not* partisanship (PID7, $\beta = 0.02$, $p = 0.41$) contributed unique variance to beliefs about equal opportunities for women.

Sociopolitical policy preferences are similar. The GSS has long asked respondents whether they support six specific conditions under which a woman should be allowed to have an abortion. Summing these creates a measure of support for a woman's right to choose. Using 2008 GSS data, when both partisanship and ideology are set against one another as predictors, liberal-conservative ideology ("extremely," $\beta = -0.24$, $p < 0.001$) accounted for 4 percent of unique variance in abortion policy preferences, while partisanship (PID7) did not account for any, $\beta = -0.05$, $p = 0.16$. So even when using measures of partisanship and ideology that are stacked in favor of the former, it is the latter that packs the greatest punch in accounting for sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences such as over equal opportunities for women and abortion.

Fiorina depicts the relationship between religiosity and abortion attitudes as a crucial case for the existence of a culture war among the American public, and asserts that "the churched and unchurched differ less on abortion than stereotypes suggest." This claim is based upon his eyeball interpretation of GSS data on the six specific conditions under which a woman should be allowed to have an abortion: "the difference . . . is . . . about two circumstances—not exactly a religious war" (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2011:87). Remarkably, no statistical evidence is presented to support Fiorina's interpretation of the GSS data.

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[3]Both regressions controlled for age, gender, education, income, and being black, Hispanic, and from the U.S. South. The β coefficients are standardized so they can be compared. The 229 respondents to C1_PP008 who chose either "another party" or "no preference" were excluded from the latter analysis.

Statistical analysis of the 2004 GSS data Fiorina presents actually reveals a *very large* difference between his "churched" and "unchurched" groups in their abortion policy preferences.[4] Furthermore, only about 10 percent of Americans typically disagree with one of the GSS conditions (ABHLTH) for obtaining a legal abortion: "If the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy." If this item is excluded from the analysis due to insufficient variation, the large difference between the "churched" and "unchurched" in their abortion policy preferences only becomes even larger. Fiorina's argument, in short, is contradicted by the very GSS survey evidence he presents.

Other survey data also contradict Fiorina's claim, revealing ideological cleavages over the culture wars. For instance, on the basis of their 2006 Faith Matters Survey, Robert Putnam and David Campbell (2010:22) argue in *American Grace* that the most and least religious Americans differ substantially on issues like abortion and homosexuality. Alan Abramowitz (2006, 2010) is right that the "culture wars" are no myth: Main Street America is divided over issues like abortion.

Discussion

Ideology likely has a greater impact on broad sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences than partisanship because it is more psychologically fundamental, reflecting deeper motivational needs (e.g., Jost, 2006). By contrast, partisanship may be better viewed as a "group influence" on individual behavior; political parties act as "sources of guidance" or "reference groups" shaping the individual (Jacoby, 2011:443). Hetherington (2012:102) suggests that party identification is like "rooting for a sports team": "Once someone has decided that he roots for the Red Sox and not the Yankees, he does not usually change sides."

Hetherington is right that we do not easily switch our team loyalties. But we can engage in what social psychologists call "social mobility" or "exit" from a particular social identity. When the Red Sox win, a Boston sports fan can "bask in their reflected glory" (BIRG) (Cialdini et al., 1976) by wearing his or her Red Sox cap. But when they lose, s/he can "cut off reflected failure" (CORF) (Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford, 1986) by wearing a Celtics jersey instead. Similarly, when the Republican Party lost the presidential election in 2008, many conservative Americans likely "cut off reflected failure" by switching the focus of their political identification from the GOP to other political groups, like the Tea Party (e.g., Skocpol and Williamson, 2012).

In short, while group identities like partisanship are powerful top-down drivers of some political attitudes and behaviors, especially toward highly partisan attitude objects like Barack Obama, they are multiple and fluid. Our ideologies, by contrast, are more stable bottom-up drivers of broader sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences, like on gender equality and abortion.

Conclusion

Few observers of American politics today would disagree that partisanship—the degree of identification with a political party—and ideology—shared and systematic beliefs about

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[4]2004 GSS: $F(1, 554) = 121.48$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 18$, controlling for age and gender. Weighted (WTSS) comparison of those, following Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2011:87), who claim to attend church (ATTEND) "several times a year" or less with those who claim to attend "nearly every week" or more. This *very large* religious attendance gap on abortion widened in the 2008 GSS data, $F(1, 807) = 201.24$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.20$.

how the world does and should work—have converged over the last several decades. Voters increasingly choose where to live based on their politics: liberals choose the two coasts and urban areas, while conservatives choose the heartland and suburban or rural areas. Americans cluster into communities of the like-minded (Bishop and Cushing, 2008). The solidly Democratic South of the past, once united in opposition to the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln, is long gone. Opposition to the civil rights movement and the Great Society triggered changing party loyalties, and 50 years later, the long conservative South is now solidly Republican (e.g., Valentino and Sears, 2005).

Extant public opinion data support this narrative of partisan and ideological convergence. ANES data reveal that between 1972 and 2008, the U.S. South became more Republican without becoming more conservative: party loyalties changed in the absence of ideological change.[5] At the national level, ANES data reveal a four-fold increase in the overlap between measures of partisanship and ideology between 1972 and 2004, from 10 percent ($r = 0.32$) to 40 percent ($r = 0.63$) (e.g., Fiorina and Levendusky, 2006:56; Abramowitz, 2006:114; Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009:9–10). Longitudinal GSS data tell a similar story of convergence, with a six-fold increase in shared variance from 1974 ($R^2 = 0.04$) to 2008 ($R^2 = 0.24$).

Despite their substantial covariance, the predominant view of the relationship between partisanship and ideology among students of American public opinion today remains remarkably lopsided, with partisanship omnipotent and ideology impotent. Many scholars continue to declare partisanship to be king (e.g., Hetherington, 2012:115), and major recent books on American ideology claim either that the American public is moderate (e.g., Fiorina, 2009; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2011) or unable to maintain coherent and consistent ideologies that constrain their sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences (e.g., Ellis and Stimpson, 2012; Noel, 2013).

This research report, by contrast, has argued that the American public maintains consistent—if consistently different—ideologies that systematically divide them in their sociopolitical attitudes and policy preferences. Both partisanship and ideology matter—depending upon the subject matter. Almost by definition, partisanship matters most when partisanship is salient, such as when thinking about political elites like Barack Obama or when voting. To return to Hetherington's metaphor, whether one is a Red Sox or Yankees fan will powerfully shape whether one would prefer Red Sox or Yankees tickets. By focusing on explaining partisan attitude objects (e.g., Obama) and behaviors (e.g., voting), many scholars of American public opinion have in effect stacked the statistical deck in favor of partisanship over ideology as a predictor.

For broader sociopolitical issues like women's rights and abortion policy preferences, however, ideology usually overpowers partisanship in explanatory power. Against Wood and Oliver (2012), and drawing on two recent nationally representative surveys (ANES 2010, GSS 2008–2012), this article demonstrates that the unidimensional liberal-conservative ideology measure is both temporally stable and a powerful predictor of domestic policy attitudes today. These findings are consistent with recent work revealing how ideology powerfully divides the American public in its attitudes and policy preferences toward China (Gries, 2014a), Israel (Gries, 2015), Latin America (Gries, 2016), multilateralism (Rathbun, 2012), and indeed American foreign policy more broadly (Gries, 2014b). Scope conditions are thus clearly needed for Hetherington's (2012:115) overgeneralization that partisanship is the "most important" variable shaping "a person's political behaviors, posi-

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[5]Partisanship: $F(17, 11122) = 10.82$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$; ideology: $F(17, 7001) = 1.42$, $p = 0.12$. Both ANES ANCOVA controlled for age and gender.

tions on issues, or feelings about groups." Ideology is frequently a more powerful predictor of the domestic and international attitudes of the American people than partisanship is.

Arguments that the American public is moderate or that partisanship trumps ideology in explaining all sociopolitical attitudes rest in part on longstanding survey question wordings and designs. A branching format has created a derived PID7 variable that suffers from an acute case of kurtosis, which has the effect of making partisanship appear *more* powerful than it really is. At the same time, "extreme" wording has artificially reduced the variance of the single-item measure of ideology, making the American public appear *less* ideologically divided than it actually is. The reduction in variance also *reduces* the predictive power of ideology.

Policy Implications

The perverse incentives of the American electoral system today are amplifying the influence of Main Street's ideological extremes on Capitol Hill. Against Fiorina's (2009) and Fiorina and Levendusky's (2006) view that American political elites are *disconnected* from Main Street, we conclude with the suggestion that fear of being "primaried" makes American politicians today *hyperconnected* to the ideologically extreme preferences of the primary voters who increasingly elect them.

Analyzing the fall 2012 elections, statistician Nate Silver (2012) estimates that just 8 percent of House districts today are competitive, while a remarkable 56 percent have become "landslide districts" in which the presidential vote margin differed from the national result by over 20 percentage points. "Most members of the House now come from hyperpartisan districts where they face essentially no threat of losing their seat to the other party."

To keep their jobs, therefore, most U.S. politicians today no longer cater to the "median voter" (Downs, 1957) in their districts, let alone voters from the other party. Instead, their main job is to curry favor with the primary voters most likely to remove them from office—the most conservative and liberal slices of the American public. U.S. congressmen understand this situation very well. "To avoid a party primary," as former Democratic congressman John Tanner from Tennessee put it, "these guys are gonna be responsive to the people that elected them . . . not their district or their country" (Draper, 2012). "The median voter" is becoming irrelevant.

Fear of being "primaried," therefore, appears to be the critical mechanism through which the ideological extremes on Main Street increasingly get their voices heard on Capitol Hill. Observers of American politics would be wise, therefore, to take the consistent—and consistently different—ideologies of the American public more seriously.

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