Political Polarization in the U.S.
The Relationship between Political Elites & the Mass Public

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Abramowitz, Chapters 1 & 2

The Current Debate (Part I)

Abramowitz & Fiorina agree about the definition of political elites:

1) Elected & appointment office-holders inside government
2) Political activists outside government

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The Political System

INPUTS	GOVERNMENT	OUTPUTS
Mass public	• Executive	Regulations
Movements Interest groups Political parties	• Legislature	Statutes
Media	• Judiciary	Court decisions

FEEDBACK LOOP

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The Current Debate (Part II)

Abramowitz & Fiorina also agree about the nature contemporary political elites:

1) Ideologically polarized
2) And, therefore dysfunctional

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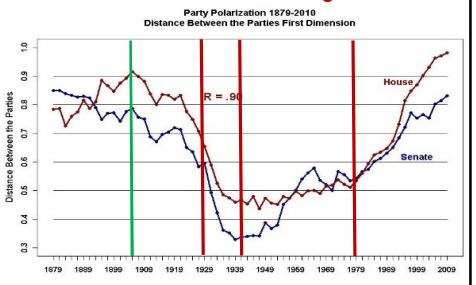
Polarization in Congress



McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (2006)
http://voteview.com/polarized_america.htm

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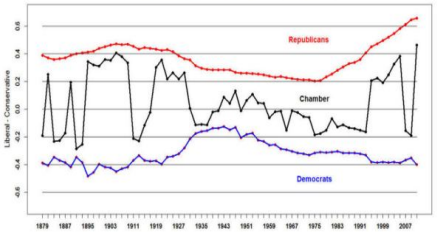
Ideology in U.S. House (1879-2011)



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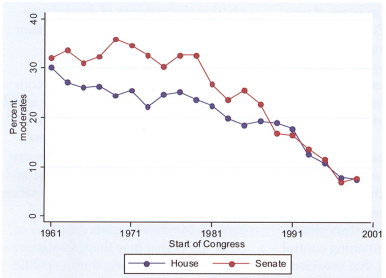
Decline of Centrists in Congress (1961-2000)



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The Current Debate (Part III)

Abramowitz & Fiorina disagree about what causes elite polariztion:

- Abramowitz: polarization in elites is mainly caused by polarization in the mass public
- Fiorina: the mass public is
  - more pluralistic than polarized
  - highly cynical about dysfunctional political elites

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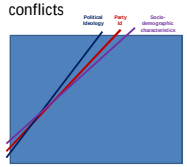
Two Types of Elites & Mass Publics

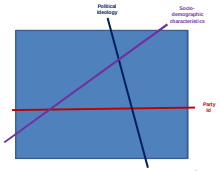
Polarized

- Few groups have overlapping memberships
- One common fault line across most political conflicts



Pluralistic

- Most groups have overlapping memberships
- No one common fault line in political debates



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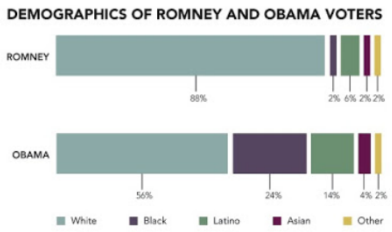
Race/Ethnicity in 2012 Vote



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Madison's Core Assumptions

1. Human nature
   a) Often flawed by self-interest, haste, passion, and short-sightedness
   b) True of even the "best and the brightest" in both the mass public and elites
2. The best public policy comes from:
   a) Bargaining and compromise between competing interests
   b) Rarely does one side have a monopoly on wisdom and virtue
3. Compromise will happen more easily and often if both elites and masses are pluralistic rather than polarized

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Two Types of Political Conflicts

1) Individual liberty versus government-guaranteed order
   a) Economic
   b) Social
2) Individual liberty versus government-guaranteed equality
   a) Economic
   b) Social

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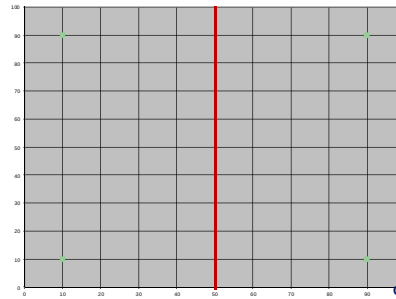
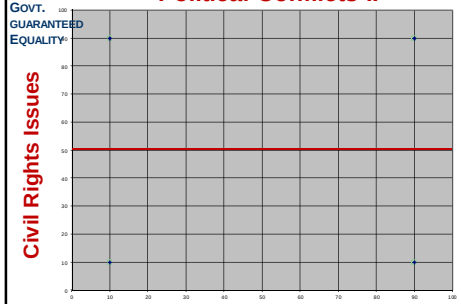
Political Conflicts I



Political Conflicts II



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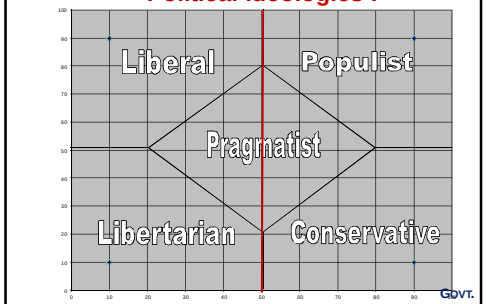
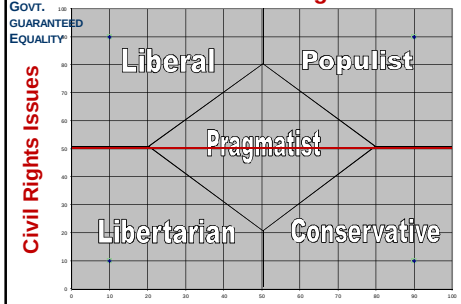
Political ideologies I



Political ideologies II



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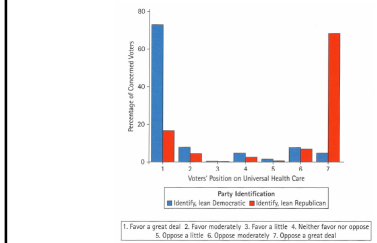
Opinions of Concerned Partisan Voters on Universal Health Care

(Abramowitz, Figure 1.1)



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Public Opinion & PPAC Act

(Kaiser Foundation Poll, Nov. 2011)

PERCENT WHO SAY THEY HAVE A FAVORABLE VIEW OF EACH ELEMENT OF THE LAW, OVERALL AND BY PARTY ID

	Very favorable	Very + Somewhat favorable			
	Total public	Total public	Dem	Ind	Rep
Require easy-to-understand plan summaries	60%	84%	88%	87%	76%
Guaranteed issue	47	67	81	63	57
Gradually close Medicare "doughnut hole"	46	74	86	73	63
Tax credits to small businesses	45	80	88	77	73
Subsidy assistance to individuals	44	75	88	76	51
Health plan decision appeals	37	74	82	70	70
Employer mandate/penalty for large employers	35	63	79	59	39
Medicaid expansion	34	69	86	70	47
Medical loss ratio	34	60	72	62	48
No cost sharing for preventive services	33	64	68	65	53
Rate review	31	66	78	66	51
Increase Medicare payroll tax on upper income	30	59	81	61	28
Increase Medicare premiums for higher income	24	57	71	54	36
Basic benefits package, defined by government	24	53	73	49	31
Individual mandate/penalty	16	35	53	29	17

Note: Question wording abbreviated. See topline for full question wording.
http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/8259.cfm

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