

United States Centre public discussion

Why Washington Won't Work

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THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE

Why Washington Won't Work

Marc J. Hetherington

and

Thomas J. Rudolph



BREAKING NEWS

Trump Rally Canceled Amid Chaos



11:02 54°





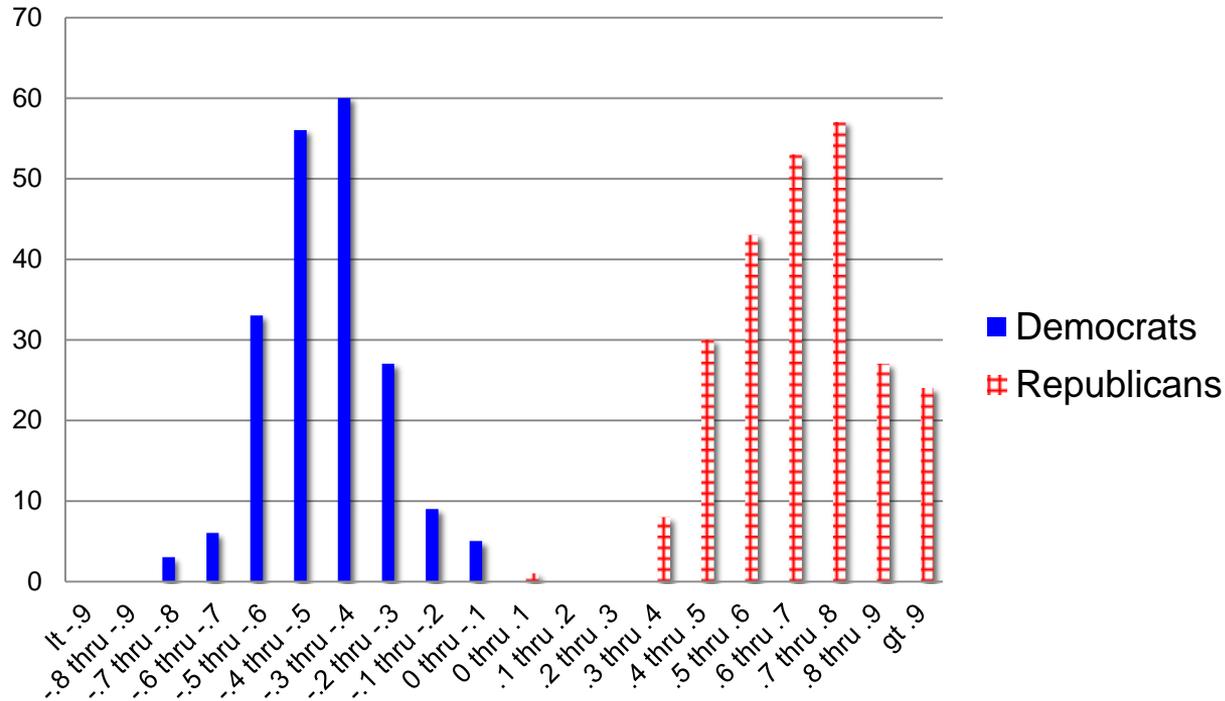
Why Washington Won't Work

- Tom Rudolph & I attempt to make sense of the polarization debate while connecting it to why nothing gets done in Washington.
- **The Puzzle:** If Americans are not *ideologically* extreme, which we think is true, then why do we put up with immoderation from our representatives?
- We suggest polarization does exist, but scholars have been looking for it in the wrong places.

On Polarization

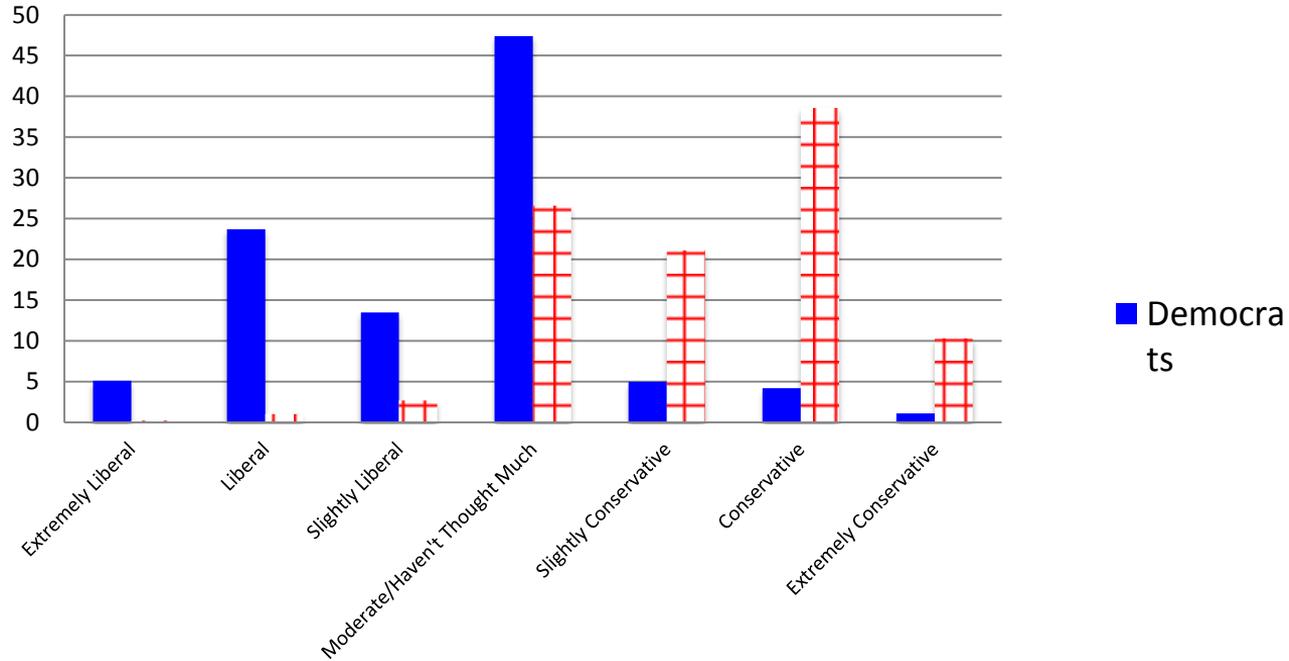
- Those studying polarization have adopted a literal understanding for evidence. Many people must cluster at the poles.
- Their focus has been mostly on ideology and issue preferences.
- Do either of these decisions make sense, given what we know about public opinion?

We see polarization like this among elites...



Source: DW-NOMINATE scores, 112th Congress from voteview.com.

...but not in the mass public.



Source: 2012 ANES

Few who study public opinion would be surprised

- People who do not know much about politics—which is a *lot* of Americans—choose the middle.
- Furthermore, is there anything beyond politics that *all* Americans would express strong preferences for or against?
 - Baseball?
 - Food?
- Not even people who are extreme want to call themselves extreme. Being “extreme” is not fashionable in the US.

Is polarization in Washington exclusively ideological?

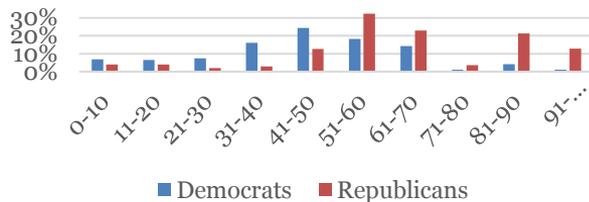
- When conservative/liberal ideas become liberal/conservative ones, do Republicans/Democrats continue to support them?
 - Individual mandate on health insurance
 - Cap & trade
 - Education reform based on federal standards
 - Rx drug benefits under Medicare

Polarization in Washington is partisan, too

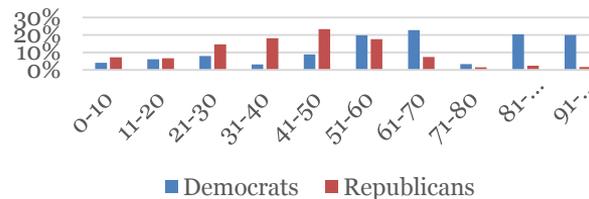
- Narrow majorities in Congress eliminate parties' incentives to cooperate on much of anything.
- When the minority feels it can win the majority in the next election, providing the majority with any legislative victories is not in the minority's best interest.
- How should that raw partisanship manifest in the public?

Polarization elsewhere? Feelings

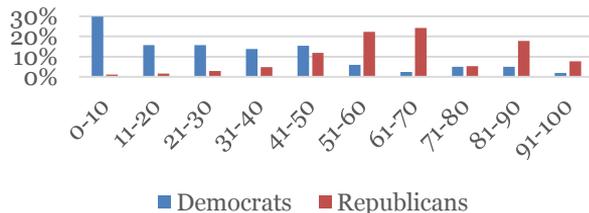
Feelings About Republican Party, 1980



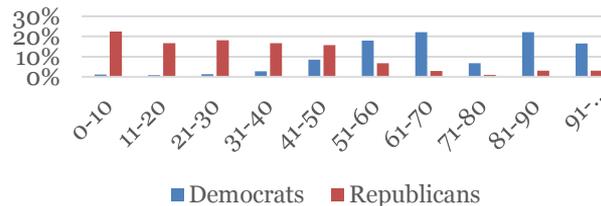
Feelings About Democratic Party, 1980



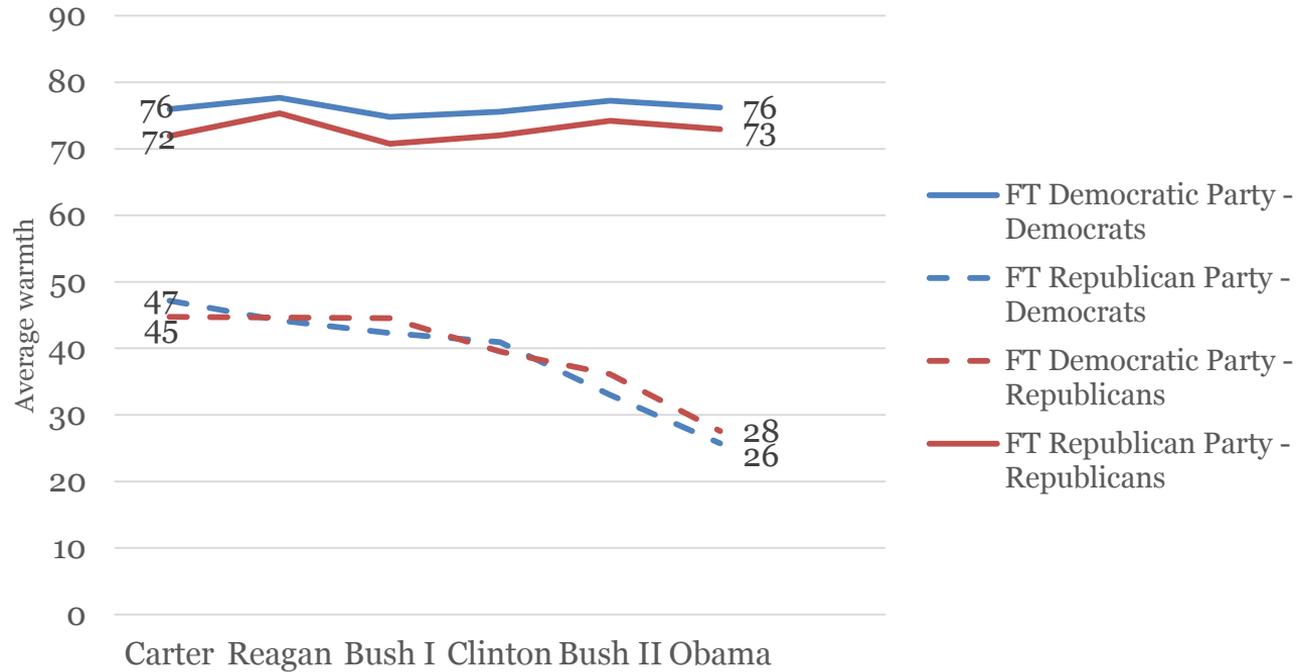
Feelings About Republican Party, 2012



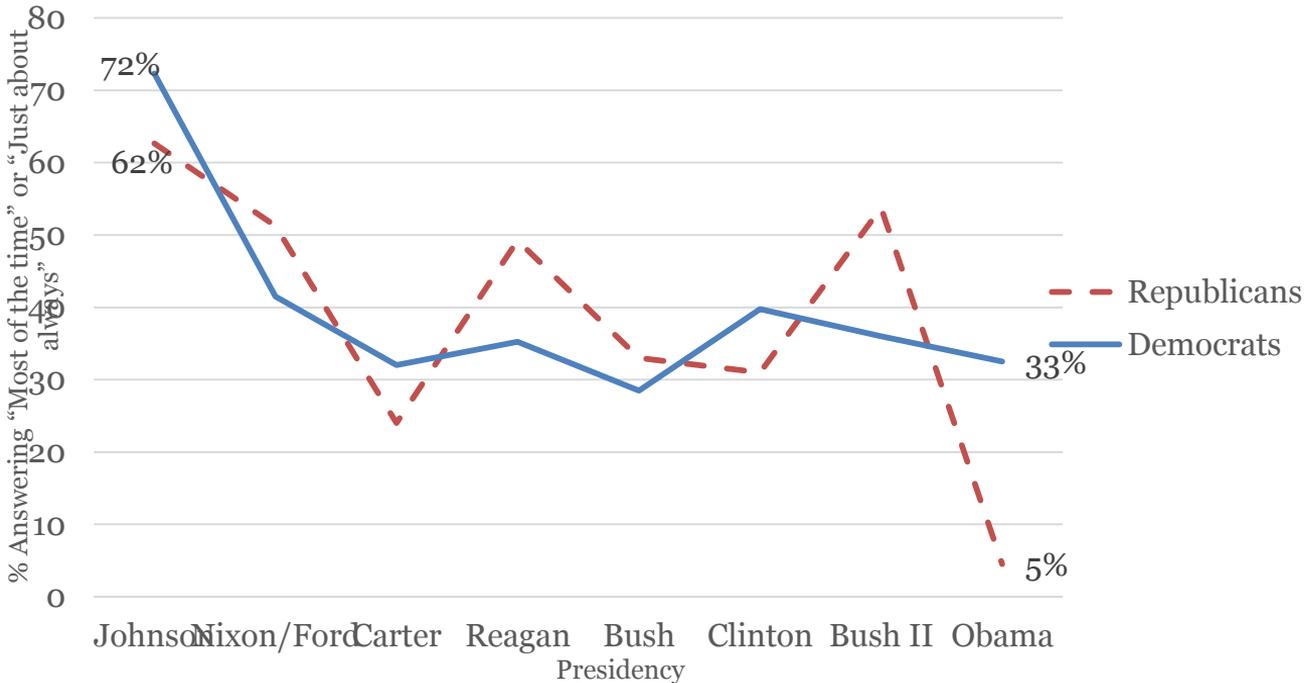
Feelings About Democratic Party, 2012



Partisans' Feelings About Their Own & the Other Party



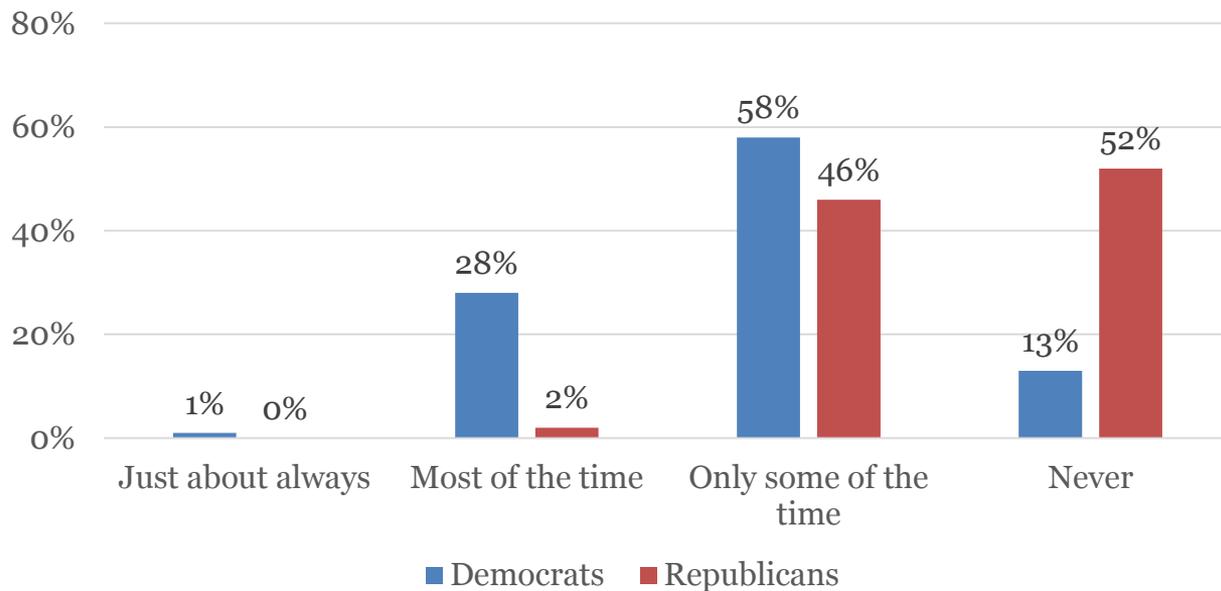
Polarization elsewhere, II? Political trust



Source: ANES Cumulative File; CCES 2010

“Never” is an extreme word

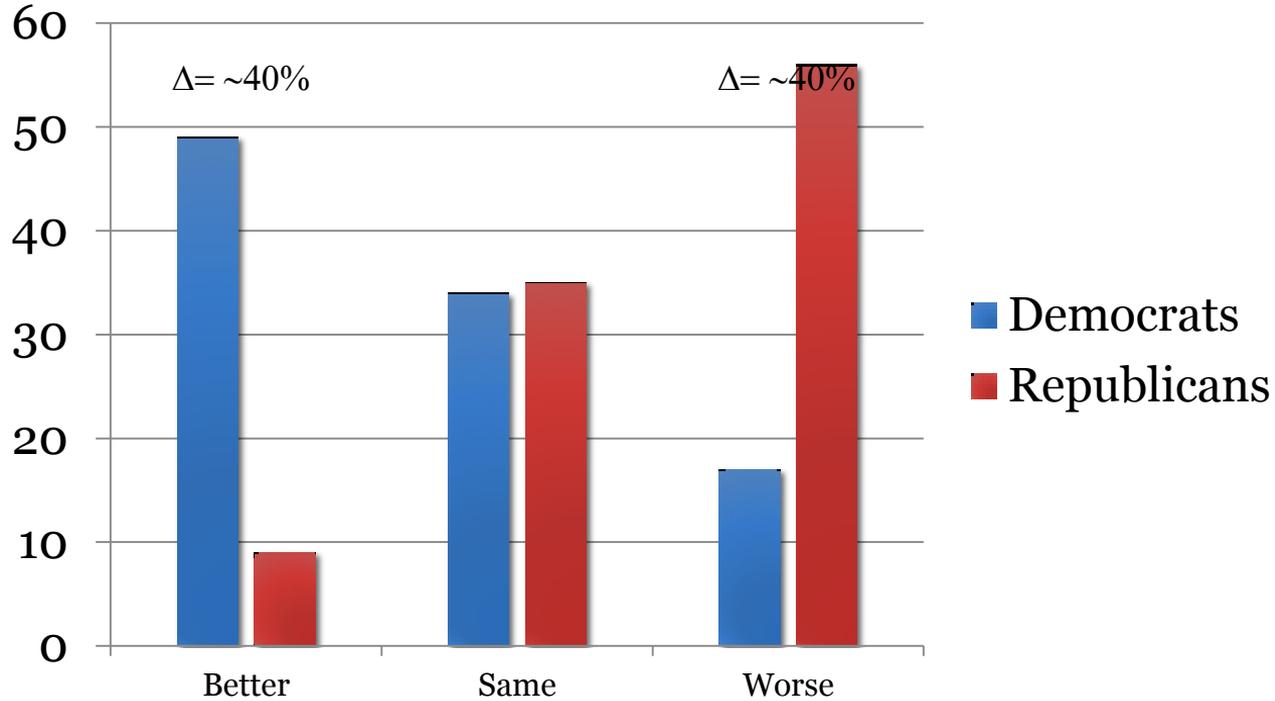
“How much do you trust the government in Washington to do what’s right?”



What caused trust polarization?

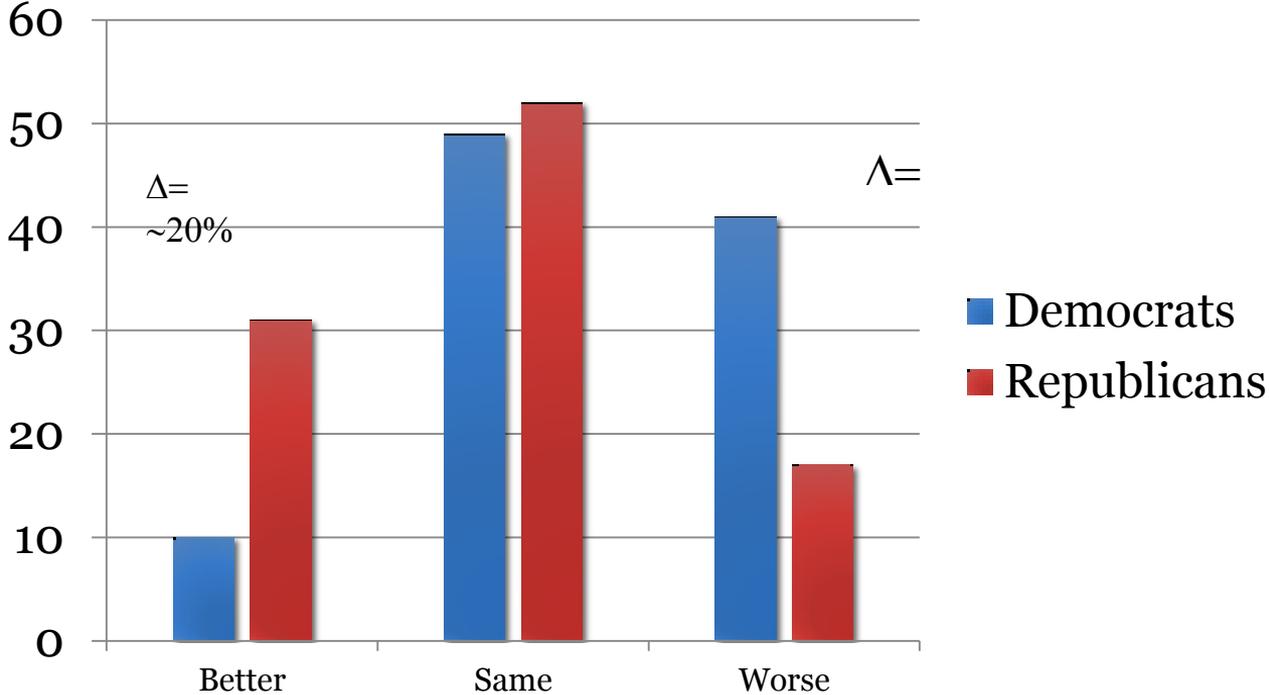
- We demonstrate that the **polarization of feelings about the parties** is the key cause.
 - People do not generally trust things that they do not like.
- **Partisan Reasoning and Partisan Weighting** are our companion explanations.
 - People of different partisan stripes see the world the way they want to see it, not how it is.
 - In addition, people update politically relevant evaluations based on criteria that are most advantageous.

Partisan Assessment of the Economy, 2012



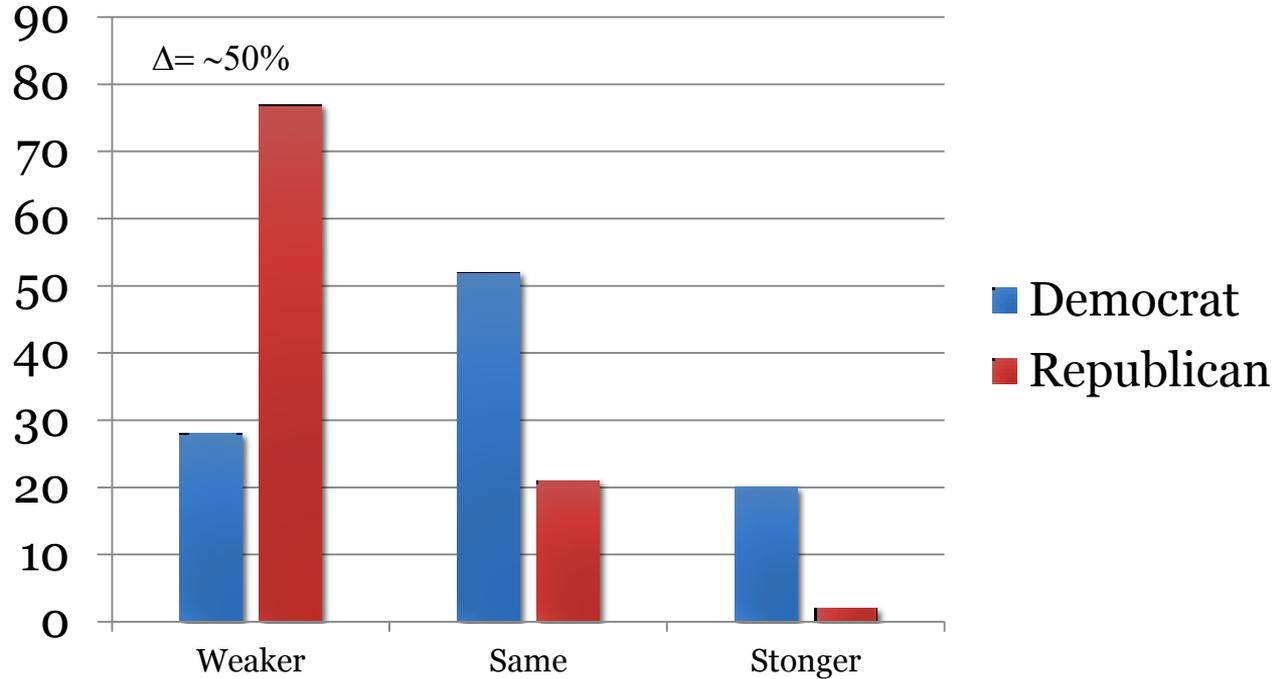
Source: ANES 2012

Partisan Assessment of the Economy, 1988



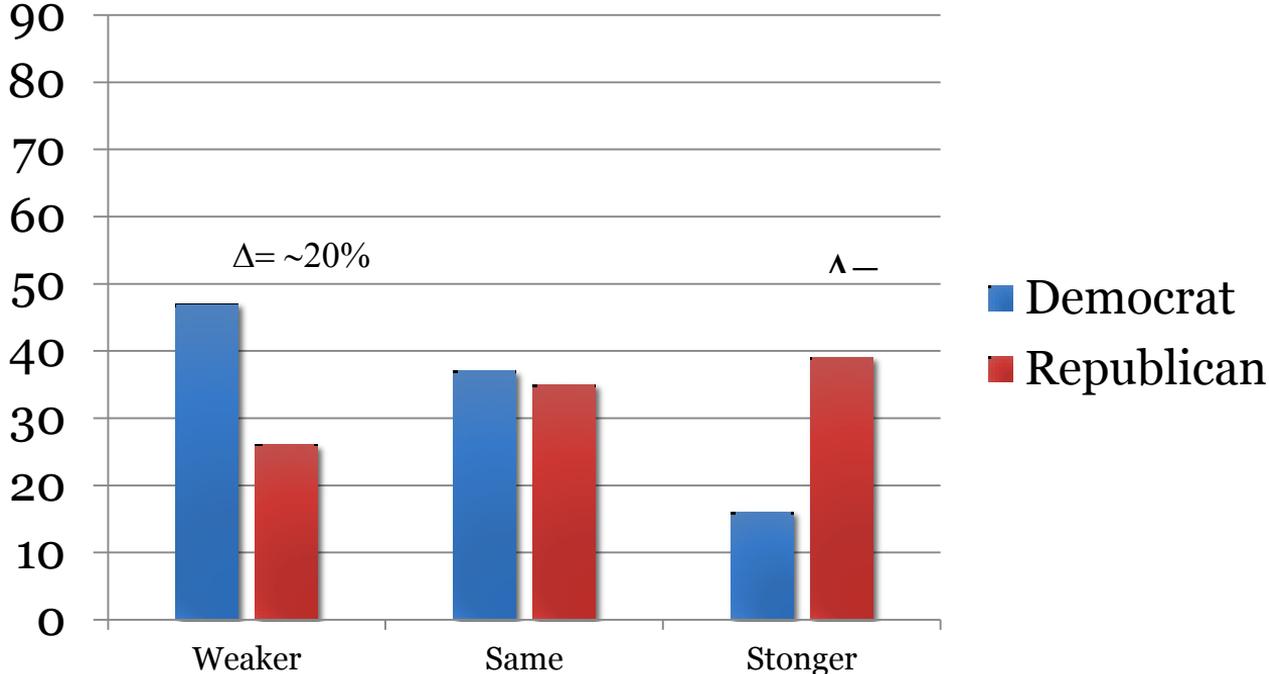
Source: ANES 1988

Partisan Assessment of America's Strength in the World, 2012



Source: ANES 2012

Partisan Assessment of America's Strength in the World, 1988



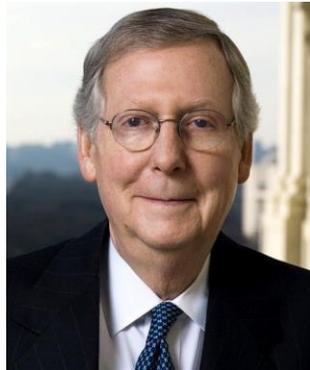
Source: ANES 1988

Why is polarized trust important?

- *Polarized* trust contributes to the governing crisis.
 - Trusters from the out-party are those most inclined to make sacrifices to support governing-party initiatives.
 - No trust among out-party identifiers means few will make such sacrifices.
 - These partisans are especially important because they are central to the reelection constituencies of minority party members of Congress.

Minority Party Leaders Have Different Incentives Now

- Without consensus, the public puts little pressure on officeholders to compromise.



Mitch McConnell

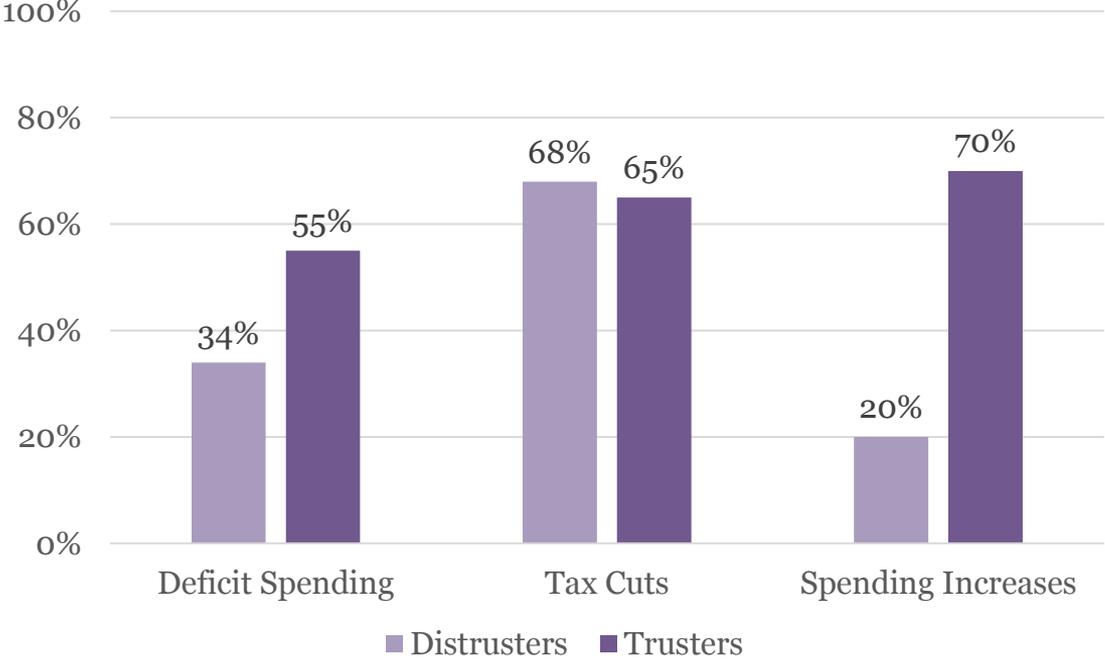


Hugh Scott

Politics of economic stimulus

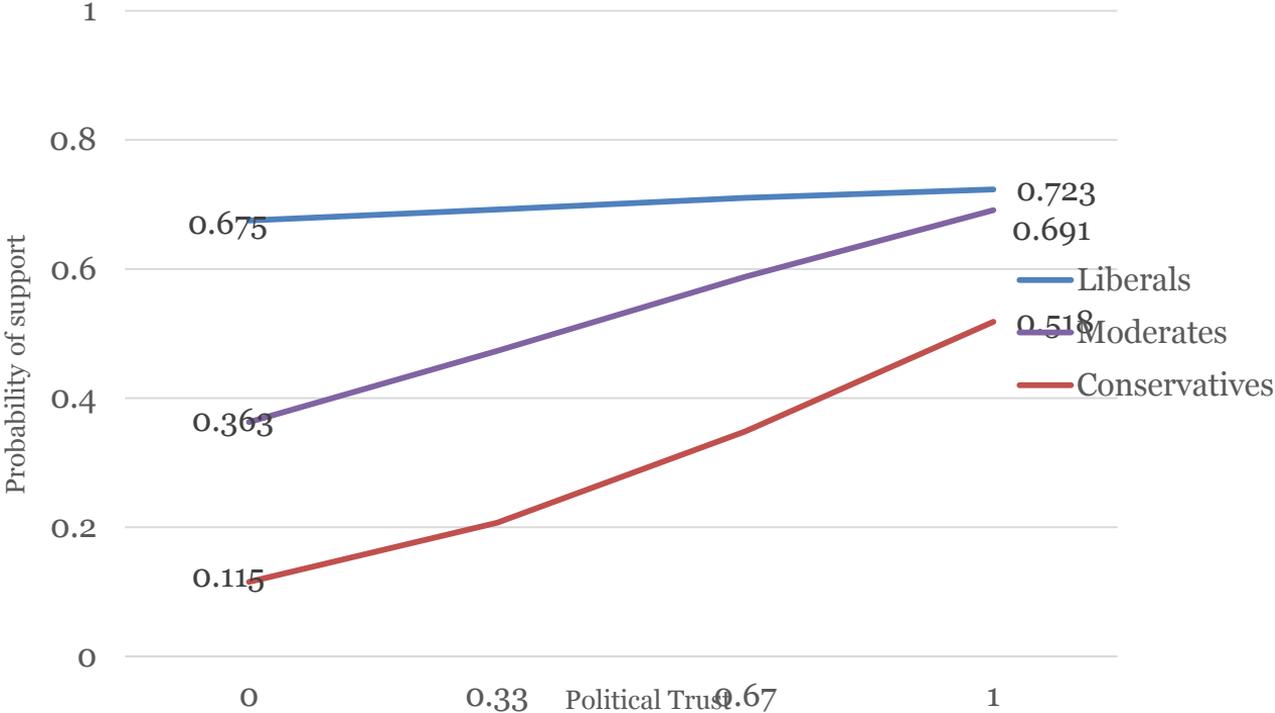
- Gaining public support for economic policy solutions suggests a Gordian Knot of relationships.
- Poor economy = low trust, but people need trust to support a government intervention in the economy.
 - Except to support tax cuts:
 - A bias in public opinion that supports conservative aims and undermines liberal aims.
- Worse, Republicans completely lack trust.
 - Low support for spending from GOP identifiers → Consensus fails to develop in mass public → Members feel little pressure to compromise

Support for Types of Economic Stimulus by Political Trust, 2012



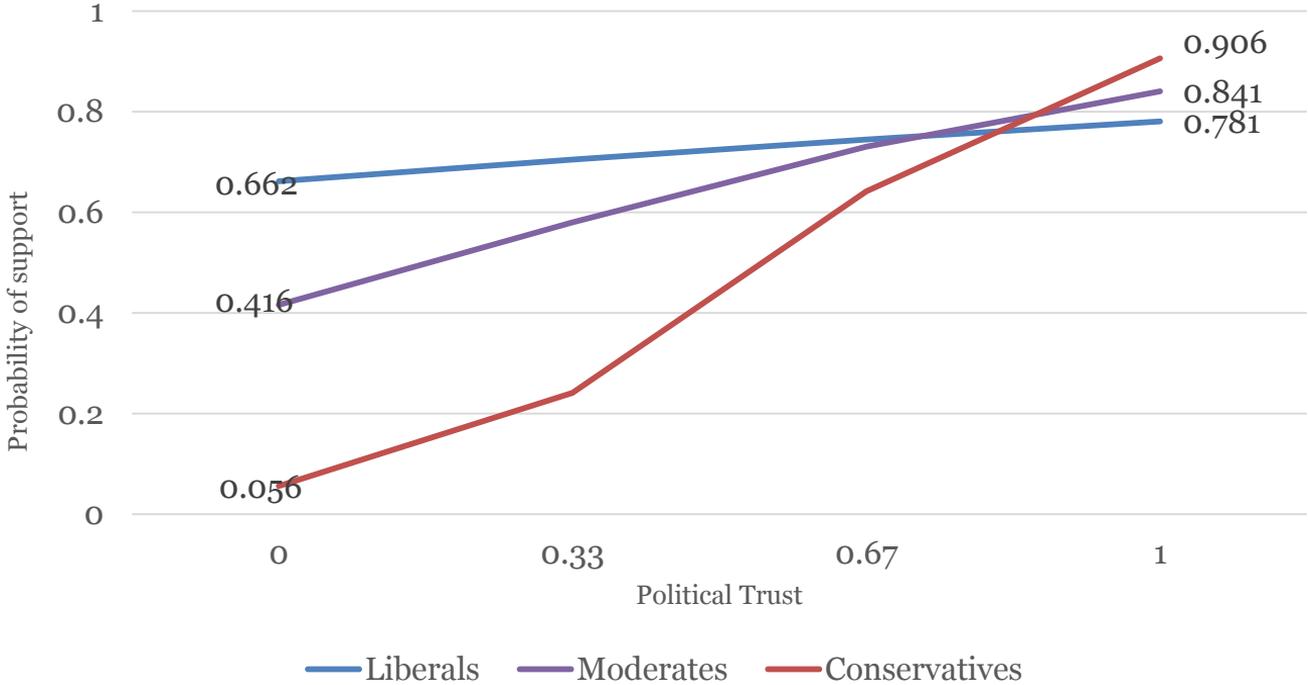
Source: CCAP 2012

Effect of Political Trust on Support for Deficit Spending



Source: CCAP 2012

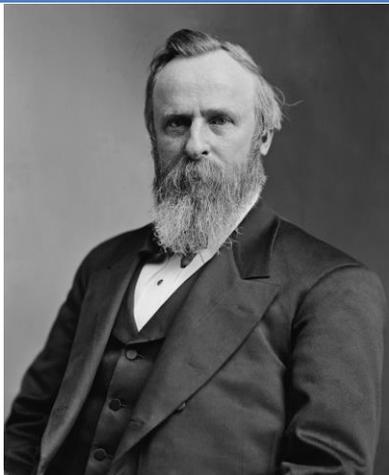
Effect of Political Trust on Support for Increased Spending as Stimulus



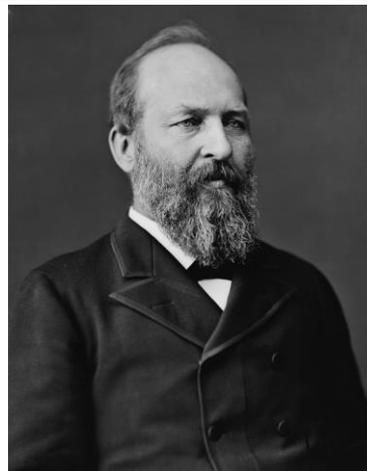
Source: CCAP 2012

The Challenge to Governance of Elite Polarization

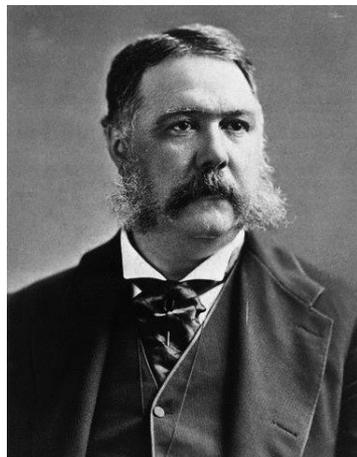
- Polarization by party/ideology in Congress is as wide now as any time in the last 100+ years.
- Traditionally, the public has been able to nudge legislators to overcome their worst instincts, when consensus about an issue emerges in the public.
- However, with low and polarized trust in government, consensus in the public does not develop, making public opinion an increasingly inert force.



R.B. Hayes



J.A. Garfield



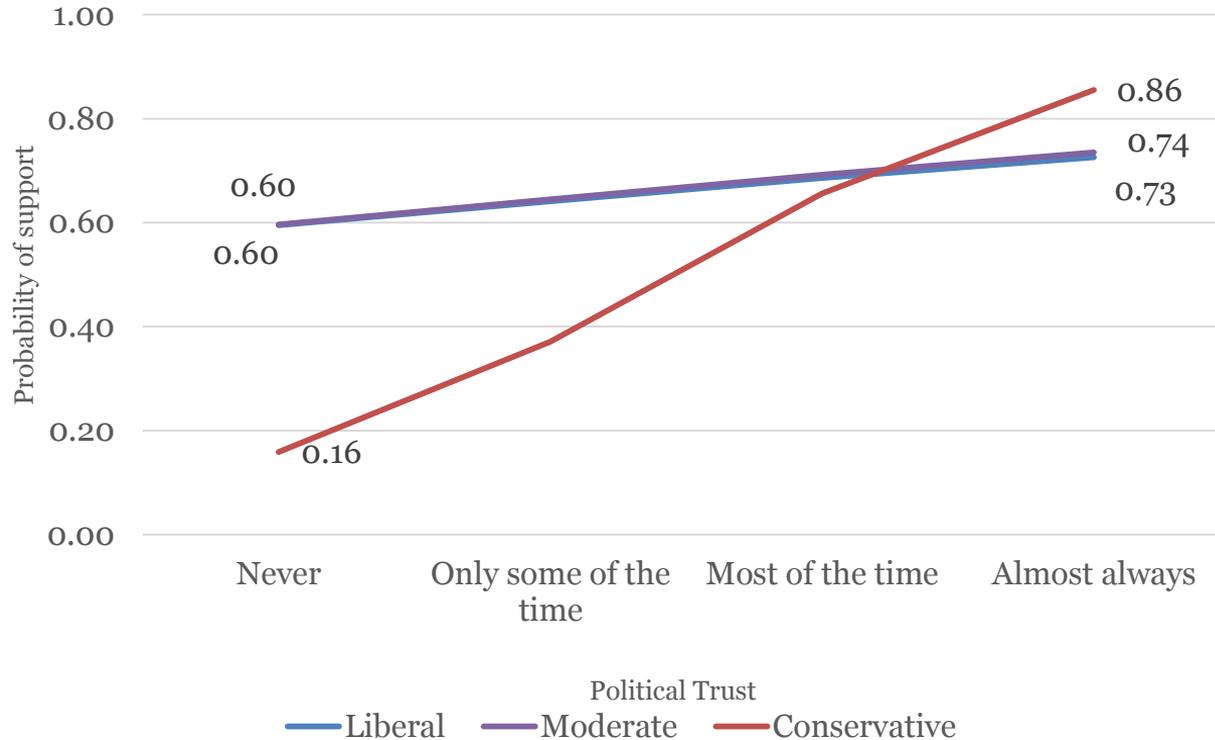
C.A. Arthur



B. Harrison

THANKS!

Probability of Supporting Health Care Reform



Effect of Trust on Support for Deficit & Increased Government Spending

	Support for Deficit Spending	Support for Increased Government Spending
Trust in Government	1.368*** (0.296)	2.003*** (0.352)
Liberal	1.291*** (0.229)	1.013*** (0.262)
Conservative	-1.481*** (0.239)	-2.485*** (0.347)
Trust in Government * Liberal	-1.118* (0.501)	-1.404* (0.579)
Trust in Government * Conservative	0.745 (0.528)	3.083*** (0.717)
n	2942	2919
Pseudo R ²	0.290	0.406

Standard errors in parentheses.

*p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01, two tailed.

Source: 2012 CCAP

Test case: Climate Change

- A consensus among experts ought to cause consensus to develop in the public.
- However, public opinion has been polarizing since 2007.
- Can we do anything to bridge the divide?

Maybe the US Military can help

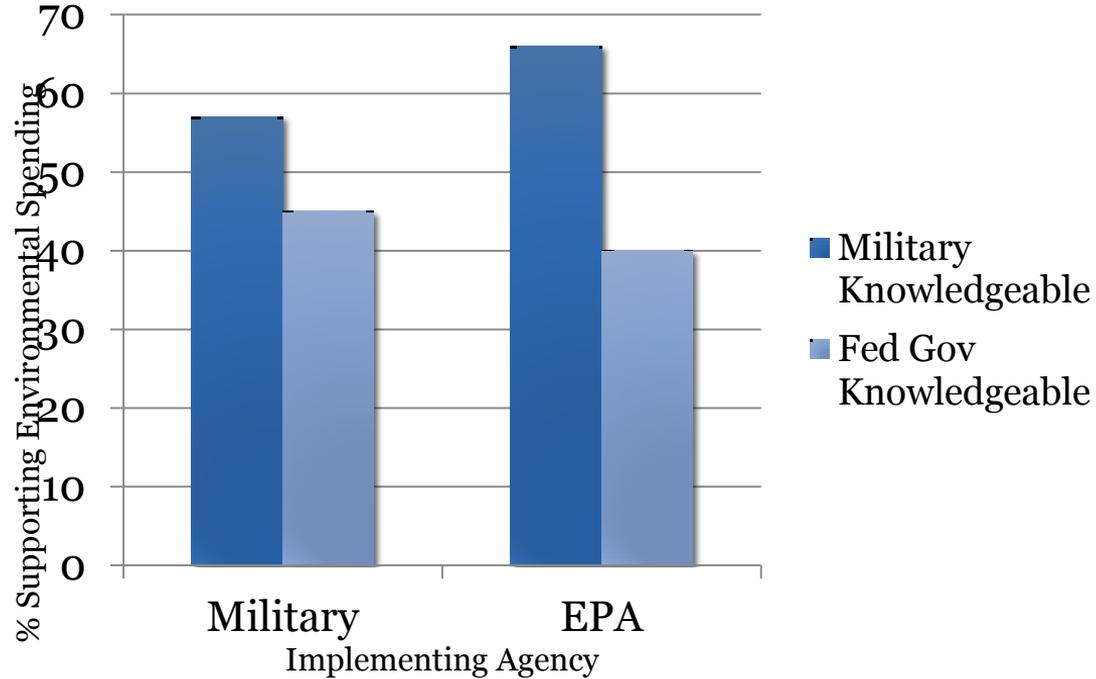
- Effective cue givers need two characteristics (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). The US Military has both.
 - 1) Trustworthiness Americans trust it more than any institution, public or private (GSS 2012). 55 percent said they had “a great deal of confidence” in it.
 - In comparison, Supreme Court (30 percent), executive branch (15 percent), Congress (7 percent).
 - 2) Knowledge, although people do not know it
 - Production of electric vehicles in Army
 - “Great Green Fleet” for Navy
 - Navy and Air Force at the forefront of developing alternative fuels for aircraft.

What if we tell the public about the military's interest in mitigating climate change?

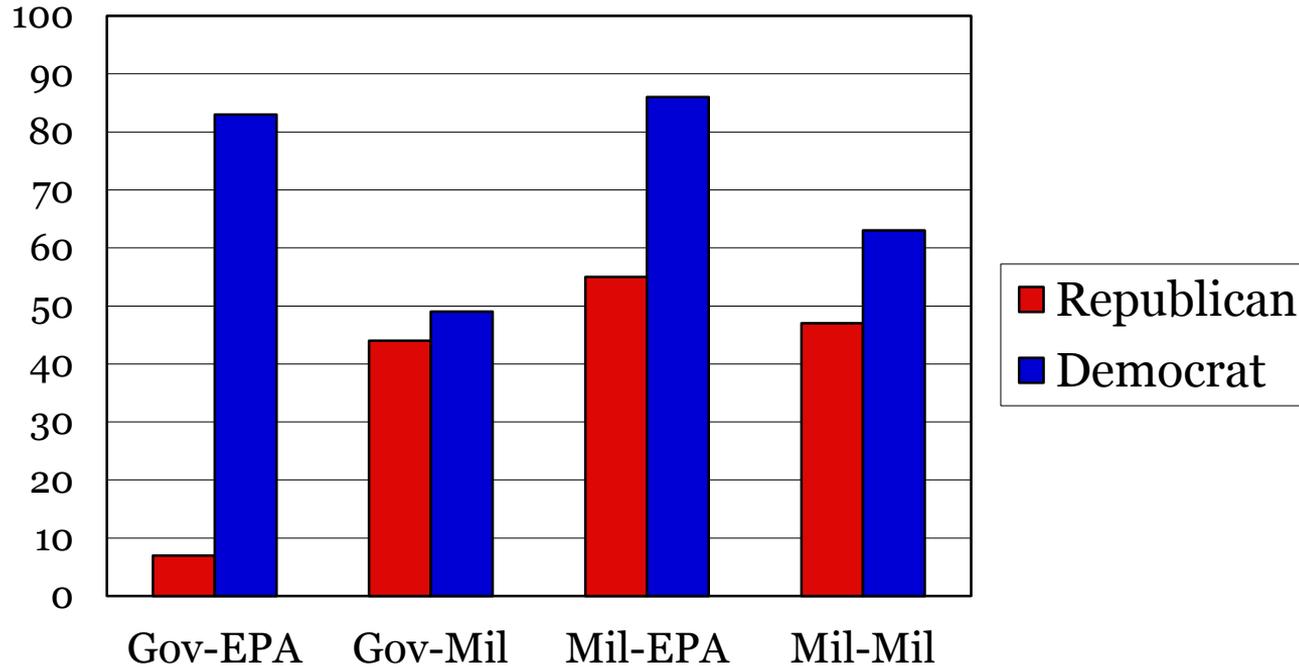
A survey experiment

- Step 1: Manipulate whether people are told that 1) the military or 2) the federal government has expertise with mitigating climate change.
- Step 2: Manipulate whether people are told that 1) the military or 2) the EPA will implement a spending program designed to help mitigate climate change

Support for Environmental Spending, by Condition



Shrinking Partisan Polarization



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