

*Toward A More Responsible Two-Party Voter:
The Evolving Bases of Partisanship*

Gerald M. Pomper

Marc D. Weiner

Rutgers University

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Please send comments, requests or questions to gpomper@rci.rutgers.edu & mdweiner@rci.rutgers.edu.
A replication data set may be found at: www.polisci.rutgers.edu/people/mdweiner.

Abstract

The 1950 APSA Report hoped that its proposed reforms “would prompt those who identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats” to base their support on “a national program.” To assess the realization of that hope, we examine changes in the foundations of partisanship over the past five decades, using two connected research designs. First, we employ a logistic regression model on individual level data to predict first the presence, and then the direction of partisanship. We assess the relative importance of traditional party loyalty inherited from parents (affective partisanship) as compared to gross perceptions of differences in party issue positions (cognitive partisanship). Perception of party differences has increased substantially and persistently. These perceptions are now a better predictor of party loyalty than parental loyalty. The second approach employs a time-series cross-section model with a binary dependent variable to assess the relative impact of political and non-political explanations on the aggregate level of these changed perceptions of party differences. We assess the relative importance of education, as a proxy for non-political factors, and the level of party unity in Congress, as a proxy for political factors. We provide evidence that, although non-political factors are significant, political factors are more important and are essential in constructing an appropriate model of the aggregate change in the perception of party differences. Party combat has provided a learning experience for voters, making them more aware of political realities. By connecting party programs to electoral behavior, these changed perceptions move American politics closer to the goals of the APSA Report.

Toward A More Responsible Two-Party Voter: The Evolving Bases of Partisanship

Gerald M. Pomper
Marc D. Weiner^{*}

We report the possible discovery of a missing link. The epochal advocacy of "a more responsible two-party system" (APSA, 1950, referred to here as the Report) dealt with political parties, yet largely ignored the audience for those parties, the electorate. Perhaps in retribution, American voters have ignored the APSA's Committee on Political Parties. We now find evidence of a significant change in mass attitudes that may partially realize the goals of the Report.

Voters in the APSA Report

The Report's silence about the voters was evident in the two basic goals of the original advocates of "responsible parties": "first, that the parties are able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and, second, that the parties possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs" (Report, 1). Voters, they hoped, would react appropriately to the changed parties, but they were seen as passive and dependent.

On rereading the Report, we are struck by its elitist tone, and its concentration on the formal parties, whether in their 1950 shape or their desired reconstruction. The authors gave considerable attention to party organization, conventions, platforms, staffing, and legislators. They made 58 specific recommendations, seeking major changes in American politics, but only four involved the mass public, and even these few items dealt with suffrage restrictions, not electoral behavior (Pomper, forthcoming 2001, Table 1).

To the extent the Report considered people other than party officials, it dealt with them almost entirely as members or potential members of the formal organization. The Committee recommended various measures to increase participation within the organization, and to increase enrolled members' influence

^{*} The authors are listed alphabetically. Gerald Pomper is Board of Governors Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University and Marc Weiner is a senior graduate student at Rutgers and a Graduate Research Fellow at the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

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on party programs (e.g. open platform hearings) and nominations (e.g. closed primaries).

The Committee on Political Parties, however, paid attention to voters behaving as voters at only two places in the Report. In both instances, the electorate was regarded as dependent on party initiatives, the passive means to promote party accountability by choosing between programs adopted by coherent, hierarchical and, therefore, now-responsible parties.

In the first mention, the emphasis was still on voters in their roles as party activists. The Committee predicted - or better, hoped - that policy-oriented parties "would prompt those who identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats to think in terms of support of that program, rather than in term of personalities, patronage and local matters" (Report, 69). Including this comment in its discussion of "intraparty democracy," the Committee here referred to organizational members, but the assertion can also be applied to ordinary voters, who "identify" with the parties with the casualness of an NES questionnaire.

The second, and more elaborate, discussion of voters came at the end of the Report, as the Committee (Report, 90-91) divided the electorate into three groups: non-voters, standpatters or traditional voters, and, party switchers. (See the similar categorization of Key, 1966, and before him, Miller, 1953.) All of these groups are claimed to be fertile ground for programmatic parties. Non-voters might be mobilized if "a real choice is presented on matters they personally consider important." Among traditional voters, "the rank and file in each party want their party so organized that the views of the party majority will be respected and carried out." Particularly important were the third group, party switchers, which is "willing to make an electoral choice and wants a choice to make; that wants to vote for a program and resents not having it carried out." Overall, the Report portrays an electorate still dependent on party initiative, but ready to respond to the recommended responsible parties.

Critics of the Report were more cognizant of the importance of voters as independent actors. They understood that reform programs would be only theoretical exercises if they did not reflect the realities of electoral politics. Early on, Turner (1951, 151) colorfully criticized the Report for ignoring the realities of voter preferences: "Regardless of the organization provided, you cannot give Hubert Humphrey a banjo and expect him to carry Kansas....and only a Republican who moderates the Republican platform can carry Massachusetts." From the perspective of a quarter-century later, Ranney (1975, 43-44) underlined the Report's irrelevance to real politics: "Regardless of how enthusiastic college professors might be about the report's prescriptions, party politicians and the man in the street showed no interest whatever, let alone the kind of fervor needed to make possible such sweeping changes."

American political parties are not intellectual creations of political scientists, a reality long recognized by the most notable empirical theorists. "A

political party is first of all an organized attempt to get power" (Schattschneider, 1942, 35); it is "the creature of the politicians, the ambitious office seeker and officeholder" (Aldrich, 1995, 4). Unless the voters cast ballots on the basis of party programs, parties will not focus on programmatic differences. This reality is even recognized at one point in the Report (presumably by Schattschneider, the major author, Report, 87), conceding that, "The greatest stake of party leaders at all levels is in the winning of elections." The party's search for victory, it then argues, depends on ideological coherence: "Ability to win elections is linked to the party's ability both to arrive at a program that will appeal to a majority of the electorate and to convince the electorate that the program will be carried out."

Now, after fifty years, we can bring the voters back in. Based on analyses of partisanship spanning five decades, we find evidence that the hopes, even if not the prescriptions, of the APSA Committee are becoming empirical realities. The missing link between mass attitudes and party responsibility may be emerging. Voters are now prepared to pay attention to those programs to which the parties commit themselves and to respond to the efforts of parties to carry out these programs. We substantiate this development through the following arguments:

1. Voters increasingly perceive policy differences between the major parties.
2. These changed perceptions have increased the relative importance of the cognitive, compared to the affective, bases of partisanship.
3. This changed relationship cannot be adequately explained by social or individual characteristics alone.
4. This changed relationship is due to the new character of American politics.

We conclude with a discussion of the sources and likely impact of these changes on electoral behavior and American politics generally. We expect these new perceptions of the parties to move the nation closer to the APSA Committee's goal, "a more-responsible two-party system."

Party Differences

Conventional wisdom tells us that there are few significant differences between the parties. Even Thomas Jefferson, the first American party leader, minimized party differences, declaring, "We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists." With far less elegance, George Wallace sneered, "There's not a dime's worth of difference" between the parties, and Ralph Nader today echoes this attitude.

Scholars are more likely to perceive differences. Tocqueville (1954, I, 185-86), with the insight of a foreign observer, found fundamental differences of political philosophy:

[T]he domestic controversies of the Americans at first appear to be incomprehensible or puerile....The deeper we penetrate into the inmost thought of these parties, the more we perceive that the object of the one is to limit and that of the other to extend the authority of the people.

Examination of party platforms also shows extensive policy differences. In a basic textbook, Wayne (2000, 167-68) details the contrasts between the Republican and Democratic 1996 platforms on such major issues as abortion, the budget, crime, education, foreign policy and welfare. The most systematic comparative study (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994, 138), concludes, "not only that the Democrats and Republicans are reasonably cohesive internally when compared with political parties in other systems, but also that their platforms are quite clearly differentiated from each other in an ideologically consistent fashion."

We want to know what the voters think. For this part of our analysis we constructed a data set from NES surveys from 1952 to 1992. We chose these dates to cover the period from the time of the APSA Report to the present. We include all of the presidential elections during that time that have usable data, but deficiencies in the NES surveys make us unable to use the elections of 1956, 1960, and 1996.*

We examine voter perceptions through a binary measure of perception of important party differences (PDIFF).† Even at the beginning of this period, a majority of respondents believed that there were significant differences in what the parties stand for. While politicians might disparage their alleged commonality, the electorate was quite capable of perceiving distinctions between the parties. This majority observation continues with virtually no change for a quarter of a century.

There is a notable, and persistent, change in these perceptions beginning at the time of the 1980 election. From that point on, close to two-thirds of the electorate perceives "important differences in what the parties stand for." The step change is clearly seen in Figure 1. This is a pattern of "dynamic evolution," closely resembling changes in public affect toward the parties and perceived "clarity" of their issue positions on race (Carmines and Stimson, 1989, chap. 7 and Figure 7.3).

******* FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE *******

* Full details on the data set are provided in the methodological explanations, below, Section 1.

† See Methodology, Section 2.

Paralleling this change is another important trend that exists in the background of this analysis, the decline of party identification. The decline in party loyalty has been clear (Miller and Shanks, 1996, chap. 7), and explained most persuasively by intergenerational change (Mattei and Niemi, 1991). For the convenience of readers, we also portray this well-documented change in Figure 2. Of particular note is the location of this decline in the 1970s, and the subsequent stabilization of the level of partisanship, at about the same time as the change in perceived party differences.

*** * * * * FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE * * * * ***

Despite common belittling of the parties, voters increasingly see differences between them. Despite the anguish of some commentators (Wattenberg, 1984), party loyalty continues. For the political system, these altered sentiments carry implications that might well warm the hearts of the Committee on Political Parties.

The Basis of Partisanship

Partisanship, or party identification, has long been recognized as the single most important influence on the individual vote. There is less consensus, however, on the sources of partisanship. For our purposes, we want to examine the relative effects of two sources of party loyalty, which we term "affective" and "cognitive" partisanship (see Mayer, 1998).

When first developed, the concept of partisanship relied considerably on affective influences, particularly family tradition. As the founding work on electoral behavior stated, "We use the concept here to characterize the individual's affective orientation... [A]n orientation toward political affairs typically begins before the individual attains voting age and this orientation strongly reflects his immediate social milieu, in particular his family." It reports a "high degree of correspondence between the partisan preference of our respondents with that which they report for their parents" (Campbell et al, 1960, 121, 146-47).

We term this familial inheritance of basic political orientation "affective partisanship." For the moment, we are concerned only with the existence of partisan loyalty, not its Democratic or Republican direction. Following the argument of *The American Voter* and its progeny, we examine the likelihood that a respondent with parents who identify with a political party will also declare a partisan identification. For this purpose, we construct a measure of parental partisanship (PPSHIP).*

* See Methodology, Section 3.

As Figure 3 demonstrates, the remembered partisanship of parents has not changed greatly over the course of the three decades from 1964. While recall data do occasion some skepticism, previous research has validated remembered partisanship (Andersen, 1976). Moreover, the reported changes in the recalled partisan direction of parents also seem to conform to gross changes in electoral loyalties in the earlier generation consistent with the electoral realignment of the New Deal. For present purposes, we will trust that children do not systemically distort their parents' party loyalties.¹

******* FIGURE THREE ABOUT HERE *******

In contrast to affective partisanship, party loyalty might be based on a cognitive assessment of Democratic and Republican programs, in keeping with the dictums of the APSA Report. More recent literature in political science argues that such rational calculations do explain partisan attachments (Fiorina, 1981, Popkin, 1991). Party identification is based on a kind of calculation by the voter, in which he or she computes a "running tally" of party preference. Focusing again on the existence rather than the direction of partisanship, we have defined our PDIFF measure, above, to capture the component of cognitive partisanship.

We can now compare these two sources of partisanship, affective and cognitive. We will employ some standard methods to reach our central finding, that the relative importance of cognitive partisanship has increased considerably.

We first use ordinal logistic regression to estimate the odds in any given election year that a potential voter will be a partisan. One can literally bet that this voter will identify with a party under either of two conditions: if she had partisan parents or if he perceives party differences. In 1952, for example, the appropriate betting odds would be between 2:1 and 3:1 under either condition. That year, a voter with partisan parents, or a voter perceiving party differences, would be between two to three times more likely to be a partisan identifier than one whose parents were not partisan or one who did not perceive differences.*

******* FIGURE FOUR ABOUT HERE *******

As Figure 4 demonstrates, there is a clear trend in the relative importance of these two factors in predicting partisan identification. Perception of party

* These ratios are calculated with controls for age, sex, race, education, income, and region. See Methodology, Section 4 for a discussion of the technical aspects of this model, and Section 5 for details on the control variables.

differences has increased greatly in its predictive power, becoming the better predictor in the 1970s. From that time, even as overall partisanship declined, the odds grew to better than 5:1 that PDIFF would predict attachment to the parties. In contrast, the effect of PPSHIP varies considerably, but slowly declines over the long haul. Those with partisan parents typically are three to four times more likely to be partisans themselves, compared to those with uncommitted parents.

A second related method, multinomial logistic regression predicting on a five-point directional scale of party identification, more specifically reinforces the trend findings. There is a significant difference between the two end periods. Affective partisanship has diminished considerably over the decades, as the APSA Committee would probably wish. Parental partisanship continues to have a significant impact, but its contribution is now dominated by the effect of perceived party differences.

Strong Democrats and strong Republicans are particularly interesting, because these most committed voters are most likely to reflect systemic influences.² The results for these groups are provided in Figures 5(a) and 5(b), which display the cumulative probability of partisanship as more cues are introduced. At the base of each bar is the proportion of partisanship that can be predicted blindly, when there are no cues available to a respondent, i.e. when partisanship is completely absent from the parental home and the respondent perceives no differences. The next segment is the additional probability that can be attributed to parental loyalty in line with the respondent's present strong identification with Democrats or Republicans, followed by the additional probability attributable to perceived differences.*

******* FIGURES FIVE(a) AND FIVE (b) ABOUT HERE *******

The trend is clearly toward increased impact by perceived party differences, with the change coming about 1970. The temporal endpoints show the pattern. In 1952, with no political cues, the probability of strong partisanship among these voters is quite low, fewer than 10% being strong identifiers. When cues are provided, that of parental partisanship is more important in raising this probability than the cue of perceived party differences, particularly among strong Republicans. Even at this time and even among the most committed, however, partisanship could not properly be considered an unthinking adoption of family tradition. Then, or later, "it is *not* something learned at mommy's knee and never questioned thereafter" (Fiorina, 1981, 102).

* Control variables are held at sample means. See Methodology, Section 6 for a discussion of the technical aspects of this model.

In 1992, effects change. With no political cues, the probability of strong partisanship continues low. In both parties, however, in contrast to the earlier time, the parental cue has declined considerably. The cue of party difference is now predominant, half again as great in its effect as parental loyalty. These voters still find reasons to be strong partisans, but they are learning less at their mommies' knees, while getting more lessons from the combat of parties.

Party loyalty surely combines affective and cognitive partisanship in an interaction which reflects socialization by partisan parents who also communicate a perception of party differences. Such interaction is found in other recent research showing the development of issue-based partisanship (Miller and Shanks, 1996, 178-82). This effect is fully consistent with the programmatic partisanship urged by the Committee on Political Parties. Inherited partisanship that interacts with perceived differences underlines Fiorina's (1981, 200) portrait "of the voter as a reasonably rational fellow," and his conclusion: "Controversies about issue voting versus party identification miss the point: the 'issues' are *in* party identification."

Changed Perceptions: Social Change and Political Effects

The increase in cognitive partisanship now requires explanation. From 1960 to 1996,* the proportion of citizens perceiving important party differences rose, more or less steadily, from 53.8% to 66.1%. Theoretically, there are two possible kinds of explanations for the increase. First, the mass public may now be better able to perceive differences. Second, actual inter-party differences may have increased. We contend that the dominant cause was changes in the real world of politics, rather than more general social trends.

Education is the most prominent social change over this period. The average respondent's schooling has risen from about tenth grade in high school to about two years of college. As academic political scientists, we would expect - or hope - that the added years in classrooms would also open the voters' minds to increased perception of party differences. Moreover, education might also increase citizens' individual capabilities; they might feel an increased personal efficacy and they might be better able to use the mass media to further their political education.

There is no doubt that the increase over time in the mean level of education has enhanced cognitive proficiency and sophistication in individual citizens in an absolute and additive fashion (Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry, 1996, 108). Indeed, the more educated individual citizens are, the more likely they are

* For this aggregate measure we are able to include data from each presidential election year from 1960 through 1996.

to be able to understand the positions of the parties and, in turn, the presence - or absence - of important differences in the party stances.

For our purposes, the vital characteristic of education is that it is distinct from the world of politics itself. Whatever Democrats and Republicans were doing, people got more schooling. Although politics may have contributed to that change, it was a change in society, completely distinct from any changes in the parties. We can consider the increase in the level of education as an independent, non-political influence.

Yet, we find education an unsatisfactory explanation. Political change without politics?

To capture the impact of political changes, we turn to our political institutions. The collective Congress reifies the world of political abstractions through political engagement. Through their behavior, Congressional parties tell voters what "Republican" and "Democratic" mean - what the parties stand for, whether they are different, how they differ. The clash of the parties in Congress provides dramatic lessons for voters on the content of politics and stimuli for the perception of party differences. As Bagehot (1928, 119) said of parliamentary debate, "it makes us hear what otherwise we should not."

From the early 1960's through 1996, the parties in Congress became more ideologically distinct (Fleisher and Bond, 1996: Fig. 2), more unified, and more polarized in their rollcall voting. We use House and Senate party unity as a measure of real-world political change. The substantive meaning of the parties becomes clearer to voters when parties are unified, and when these unified parties are different from each other.*

******* FIGURE SIX ABOUT HERE *******

Figure 6 shows the relative trends of the two influences, education and party unity. Both have increased steadily over the period, and each bears a striking similarity to the trend in the perception of party differences. We believe the political indicator is more meaningful. Education may increase, as it has, even in the absence of party differences, but greater ability to perceive differences is meaningless in the absence of such differences. We contend that while education is a necessary but not sufficient condition, this change in the political environment is an absolutely necessary condition to account for voters'

* Using the common, widely-accepted indexes developed by *Congressional Quarterly*, we develop a summative six-item scale of party unity to specify this effect (Chronbach's $\alpha = .9630$). See Methodology, Section 7.

perceiving party differences. We expect that the level of party differentiation will have a distinct effect on mass perceptions.

Standing alone, one could eliminate either predictor and still generate the trend line in the perception of party differences in Figure 6. Analysts then could easily (albeit atheoretically) conclude that the increase in education was irrelevant to political change. Or, they could conversely conclude that changes in political parties were unnecessary for understanding political change. We now seek to show that change in the perception of differences between the parties cannot be adequately explained solely on the basis of non-political factors.

Changed Perceptions: The Centrality of Politics

We justify the centrality of political change in three ways. First, we examine the direct relationship between the perceptions of important party differences and the mean levels of education and party unity. These results support our inference. While both relationships are high, the relationship between the percent of the sample perceiving party differences and party unity is higher (.7333, $p = .0158$) than it is for education (.6970, $p = .0251$).

We go on to a second and third step. Using logistic regression on pooled cross-sectional time-series data, we model the changes over time in the proportion of the sample perceiving important differences between the parties.[†] Driving the construction of this model is the notion that rather than looking merely inside at individual non-political characteristics, theory compels us to also look outside at the real political world. In this model, we seek to measure the extent to which aggregate level influences - party unity - combine with individual level effects, including education.

As control variables, we include individual-level measures of age and media exposure, as well as sex and race. We include age to control for the speculation that the "greening" of the electorate has brought a new youthful perceptiveness into politics. In 1972, 18-year-olds were admitted to the franchise. Furthermore, the electorate was transformed by the addition of the massive baby-boom generation. Just as these cohorts have changed American music and life-styles, they once gave promise of transforming political consciousness (for example, recall Reich, 1970). It is certainly conceivable that the changes in party

* With deference to the small time series of aggregate data, we use Spearman's rho, a non-parametric version of the Pearson correlation coefficient to comparatively assess the zero-order relationships. See Methodology, Section 8.

† From this point forward, we were unable to use 1988 (because that year's media exposure measures were inconsistent with the other years). As such, for this model we use each presidential election year from 1960 through 1996 except 1988 ($N = 11,407$). See Methodology, Section 9 for a discussion of the technical aspects of this model.

perceptions that become manifest in the 1970s simply reflect the simultaneous enfranchisement of these young and restless voters.*

The development of the mass media is another social trend that could affect perceptions of politics. Television became ubiquitous in the United States in the last half of the twentieth century, cable television vastly multiplied the number of outlets, print media became more numerous and more specialized, and the Internet has provided detailed guides for media consumers. This enriching of the information environment could also prompt voters to an increased perception of party differences. We control for this possibility by including an additive measure of individual media exposure in the model.

Sex and race are included as basic demographic controls. We might hypothesize that the great social movements of these decades, by blacks and women, leading to new racial and feminist consciousness, might also be the source of new party perceptions. We note, but dismiss, these arguments as tendentious and untestable with the data at hand.† For temporal control, we include dummy variables to capture variation over time unrelated to the other included variables. (Beck, et al., 1998).

After preliminary specification and goodness-of-fit tests of the model, we turn to the essential task at hand: to test the relative importance of the political and non-political factors. The most common and most efficient technique would be ordinary least squares regression, but that method is inappropriate here.³ So, we devised indirect strategies.

In the second step of this analysis, we examine the total effect of changes in party unity, and then education, on the binary measure of perception of party differences.‡ The maximum real-world change in party unity increased the proportion of the sample perceiving party difference by 16.4 points, or approximately 28%.§ We can also make finer distinctions about the effect of changes in party unity, by dividing the total change into four equal increments, each of approximately 6.25 points of change in the unity scale. To provide some

* For ease of interpretation we set the mean of age (approximately 46 years old) to zero.

† Hypotheses on effects of consciousness cannot be examined with these data because when aggregated, the individual measures of sex and race only reflect the proportion of the sample with those characteristics, rather than any group consciousness.

‡ This method, first differences analysis, holds all other variables at some set value - typically their sample mean - while examining the effect resulting in the dependent variable from changes in the independent variable of immediate interest.

§ We scaled party unity so that zero represented the real world low (53.17) and one reflected the real world high (78.3). We then assessed the change in predicted values in the binary dependent variable from a zero to one (i.e., whole range) change in party unity.

substantive validation, these increments are equivalent to the change in party unity from 1968 (53.2) to 1980 (60.0), or from 1980 to 1988 (67.1), or from 1984 (64.4) to 1992 (71.2).

The incremental changes in party unity have regular effects on party perceptions, but were not evenly spaced. As we examine each increment of 6.25 points in the unity scale, perceptions of differences increase about 7%. Both of these measures accelerate in the 1980s.⁴ Paralleling actual changes in the political environment, these results capture the “real world.”

In comparison, the maximum change in education increased the proportion of the sample perceiving party difference by 16.5 points, or approximately 28%, a total change essentially equal to the effect of party unity. The difference between those with a high school education or less and those with some college training produced the larger share of this change, increasing the proportion perceiving important party differences by .0922 or 15.76%.

These results support our inference that party unity is a more significant explanation of the change over time in the aggregate perception of party differences. After all, the largest possible change in education - for every respondent to move from high school or less, to college or more, effects a 28.21% change in the relevant proportion of the sample, while the largest possible change in party unity, from the real-world low to the real-world high, effects a nearly identical change of 28.0%. But, a change in levels of education, for all respondents, from the lowest to the highest is an unrealistic hypothetical statistical construct.⁵ The changes in the level of party unity are real.

In the third step of this analysis, we infer explanation from prediction. Under the model including both education and party unity (as well as all control variables) the mean error in prediction was .002763 with a standard deviation of .00864. Omitting party unity from the model more than doubled the mean error in prediction to .00573 and nearly doubled the standard deviation to .01427 (for both models $N = 11,407$). This effect is demonstrated in Figure 7, which compares the predictions under both the full and truncated model to the actual observed proportion perceiving important differences between the parties. Clearly, the model capturing real world political effects predicts better, especially after Ronald Reagan’s resuscitation of the Republican Party in 1980.

******* FIGURE SEVEN ABOUT HERE *******

The events of American politics at the end of the twentieth century illuminate the statistical results. Voters unfamiliar with regression analyses still could hardly ignore the party differences, often rancorous, within Congress. Voters inattentive to party platforms could still respond to tense conflicts of emblematic party leaders such as Gingrich and Clinton. Voters unversed in the

constitutional separation of powers could still learn that the government had shut down after a partisan dispute over the federal budget and, later, that a Republican majority in Congress was seeking to remove a Democratic president from elected office.

Voters have come to see greater party differences for a simple reason. The parties have been emphasizing their differences in dramatic and obvious fashion, in their rollcall voting in Congress including their responses to the president's program. Education has helped people to understand, younger people have been more prone to comprehend, and media users have consumed this information better. But the character of the political world has been the great teacher of all Americans, whether in or out of the classroom, whether wizened or apple-cheeked, whether couch potatoes or hermits.

Toward a More Responsible Two-Party Voter

Politics matters. That is our most basic conclusion, and our research conveys a testament to the authors of the APSA Report, scholars who cared about the real world of parties and elections. Politics affects the existence of partisanship in parents and in children, and it affects the direction of partisanship across generations. More specifically in our analysis, it affects the perception of party differences and, to close the circle, those perceptions affect partisanship itself.

We go beyond our detailed data and technical analyses to speculate on past and future trends in American politics. To begin, let us quickly review what we know about trends in partisanship. Over the past four or five decades, partisanship declined somewhat, and the strength of party identification declined considerably for most of the period. The effect of partisanship on the vote lessened for a time, but has now become as strong as at the beginning of the era (Bartels, 2000). Partisan elite conflict has become elevated and intense. The voters came to perceive greater differences between the parties, and these perceptions became more important sources of their partisanship, and traditional loyalties became less important.

These trends are probably interrelated. Without attempting to test it, we suggest this explanation. The decline of the strength and extent of party identification made the remaining strong partisans more ideologically coherent. Elected officials became more overtly committed to their distinctive ideological programs, providing new cues for mass polarization (Carmines and Stimson, 1989, chap. 7). Party elites became more coherently ideological because of the growing influence of programmatic interest groups, the policy commitments of rising leaders such as Gingrich, and the decline of moderating influences within the Congressional parties, such as southern Democrats and liberal Republicans.

Elite conflicts communicated party differences to the general public, and these new perceptions made the mass base of the parties more homogeneous in

their policy preferences, more cognitive in their partisanship, and more apt to follow their issue-based party loyalties in casting votes. "[O]nce citizens moved toward greater polarization, elites seemed to have taken sustenance from this, and polarized even more. Thus, there may be...a relatively simultaneous influence of mass and elite polarization in which each actor's more partisan attitudes reinforced the other" (Fleisher and Bond, 1996, 17).

These developments bring us back to the future envisaged in the APSA Report. The Committee saw the development of coherent and distinct parties as the elite stimulus of a responsible two-party system. We now have such parties. The Committee expected voters to respond to this stimulus by choosing leaders on the basis of their own issue preferences and the performance of the parties. Decades of electoral studies verify the development of issue-based voting as well as the continuing importance of performance judgments (Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966; Miller and Shanks, 1996; Nie et al, 1976; Pomper, 1975; Popkin, 1991).

These elements of the doctrine of responsible parties, however, lacked a vital link between parties and voters. Coherent issue-based parties and issue-based voting could exist independently of one another. It is at least theoretically possible that the parties could present coherent issue alternatives that are also not salient to the issue concerns of the voters. In fact, some of the sharpest issue differences between the party elites today (estate taxes and even abortion) may concern only small fractions of voters, while the parties may be very similar on issues (free trade is one example) that do concern large numbers of voters.

To link the two elements of the theory of responsible parties, voters must perceive that there are important differences between the parties - important to the perceiving voters, not only to the policy analyst and the party activist. We now have evidence that voters do indeed more fully perceive such party differences. Even if our politicians often fail in their jobs, the voters have become more responsible. To that extent, we have come closer to realizing the goals of the political scientists who dared, half a century before our time, to dream of a new American politics.

Methodology

1: Data Sets

All data for this paper were drawn from the 1998 edition of the American National Election Studies (1948-1997) CD-ROM. Wherever possible, we endeavored to cover the period from 1952 through 1996 and to include as much year-to-year variation as possible. However, because of the intermittent exclusion of critical questions from the ANES format, as reported in the text or footnotes, certain years were omitted from certain analyses. The critical ANES question, of course, is the "perception of important differences in what the parties stand for" inquiry. Because this question was not asked in 1956, we were unable to use that year for any purpose.

More specifically, the working data were drawn from a composite dataset comprised of extracts from the 1948-96 ANES Cumulative Data File supplemented with the 1952 ANES Data Set. Data for each presidential election year from and including 1960 through 1992 were extracted from the 1948-96 Cumulative Data File, while data for 1952 were extracted from the 1952 ANES (SRC) Election Study. Only cases for which the respondent participated in both the pre- and post-election interview were selected.

For the aggregate measures shown in Figures 1 and 2, we used 1952 through 1992, with the exception, as above, of 1956. For Figure 3, and the first part of the research (generating Figures 4 and 5(a) & (b)), we had to further omit 1960 and 1984, because the parental partisanship questions were not asked as part of those years' studies.

For the aggregate measures shown in Figure 6, we were able to add 1960 and 1984, and to include 1996, but, not having the party unity data for 1952, we had to drop that year. For the second part of the research (the pooled time-series cross section data with the dependent variable generating Figure 7), we had to drop 1988, as that year's measure of media exposure was inconsistent with the other years.

2: PDIFF

This binary variable measures the fact of respondent's perception of important party differences. In general, this is a simple yes/no dichotomy to the following question: DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES IN WHAT THE REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS STAND FOR?

For the Cumulative Data File years, responses of "don't know," "depends" (1972 only), and "yes, a difference but don't know what" (1964 only) were combined, by the NES, into a missing value. This is inappropriate, we contend, because a respondent who answered "don't know" to the question of whether there are "important differences" between the parties was, in fact, indicating a

substantive negative response. Respondents who did not know whether there are “important differences” between the parties are cognitively equivalent to respondents who indicate that they are not aware of any “important differences” between the parties.

Although the text of the question in 1952 was virtually identical to later years, the answers were more broadly coded. In order to maintain consistency, the 1952 answers were compressed to match the later years: respondents who said “very important” and “important,” or “minor” differences were combined to “yes” and those who said “no differences” were combined to “no.” The decision to include “minor” differences in the affirmative response was predicated on the text of the question, i.e., that any respondent indicating any affirmative response to the question was, as a threshold, assenting to the presence of “important differences” between the parties, whether or not the level of such “important difference” was later mitigated by a minimizing qualification. In order to preserve consistency, “don’t know” responses were coded as missing values.

3: PPSHIP

This variable, which measures respondent’s parental partisanship, was coded in two different ways. Initially, it was coded as a binary variable. Regardless of the year, if respondent reported that either or both parents belonged to a major political party, then PPSHIP was scored as partisan; if neither parent belonged to a major political or respondent answered “don’t know”, then PPSHIP was scored as non-partisan.

PPSHIP was also coded by parental party identification. Under that scheme, if, for e.g., both parents identified as Democrat, or one parent identified as Democrat and the other as “other,” “none” or “apolitical,” that respondent was coded as having a Democratic parental influence. Naturally, the same coding convention applied for Republicans. If the respondent indicated that one parent was of one party and the other parent of the other party, that respondent was coded as “split.” If the respondent indicated that neither parent identified with either major party, then that respondent was coded “none.”

PPSHIP was used in its more differentiated form to generate Figure 3 and in its binary form for the ordered logit analysis that generated Figure 4. For the multinomial logit analysis that generated Figures 5(a) and (b), PPSHIP was used in its more differentiated form, but was converted to a set of dummy variables. For both the ordered logit and multinomial logit, PDIFF and PPSHIP were combined into a dummy variable set in order to capture any manifest interaction effect.

4: *Ordered Logit Model*

To generate an over-time analysis of the comparative effect of the odds ratios for PDIFF and PPSHIP, we specified an ordered logit model with the dependent variable as a three-point, non-directional measure of party identification. Under that coding, 0 represented "true independents," 1 represented "wary partisans" comprised of "independent leaners" and "weak partisans," (of both parties), and 2 reflected "strong partisans" (again, of both parties). This intensity-based coding is designed to reflect political reality, and to separate out strong partisans as the group of most theoretical interest. (Parenthetically, it should be noted that the results are substantially similar when the dependent variable is coded on a revised three-point scale where "independent leaners" are grouped with "true independents", as well as on a four-point scale that simply folds the NES's 7-point scale on the mid-point.) The trends are most easily discerned with the three-point scale that differentiates between "true independents" and "strong partisans" and groups "independent leaners" and "weak partisans" between them.

We included as explanatory variables a set of dummy variables to capture PDIFF and PPSHIP alone and in interaction (dropping, so as to prevent collinearity, the combination reflecting "no-PDIFF and no-PPSHIP"), as well as age, sex, race, education, income, and region for control variables. Using Stata Version 6, ordered logit coefficient estimates were obtained for each available year and the coefficients were, using the conventional formula, converted to odds ratios. Since the scales for PDIFF and PPSHIP are both binary, and since an ordered logit model is a proportional odds model (i.e., that the effect of the independent variables is a proportionate change in the odds of $Y_i = j$ for all response categories j) the coefficients are directly comparable. In other words, the coefficients for each of the explanatory variables reflect a proportional increase across both cut-points upon the presence of the condition under that explanatory variable.

All of the dummy variables for PDIFF-PPSHIP combination were statistically significant at $p > |z| = 0.0000$, with the sole exception of the PDIFF dummy variable in the 1964 equation with $p > |z| = 0.0100$. It is then not surprising that all the likelihood ratio tests for the set of dummy variables were significant at $p > \chi^2 = 0.0000$ with the following $\chi^2(3)$ values: 1952: 86.28 ($N = 1,369$); 1964: 107.95 ($N = 1,358$); 1968: 115.11 ($N = 1,237$); 1972: 66.21 ($N = 948$); 1976: 166.14 ($N = 1,573$); 1980: 105.80 ($N = 1,141$); 1988: 183.54 ($N = 1,522$); and, 1992: 191.58 ($N = 1,936$).

In order to examine model goodness-of-fit, for each of the ordered logit equations generated, Stata's specification link-test was performed. (Stata Release 6.0 Reference Manual, Vol. 2, pp. 186-91). The specification link-test regresses the prediction squared on the dependent variable in order to test the hypothesis that there are no additional independent variables that would be

significant except by chance. If the prediction square is devoid of predictive power, then - assuming theoretical defensibility - the model is held to be correctly specified. At no point was the prediction squared statistically significant: 1952 $p>|z| = .932$; 1964 = .710; 1968 = .223; 1972 = .281; 1976 = .367; 1980 = .380; 1988 = .448; and, 1992 = .182.

5: Control Variables

For the ordered and multinomial logit analyses, control variables included age, anchored such that 0 represented the voting age (21 prior to 1972, 18 thereafter); sex, with 0 indicating male and 1 indicating female; and, race, with 0 indicating white and 1 indicating non-white. Additionally, we included education, following the Cumulative Data File's four-point coding (with 0 representing "grade school or less," 1 reflecting "high school (and non-college training)," 2 indicating "some college (13 grades or more, but no degree)," and 3 representing "college or advanced degree"); and income, also following the Cumulative Data File's coding convention of a five-point percentile spread (0 equaling 0 to the 16th percentile; 1 indicating 17 to the 33rd percentile; 2 for 34 to the 67th percentile; 3 reflecting 68 to the 95th percentile; and, 4 representing 96 to the 100th percentile). Finally, in order to control for southern politics, we included a region variable where 1 indicated the Confederacy, with 0 capturing all other states.

For the pooled time-series cross-section data, we included as control variables only sex, race, and age (with the mean aggregate age - approximately 46 - anchored to zero). In that model, education, of course, became a primary explanatory variable, and income and region were theoretically unhelpful.

6: Multinomial Logit Model

The dependent variable for the multinomial model which generated Figures 5(a) and (b) was a five-point directional measure of party identification. The mid-point, which served as the comparison group, was "true independents," surrounded by "wary Republicans" and then "strong Republicans" on the right, and "wary Democrats" and "strong Democrats" on the left. As before, "wary" partisans included "independent leaners" and "weak partisans."

The control variables were included in this model as they were in the ordered logit model. PDIFF remained - as given the constraints of the NES question it must - a binary measure, but PPSHIP was expanded to a four-point factor in order to include directionality. The base PPSHIP measure used corresponded to the coding reflected in Figure 3 (i.e., "neither," "split," "both Dem or one Dem the other 'other'," or "both Rep or one Rep and the other 'other'"). That measure was combined with PDIFF to create a set of eight dummy variables representing all possible combinations of those two variables. As with

the ordered logit model, in order to prevent collinearity, we dropped the "no-PDIFF and neither-PPSHIP" dummy variable making that the reference group.

A multinomial logit regression was run for each available year. From those regression results, we held the control variables at their sample means for the given year, and generated probabilities that the respondent would fall into each response category under each of the eight different conditions of the combined PDIFF-PPSHIP variable. From those probabilities we extracted the incremental probability increases that comprise Figures 5(a) and (b).

Unfortunately, the specification link-test is only available for single-equation models. We did, however, conduct likelihood ratio tests to confirm that these sets of predictors were statistically significant. In fact, they were across the board: 1952, $\chi^2(26) = 373.39$ ($N = 1,369$); 1964, $\chi^2(28) = 416.14$ ($N = 1,358$); 1968 = 355.36 ($N = 1,237$); 1972 = 350.48 ($N = 948$); 1976 = 508.57 ($N = 1,573$); 1980 = 388.12 ($N = 1,141$); 1988 = 444.24 ($N = 1,522$); and, 1992 = 567.95 ($N = 1,936$); with $p > \chi^2 = 0.0000$ for all years.

7: Party Unity Scale

This variable is a summative scale comprised of unstandardized measures of the following Congressional Quarterly indexes for the two-year Congress preceding the presidential elections from 1960 through 1996:

- Party unity score for Senate Democrats
- Party unity score for Senate Republicans
- Party unity score for House Democrats
- Party unity score for House Republicans
- Percent of unity rollcall votes in the Senate
- Percent of unity rollcall votes in the House

A "unity score" is the percent of rollcall votes on which a member votes with her or his party, for votes in which the majorities of each party are on opposite sides. A "unity rollcall" is a vote in which party majorities are on opposite sides. This scale performs well (Chronbach's $\alpha = .9630$), exceeding the conventional desirable standard of .95.

8: Spearman's rho

The choice of Spearman's rho as a measure of correlation was compelled by the small size of the aggregate data set. For aggregate measures we had only ten years, i.e., presidential election years from 1960 through 1996. While rho is typically used for ordinal measures, there is no reason that it cannot be

used for interval level data as well, for an ordinal scale is merely a less exact version of an interval scale, and both satisfy the requirement for rho that the data be arranged in rank order. On this point, the SPSS reference documentation specifically reports that rho "is appropriate for ordinal data, or for interval data that do not satisfy the normality assumption" (SPSS, Release 7.5.3, 1997). As a non-parametric measure, rho is particularly appropriate for small sample sizes. Its values are measured on a -1 to +1 range, the same as the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

9: *Binary Dependent Variable Time-Series Cross Section Model*

While the political variable does vary over the ten available year-points, within each year it is constant. As such, and in a phrase, we seek to model changes over both "space and time" which methodologically is a presumptively difficult task (Stimson 1985; and see for e.g., Markus, 1988; and Kramer, 1983). Complicating things even further is that the only measure of perception of party differences we have at the individual level is the binary individual response to the party differences question. Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998) have dubbed this type of model the "binary time-series-cross-section model".

Obviously, given our desired inference, the problem with this data set is two-fold: First, while we seek to draw an inference about a continuous aggregate measure, the only indicator of the concept underlying that aggregate measure is a binary individual level measure. Second, the independent variables are of two kinds: individual and aggregate. The constancy of the political variable within a given year prevents us from performing the type of clean relative effects of odds ratios analysis we did earlier.

We include in the model as explanatory variables measures for education and the party unity scale. Because the NES cumulative data file compresses the variation in education to a four-point scale, and because we have no *a priori* reason to believe that the intervals in that scale are equal, we include education as two dummy variables, one for "some college, but no degree," and the other for "graduated college or advanced degree." The education reference group, then, is "high school education or less." The party unity scale was recoded to range from zero to one, such that zero represented the lowest point of party unity and one reflected the highest point over the time series. In this way, we were able to capture the variation in the political variable, without including unreasonable values. Moreover, since zero was now a substantive value, the interpretability of the logistic equation was improved.

We next subjected the model to three preliminary tests: (1) we tested for, and confirmed, the necessity of the correction for temporal dependence; (2) we performed standard likelihood ratio tests to confirm that both of the explanatory variables present net effects after controlling for each other together with all

control variables; and, (3) we performed a Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test. We find that the temporal dummy variables are necessary; that - as predicted - each of the explanatory variables present net effects; and that the model performs admirably (with 10 groups ordered on the predicted probabilities at $N = 11,407$, the H-L $\chi^2(8) = 4.09$, $p > \chi^2 = .8488$).

As to temporal dependence, rather than including a dummy variable to represent each year in the data set, which would surely have resulted in collinearity with the party unity scale (as both would be constants within each year), we coded the temporal variables to reflect political reality. Setting 1960 and 1964 as the reference group, we grouped 1968 and 1972 together, 1976 by itself, 1980 and 1984 together, and 1992 and 1996 together. (Were we able to use 1988, we would have grouped it with the 1980-1984 group.)

Within the confines of a given sample, the most efficient way to show this relative importance is to display the standardized coefficients from an ordinary least squares regression. Unfortunately, the only continuous measure we have of the relevant dependent variable is limited to ten cases, which rules out any meaningful use of OLS. As such, and particularly given the different measurement scales of the explanatory variables, we have no direct way to measure their relative impact. We instead use a two-part indirect analysis.

First, using King and associates' bootstrapping software, *Clarify* (1998, and see King, Tomz, and Wittenberg, 2000), we ran the model with 1,000 resampling (with replacement) iterations. In this way, we non-parametrically generated a distribution of the model parameters so that we could use the real mean value for each parameter. This procedure dramatically increased the knowledge about the model parameters we were able to obtain from the logistic regression. We then used the mean value for each parameter to generate the first differences produced by relevant changes in the explanatory variables. Those first differences quantify, upon gross changes in the explanatory variable, the increase or decrease in the proportion of the sample perceiving important differences between the parties.

For the second analysis, we ran the model twice, first without the political variable and then with the political variable. From each run, we predicted, by year, the proportion of the sample perceiving important differences between the parties and compared those results to the observed proportions.

Expressed in the more comprehensible odds ratios, the logit estimates for the results for the full model are as follows:

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Logit estimates                               Number of obs   =    11407
                                                LR chi2(11)    =    816.52
Log likelihood = -7330.4582                  Prob > chi2     =    0.0000
```

PDIFF	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P> z	95% Conf. Interval]	
E3	1.462668	.0770789	7.216	0.000	1.319136	1.621817
E4	2.045917	.1281402	11.429	0.000	1.80957	2.313133
U2	2.054087	.5768989	2.563	0.010	1.184556	3.561905
MEDIA	1.383649	.0271564	16.545	0.000	1.331434	1.437912
AGE2	1.002725	.0011882	2.296	0.022	1.000399	1.005056
SEX	.8479797	.03383	-4.133	0.000	.7842003	.9169465
RACE	1.583486	.1007218	7.226	0.000	1.397885	1.793731

Where:

E3 = dummy variable for "some college (13 grades or more but no degree)"

E4 = dummy variable for "college or advanced degree"

U2 = the party unity scale

MEDIA = additive measure of media exposure at the individual level

AGE2 = age, with the mean age (46) set to 0

SEX = dummy variable for sex, male = 0, female = 1

RACE = dummy variable for race, white = 0, non-white = 1

We do not show the coefficients for the temporal dummy variables (Katz, et al. 1998).

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Endnotes

¹ The average age of respondents in any given year is 42-46. If we assume that meaningful political socialization takes place in the ages of 14 to 18, then the benchmark for remembered parental partisanship would be the presidential election about 28 years earlier. The remembered Democratic upturn in 1964 would then reflect the high-water mark of the New Deal in 1936, and the remembered downturn in 1980 would reflect the movement toward Eisenhower Republicanism. The subject would of course require far deeper analysis to reach any firm conclusions, but these relationships do at least provide a facial validity to remembered parental partisanship. These patterns are also consistent with Andersen's (1976, 83) reconstruction of party identification in pre-NES years.

² Analysis for other partisan groups is available from the authors.

³ Indeed, a comparison (within sample) of the standardized coefficients would promptly tell us the relative impact of the explanatory variables. Even though others using time-series cross-section data with a binary dependent variable have employed a linear probability model (for e.g., see Markus, 1988 comparing the relative effects of pocketbook versus sociotropic voting on incumbent-challenger vote choice), we are uncomfortable with that approach for the typical reasons one does not model binary data with a linear specification. Similarly, we rejected a latent variable model.

⁴ The first difference change in the first increment - from the lowest level of party unity (53.2) to approximately 59.5 - increased the proportion of difference-perceiving respondents by .0435 (approximately 7.44% of the observed proportion). This is roughly equal to the effect in the change in party unity from 1972 (53.4) to 1976 (58.4). The second incremental change, from about 60.0 to 66.3 on the real scale corresponds roughly with the change from 1980 (60.1) to 1988 (67.1). This change increased the relevant proportion by .0423 or 7.24%. The third incremental change, from about 66.0 to 72.0, matching roughly with the change from 1984 (64.4) to 1992 (71.2) effected a change in the relevant proportion of .0403, or roughly 6.89%. Finally, the change from about 72.0 to the real scale high of 78.0, which roughly matches the change from 1992 (71.2) to 1996 (78.3), increased the proportion by .0376 or about 6.44%.

⁵ In an effort to capture a more realistic change in education, we re-ran the model omitting the dummy variables but including the NES Cumulative Data File's four point measure where education is coded with 0 representing "grade school or less," 1 reflecting "high school (and non-college training)," 2 indicating "some college (13 grades or more, but no degree)," and 3 representing "college or advanced degree."

This model performed substantially similar to the reported model, and the diagnostic test results were substantially similar. Under this model, the entire range change for party unity was 14.2 points (24.3%) (rather than 16.4 points (28.0%) for the reported model). An entire range change for education -- from the low mean in 1960 of .819 to the high mean in 1996 of 1.51 -- 4.4 points (7.5%). Standing alone, that comparison clearly supports our inference.

Under this model, incremental party unity changes were slightly lower than the reported model, although the sizes of the increments were roughly the same. For the change in

party unity from 1972 to 1976, this model predicts a change in the proportion of difference perceivers of .037 (6.3%), while the reported model produces a change of .044 (7.4%). For the 1980 to 1988 change, this model produces a change of .036 (6.2%), while the reported model produces a change of .043 (7.2%). For the 1984 to 1992 and 1992 to 1996 periods respectively, this model produced changes of .035 (6.0%) and .033 (5.6%) while the reported model predicted changes of .040 (6.9%) and .038 (6.4%).

Assuming that one accepts the four point coding as reflective of reality, we can estimate changes on the proportion of difference-perceiving respondents corresponding to real changes in the mean levels of education. For e.g., a change in education from the 1960 mean (.819) to the 1972 mean (1.07) generated a .016 (2.74%) change in the proportion of difference-perceiving respondents. Similarly, a change from the 1972 mean to the 1984 mean (1.39) resulted in a proportion change of .020 (3.42%), and a change from the 1984 mean to the 1996 mean (1.51) increased the proportion by .008 (1.37%).

Clearly, under either construction of the model - education reflected by dummy variables, or education reflected by a compressed ordinal measure - increasing education expands the proportion of the electorate who perceive important differences between the parties. And under either model, the rate of change is much smaller compared to change which results from increased party unity. While, in regard to education, the results from this model are more intuitively understood, we are uncomfortable with the assumption that the 0 to 3 coding adequately captures the variation in education. And so we relegate these results to this endnote.

Figure 1: Perception of Party Differences

(Percentage of Respondents who Indicate a Perception of Important Differences in what the Parties Stand for (1952 - 1992))

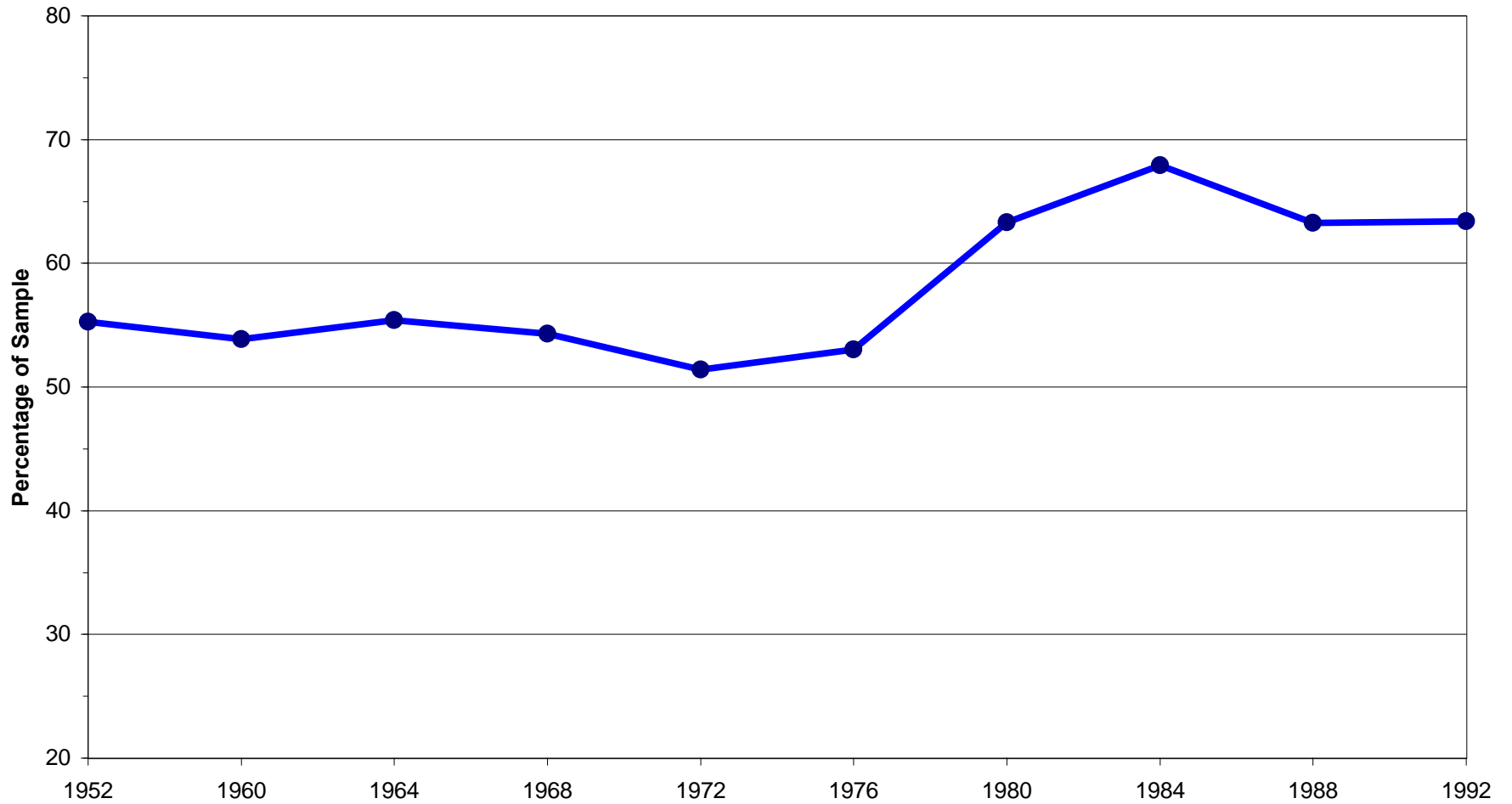


Figure 2: Partisan Identification
(Percentage of Partisan Identifiers (1952 - 1992))

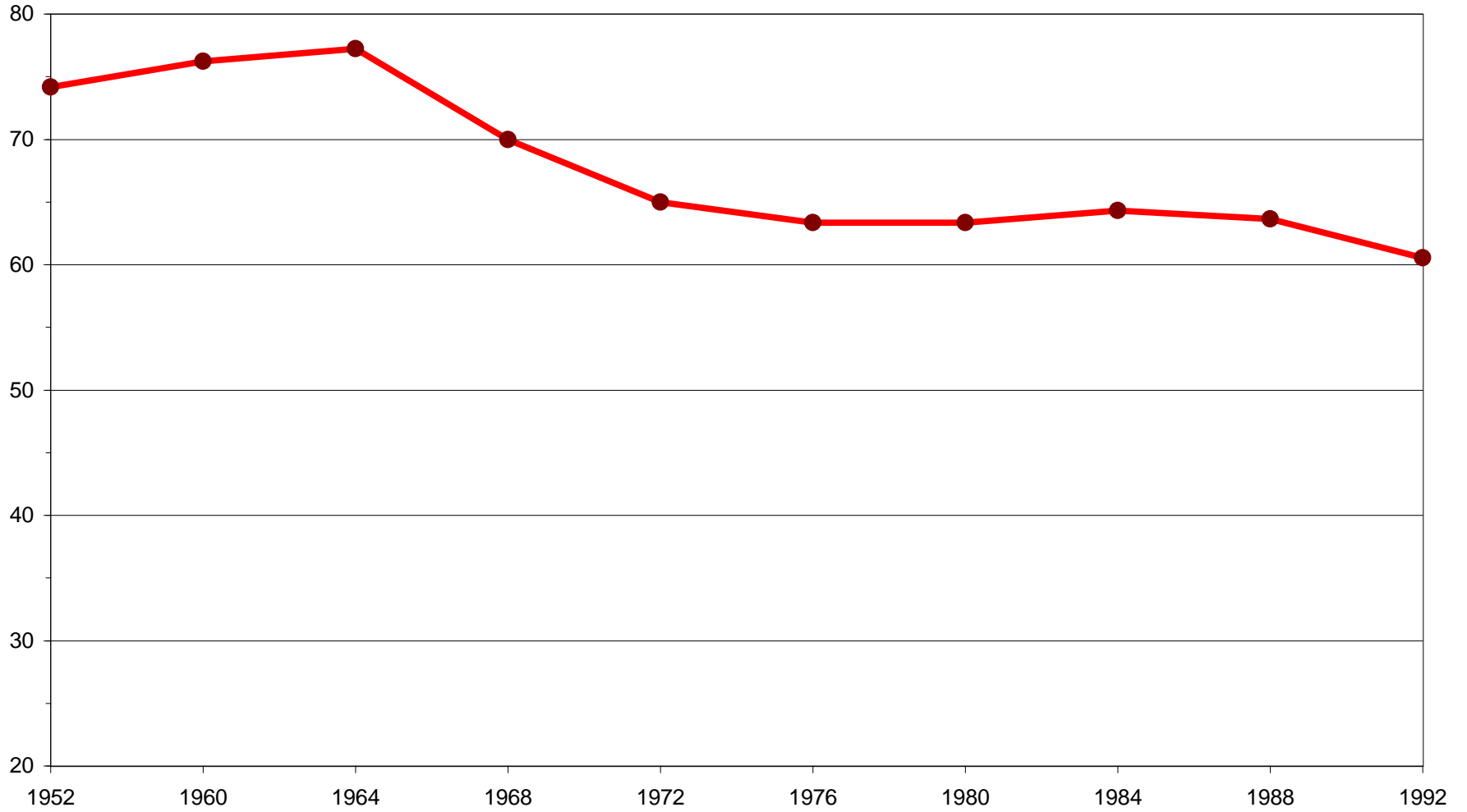
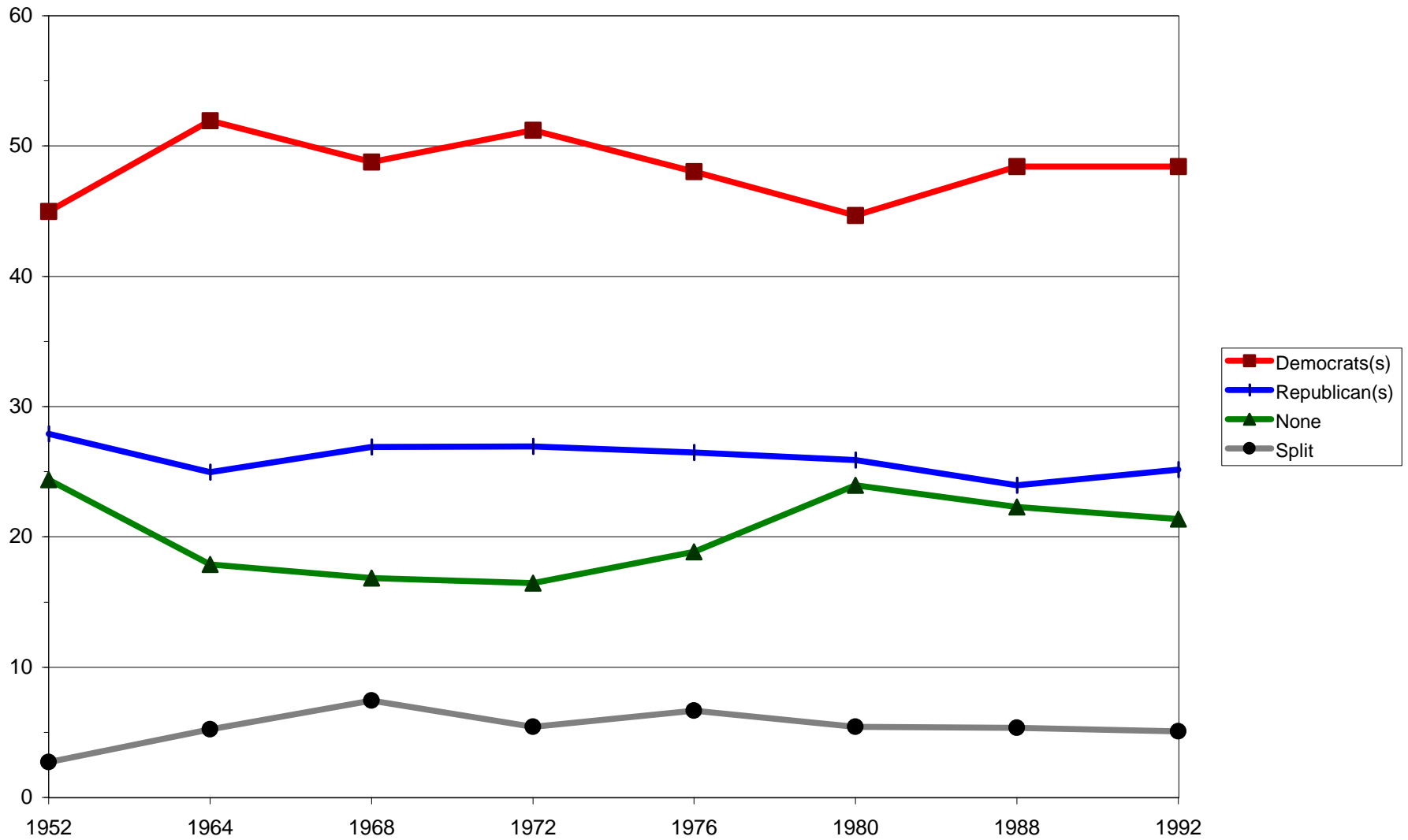


Figure 3: Parental Partisanship (1952 - 1992)



**Figure 4: Relative Effect of
Parental Partisanship and Perception of Party Differences**

(3-point, non-directional ordinal model)

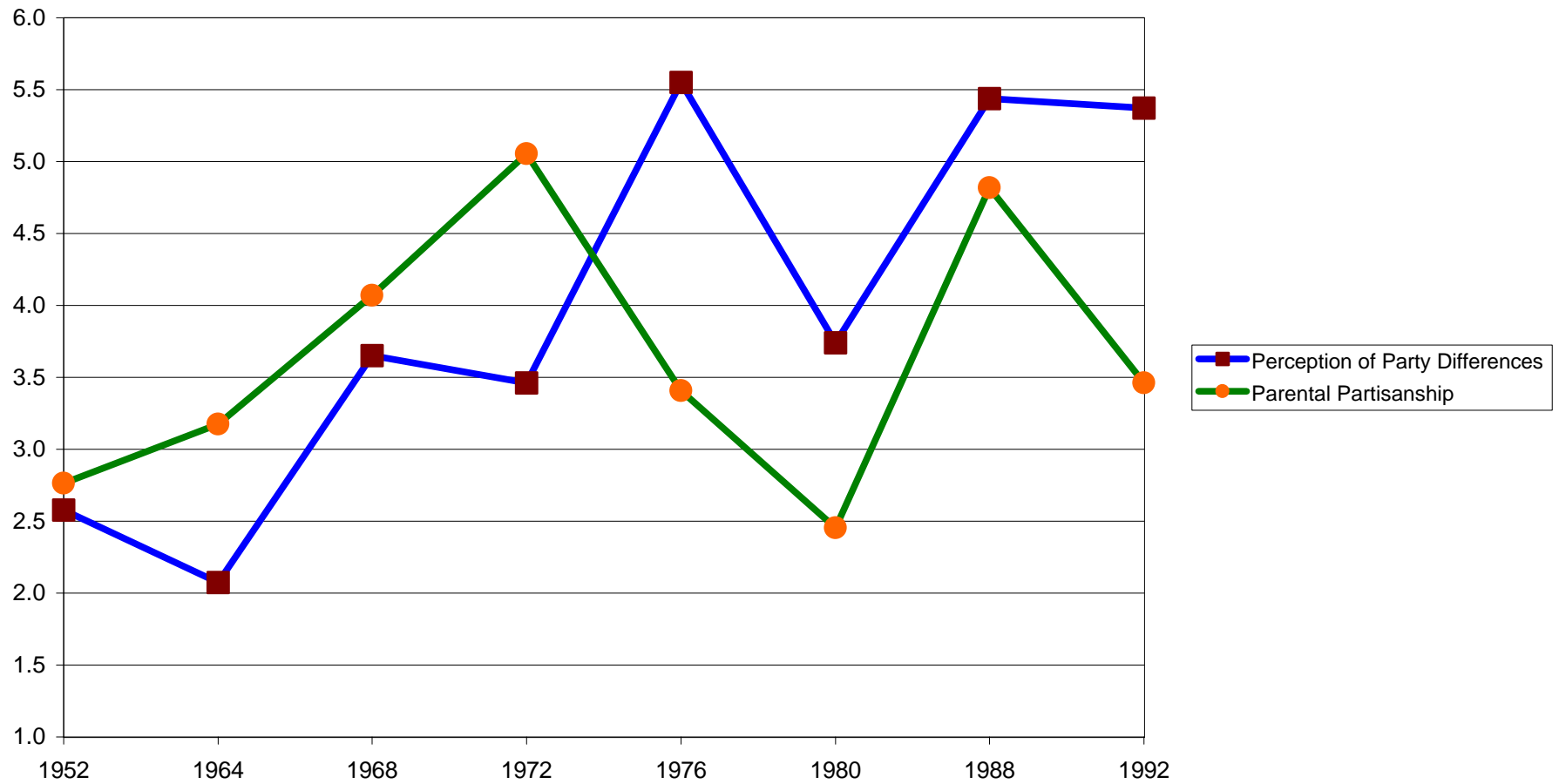


Figure 5(a): Probability of Strong Democratic Partisanship

(Multinomial Model)

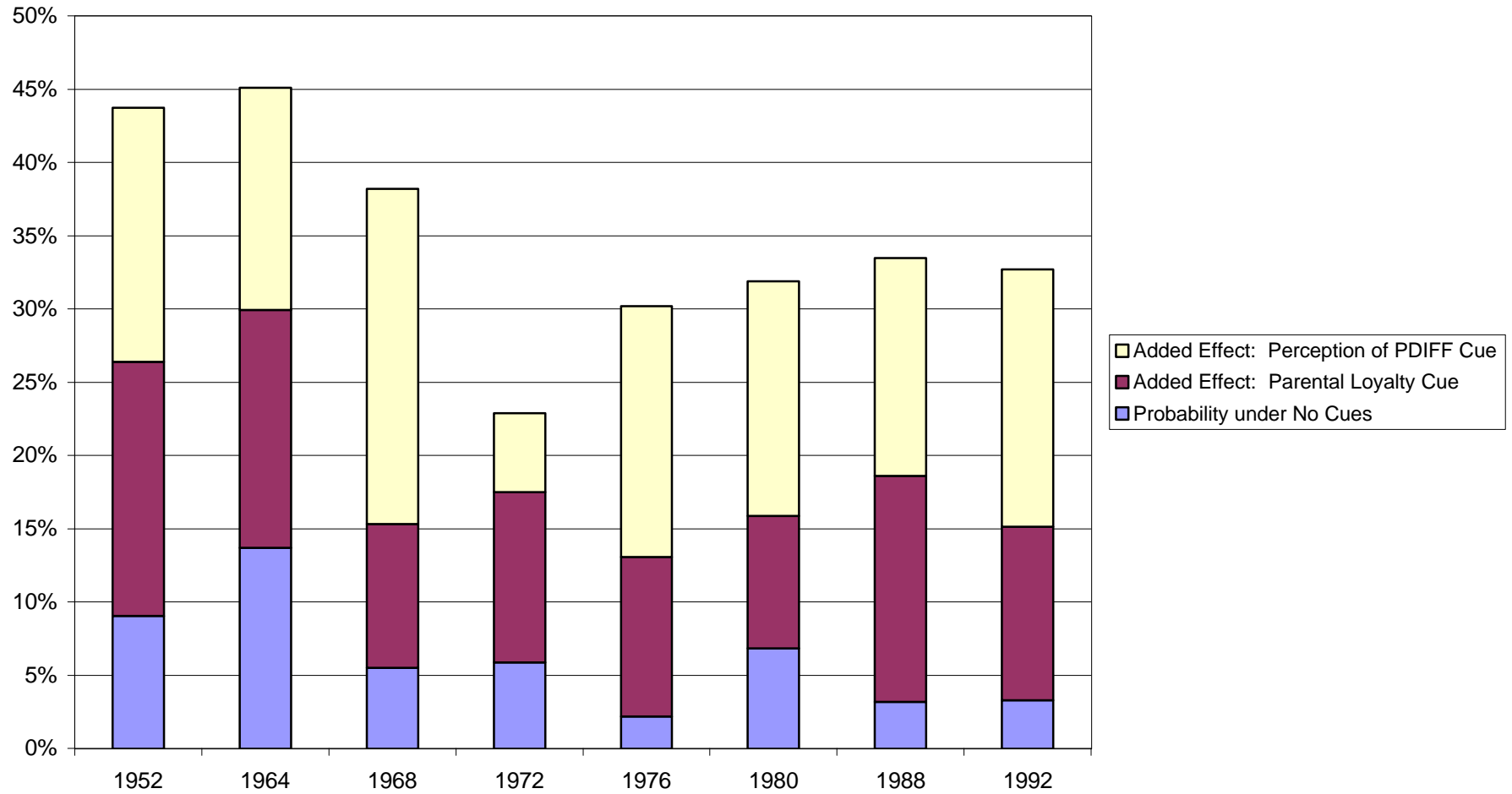


Figure 5(b): Probability of Strong Republican Partisanship

(Multinomial Model)

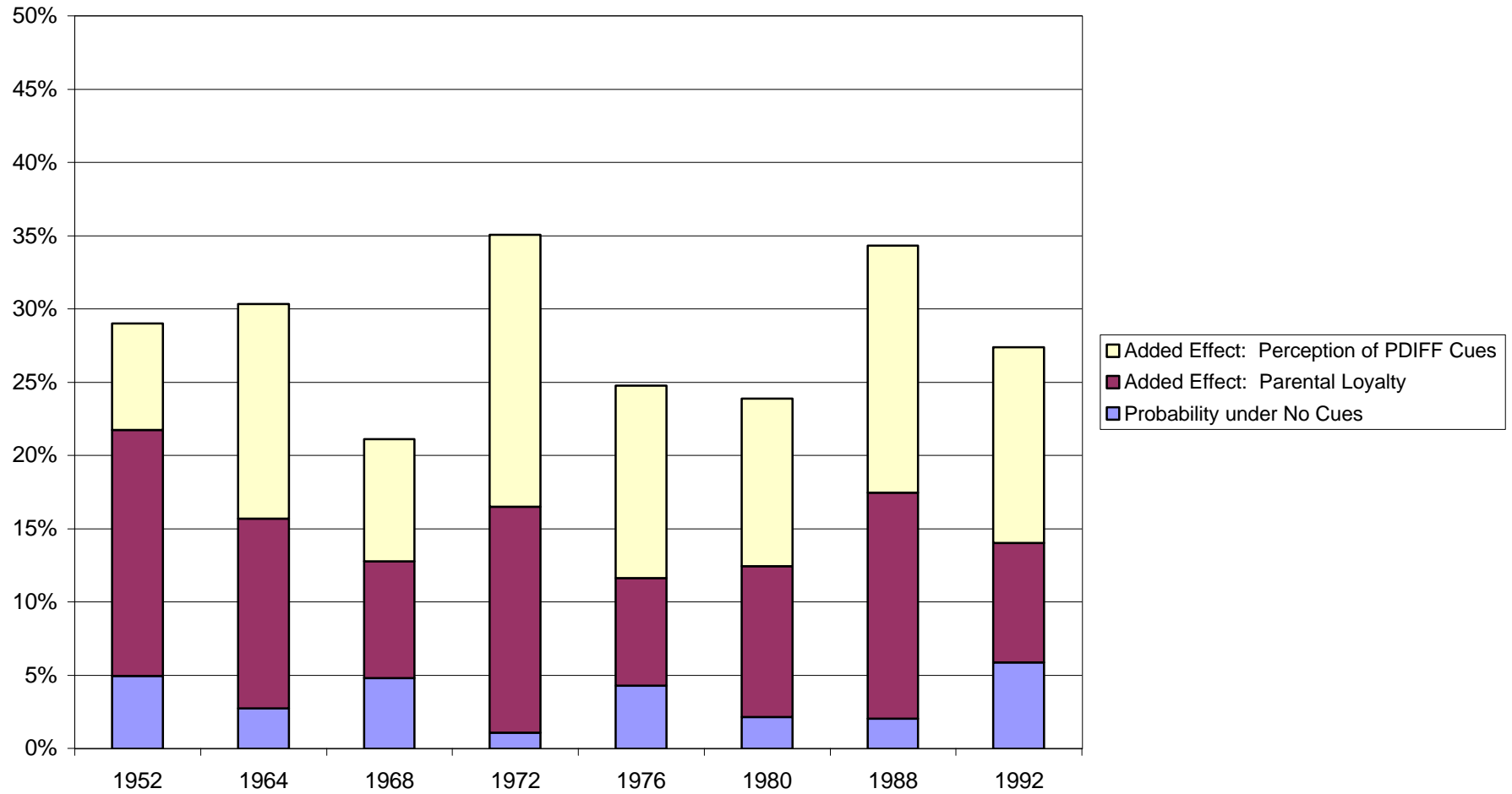


Figure 6: Comparison of Trends
(Change in Education and Party Unity
Relative to Change in Perception of Party Differences)

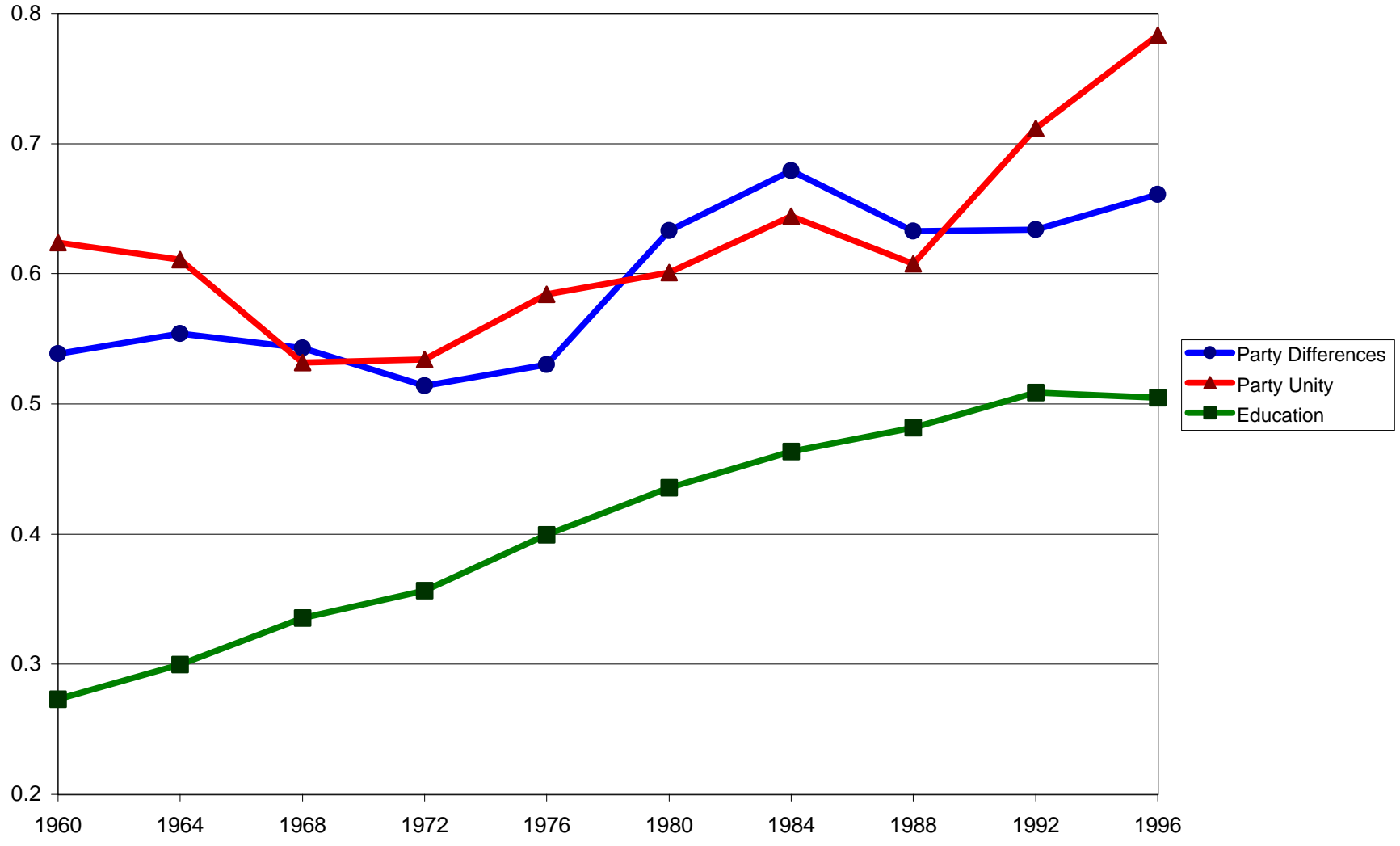


Figure 7: Comparison of Predictive Powers

