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Policy and Performance in the New Deal Realignment: Evidence from Old Data and New Methods

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Recent research has challenged the policy bases of the New Deal realignment, arguing that it was instead driven by retrospective evaluations of the economy. Using a comprehensive analysis of opinion polls conducted in 1936–52, we argue that policy preferences were far from irrelevant. At the individual level, presidential Republicans who became Democrats were much more supportive of New Deal policies than those who remained loyal (vice versa for Democrats). At the state level, both public support for the New Deal—as measured by a group-level item response model—and income growth predict pro-Democratic shifts in presidential elections. In short, the realignment was rooted in both policy preferences and economic retrospection. Moreover, mass support for the New Deal, unlike partisan identification, was a leading indicator of long-term electoral trends, predicting presidential elections decades in the future even better than it does contemporaneous elections.

Few transformations in American political history have been as consequential as the partisan realignment of the 1930s.¹ The elections of 1930 and 1932, held during the worst economic downturn in US history, swept the Republican Party out of power for the first time in a decade. In cooperation with the Democratic Congress, newly elected President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted an ambitious and experimental series of policies that expanded state intervention in the economy, reshaped the financial system, laid the foundations of a modern welfare state, and guaranteed the rights of organized labor. A dramatic break from the *laissez-faire* tradition in the United States as well as from his party's ambiguous ideological identity, FDR's "New Deal" permanently restructured and expanded the national government's role in citizens' lives.

The partisan legacies of the 1930s were as dramatic as the policy legacies. In 1936, at the height of their electoral success, the Democrats earned overwhelming majorities in every

region of the country, with Roosevelt winning by at least 10 points in 44 of 48 states. In 1938, the Republicans began a steady comeback in Congress, eventually achieving a brief majority in 1946 and again in 1952, when Dwight D. Eisenhower finally wrested the presidency from the Democrats. But the Democrats quickly regained control of Congress and would control it for decades, aided by the commanding supermajority among party identifiers that they had built up in the 1930s and 1940s (Caughey et al., forthcoming; Mackuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989). The Democrats' new majority in the mass public included its traditional base among Catholics and Southern whites plus several new constituencies: non-Southern urbanites, Jews, African Americans, and blue-collar workers (Ladd and Hadley 1975, 31–87). Once constructed, this "New Deal coalition" structured partisan cleavages in the mass public for at least a generation.

In short, the political transformations of the 1930s had large and lasting consequences for both policy making and

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1. See Mayhew (2000, 2002) for critical reviews of the realignment literature; the New Deal case holds up well in relation to most of the criteria Mayhew details for assessing whether a partisan realignment occurred. See also Hershey (2005, 294) for an account that treats the New Deal realignment as a leading example of a policy-based realignment.

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mass politics. But what was the relationship between these two legacies? One classic interpretation is that voters' rejection of the Republican Party in 1930–32 signaled their repudiation of the existing laissez-faire policy regime, and the Democrats' victories in subsequent elections constituted their "ratification" of the New Deal order (Key 1964, 531–32). On this view, then, the new Democratic majority was a joint consequence of the public's leftward shift in response to the Depression and the Democrats' adoption of a liberal policy program in line with this shift. By the same token, the Republican comeback that began in the 1938 elections signaled many voters' judgment that the New Deal had gone far enough (e.g., Schickler and Caughey 2011). A corollary of this perspective is that the changing composition of the parties' electoral coalitions was a consequence of the parties' new policy commitments (see, e.g., Sundquist 1983). Whether out of abstract ideological principles or concrete material interests, social groups like Jews and African Americans "rallied to the Roosevelt Democratic party because it was the *liberal party*" (Ladd and Hadley 1975, 85). To a greater or lesser degree, expositors of this view of the New Deal realignment also acknowledge the importance of nonideological factors, most obviously economic depression and recovery but also foreign-policy successes (e.g., Norpoth, Sidman, and Suong 2013). On the whole, though, this perspective still attributes a key role to voters' policy preferences in altering both the balance of partisan loyalties and the parties' relative appeal to different constituencies.

Recently, however, Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels have offered a powerful challenge to this traditional view, as part of their more general critique of the role of issue preferences in electoral politics (Achen and Bartels 2016, 177–212). "Judgements about the role of the government in economic life, the value of laissez-faire economics, or specific aspects of the New Deal program," argue Achen and Bartels, "were largely irrelevant" to partisan shifts in 1930s (191). They propose, instead, a "myopic, nonideological explanation" for the New Deal realignment. Like electorates in other nations, American voters ejected the party that happened to be in charge when the Depression struck and rewarded its successor for the ensuing economic recovery (200–211). In particular, the 1936 presidential election was not some ratification of New Deal liberalism but primarily a function of short-term economic conditions: Roosevelt's share increased in states where the economy grew in 1936 and decreased where growth was weak (185). Moreover, because voters updated their partisan identities in response to election-year conditions, Depression-era "myopic economic retrospections" were the dominant cause not only of short-term fluctuations in party fortunes but also of long-term partisan realignment

(198–99).² The implications of these conclusions are far-reaching and fundamental, for if citizens' policy preferences ever play a role in elections, it should be in "exceptionally ideological" moments of partisan realignment like the New Deal era (Burnham 1967, 288).

While intended to refute the primacy of issue attitudes in the New Deal realignment, Achen and Bartels do not actually measure those attitudes. The closest Achen and Bartels come to an empirical assessment of policy voting is including per capita income, percentage African American, and other state-level demographic attributes in a regression predicting change in presidential votes between 1932 and 1936. On the basis of the statistical insignificance of these demographic characteristics, Achen and Bartels (2016, 188) conclude that "unusually clear evidence of the Democrats' new ideology favoring them seems to have made no difference" to the putative beneficiaries of New Deal policies. However, given the (at best) approximate relationship between demographic characteristics and policy preferences, it is difficult to know how much weight to give to this conclusion.

In this article, we bring old data and new methods to bear on the question of what role citizens' policy preferences played in the New Deal realignment. We exploit a rich but underused data source: hundreds of public opinion polls conducted between 1936 and 1952, which among them included hundreds of issue questions related to the New Deal. Given the time coverage of these data, we cannot use them to determine whether Democratic gains in the initial phase of the New Deal realignment (1932–36) coincided with a general shift to the left in the mass public. But they can provide invaluable insight into the consolidation of the new partisan regime in the late 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. In particular, they allow us to examine the relationship between citizens' policy attitudes and partisan shifts in presidential elections between 1936 and 1952.³

We do so first at the individual level, showing that controlling for their choice in the previous presidential election,

2. These conclusions run counter to those of Fleck (2013), whose county-level analyses reveal little evidence that the effects of Depression era economic conditions persisted over the long run.

3. This focus is consistent with the initial definition of a realignment, offered by Burnham (1967, 288) and picked up by many others, as a cycle of elections that "precipitates massive grass-roots changes in voting behavior and results in a new coalitional pattern for each of the parties" (cf. Key 1955). This is the aspect of realignment that Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale (1980) refer to as "interaction," which involves changes in parties' distributions of support across different subsets of the electorate (in our case, economic liberals and conservatives). But some realignment scholars focus instead on what Clubb et al. call "surge": across-the-board increases in the support for one party, possibly resulting in a new majority party (e.g., Campbell 2006). For an empirical analysis that considers both surge and interaction, see Bartels (1998).

supporters of Democratic presidential candidates were much more supportive of New Deal policies than were presidential Republicans. We then examine state-level presidential election returns, directly paralleling the analysis of Achen and Bartels (2016). We confirm their finding that in non-Southern states, election-year income growth drove partisan shifts in presidential elections, although the effect is clearer in 1936 than it is in subsequent elections. But we find that the liberalism of the state public, as estimated using a group-level item-response model of survey responses (Caughey and Warshaw 2015), is also a robust predictor of shifts toward Democratic presidential candidates. This result holds whether mass liberalism is measured contemporaneously, lagged, or differenced and is robust to controlling for the balance of party identification (PID) in the public. In short, we find clear evidence that over the 1936–52 period, relative liberals moved toward Democratic presidential candidates and relative conservatives moved toward Republicans.⁴

Finally, we consider the longer-term legacies of the New Deal realignment. We find that state liberalism was a leading indicator of presidential elections. Liberalism circa 1940, for example, has little relationship with pre-1940 presidential elections, but it predicts elections 70 years later at least as well as it does the 1940 election itself. In other words, despite the challenges the Democratic coalition has weathered since the 1960s (see, e.g., Edsall and Edsall 1991), the ideological alignment of states that emerged out of the New Deal realignment has continued to structure presidential elections up to the present day.

Taken together, our findings offer qualified support for the traditional view of the New Deal realignment. As Achen and Bartels argue, partisan shifts in the early to mid-1930s can be attributed in large part to valence considerations such as income growth that were mostly unrelated to citizens' ideo-

logical or policy stances.⁵ Moreover, given the limitations of our data, we cannot determine whether the massive leftward shifts in electoral and policy outcomes between 1928 and 1936 reflected an analogous shift in the mass public. But mass support for New Deal liberalism played an important role in solidifying the new Democratic and Republican coalitions. In the early to mid-1930s, the tide of economic recovery may have buoyed the Democrats to varying degrees across the whole country, but support for the Democrats' policy program helped determine who remained a Democrat when the Democratic tide receded. Both policy and performance, in short, drove the New Deal realignment.

PUBLIC OPINION DATA, 1936–52

Evaluating the role of policy in the New Deal realignment requires information on issue attitudes in the mass public. Previous studies of this subject have relied on proxies for citizens' policy preferences, such as their racial or demographic characteristics (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; but see Hayes 1939). More direct evidence is available, however, in the form of public opinion polls from the 1930s–50s. Beginning in 1936, when George Gallup's American Institute of Public Opinion conducted its first national poll, the American public was surveyed on an almost monthly basis by a variety of organizations. By 1952, these organizations had recorded the responses of over 1 million Americans to hundreds of unique survey questions, among them 400 related to the economic issues at the heart of the New Deal. The data from these early polls, housed by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research (<https://ropercenter.cornell.edu>), thus constitute a treasure trove of information on the political attitudes of the American public.

Taking advantage of these data, however, presents a challenge. First, nearly all the polls predated the development of probability sampling. They instead employed an alternative method known as quota sampling, a two-step process in which interviewers were first sent to purposively sampled locations, where they then selected respondents to fill preset quotas for different demographic groups. As Berinsky (2006) observes, these quota-sampling methods resulted in both intentional and unintentional biases in the poll samples. The intentional biases stemmed from the fact that many polls were designed to predict elections, and thus the quotas they used deliberately underrepresented women, African Americans, southerners, and other groups that voted at below-average rates. In addition, interviewer discretion within quota categories

4. In addition to their analysis of presidential voting, Achen and Bartels show that income growth was related to changes in congressional votes in 1934–40. We focus on presidential elections because they present the same two candidates to voters across the country, an important feature when using mass liberalism to predict vote choice. To the extent that candidates vary in their ideological locations across states, the expected relationship between liberalism and aggregate outcomes will differ. Furthermore, analyses of congressional votes are complicated by incumbency, differences in candidate quality, and a range of additional factors. When we nonetheless model congressional votes as a function of both mass liberalism and income change, our findings are mixed for both variables (see app. C for the results). Contrary to Achen and Bartels, when one controls for liberalism—either contemporaneous or lagged—the impact of economic conditions is generally small and insignificant. However, the relationship between mass liberalism and congressional votes is also inconsistent. Instead, lagged congressional votes is by far the most powerful predictor.

5. However, see Wright (1974) for evidence that state economic growth in the 1930s was partly a function of the geographic distribution of New Deal spending, which was itself influenced by political considerations such as the electoral marginality of the state.

created unintentional biases that skewed the samples toward respondents with higher educational and class status than the American public as a whole.

To ameliorate the unrepresentativeness of the early surveys, we take advantage of population data and survey weights created and described by Caughey et al. (forthcoming). As these authors demonstrate, weighting the quota-controlled samples to match known population benchmarks for race, gender, occupation, and other variables substantially decreases the biases in the polls (see also Berinsky et al. 2011). Thus, while the early polls are not ideal, weighting them yields samples that are roughly representative of the American public. The main exception to this is Southern African Americans, who, because they were disenfranchised, were so severely undersampled that in many polls they cannot be analyzed. Since we focus on the non-South, this is not fatal to our enterprise, but it does mean that most of our analyses of Southern states (i.e., the former Confederacy) are based on the white population only.⁶

POLICY ATTITUDES AND PARTY SWITCHING

We now turn to using the survey data described above to examine the relationship between mass policy preferences and partisan voting patterns. We argue that citizens' policy preferences played an important role in the New Deal realignment. Specifically, we argue that Roosevelt and the national Democratic Party's embrace of government intervention in the economy—and the Republican Party's general repudiation of the Democrats' program—caused an ideological shift in the parties' electoral coalitions. This is not to say that voters abandoned party loyalties overnight or that policy preferences were the only determinant of partisan identities or electoral outcomes. Most importantly, the "Solid South" remained much more Democratic than its economic conservatism would predict, a fact largely attributable to the Democratic Party's central role in protecting the South's system of racial segregation from external interference (Key 1949). Moreover, the parties' fortunes also fluctuated for reasons unrelated to ideology—the economic recovery of the early 1930s, the 1937–38 recession, the wartime atmosphere of 1941–45, the scandals of the Truman Administration, and the public's general wearying of Democratic control. But on average, net of these durable loyalties and partisan tides, Democratic candidates tended to win the support of citizens who supported their policy program.

We begin with an analysis of individual voters, comparing the policy preferences of those who switched from one party

to another to those who did not. Our analysis takes inspiration from early work by Hayes (1939), who used data from a 1932 poll conducted by the League of Women Voters to examine the relationship between voters' policy attitudes and their choice between Hoover and Roosevelt, controlling for their recollected vote in 1928. Hayes analyzed responses to two dozen Likert-style policy questions, on topics ranging from new issues such as unemployment relief and the World War I soldiers' bonus to long-standing ones such as tariffs, inflation, and prohibition. Overall, he found that, conditional on their 1928 vote, "the more conservative voters tended to move toward the Republican party and the more progressive toward the Democratic" (518). Indeed, newly converted Democrats (i.e., voters who switched from Hoover to Roosevelt) were actually more progressive than Democratic loyalists. As Hayes himself admits, such correlational analysis alone cannot determine whether policy attitudes are a cause or consequence of party bolting, especially since these attitudes were measured after any changes in vote preference (the poll was administered two weeks before the 1932 election). But they nonetheless help establish the plausibility of a causal role for policy attitudes in voters' partisan choices.

In policy terms, the 1932 election was in some sense a holdover of an earlier era. Indeed, as many commentators have noted, the most salient policy conflict between the candidates during the 1932 campaign was over prohibition, which Hoover supported and FDR did not. It seems likely, then, that ideological cleavages over economic issues should emerge more clearly in subsequent elections, once Roosevelt had firmly planted the Democratic Party on the left and faced Republican candidates who, to varying degrees, opposed his brand of government activism. To investigate this possibility, we conduct a series of analyses of the 1936, 1940, 1944, and 1948 elections, using data from Gallup polls that included questions on both previous and prospective presidential votes as well as an issue question related to New Deal liberalism. We summarize these analyses in table 1, each row of which reports the results of an ordinary least squares regression predicting a liberal response based on prospective vote (Democratic vs. Republican), controlling for past presidential vote.⁷

The first two rows of table 1 reveal large policy differences between supporters of the Democratic candidate President Roosevelt and supporters of the 1936 Republican candidate

6. The general effect of the weights is to modestly increase the estimated liberalism and Democratic partisanship of the public. For further details, see Caughey et al. (forthcoming).

7. The analysis sample includes respondents who reported not voting in the previous election and those who voted or intended to vote for minor-party candidates. All but one of the poll samples are weighted to match the proportion of blacks, women, professionals, phone owners, farmers, and urban residents in the US population. The exception was the 1936 survey, which lacked a question about telephone access and thus is weighted on all the variables except phone.

Table 1. Partisan Differences in Issue Positions Conditional on Previous Vote Choice

Poll Field Date	Question Topic	% Diff	SE
1936:			
September 28–October 2	Aid to tenant farmers	16.5	3.7
September 28–October 2	Old-age insurance	17.5	4.3
1940:			
October 26–31	More regulation of business	27.8	2.7
October 26–31	Less regulation of business	50.9	2.9
1944:			
May 25–31	Maintenance of membership	17.2	2.9
August 18–23	Restart Works Progress Administration	21.8	5.9
1948:			
January 2–7	Rationing and price controls	10.7	3.2
January 23–28	Taft-Hartley	15.0	3.3
January 23–28	Minimum wage	2.8	4.1
February 6–11	Rent control	6.0	2.7
February 6–11	Government ownership of industry	6.4	3.7
March 5–10	Go left/right	12.3	2.2
July 16–21	Liberal/conservative	18.7	3.7
July 30–August 4	Minimum wage	10.2	3.1
July 30–August 4	Housing aid	5.5	2.2

Note. “% Diff” is the difference in the percentage of liberal responses between intended Democratic and Republican presidential voters, controlling for their vote in the previous presidential election. Results for 1948 exclude the South (results for other years differ little by region).

Governor Alf Landon, even after controlling for how individuals voted in the 1932 presidential election. Conditional on their 1932 choice, voters who supported Roosevelt in 1936 were 18 percentage points more likely than Landon voters to approve of the old-age insurance program in the recently enacted Social Security Act of 1935. Similarly, FDR voters were 16 points more supportive of low-interest loans for tenant farmers to purchase their own plots of land, a liberal reform that later came to fruition in the Farm Tenant Act of 1937.⁸ Conditional on prospective vote, the analogous differences by retrospective vote were smaller in magnitude. Thus, for example, respondents who voted for Roosevelt in both 1932 and 1936 were 11 points more supportive of old-age insurance than Hoover-Roosevelt voters but 15 points more supportive than Roosevelt-Hoover voters.

FDR’s 1940 reelection campaign against Republican Wendell Willkie seems to have opened up even larger policy differences between the two parties’ presidential coalitions. In the only poll in the 1940 cycle to include retrospective and prospective vote questions, respondents were asked whether they favored “more regulation or less regulation of business

by the Federal Government, than at present.”⁹ Conditional on their choice in 1936, Roosevelt voters’ probability of favoring “more regulation” of business was 28 points higher than Willkie voters, and their probability of favoring “less regulation” was 51 points lower. It is worth emphasizing that the reference point for these comparisons was the policy status quo after nearly a decade of Democratic rule. If FDR supporters merely wished to express approval of the Roosevelt Administration, they might have rejected both “more” and “less” regulation in favor of the third response option, “about the same.” And Roosevelt supporters were indeed 24 points more likely than Willkie supporters to express approval of the status quo. But the fact that the partisan gap on support for more regulation was even larger suggests that FDR supporters’ greater liberalism did not simply reflect rote approval of the incumbent’s policies.

The results for 1944 show the same pattern. Controlling for past vote, Roosevelt supporters were 17 percentage points more likely than Dewey supporters to favor “maintenance of membership” (i.e., “requiring a person who joins a union to continue to belong to that union in order to hold his job”).¹⁰

8. Both of these questions were included in Gallup Poll 53, September 28–October 2, 1936.

9. Gallup Poll 219, October 26–31, 1940.

10. Gallup Poll 319, May 25–31, 1944.

On the issue of whether the Works Progress Administration should be restarted after the war, the difference was 22 points. Clearly, the wartime atmosphere did not preclude large partisan differences over domestic policy.

Polls containing usable issue and vote-choice questions were particularly prevalent during the 1948 election cycle. Analyzing this election, however, is complicated by the participation of two dissident Democrats—the Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond on the right and the Progressive Henry Wallace on the left—in addition to the Democratic incumbent Harry Truman and his Republican challenger Thomas Dewey. In deference to these complications, we focus on the results for the non-South, where comparisons are cleaner.¹¹ As table 1 shows, non-Southern supporters of Truman in 1948 were, conditional on their past vote, more liberal across the board than Dewey voters. The partisan gap on the typical issue in 1948 was 10 points, considerably smaller than in the preceding three elections. This may be due in part to the tendency of the most liberal voters to defect from Truman to Wallace, but it also may reflect the fact that the New Deal realignment had matured and ideological differences over economics were now “built into” partisan identification.¹² Consistent with the latter conjecture, only in 1948 was the partisan gap by previous presidential vote larger on average than the gap by prospective vote.

On the whole, the individual-level evidence presented here is consistent with the hypothesis that policy preferences played an important role in the New Deal realignment. In the 1936, 1940, 1944, and 1948 presidential elections, previously Republican voters who bolted to the Democrats expressed more liberal issue attitudes than those who remained Republican, and Democratic-to-Republican switchers were more conservative than those who stuck with the Democratic nominee. This seems to contradict the contention that the New Deal realignment was merely the accumulation of economic retrospections.

An important limitation of this analysis, however, is that policy preferences were measured after any partisan switch had occurred, raising the possibility that party switchers brought their policy attitudes into alignment with their vote choice rather than the other way around. Given the absence of panel surveys from this period, we cannot rule out this

possibility at the individual level. Rather, we must move from individual voters to state electorates. This not only permits measurement of policy attitudes before partisan change has occurred, but it also enables us to directly parallel Achen and Bartels’s (2016) analyses and compare the impact of policy preferences with that of economic retrospection. Aggregate analyses have their own limitations, of course. In particular, we can track which states shifted, but there is no assurance that changes in aggregate-level relationships correspond to individual-level ones. Still, the consistency of results across individual and aggregate levels suggests the robustness of the finding that voters’ economic views had a substantial impact of the forging of the New Deal coalition.

A DYNAMIC STATE-LEVEL MEASURE OF MASS LIBERALISM

Examining the dynamic relationship between the policy preferences and electoral behavior of state publics requires time-varying measures of each concept. For electoral behavior we can simply rely on election returns, but measuring mass policy preferences in a way that is comparable across years presents a difficult statistical challenge. The crux of the problem is that the public opinion data from this period are sparse, in two senses of the word. First, survey questions were rarely asked in an identical form across more than a few polls and years. Restricting the analysis to the few comparable-question series would thus entail dropping the vast majority of the poll data. Second, each poll respondent was rarely asked more than a handful of economic policy questions. This precludes using an individual-level scaling method such as an item response theory (IRT) model to place respondents on the liberal-conservative spectrum.

Our solution to this challenge is to use a dynamic group-level IRT model (Caughy and Warshaw 2015) to estimate the average liberalism in each state.¹³ The first step in this approach is to classify respondents into population groups defined by demographic characteristics and state of residence (e.g., white farmers in Kentucky). We then model each group’s percentage of liberal responses to a given question as a function of average liberalism in that group and question-specific characteristics. Formally, if n_{gqt} members of group g answered question q in year t , then the number of liberal responses s_{gqt} is distributed

$$s_{gqt} \sim \text{binomial} \left(n_{gqt}, \Phi \left(\frac{\bar{\theta}_{gt} - \kappa_q}{\sqrt{\sigma_q^2 + \sigma_{\theta t}^2}} \right) \right), \quad (1)$$

11. Many polls in 1948 ask only about voting “Democratic,” the meaning of which is unclear given that Strom Thurmond was the official nominee of several state Democratic parties in the South.

12. In the non-South, third-party voters—overwhelmingly Wallace supporters—were markedly more liberal on economic issues (as well as civil rights) than Truman voters. By contrast, third-party voters in the South—who were almost universally Thurmond supporters—were more conservative than Democratic voters.

13. As Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder (2008) show, a further advantage of using a scaling method such as IRT to combine many issue questions into a single measure is a substantial reduction in measurement error.

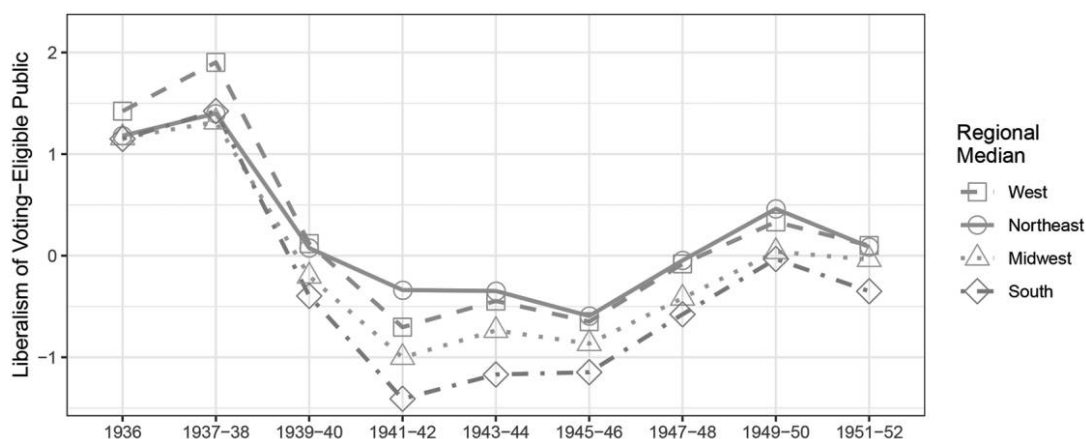


Figure 1. Trends in New Deal liberalism among the voting-eligible population, by biennium. Lines and hollow shapes indicate the median state in each region. Color version available as an online enhancement.

where $\bar{\theta}_{gt}$ is group g 's average liberalism in year t , $\sigma_{\theta_t}^2$ is the variance of $\bar{\theta}$ within groups, κ_q is the threshold for a liberal answer to question q , and the inverse of σ_q^2 indicates how “ideological” question q is.¹⁴ The group-level IRT model enables us to use data from many polls containing different questions to estimate groups' average liberalism on a common scale. To deal with empty or nearly empty groups, we smooth the estimates of $\bar{\theta}_{gt}$ by modeling their prior distribution with a dynamic linear model, which “borrows strength” from adjacent time periods and demographically similar groups. Finally, to estimate average liberalism in a state, the group-specific estimates can be weighted according to their percentage in the population of interest.

To estimate this model in our application, we constructed a data set of 273 different polls fielded between December 1936 and July 1952. We analyzed responses to 258 distinct policy questions related to social welfare, economic regulation, and other New Deal issues, dropping questions with a presidential or candidate cue as well as ones that explicitly reference the policy status quo. We coded the responses to each question according to their relative liberalism and dichotomized questions with more than two response options at an appropriate midpoint. Over 340,000 unique survey respondents are represented in this data set, with the sample size in each year ranging from a minimum of 2,301 in 1951 to 56,411 in 1937.

We classified respondents into one of 288 demographic groups, defined by the cross-classification of state, black/non-black, and urban/rural/farm. Within groups, we weighted re-

spondents to match the marginal population distributions of gender, phone ownership, and professional status in that group. We estimated the model in the Bayesian simulation program Stan, as implemented by the R package dgo (Dunham, Caughey, and Warshaw 2016). We ran four chains of the sampler, each with 2,000 iterations, discarding the first 1,500 and thinning every two. The estimation produced 1,000 samples from the posterior distribution of average liberalism in 288 demographic groups in each of 17 years (1936–52), which we poststratified to obtain yearly liberalism estimates for the voting-eligible population in each of the then-48 states.

Previous analyses of survey data from this period have found that the mass public shifted to the right in the late 1930s and early 1940s, although with some reversal in the late 1940s. The proportion of Americans identifying as “liberal” or “left,” for example, fell dramatically in the late 1930s, hitting a low point in the late 1940s before recovering somewhat (Ellis and Stimson 2009, 396). A similar pattern can be seen in public attitudes toward many (although not all) New Deal-style policies, especially on issues related to organized labor (Schickler and Caughey 2011). These ideological shifts can be seen clearly on questions asked in comparable form across multiple years. The percentage of Americans who favored “closed shop” union security agreements, for instance, fell by 20 points between the late 1930s and mid-1940s. Support for government ownership of banks, utilities, and railroads fell by similar amounts. As figure 1 shows, these over-time shifts are reflected in our group IRT estimates. Across all regions there was a marked drop off in liberalism between 1936–38 and the remainder of the period, with a low point in the early 1940s followed by a partial recovery.¹⁵ In

14. In more common IRT notation, $1/\sigma_q = \beta_q$ is the “discrimination” of question q , and $\kappa_q/\sigma_q = \alpha_q$ is q 's “difficulty.” The model in eq. (1) follows from the conventional probit IRT model, plus the assumption that liberalism is normally distributed within groups with variance $\sigma_{\theta_t}^2$.

15. The liberalism estimates are cardinally comparable across years under the assumption that the ideological meaning of repeated questions—that

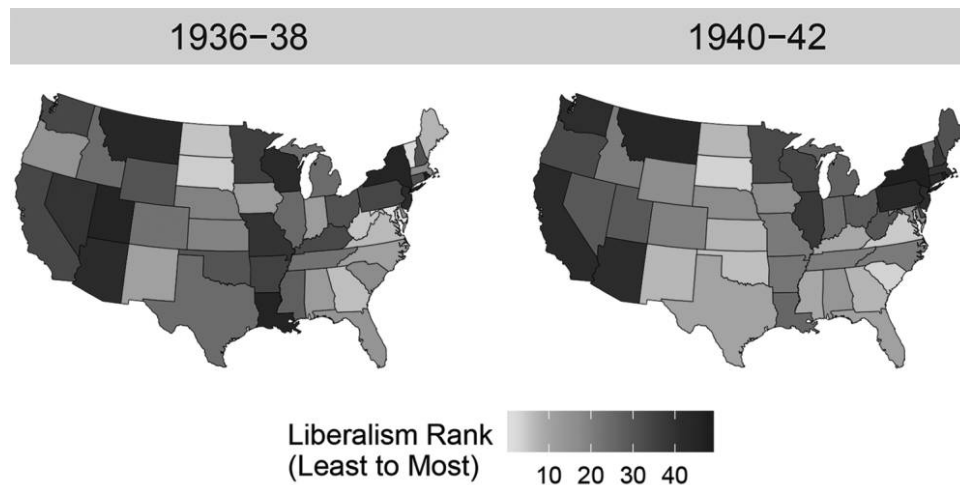


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of New Deal liberalism, 1936–38 and 1940–42. Shading indicates a state's liberalism rank, averaged across the three-year period. Color version available as an online enhancement.

fact, by the first half of the 1940s, the most liberal state public in the nation was about as supportive of New Deal-style policies as the most conservative state in the late 1930s. It is worth noting that these shifts mirror Republican gains in House elections between 1936 and 1946, although only rather loosely.

In relative terms, the ideological rankings of most states were fairly stable, and at the regional level the overall pattern is one of parallel movement (cf. Page and Shapiro 1992). Some important regional shifts did occur, however, particularly around 1939. At the beginning of the period, the median western state public was substantially more liberal than the three other regional medians, which were clumped closely together. But after 1938, the Northeast converged with the West while the (white) South emerged as the most conservative region in the country. For instance, in polls taken before 1941, westerners and white southerners expressed the highest level of support for government ownership of electric power companies (51%), and northeasterners expressed the least support (45%). By the late 1940s, the regional pattern had changed: the West and Northeast were the most supportive (33%–34%), and the Midwest and white South were least so (29%–30%). As this example illustrates, over-time shifts in support for specific policies often dwarfed regional differences. Nevertheless, within these national trends there were important changes in states' relative support for the New Deal.

The changing geographic distribution of New Deal liberalism is highlighted by the maps in figure 2, which display the liberalism of state publics in 1936–38 and 1940–42. To aid comparability across time, we ranked states by their lib-

is, the “mapping” from citizens' liberalism to their probability of giving a liberal answer—is stable over time.

eralism in each year and then averaged the ranks within each three-year period.¹⁶ To modern eyes, the 1936–38 map appears anomalous. Much of the South is more liberal than the nation as a whole, while New England is generally right of center and much of the so-called heartland of the country appears as liberal as the coasts. The 1940–42 map looks much more familiar. Liberalism is concentrated on the two coasts and lower New England, the South tends to be conservative, and a belt of conservatism runs northward from Texas to North Dakota. The same basic pattern persists for the remainder of the period. In sum, it appears that a new ideological cleavage across states crystallized around 1940, one that foreshadowed electoral cleavages decades later (the longer-term legacies of this new alignment are considered below).¹⁷

NEW DEAL LIBERALISM AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

With these estimates in hand, we can now examine the state-level relationship between mass support for the New Deal and presidential election outcomes. Our goal is to assess whether the consolidation of the New Deal realignment over the 1936–52 elections was shaped by mass policy preferences. As a first cut, we examine the cross-sectional relationship between state liberalism and Democratic vote share in each presidential election, separately for the South and non-South (Achen and Bartels exclude the South from their analyses). Distinguishing by region is important because, as

16. Because states' relative liberalism fluctuated slightly within triennia, we averaged ranks across years to increase the precision of the estimates.

17. The timing of such a shift would be consistent with Sinclair's (1982, 20) conclusion that a realignment in congressional voting patterns on social welfare issues occurred in 1939–40.

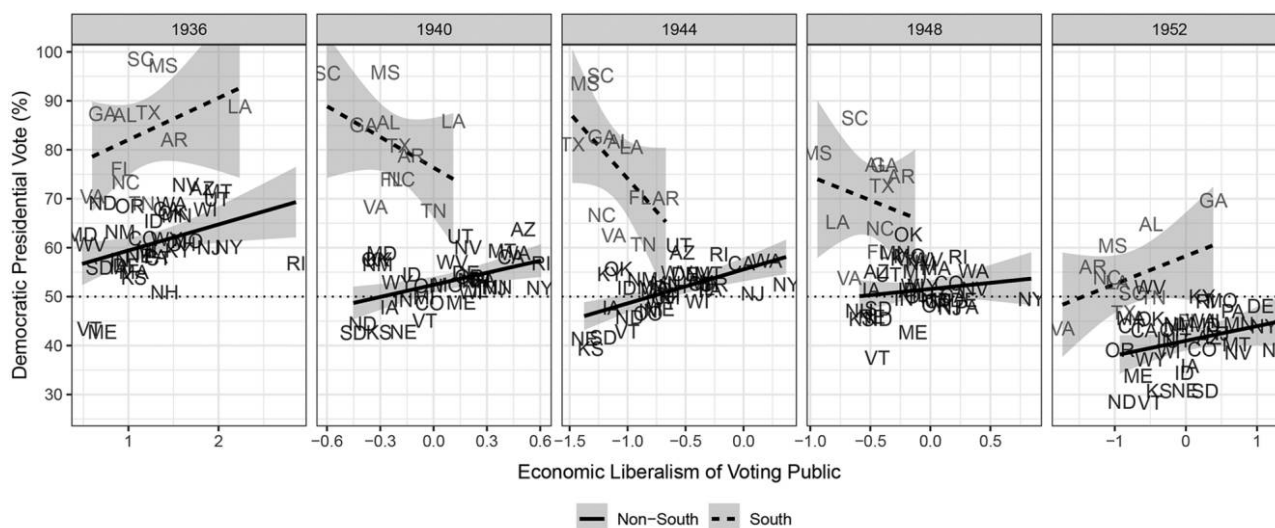


Figure 3. Economic liberalism and Democratic presidential vote in state electorates, 1936–52

figure 3 shows, the South exhibits quite different patterns from the rest of the country. Not only is the South much more Democratic, but within the region presidential vote has no consistent relationship with the public's economic policy preferences. Rather, as Key (1949) notes, the most solidly Democratic states were in the Deep South, where the (disenfranchised) black population was largest and the one-party system most entrenched. Clearly, when it came to presidential elections, the intensity of Southern whites' commitment to the Jim Crow one-party system largely trumped their economic policy preferences in this period.¹⁸ For this reason, we follow Achen and Bartels (2016) and focus our analysis on the 37 states outside the former Confederacy.¹⁹

Turning our attention to the non-South, we find a more consistent pattern of results. Outside the South, states with more liberal publics gave more support to Democratic presidential candidates in every year. In the typical year, the most conservative and most liberal states differed in Democratic two-party vote share by an average of around 10 percentage points. The weakest relationship is for 1948, which may be attributable to the fact that the Progressive Henry Wallace ran best in liberal states like New York, depressing the Democratic margin in such states.²⁰ It is also worth noting

18. In this sense, policy mattered to Southern voters' partisan choices, but the policy cleavage focused on race rather than economics.

19. The four-way 1948 presidential race complicates our analysis of that election, particularly in the South, where the Dixiecrats succeeded in designating Strom Thurmond as the official Democratic nominee in four states (South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana). Since President Truman was not even on the ballot in Alabama, we impute his major-party vote share in that state as the average of the other three Dixiecrat-controlled states.

20. Wallace earned 8% of the total vote in New York, which was by far the most liberal state in 1948. The fact that the Republican nominee Thomas

that Democratic presidential vote share declined between 1936 and 1952 in both the South and the non-South, loosely paralleling the national public's conservative shift over this same period (see fig. 1). In short, economic liberalism and support for Democratic presidential candidates were clearly related to one other in the 1936–52 period.

This cross-sectional analysis, however, does not rule out the possibility that mass liberalism was merely a consequence or correlate of preexisting support for the Democratic Party. To investigate this possibility, we turn to a formal regression analysis that mirrors the approach Achen and Bartels (2016) use to estimate the relationship between income growth and presidential vote in 1936 (see 185–89, esp. table 7.1). Like them, we use a lagged dependent variable (LDV) specification, modeling the two-party Democratic vote share in each state as a function of Democratic share in the previous election plus the explanatory variables of interest. In our case, the latter are income growth and mass liberalism, each measured in the election year.²¹ We interact every predictor with a South indicator, thus effectively fitting the model separately by region. In addition, to account for the fact that states' average liberalism is measured with error, we use a procedure called the method of composition (MOC) to propagate the uncertainty in the measures through to the regression estimates (Caughey and Warshaw 2018, 254; Treier and Jackman 2008, 215–16). The primary consequence of the MOC correction is

Dewey was a New Yorker may also have depressed Democratic share there. Removing New York from the data increases the slope for 1948 in fig. 3 from 2.5 to 4.1.

21. Data on state per capita personal income were obtained from US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Income Division (2017).

Table 2. Predictors of Presidential Election Results, by Year

	1936	1940	1944	1948	1952
Income growth _t	.26* (.07)	-.33 (.32)	.02 (.05)	.25* (.10)	.20 (.19)
Mass liberalism _t	1.60 (1.42)	5.02* (2.69)	1.81* (.76)	.02 (2.36)	1.16 (1.32)
Democratic president _{t-4}	.82* (.10)	.39* (.09)	.80* (.06)	.76* (.15)	.79* (.13)
South	1.93 (7.73)	-28.45* (7.05)	-28.21* (5.43)	-6.65 (11.94)	28.31* (16.25)
Income growth _t × South	-.16 (.16)	.37 (.37)	-.21 (.14)	.21 (.31)	-1.13 (1.13)
Mass liberalism _t × South	-2.48 (2.47)	-5.39 (4.68)	-4.90 (3.65)	15.06* (7.11)	1.89 (3.88)
Democratic president _{t-4} × South	.04 (.12)	.55* (.10)	.36* (.09)	.12 (.19)	-.31 (.25)
Constant	8.30 (6.06)	30.95* (5.76)	9.77* (3.14)	10.23 (7.80)	-.38 (6.72)
R ²	.93	.93	.99	.90	.71

Note. Dependent variable = Democratic percentage of two-party presidential vote. Standard errors (in parentheses) are robust to heteroskedasticity. Estimates are corrected for measurement error in mass liberalism. $N = 48$.

* Significant at the 10% level.

to attenuate the estimated coefficients on mass liberalism by about one-third.²²

The results of this analysis are reported in table 2. Aside from the addition of mass liberalism, the first four rows of this table, which report coefficients for non-Southern states, correspond to the results reported by Achen and Bartels (2016, 187).²³ The first row of the 1936 column reproduces Achen and Bartels's finding that election-year income growth was a powerful predictor of non-Southern states' shifts toward Roosevelt between 1932 and 1936. According to this estimate, each additional percentage point of per capita income growth increased state Democratic vote share by 0.26 percentage points. As the remaining columns indicate, however, the estimated impact of income growth was inconsistent after 1936: negative in 1940, zero in 1944, and positive in 1948 and 1952, although only significantly so in 1948.

Table 2's second row indicates that even controlling for lagged presidential vote, mass liberalism positively predicts Democratic share in most years. Like income growth, the coefficient estimate for liberalism is significant in only two

elections (1940 and 1944), but in most years the coefficients are similar in magnitude.²⁴ The exceptions are the anomalous 1948 election, where liberalism has no conditional relationship with presidential vote, and 1940, where its estimated effect is three times larger than in other years.²⁵ Interestingly, lagged presidential vote is far less predictive in 1940 than in other years. Like figures 1 and 2, this again suggests a durable shift in non-Southern states' political alignments between Roosevelt's first and second reelections.

Notwithstanding the variation across elections, pooling the analyses across years indicates that both mass liberalism and income growth predict shifts in Democratic presidential vote share. This remains true even if mass liberalism is lagged in order to rule out the possibility of income growth affecting mass liberalism.²⁶ Table 3 shows this systematically using six different regression specifications. Column 1,

24. The estimated effect of mass liberalism in 1936 is substantially depressed by a single outlier (Rhode Island). Removing this state from the analysis increases the MOC-corrected point estimate from 1.6 to 2.3.

25. The ideological variation across states was substantially lower in 1940 than in other years, which complicates comparison across years. However, if liberalism is scaled within year by its cross-state standard deviation, the coefficient for 1940 is still twice as large as the average of the other four years (1.6 vs. 0.8).

26. If election-year income growth affected presidential vote through its effect on election-year liberalism, then including election-year liberalism

22. The income growth variable that we and Achen and Bartels employ is also measured with error, but estimates of that error are not available, so we cannot correct for it.

23. Achen and Bartels also control for turnout change, which we do not examine.

Table 3. Predictors of Presidential Election Results, Pooling Years

	1936–52			1940–52		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Income growth _t	.05 (.06)	.18* (.05)	.14* (.07)	.14* (.07)	.06 (.06)	.07 (.06)
Mass liberalism _t	2.90* (1.30)	1.64* (.75)				
Mass liberalism _{t-1}			2.07* (1.06)		2.19* (1.12)	1.81 (1.13)
Mass liberalism _{t-4}				1.55 (1.15)		1.00 (1.06)
Democratic PID _{t-1}					.18* (.04)	.19* (.04)
Democratic president _{t-4}		.69* (.04)	.63* (.06)	.63* (.06)	.39* (.09)	.37* (.09)
South	18.42* (6.81)	-4.84 (5.38)	-2.07 (6.04)	-.36 (6.45)	-8.18 (7.87)	-9.39 (9.45)
Income growth _t × South	.43 (.29)	-.14 (.09)	-.12 (.15)	-.11 (.14)	-.04 (.15)	-.04 (.15)
Lib _t × South	-2.44 (3.98)	-.89 (1.91)				
Mass liberalism _{t-1} × South			-2.78 (3.63)		-3.10 (3.73)	-2.97 (4.13)
Mass liberalism _{t-4} × South				-.81 (2.22)		.04 (2.50)
Democratic PID _{t-1} × South					-.17 (.18)	-.17 (.19)
Democratic president _{t-4} × South		.15* (.06)	.19* (.08)	.19* (.08)	.43* (.17)	.45* (.17)
Year × South fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	240	240	192	192	192	192
R ²	.77	.92	.90	.90	.91	.91

Note. Dependent variable = Democratic percentage of two-party presidential vote. Standard errors (in parentheses) are clustered by state and robust to serial correlation. Estimates are corrected for measurement error in mass liberalism and partisanship.

* Significant at the 10% level.

confirming the year-specific plots in figure 3, demonstrates mass liberalism's robust cross-sectional association with the Democratic share in elections between 1936 and 1952. Election-year income growth, however, does not predict contemporaneous presidential election results unless the model includes lagged presidential vote, which the models reported in columns 2–6 do. Model 2 replicates the year-specific LDV

in the model could bias the estimated effect of personal income growth downward. The robustness of the liberalism effect when measured before the election year militates against this concern. It is also worth noting that lagged presidential vote may itself incorporate some of the impact of past state-level liberalism; the impact of ideology could travel through past voting, which is a control variable in both Achen and Bartels and in our replication.

analyses reported in table 2 and confirms that both election-year income growth and mass liberalism predict changes in the Democratic percentage of the two-party presidential vote.²⁷ Table 3 columns 3 and 4 show the same result with

27. The results for the non-South are qualitatively similar if we substitute state fixed effects for LDVs, with the exception of the fourth-order lag of mass liberalism (although the latter is highly predictive in the South). Like Achen and Bartels (2016), we consider an LDV specification to be more natural because state fixed effects are designed to address time-invariant state-specific confounders, whereas in this application states are clearly evolving politically and confounding processes are clearly sequenced in time. Our main findings are also mostly robust to using change in presidential vote as the dependent variable, which is equivalent to constraining the coefficient on lagged presidential vote to equal exactly 1 (contrast this

mass liberalism lagged one and four years, respectively, although the four-year lag is not statistically significant ($p = .18$). (Since 1936 is the first year that liberalism estimates are available, lagging mass liberalism requires that we drop 1936 from the analysis.) In short, shifts in presidential vote share are predicted not only by contemporaneous liberalism but also by liberalism measured as many as four years in the past.

Table 3 column 5 introduces a final control variable: the estimated Democratic share of major-party identifiers in the state public the year before the election, which is available beginning in 1937.²⁸ While a powerful predictor in its own right, PID's inclusion in the model does not budge the estimated effect of one-year-lagged liberalism. This suggests that mass liberalism is not merely proxying for general partisan shifts. (Including election year rather than lagged PID yields similar results.) Controlling for Democratic partisanship does, however, reduce the magnitude and statistical significance of the estimated effect of income growth (but note that this analysis does not include the 1936 election, which, as table 2 shows, was when the effect of income growth was clearest). Finally, table 3 column 6 shows that even if we add back the four-year lag of mass liberalism, mass liberalism one year before the election still independently predicts presidential vote share ($p = .11$). Because this specification controls for the four-year lags of both presidential vote and mass liberalism, this suggests that shifts in presidential vote were associated with changes in mass liberalism in the years leading up to the election year.

Let us summarize what we have learned from the state-level analyses. First, consistent with the argument of Achen and Bartels (2016), non-Southern states that experienced greater income growth became relatively more Democratic in presidential elections, although there is some variation across years. But contrary to Achen and Bartels (2016), shifts toward the Democratic Party were also associated with greater economic liberalism in the state public. Strikingly, this general relationship persists even if mass liberalism is lagged one or (more suggestively) four years. Mass liberalism's capacity to predict future presidential votes makes it less plausible that state publics were simply "following the leader" and adopting the view of their favored presidential candidate (Brody and Page 1972; Lenz 2012). Were this the case, then we would expect state liberalism four years before election to have no predictive power once we control for lagged presidential vote

with the actual lag coefficients reported in the row labeled "Democratic president_{t-4}" in table 3, which are clearly less than 1).

28. State-level Democratic identification was estimated with data from 161 polls conducted between 1937 and 1952, using the `dgrp` function in the R package `dgo` (Dunham et al. 2016). The regression coefficients for this variable are also corrected for measurement error.

and the balance of PID. Of course, we cannot fully rule out the possibility that the apparent effect of mass liberalism was in fact driven by unmeasured partisan trends or other confounders. But we can confidently conclude that more liberal publics trended toward Democratic presidential candidates, a finding consistent with our more general claim that policy preferences were an important driver of the New Deal realignment.

CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF THE NEW DEAL REALIGNMENT

Realignment theorists such as Walter Dean Burnham and James Sundquist have argued that the partisan alignment forged in a realigning era has a strong ideological element that persists for generations. Achen and Bartels counter, however, that not only is issue voting limited in normal elections but even the transformation associated with the New Deal featured little in the way of issue voting or ideologically driven mass politics. While data limitations make it difficult to assess the extent to which the initial surge toward the Democrats reflected voters' issue stands, our evidence strongly suggests that the consolidation of the New Deal realignment in the 1936–44 period was to a substantial extent shaped by differences across groups and states in their evaluations of the New Deal's economic programs. Our results are thus consistent with the traditional idea that the New Deal realignment did have a significant ideological component: changes in state-level presidential vote were clearly related to the distribution of economic liberalism across states, both contemporaneously and in the past. In short, both the economic retrospections highlighted by Achen and Bartels and voters' policy commitments played an important role in the New Deal realignment.²⁹

Nonetheless, one might still question the durability of these ideological commitments. Were the shifts in liberalism described above simply short-term fluctuations, or did they instead reflect the public's enduring reaction to the particular rendition of liberalism that emerged during the New Deal years? In other words, did the ideological alignment forged in the 1930s and 1940s endure, or was it disrupted by either economic shocks or events, such as the civil rights revolution of the 1960s, that are often seen as eroding the New Deal coalition?

29. Because of space limitations, we do not take up the question of which groups within states were responsible for shifts in state-level liberalism and voting. However, individual-level analyses suggest that urban residents, blacks, Jews, immigrants, and members of the working class were especially likely to embrace New Deal liberalism and increasingly voted Democratic during these years. It is quite plausible that states with larger concentrations of these groups were more likely to move in a liberal direction.

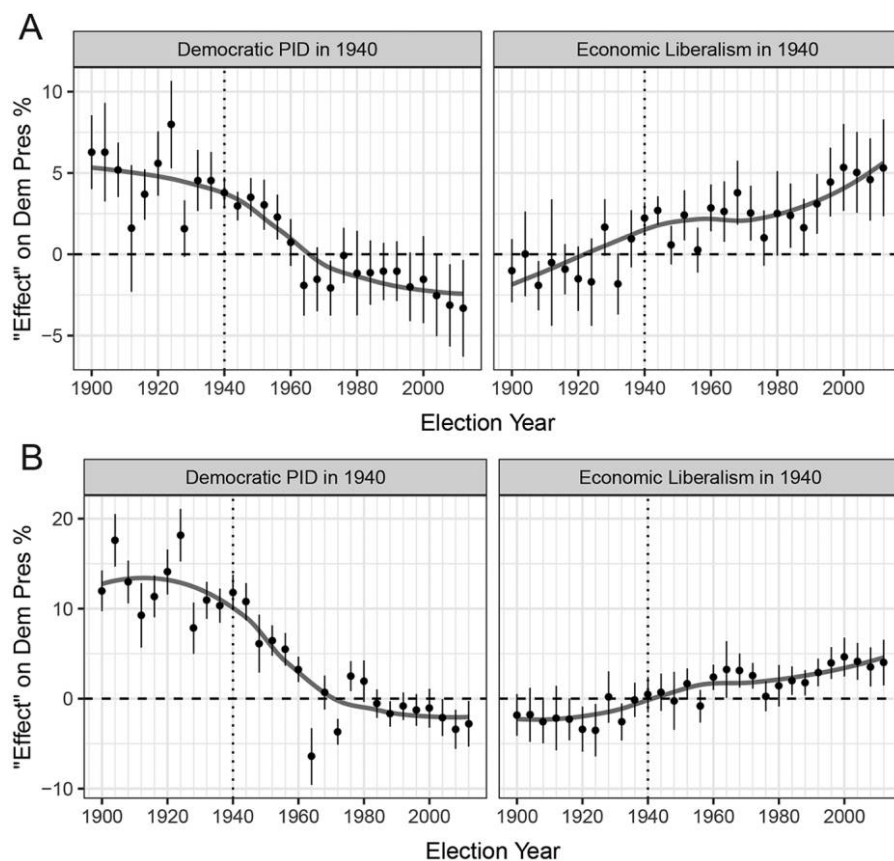


Figure 4. Partisanship and ideology as lagging and leading indicators of presidential elections. *A*, Coefficients from regressions predicting Democratic presidential vote share in elections 1900–2012 as a function of Democratic PID and economic liberalism in 1940, using data from non-Southern states. *B*, Analogous coefficients from a regression of all states (excluding Alaska and Hawaii). Within both state subsets, Democratic PID and economic liberalism have been standardized to have unit variance. The estimates underlying these figures include Southern African Americans and are not corrected for measurement error. The 95% confidence intervals around each coefficient are based on conventional homoscedastic standard errors.

The maps in figure 2 have already hinted at the legacy of the ideological alignments that emerged from the New Deal era. As we noted earlier, an enduring new ideological alignment seems to have solidified by 1940. The Democratic vote share in the 2012 presidential election, for example, is essentially uncorrelated with state support for New Deal liberalism in 1936, both nationally and among non-Southern states (the same holds for liberalism measured in 1937 or 1938). But its MOC-corrected correlation with 1940 liberalism is much higher: 0.37 nationally and 0.41 outside the South. The correlations are just as high for liberalism measured in years after 1940.

The contrast between 1936 and subsequent years suggests that it took some time for the New Deal system to solidify but that it eventually did so based in part on ideological differences across states (see Sundquist [1983] on the “after-shocks” of the New Deal realignment). This ideological alignment remained reasonably stable over ensuing decades, with the primary shift evident in the South, as the region’s voting behavior gradually came into line with the economic con-

servatism that became evident by the 1940s.³⁰ Another way to see this is to examine how the ideological and partisan cleavages forged by the New Deal relate to electoral patterns before and after that point. We do this by regressing, for each election between 1900 and 2012, states’ Democratic presidential vote share on their Democratic PID and economic liberalism in 1940.³¹ Figure 4 plots the resulting coefficient estimates for the non-South (fig. 4A) and all states (fig. 4B).

As we have already seen, in non-Southern states both partisanship and liberalism in 1940 independently predict contemporaneous presidential vote (fig. 4A, vertical dashed line). Their coefficients, however, trend in opposite directions over time. As one would expect of a variable that measures

30. It is also worth noting that the South would appear even more conservative starting in the late 1930s if one restricts the sample to the (enfranchised) white electorate. This would increase the correlation between state liberalism in 1940–48 and election outcomes decades later.

31. The choice of 1940 as a baseline is fairly arbitrary; any other year between 1939 and 1952 yields essentially the same results.

enduring attachment to a party, the proportion of Democratic identifiers in 1940 is at least as strongly associated with Democratic vote share in preceding presidential elections as it is with contemporaneous vote share. The predictive value of 1940 Democratic PID falls off rather steeply in subsequent elections, and after 1960 it is actually negatively associated with Democratic presidential vote. Economic liberalism exhibits the opposite pattern. Liberalism in 1940 does not have a significant positive association with presidential vote share in any pre-1940 election. But in contrast to PID, liberalism predicts most future presidential elections at least as well as, if not better than, it does the election of 1940 itself.

This pattern emerges even more starkly when we consider all states (fig. 4B). The inclusion of Southern states, which in the 1940s were relatively conservative but still overwhelmingly Democratic in both PID and vote choice, wipes out the cross-sectional relationship between liberalism and Democratic presidential share.³² But by the 1960s, presidential election results had become positively associated with 1940 liberalism. Moreover, the predictive power of 1940 liberalism had clearly overtaken that of 1940 PID, which is if anything inversely correlated with post-1960 Democratic presidential shares. By the twenty-first century, in both the non-South and the nation at as whole, Democratic presidential share was as highly correlated with 1940 liberalism as it had ever been. In the 2000 presidential election, for example, a state whose liberalism was 1 standard deviation below average in 1940 was predicted to give 43% of its major-party votes to the Democrat Al Gore, as compared to 51% for a state whose liberalism in 1940 was a standard deviation above average.³³ In short, public support for New Deal liberalism was a leading indicator of support for Democratic presidential candidates, whereas partisan identification was a lagging indicator.

These results support the view that the New Deal realignment involved a durable transformation in the ideological bases of the two parties that reached down to the mass level. Consistent with the idea that partisan realignments may be a moment in which the mass public responds to major changes in the policy stances adopted by the parties, we find that the electoral coalition forged by the end of the New Deal period had a distinctly ideological cast that would persist—and, indeed, be reinforced—for decades. More generally, our findings suggest a partial corrective to the conclusion that

32. Unlike our earlier analyses, the estimates plotted in fig. 4 include Southern blacks, who were effectively enfranchised only in the 1960s. The patterns are essentially the same if blacks are excluded from the 1940 estimates for Southern states.

33. These estimates are corrected for measurement error.

voters' policy views have a minimal impact on election outcomes and coalitions. There is no doubt that simple retrospective voting played a major role in generating Democrats' massive gains in 1932 and in sustaining Democrats' majority in 1936. At the same time, our evidence suggests that differences in popular attitudes toward New Deal economic liberalism also played a significant role. The aggressive response to the Depression crisis identified the Democratic Party with policies of government intervention, social welfare, and support for labor unions, while the Republican Party's turn to antistatism sharpened the ideological divide between the parties. Voters evidently responded to this new cleavage over economic policy, with groups and states that supported economic liberalism significantly more likely to stick with Roosevelt in the late 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, those groups and states that embraced economic liberalism during this period would prove to be bastions of Democratic support decades later. Even as there clearly is much to the view that vote choice is often shaped by simple retrospective evaluations concerning economic performance, the New Deal realignment demonstrates that broad-based policy concerns can also be an important, enduring basis for electoral coalitions.

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