

BAK10: Comparative Democratic Politics

Week 9 - Electoral Behavior

Leonardo Carella

The Plan for Today

- Why do people vote the way they do?
 - ‘Classical’ socio-psychological models (‘Michigan’ and ‘Columbia’ schools).
- Partisan dealignment and alternatives:
 - Spatial models and issue voting.
 - Valence voting.

Where were we...?

- **Cleavages:** party systems reflect social conflicts. Their stability depends on **voter loyalties** that develop around these divisions.
- Explaining **party system change**. Dealignment theory: declining influence of these loyalties. Realignment theory: new cleavage(s) replacing old ones.
- Focus of today's class: **the voters' side**. How do they develop these loyalties? How do they vote when they don't have these (anymore)?

Columbia School

- Voting is largely shaped by **social position**:
 - “The poor, the urban residents, and the Catholics are more likely to vote the Democratic ticket, while the well-to-do, the Protestants, and the rural dwellers are more frequently found in the Republican camp.”
 - Key role of personal networks: contact reinforces group norms, people rarely form preferences “on their own” – they take cues from opinion leaders in their social groups.
 - Long-term influence: survey research, cleavage theory.



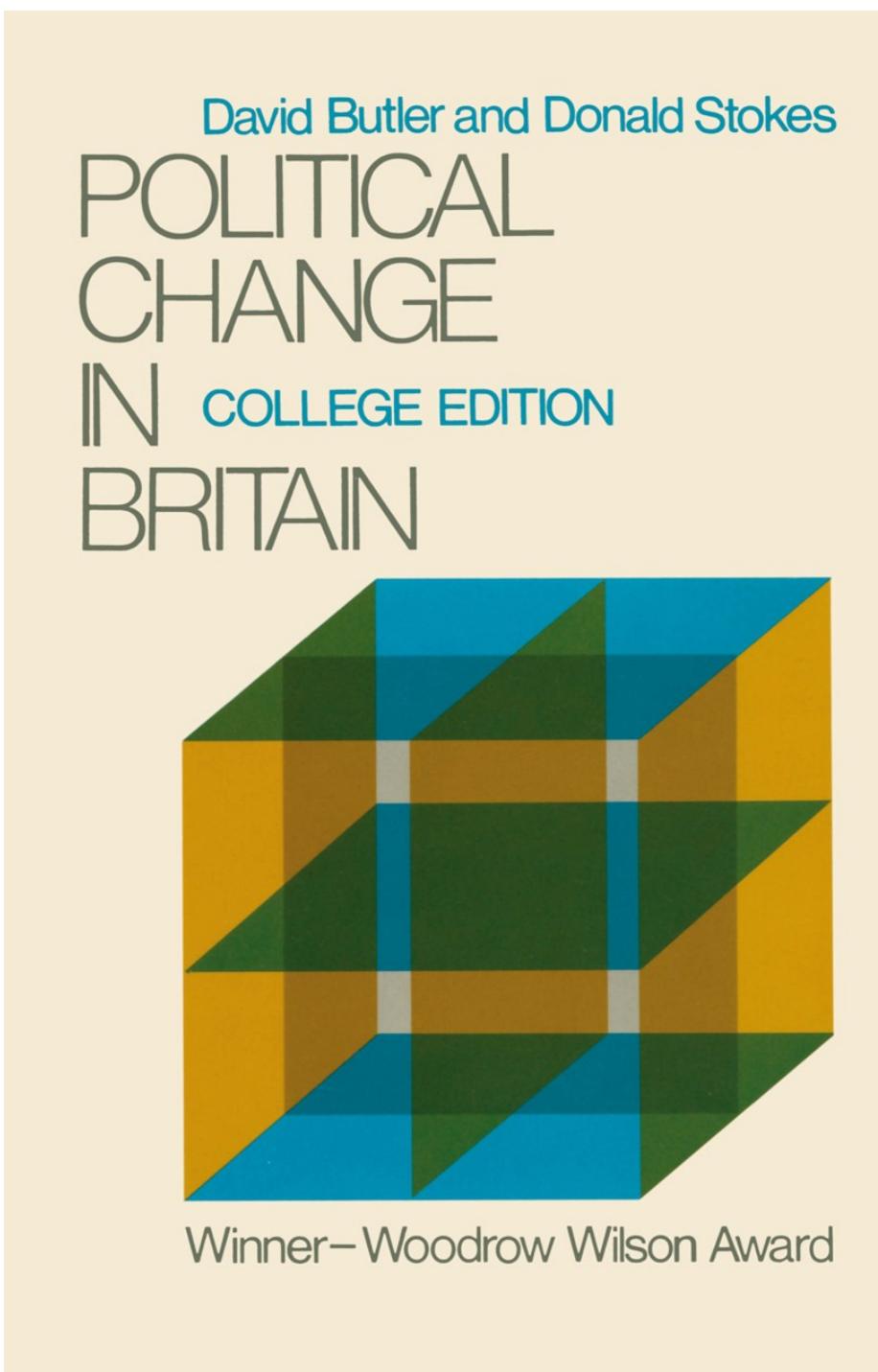
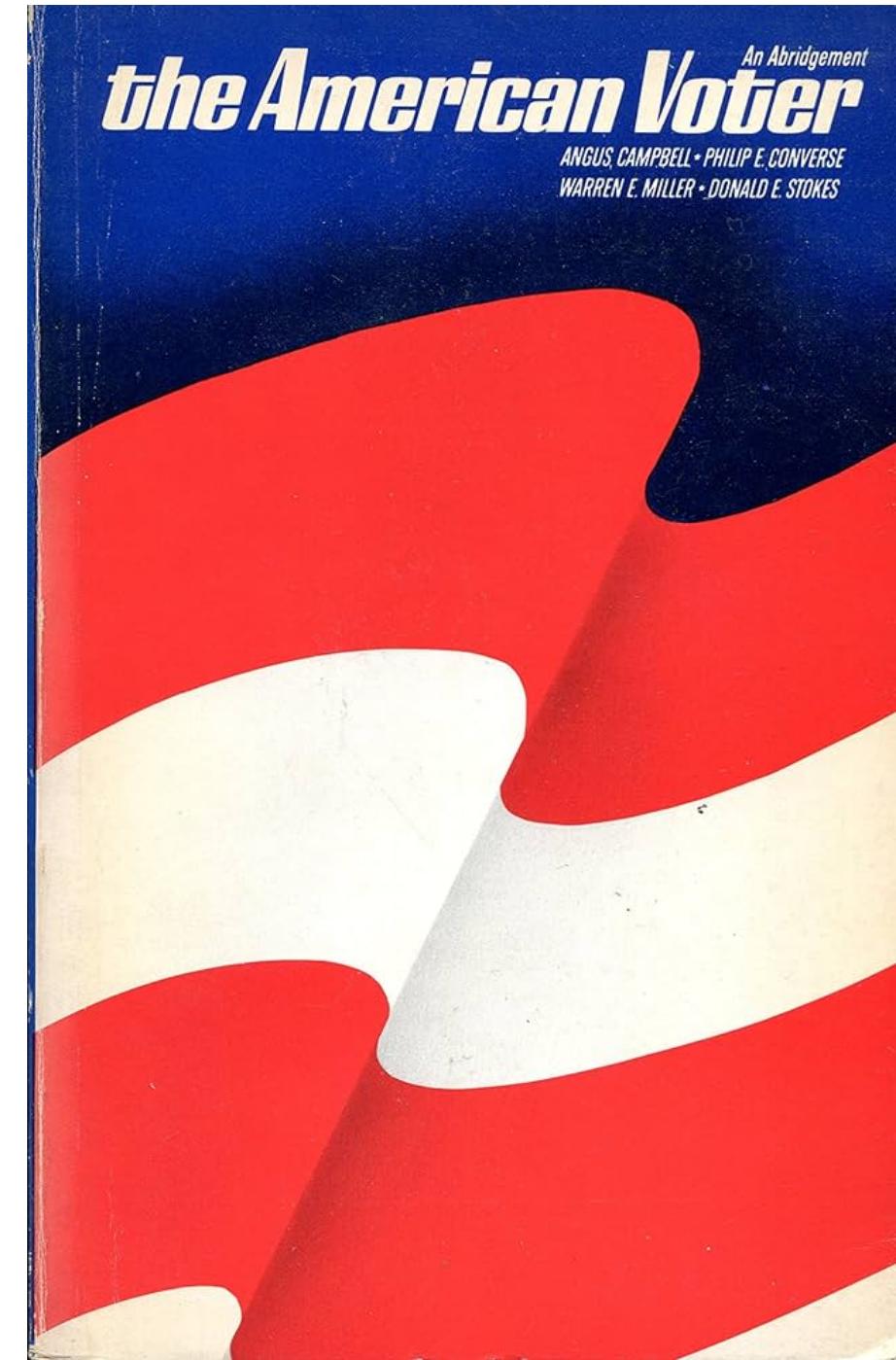
Columbia School

- Implications:
 - Party choice is very stable. Switching can be explained by cross-pressured social positions (e.g. ‘wealthy Catholics’).
 - Attitudinal consistency within social groups emerges from reinforcement in their interactions. Little role for campaign, short-term factors.

<i>Actual Vote</i>	VOTE INTENTION IN OCTOBER				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Dem.</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	<i>Don't Expect to Vote</i>	
Republican	215	7	4	6	232
Democrat	4	144	12	0	160
Didn't vote	10	16	6	59	91
Total persons	229	167	22	65	483

Michigan School

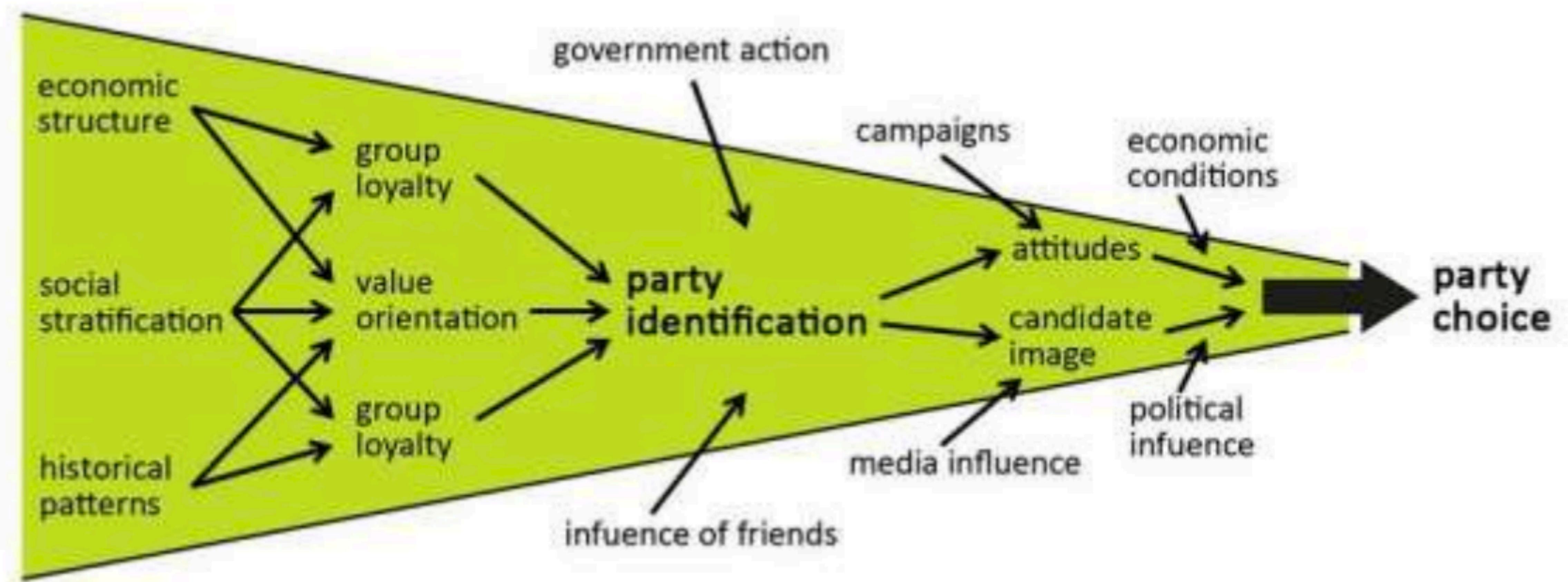
- Shift in focus from **sociology** to **psychology**.
- The ‘prime mover’ is not so much group membership, but rather **partisan identification**. Politics itself is a social identity.
- Party ID is long-term, psychological attachment to a political party, learnt in the family. It’s a lens through which people evaluate issues and candidates, and select consistent information.



Winner–Woodrow Wilson Award



Funnel of Causality

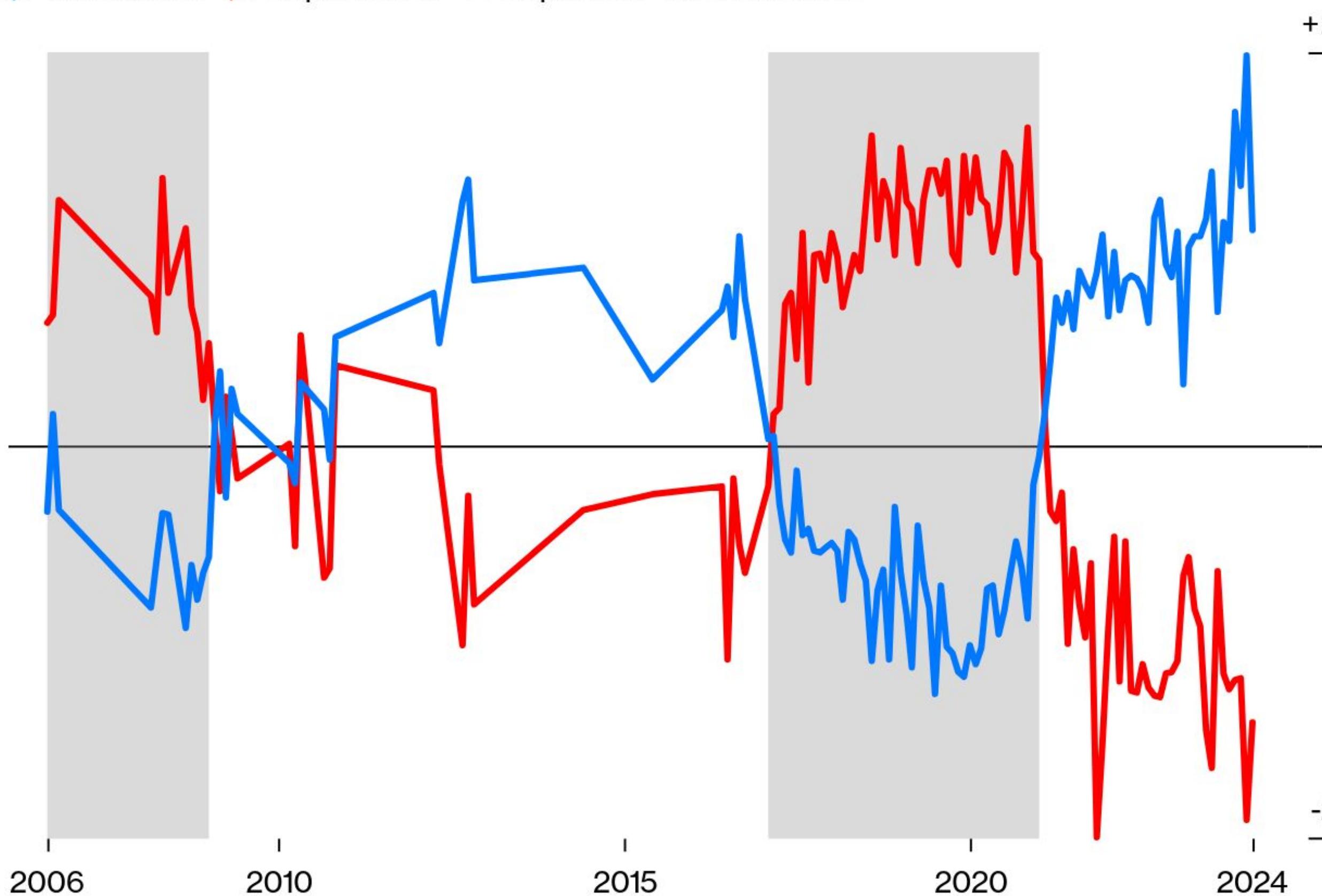


Party ID is a helluva drug

Current Consumer Sentiment

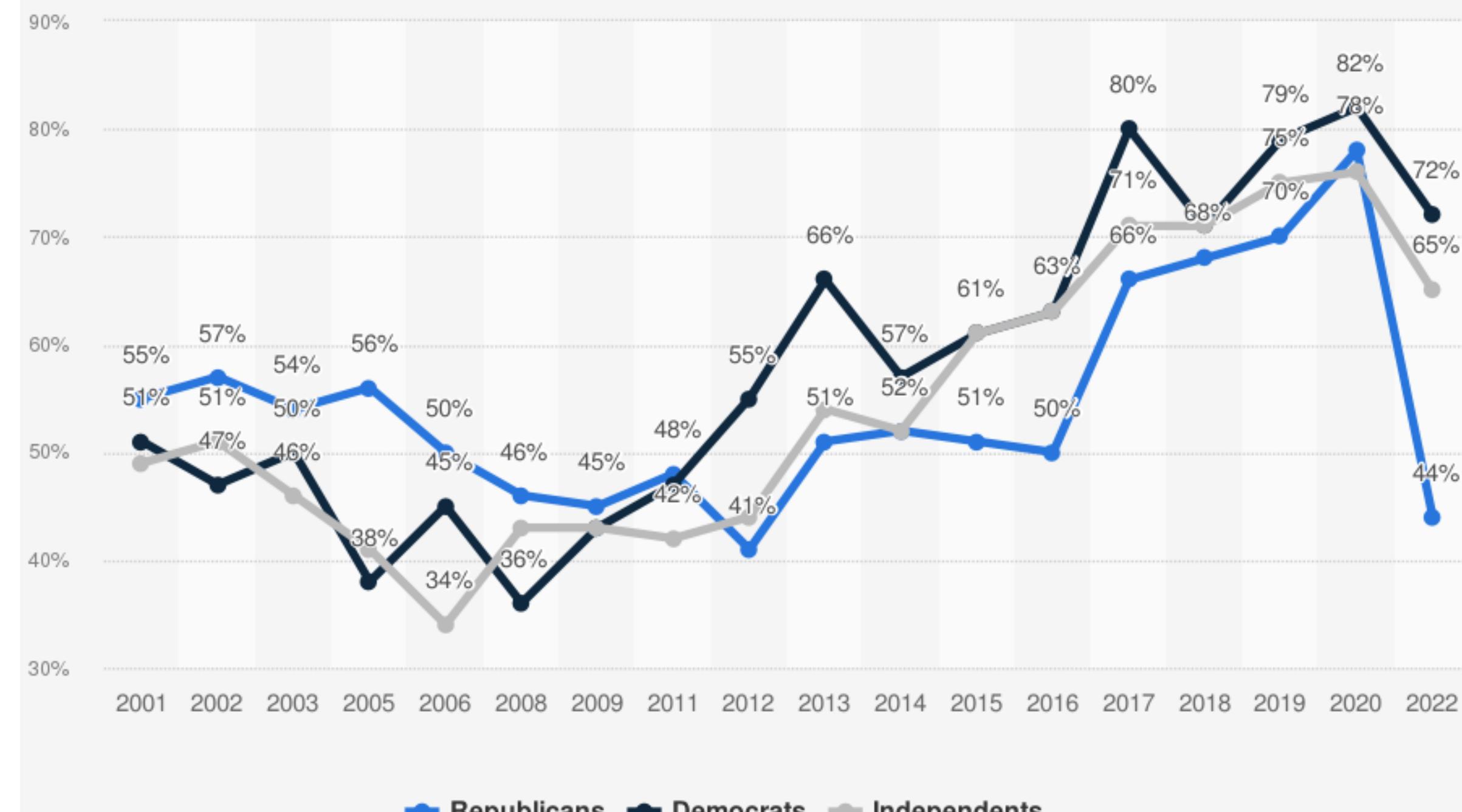
Difference between current consumer sentiment among all respondents and respondents by political party

Democrats Republicans Republican administration



Source: University of Michigan Index of Consumer Sentiment

Percentage of Americans who view foreign trade as an opportunity for the United States from 2001 to 2022, by political party

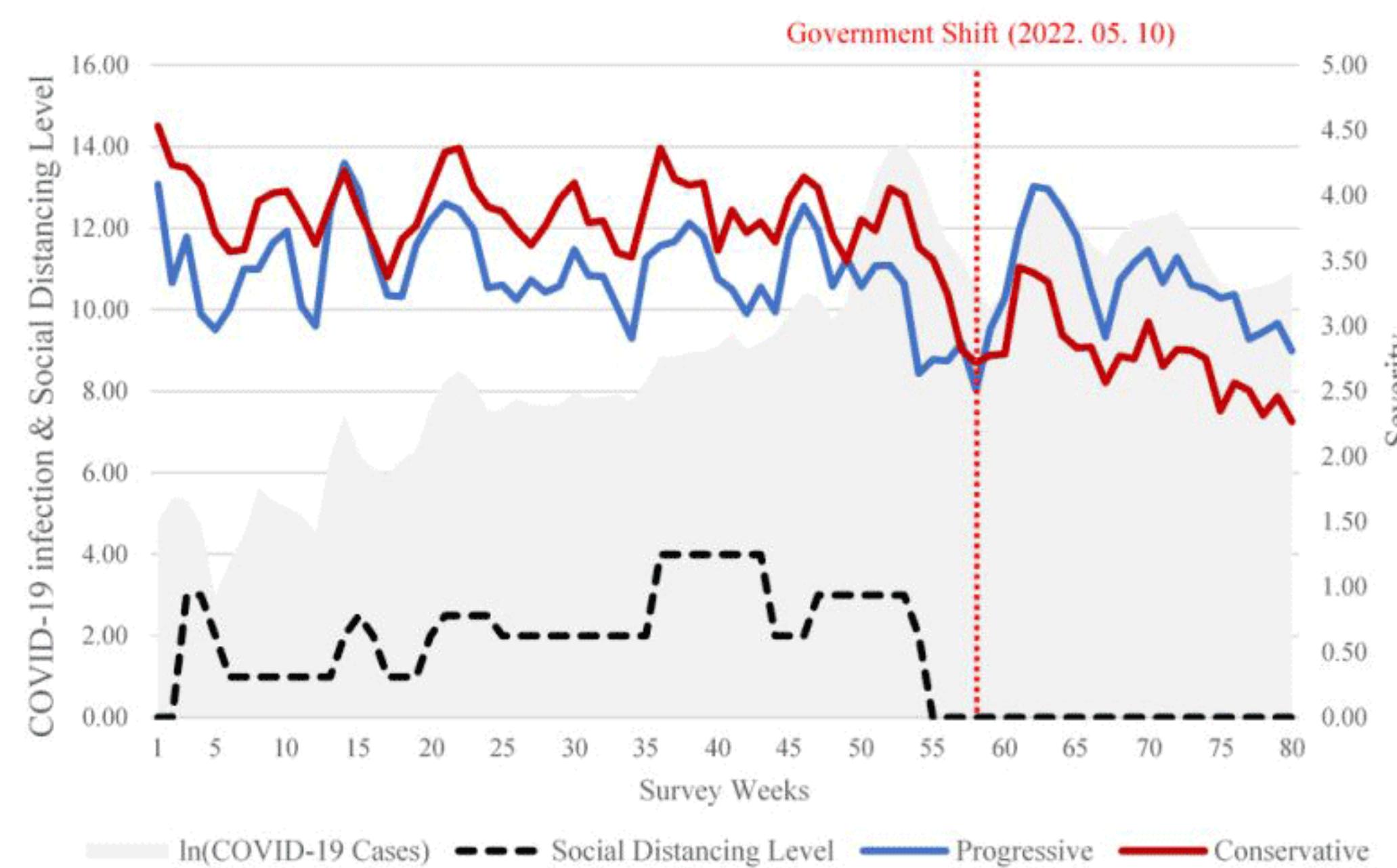


Additional Information:
United States; 2001 to 2022; about 1,000 each survey; 18 years and older; Telephone interview

Bloomberg Businessweek

Party ID is a helluva drug

A



Overall

Types of partisans

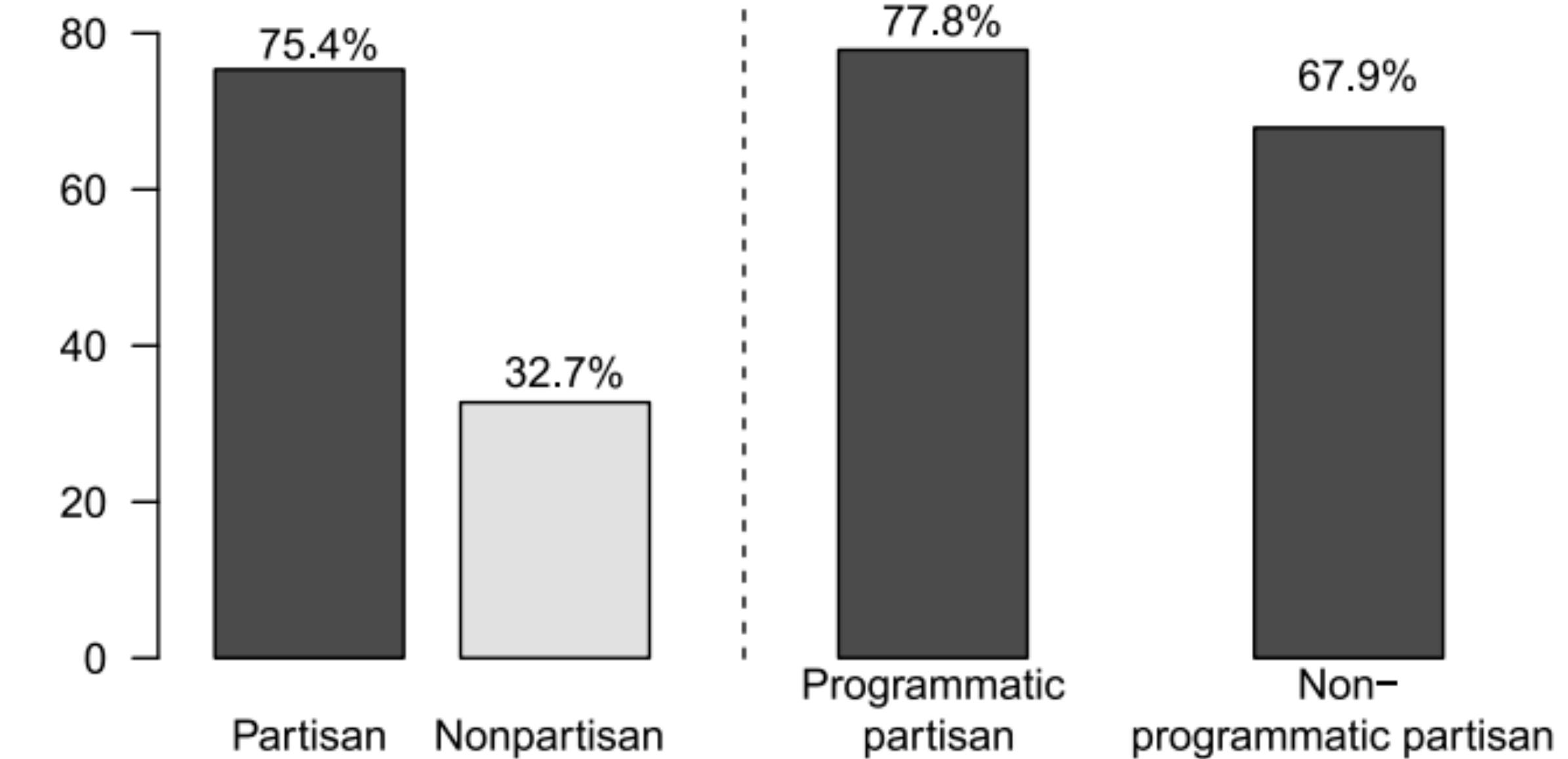


Fig. 7. Partisanship and voting intentions.

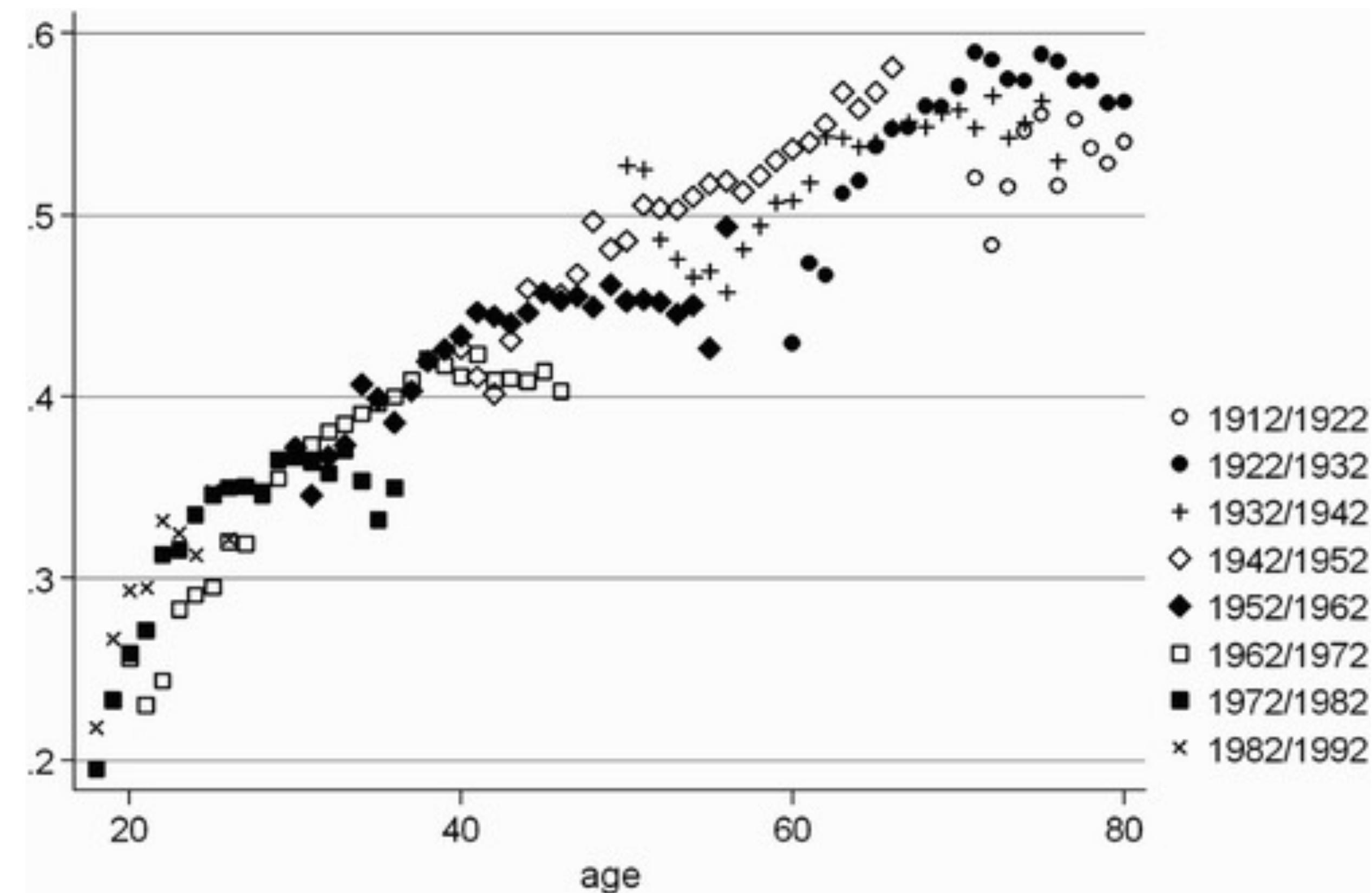
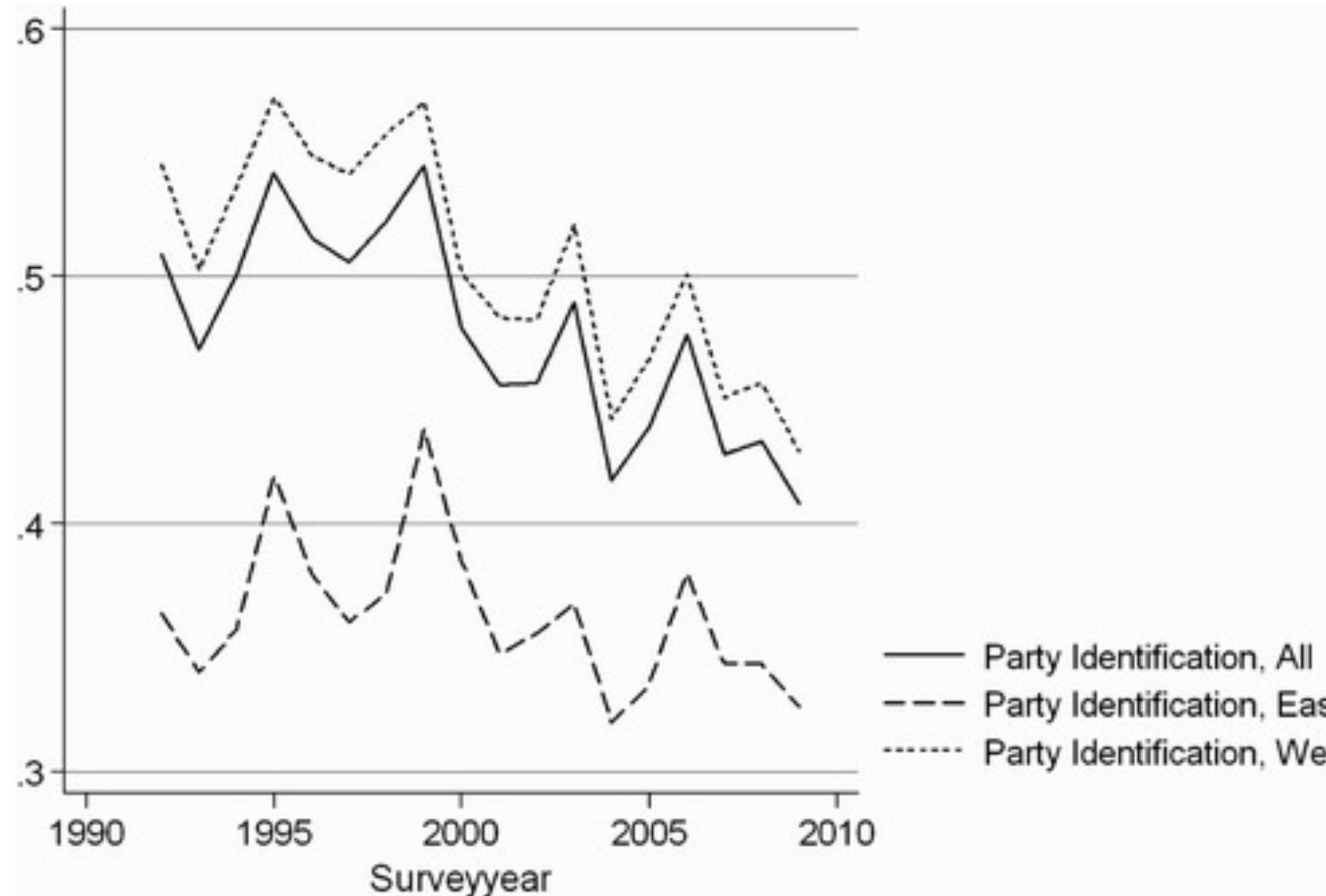
Note: Respondents were asked whether they would repeat their vote choice from the previous election. The share of those saying "Yes" is reported here.

Michigan School

- Party ID is the strongest predictor of vote choice in models of voting behaviour.
- Implications: early socialisation ‘crystallises’ attitudes towards parties even when issues/leaders change and even in presence of some social mobility.
- But requires two key assumption:
 - Partisan identity → preferences and opinions
 - Most people have a party ID: but do they?



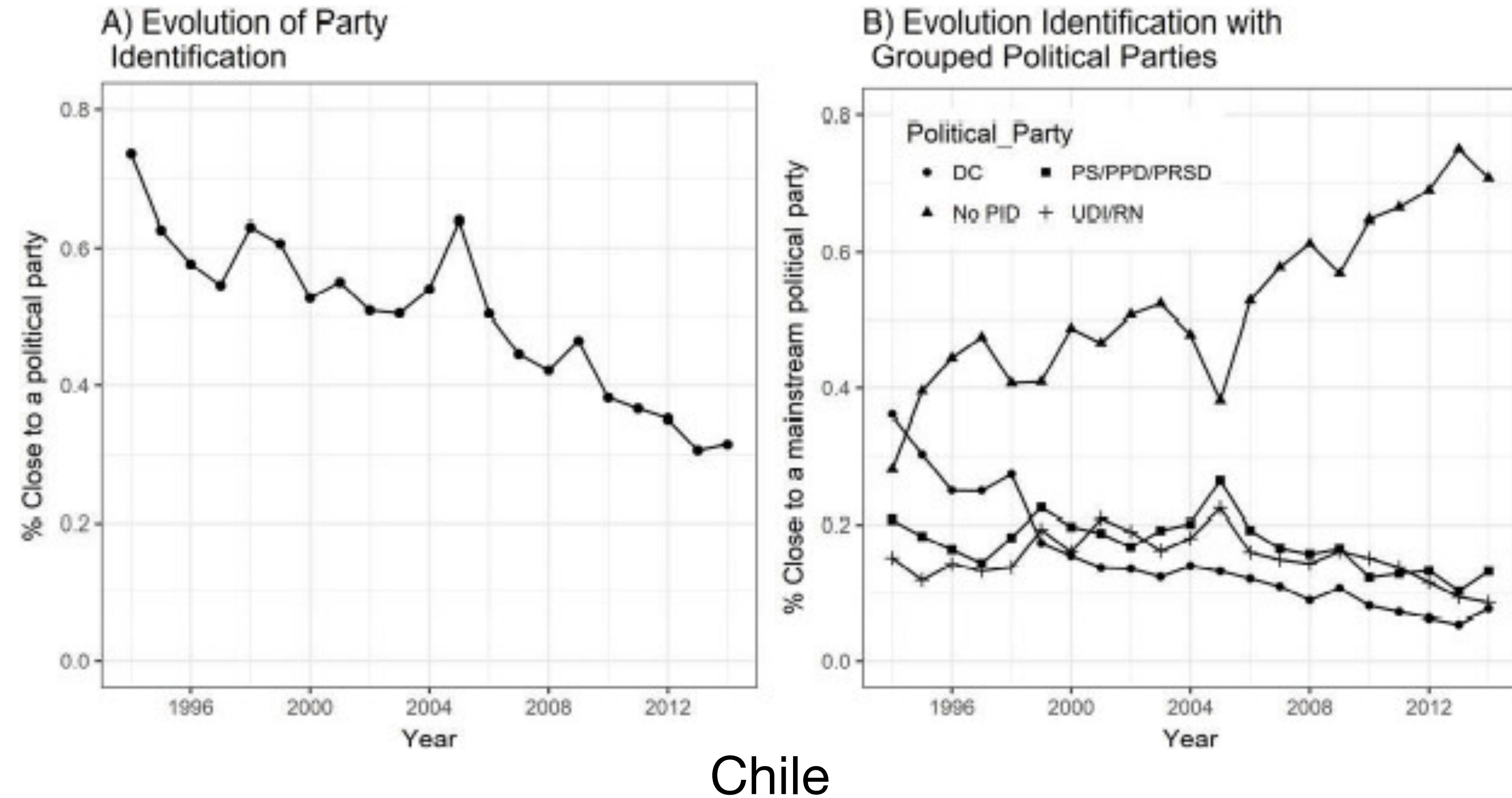
Dealignment



Germany

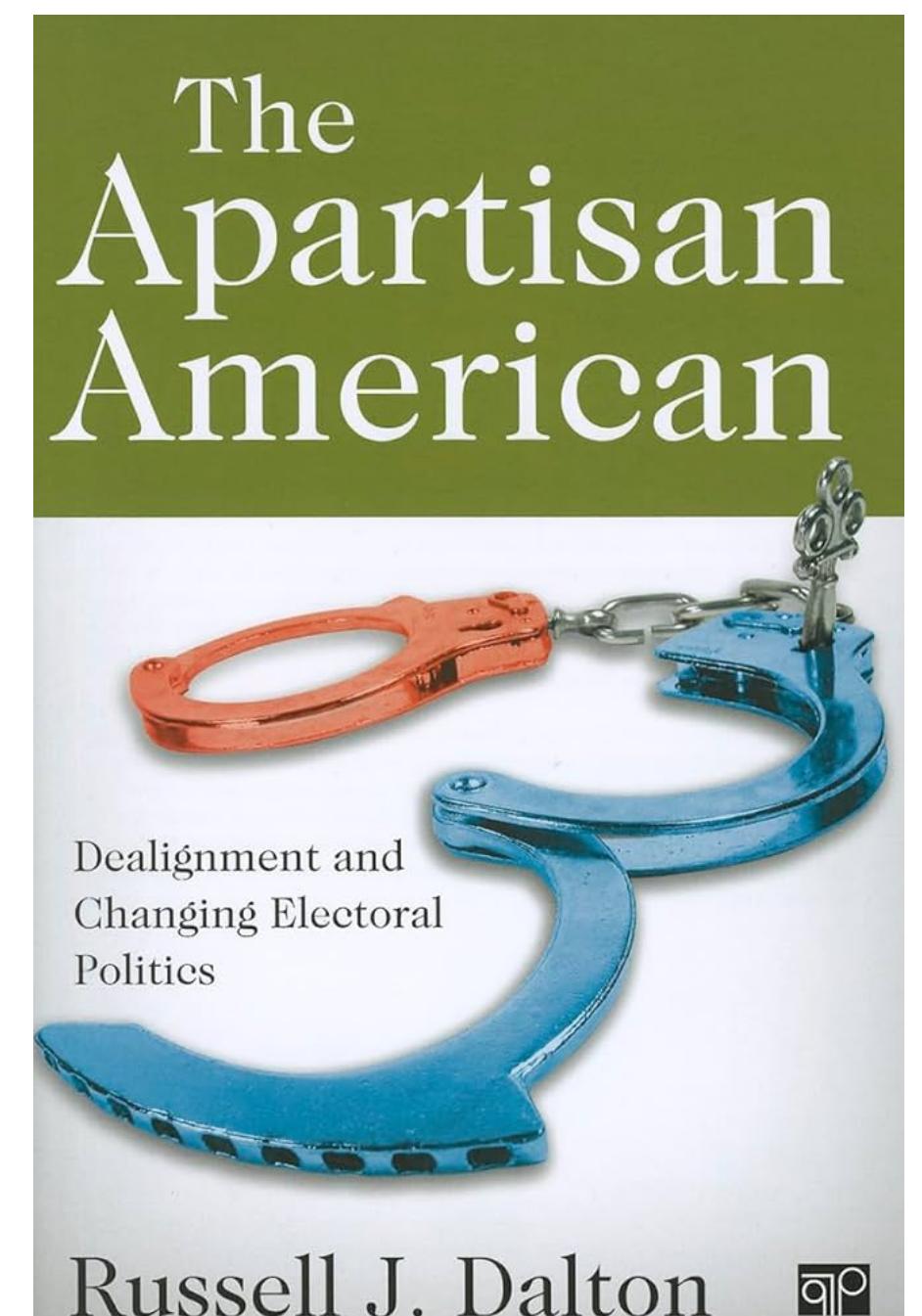
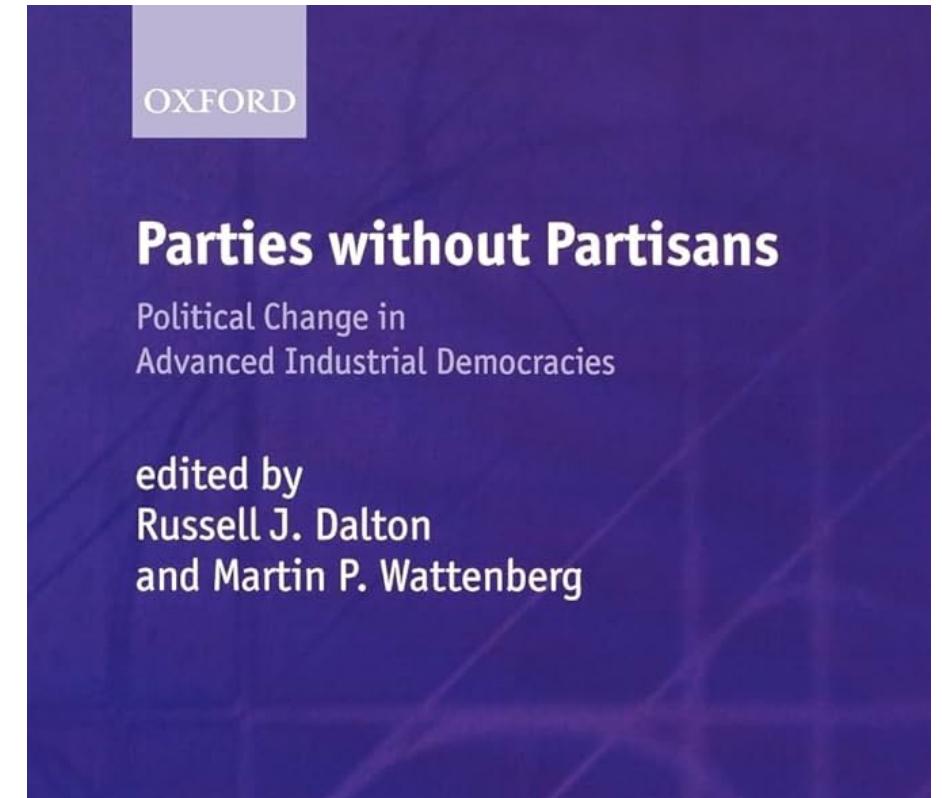
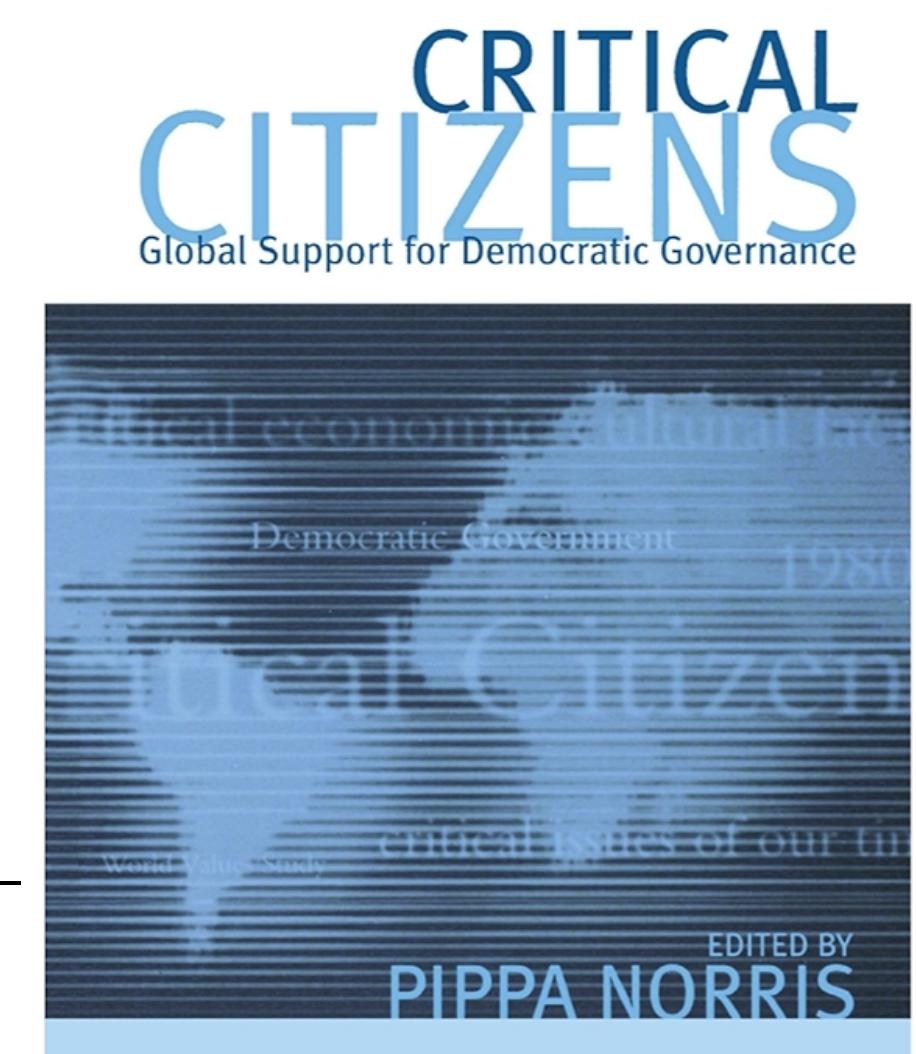
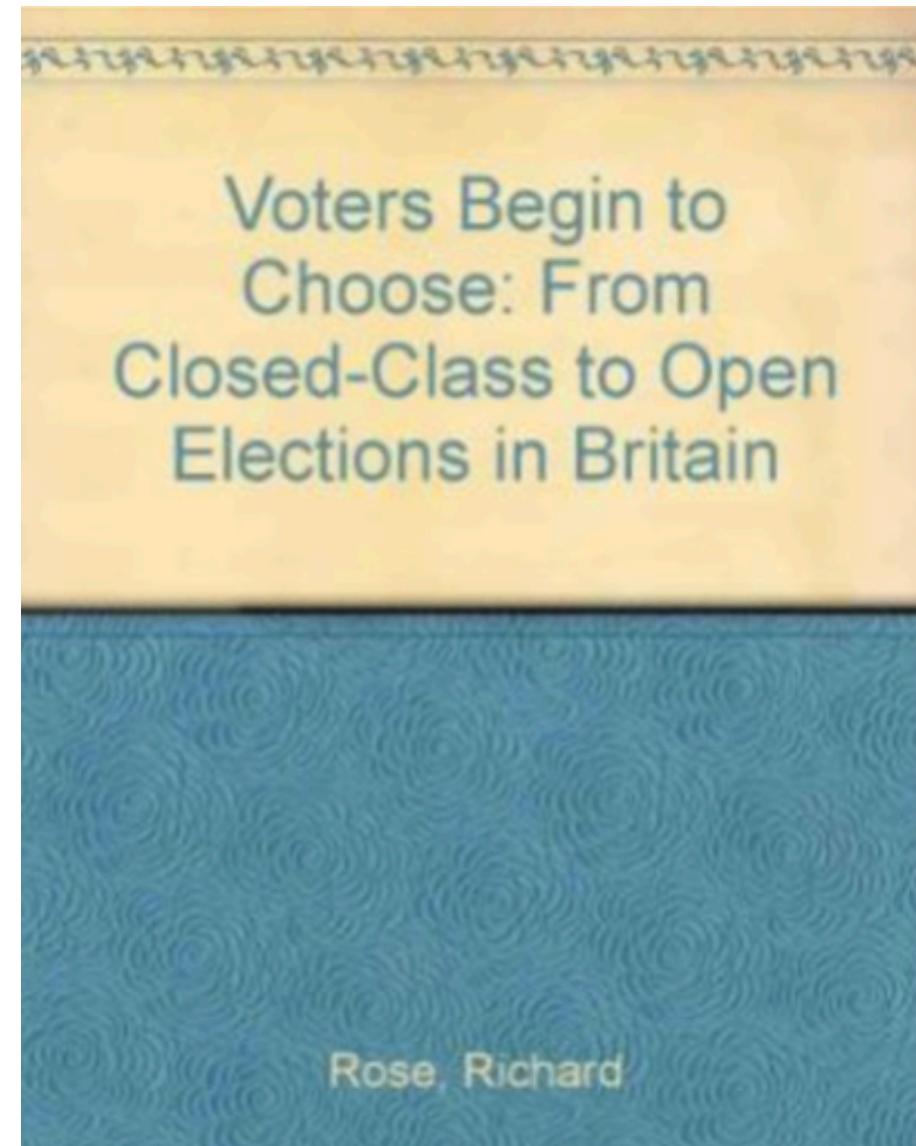
- Dassonneville, Ruth, Marc Hooghe, and Bram Vanhoutte. "Age, period and cohort effects in the decline of party identification in Germany: An analysis of a two decade panel study in Germany (1992–2009)." *German Politics* 21.2 (2012): 209-227.

Dealignment



Dealignment

- Dalton (2000):
 - Generalised, generational trend points to broad social changes, not individual failures of performance.
 - **Cognitive mobilisation:** more people now possess the level of political skills and resources necessary to become self-sufficient in politics.
 - Parties lost grip on public opinion to **mass media** (and later, **online media**).



Questions for you

- What are some **consequences** of dealignment?
- Do you believe these implications of dealignment to be positive or negatives for **democracy**?
- What's the relationship between dealignment and **realignment** (last time)?

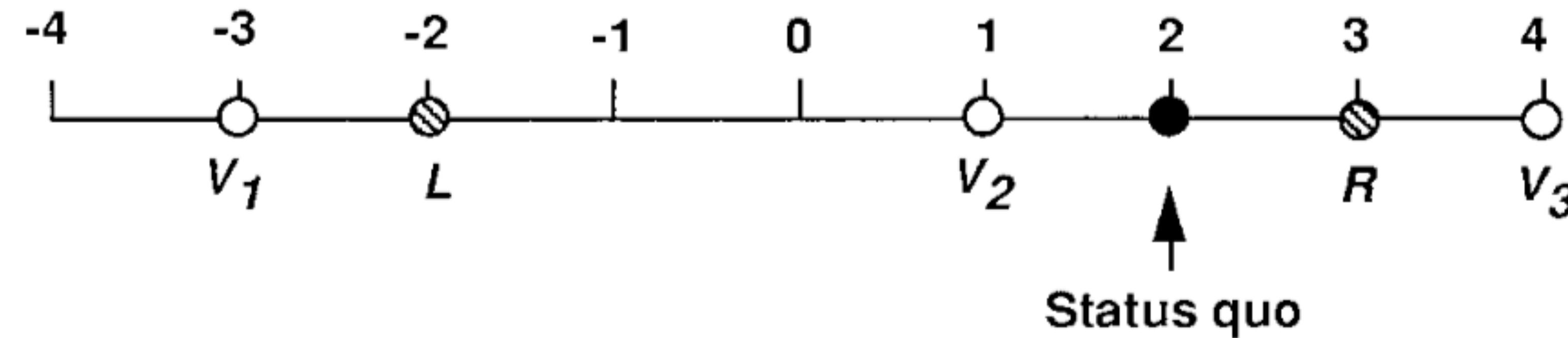


Voter Choice Today

- Social group- and partisanship-based models of voting are still highly influential in understanding voter behaviour today:
 - Parties and social groups remain central to how voters think of politics.
 - Realignment coexists with dealignment: rise of new political identities.
 - New kinds of partisan affects: “affective polarization”/negative partisanship.
- **But** alternative models of voter choice are called for to make sense of the behaviour of a “dealigned” electorate.

Spatial/Issue Voting

- **Spatial voting** models give more credit to voters as rational agents:
 - Voters and parties take distinct positions on an issue dimension, and the voter supports the party whose position matches their own.



- **Issue voting** highlights that this calculation happens on multiple dimensions: voters may have to weight proximity to parties on different issues.

Spatial/Issue Voting

- How do voters choose between parties that “match” their preferences on different dimensions?
- **Issue salience:** how important an issue is to voters at the moment of choice.

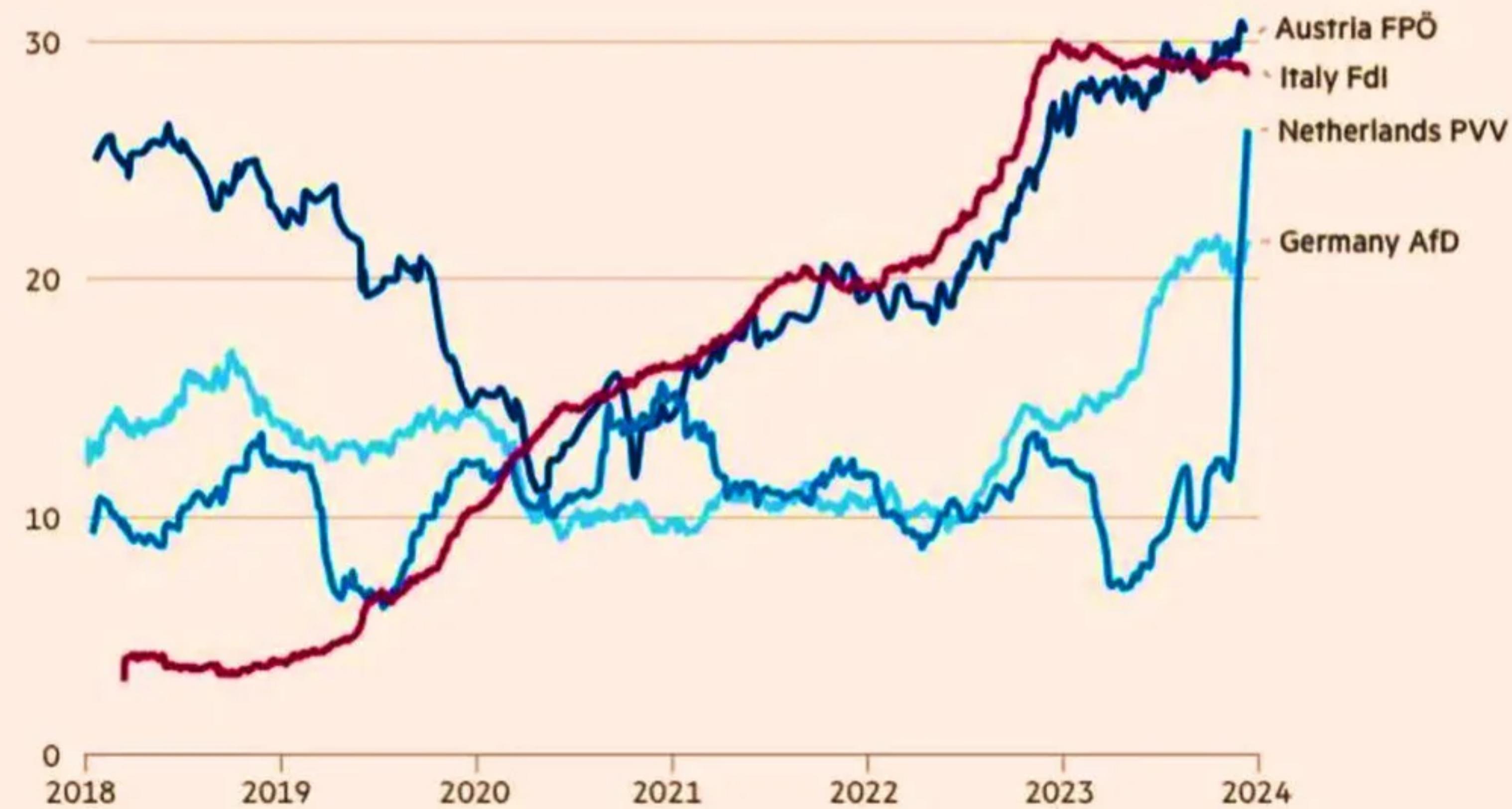
Issue Salience at Work

- Why have anti-immigration parties been so successful in recent decades...?

Far-right populist parties are polling well in several EU countries

Polling for national parliament elections (time-weighted moving average, %)

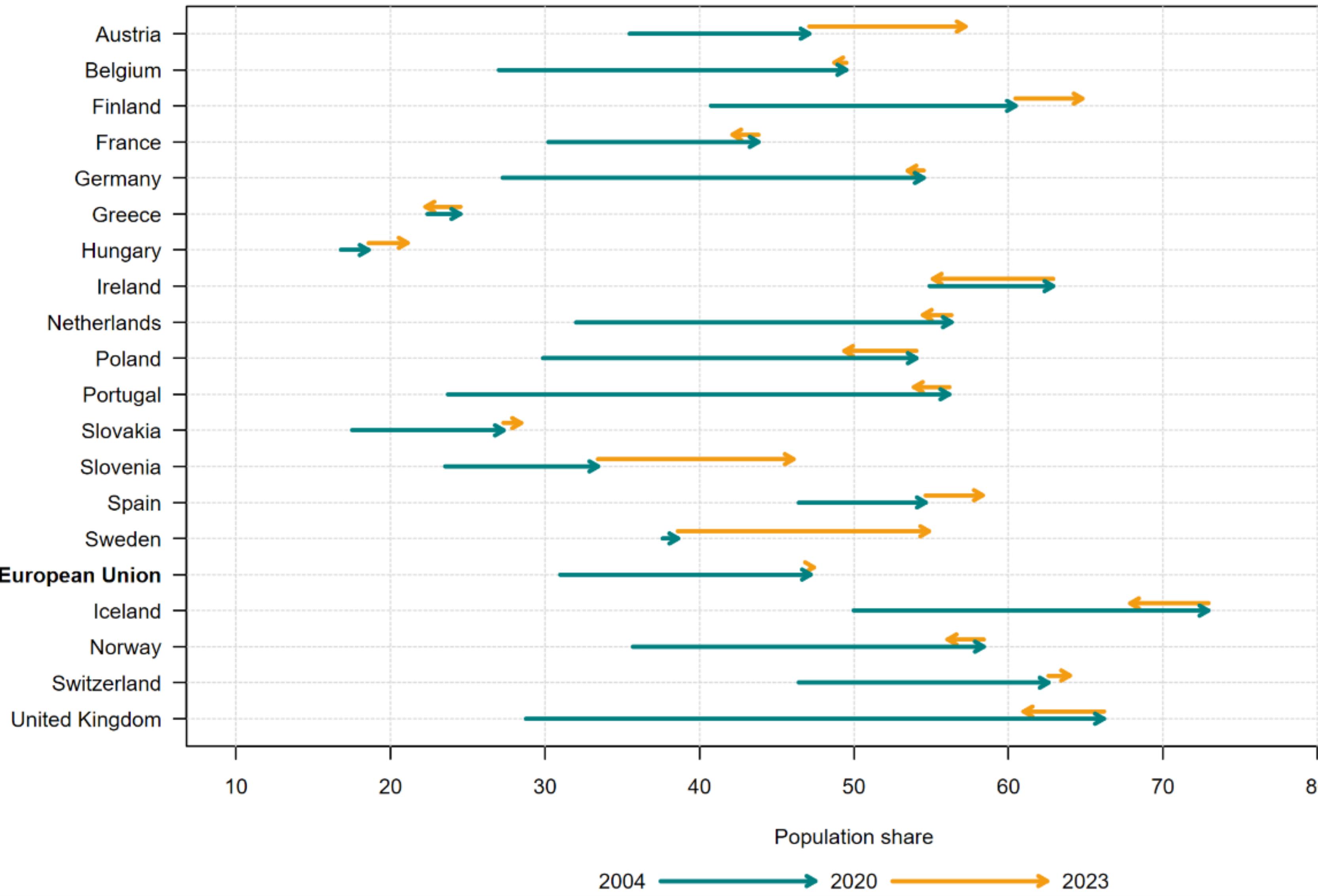
Austria FPÖ Germany AfD Netherlands PVV Italy FdI



Issue Salience at Work

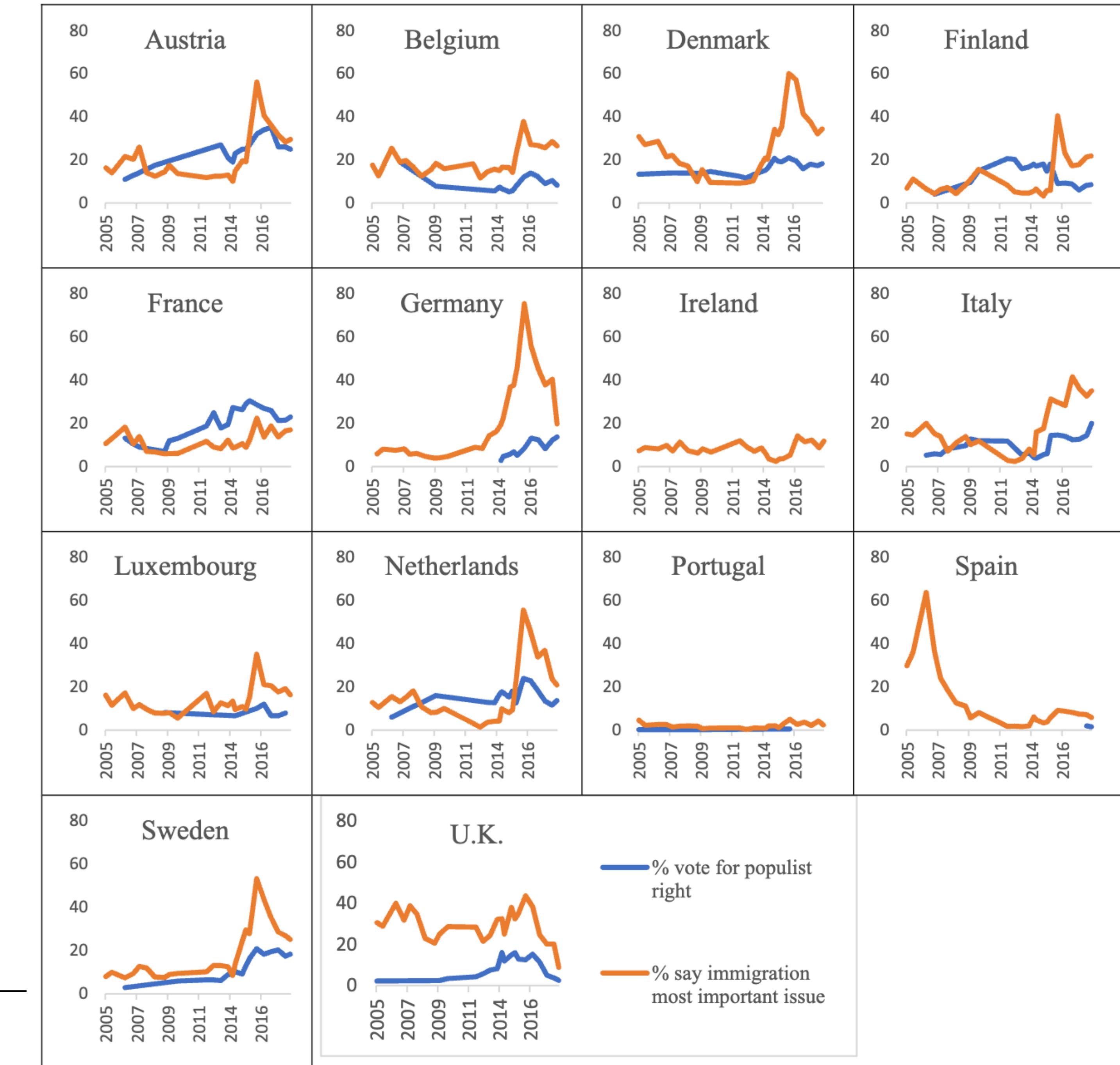
- ...when electorates are becoming gradually **less hostile** to immigration?

Change in the perception that immigration is good for country's economy



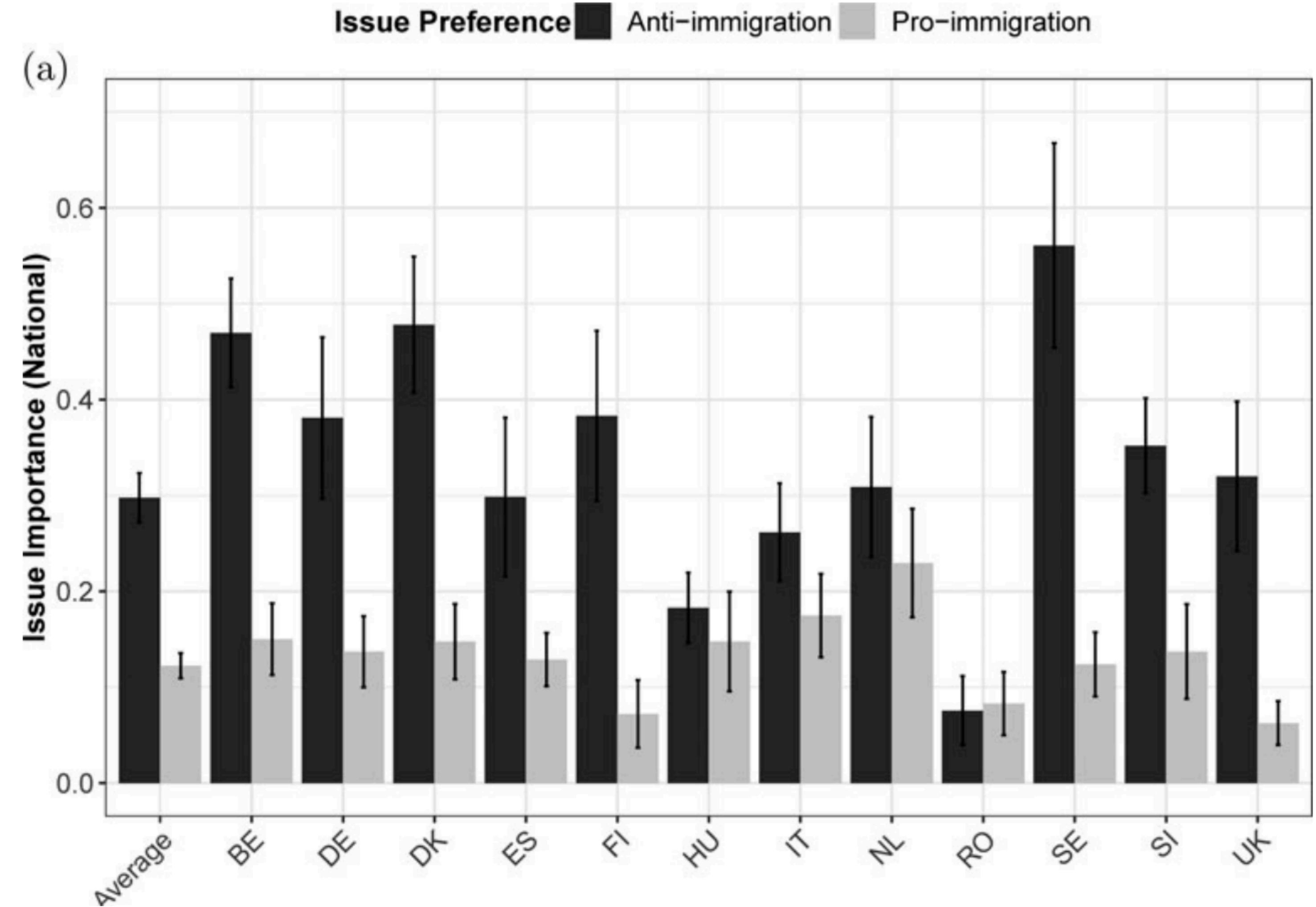
Issue Salience at Work

- Because immigration has become **more salient...**



Issue Salience at Work

- ...and because it is **more salient to anti-immigration voters** than to pro-immigration voters.



Spatial/Issue Voting

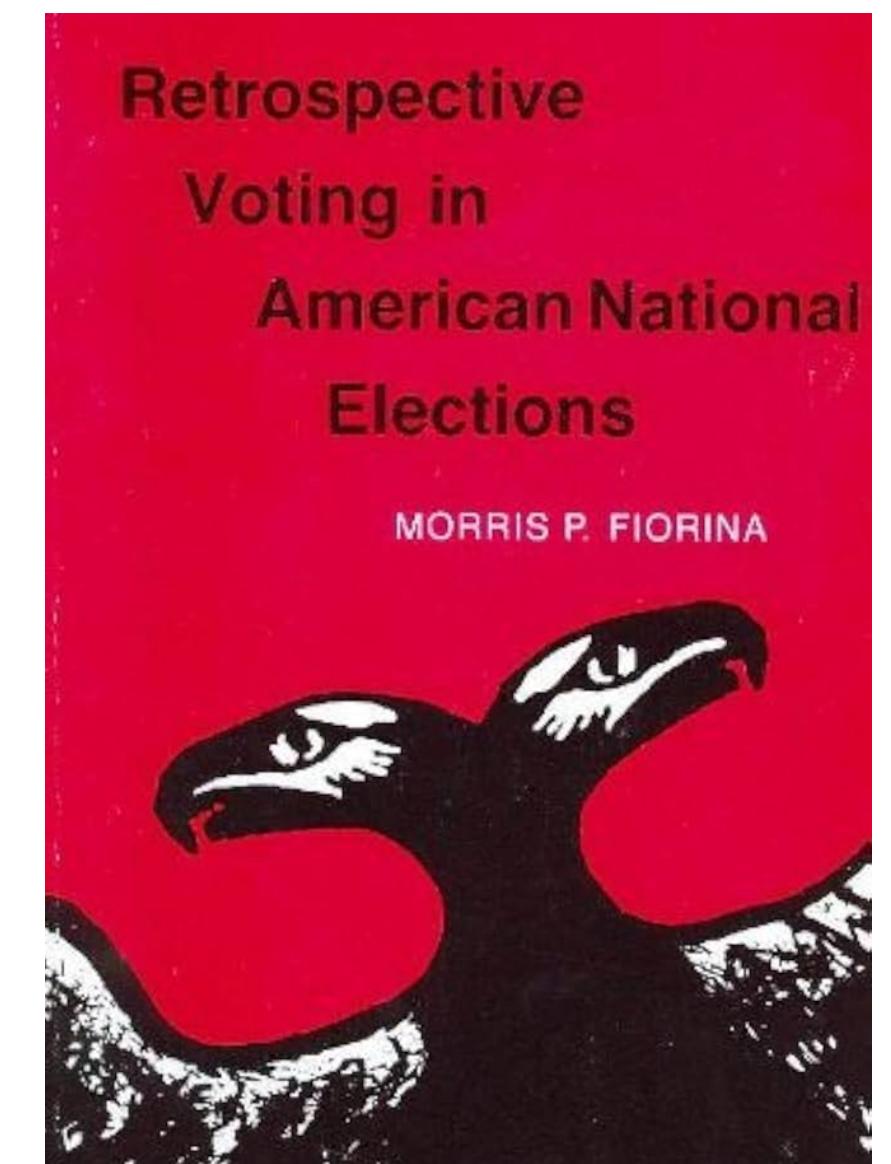
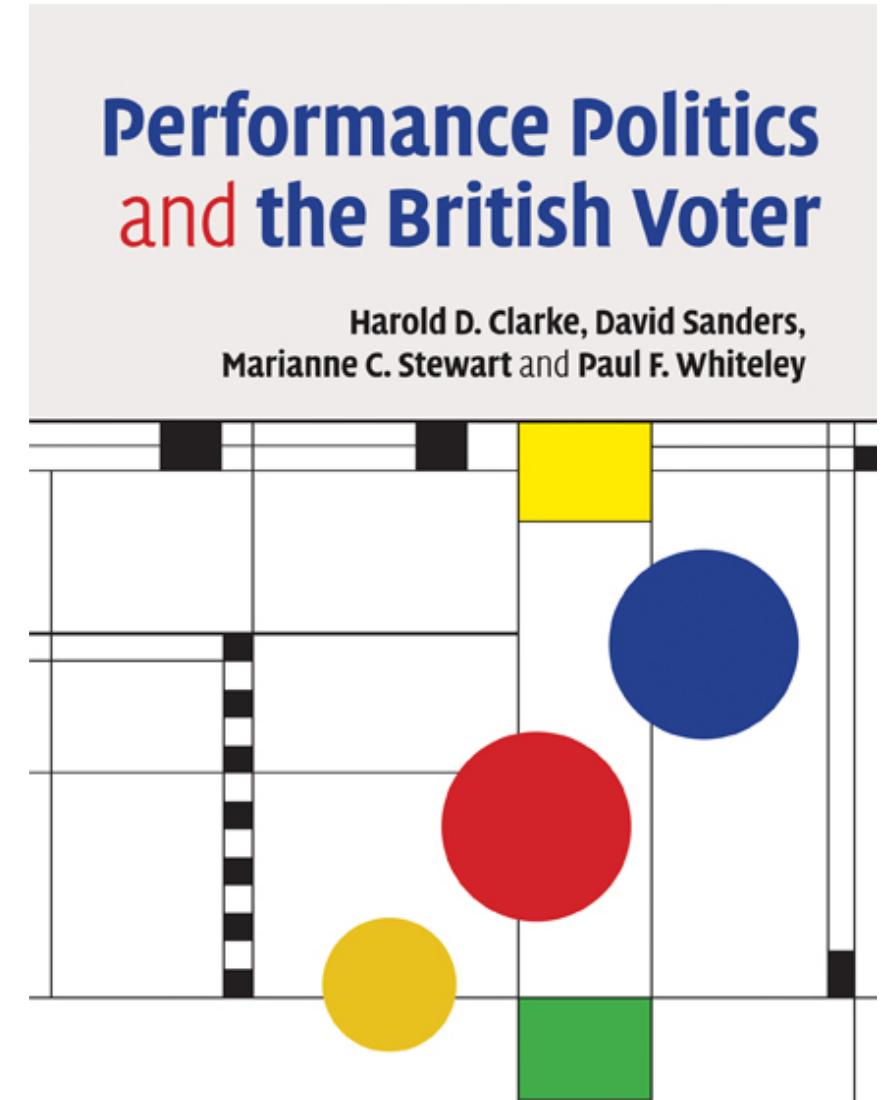
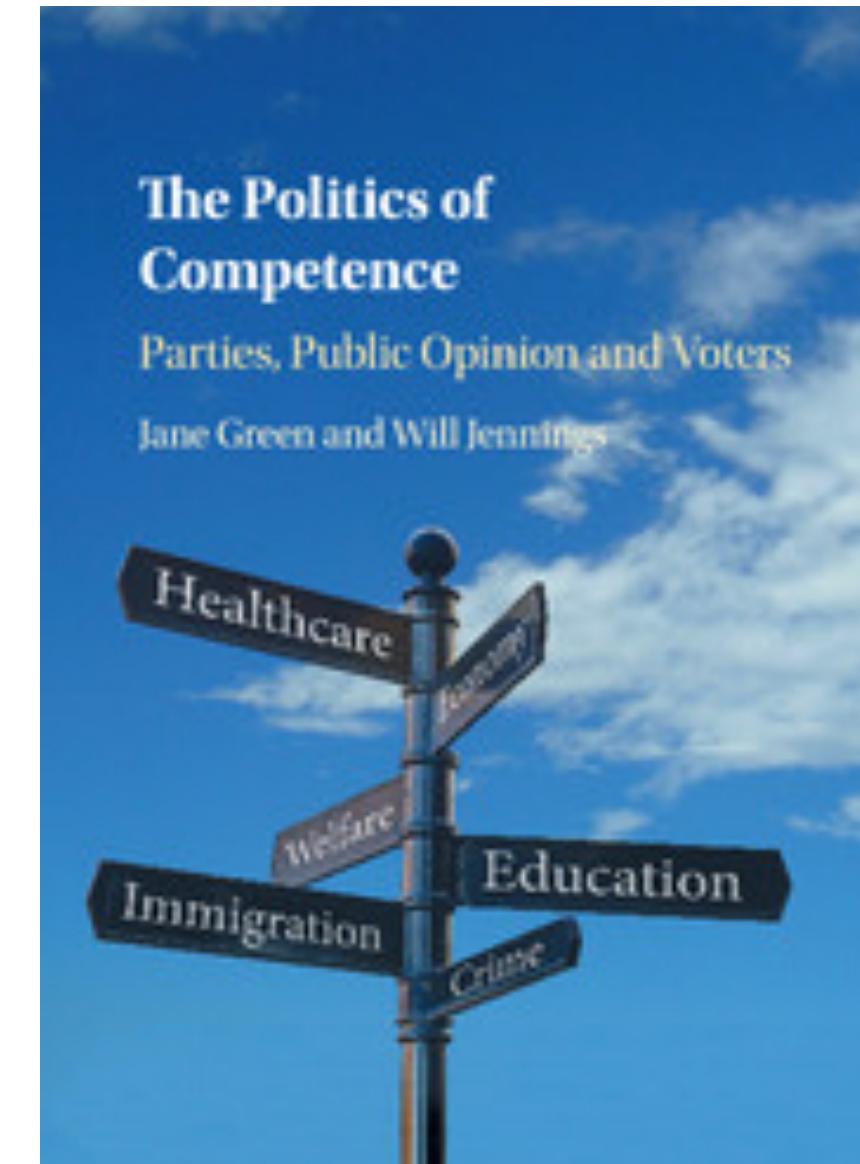
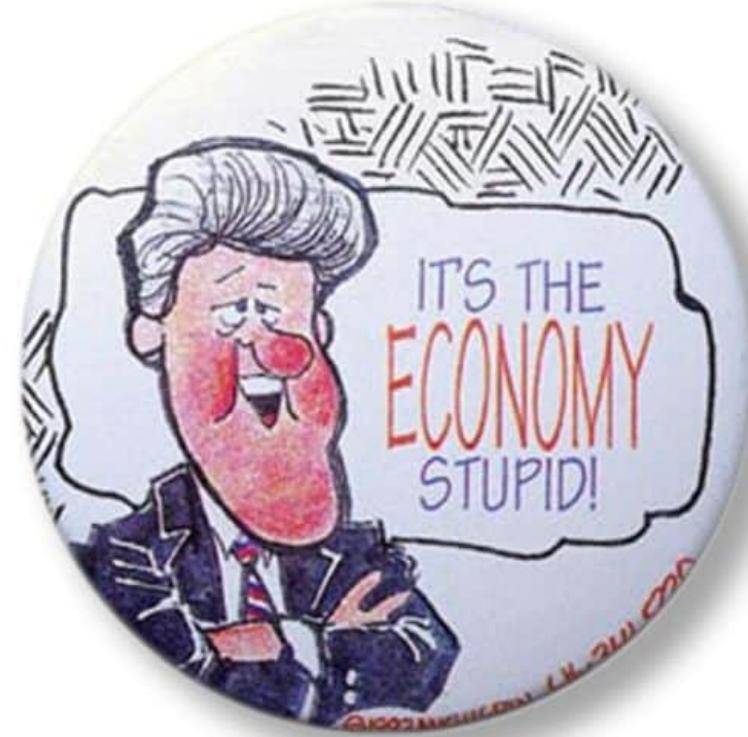
- Summing up:
- Issue voting occurs when voters' choices are shaped by their preferences and perceptions of party positions.
- Salience acts as the gatekeeper: without it, proximity does not lead to vote choice. **Electoral volatility** results from changes in the issue agenda.
- Salience does not 'fall from the sky': **parties actively shape the agenda.**

Valence Voting

- Some shortcoming of issue voting:
 - Very demanding of voters' ability to form opinions and identify parties' stances. Voters are generally “rationally ignorant”.
 - Only considers issues on which there can be disagreement (positional issues). But many issues are not like that: we would all like less crime, more growth, cleaner environment, better schools and public services etc.
- **Valence** voting: voters choose the party or candidate that they think is most competent and able to “deliver” things we widely agree are “good”.

Valence Voting

- **Valence** considerations include:
 - Perceived competence, integrity, leadership.
 - Performance record, especially tied up with the **perception of the economy**.
 - Very trendy in the 1990s and 2000s: sustained growth, “Third Way” social democracy, “end of ideology”, personality-driven media coverage.



Valence Voting

- In some accounts, valence is a form of '**macro-competence**': voters' infer government performance on various issues from direct experience.
- But valence can still be multi-dimensional → **Issue ownership**: parties are perceived as “competent” on different issues:
 - Typically, the left “owns” public service performance and environmental protection, the right “owns” security, crime and economic management.
 - Therefore, the **salience** of valence issues still matters!

Summing Up...

- **Socio-psychological models** see voting behaviour as rooted in collective identities: social groups (Columbia) and partisanship (Michigan). But traditional versions of these group identities have eroded.
- **Spatial and issue voting** accounts centre rational voter calculations over their and parties' policy positions, weighted by a “salience” factor.
- **Valence** considerations refer to competence to “deliver” on things most people perceive as valuable goals. It's actually how many voters think.
- No obvious “winner” in the horse race of voting models, but up to you to think about which is more useful in which contexts.

**Thank you very much for
your kind attention!**