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Explaining Political Trust from Ideological Distances with Political Parties

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Abstract

This study tries to explain the fluctuation of political trust in American society since 1970s as the product of ideological distance with the incumbent party in presidency. Before formally testing the relationship between political trust and perceived ideological distance, this study first examines the ideological differences between different groups in these years. The trends described in this study have covered the ideological distance between average people and party elites, Democratic and Republican Party, Democrats and Democratic Party, Republicans and Republican Party, as well as Democrats and Republican Party, and between Republicans and Democratic Party. Based on the examination of ideological differences, this study develops formal models to test the relationship between political trust and the ideological distance with the incumbent party. The perceived distance in ideology from the incumbent party is negatively related to political trust. And this relationship is more significant among Republicans when Democrats are in power, compared with that among Democrats when Republic Party is incumbent.

Keywords: political trust, ideology, Democrats, Republicans

Introduction

There has been abundant evidence about political polarization in elite level in American society. Previous literature has shown the increasing divergence between political parties in Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Jacobson 2005; McCarty et al. 1997; Trubowitz and Mellow 2005; Poole and Rosenthal 2001). But what happens among political elites is one thing. What people think about what has happened is another thing. Public perception about elite polarization does matter in the relationship between electorates and representative government, especially in the subjective evaluation of political trust that an electorate shows toward the government. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to establish the bridge between elite polarization and mass perception. More specifically, this study will first reveal whether the American public has perceived the polarization of political elites and what specific perception they have based on partisanship and ideology.

The consequences of elite polarization have also been documented as including positive sides as well as negative aspects. Positive consequences include effects of party divergence on government level such as increasing accountability and policy representation (Jacobson 2000; Burden 2001; Crotty 2001), and also the effects in mass level such as increasing ideological sophistication of political orientations among American public (Pomper and Weiner 2002; Layman and Carsey 2002). Negative consequences include detriment to government's legislative productivity, declining political interest of the public, declining political participation and so on (Binder 2003; Jones 2001; Fiorina et al. 2005). Declining political trust is one of the negative consequences of elite polarization (King 1997). But what matters in this study is the consequence of perception about elite polarization. Based on the objective of revealing public perception about political polarization, this study will further examine the linkage between public

perception and political trust since 1970s.

Basically political trust reflects the belief of the public about to what extent the government is functioning in accordance with individual expectations of efficiency, honesty, competence and equity (Miller et al. 1979). The ideological trend among average Americans can be considered as one of the indicators of individual expectations about the government in terms of ideology orientation. The underlying logic of connecting ideology with political trust actually locates in the representative election system in American society.

Representatives are supposed to speak for the interests of their constituency in order to achieve accountability and representativeness. They can be examined based on how well the characteristics of a given electoral constituency can explain the behavior of their representatives. Good representation occurs when a representative's behavior is strongly associated with measures of the constituency's preferences and interests.

Citizens are naturally more trusting of government who shares their concerns and interests. The singular accomplishment of a democracy is that public officials have strong incentives to be beholden to their constituents' preferences. When political parties stake out positions rather distant from electorates' wishes, frustration and alienation would grow. Although electorates can always choose one candidate who is relatively closer to their preferences, the distance with the chosen candidate still exists. After the elected control the government, the ideological distinction can still result in political distrust even if the elected in power is in the same party with the electorate. It is simply a question of how far away the government is from your basic concern rather than which party or politician is closer to you.

The elected government is expected to represent the preferences and interests of the electorates. When the incumbent government can't represent and reflect their preferences,

political trust may decline. So the ideological distance between electorates and representatives may contribute to the fluctuation of political trust in American society. Under two-party system, the perceived difference between average people and political parties can serve as the measurement of the distance between electorates and their representatives.

Therefore, based on the examination of the trend of declining political trust, this study will first describe the trends of the ideological distances between different groups. More specifically, the trends cover the ideological differences between average people and party elites, between Democratic Party and Republican Party, between Democrats and Democratic Party, between Republicans and Republican Party, as well as between Democrats and Republican Party, and between Republicans and Democratic Party. Inspired by the examination of ideological differences between different groups, this study will then formally test the relationship between political trust and the ideological distance with the incumbent party.

Political distrust and ideological polarization

The National Election Study (NES) conducted in America has asked questions about political trust since 1950s. The four questions that have been constantly surveyed in every year include *How much do you trust the Federal Government to do what is right, Is Federal Government run by few interests or for the benefit of all, How much does the Federal Government waste tax money, and How many government officials are crooked.* The four measurements are then summarized as a scale ranging from 0 to 100 with higher value indicating higher trust. The trend of political trust since 1950s in American society is illustrated in Figure 1.

Political trust substantially declines from 1960 to 1980 due to Watergate and the other scandals of the Nixon administration. Public confidence toward the government has recovered in

Reagan administration, but soon declines to the trough in 1994. Between 1994 and 2004, political trust resurges to some extent but doesn't go back to the previous crest. Therefore, the trend of political trust in American society since 1960s is fluctuated with overall decline. When the Democratic Party is in power, political trust among Republicans declines greatly. When the Republican Party gets elected, political trust among Republicans surges steeply. Comparatively, political trust among Democrats as incumbent or opposition is less abrupt.

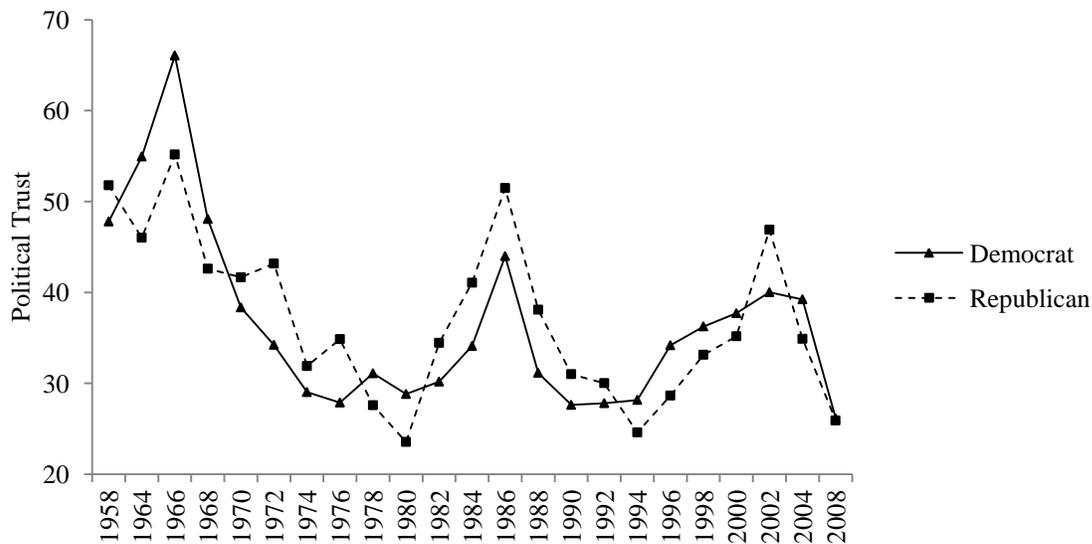


Figure 1 Political Trust by Partisanship from 1958 to 2008

The fluctuation can't be neglected since the oscillation between trough and crest contributes to the stability of political system in American society as a whole. Especially under two-party system, the alternation of power can be the source of instability of political trust when the incumbent party loses power in subsequent election, and also on the other hand, can be the source of overall stability of political trust when the opposing party regains power. The alternation of power may contribute to the fluctuation of political trust.

Abundant literature has tried to explain the decline of political trust both in individual and aggregate level. The explanations have included various perspectives. Political explanations include disaffection about government policies (Miller 1974; Aberbach and Walker 1970), dissatisfaction with incumbent leaders (Citrin 1974), and polarization of political elites (King 1997). Sociological explanations focus on incremental change in the society as a whole such as the evolving scope of government (May 1997) and the unrealistic expectations toward government and political system (Orren 1997). Cultural explanation is the proliferation of postmaterialist values and the erosion of institutional authority (Inglehart 1997b, 1997a). Other explanations blame the negative journalism in mass media as the fuse of cultivating public cynicism (Moy and Pfau 2000).

This bunch of literature mostly focuses on the trend of decline before the resurgence of public trust in 1994. In other words, these studies deal with the decline rather than the fluctuation of political trust. The causes of political distrust such as postmaterialist values and expansion of government scope didn't change much in these years. According to those explanations, political trust might have declined to such a substantive trough that can threaten the legitimacy of political system. But as a matter of fact, the decline is not constant. Some resurgence did occur. A reasonable interpretation of political trust has to avoid the dilemma between explanation and reality. A plausible alternative is to reconsider the fluctuation of overall trend rather than overemphasize the decline. The periodic resurgence can't be ignored.

The dispute between Miller and Citrin about the causes of declining trust has contributed much to individual-level explanations of mistrust. Miller (1974) attributes widespread political cynicism to the disaffection with policy alternatives provided by incumbent government. Comparatively, Citrin (1974) argues that it is disaffection with incumbent leaders rather than

policies that results in distrust. These two individual-level explanations are neither exclusive from nor contradict with each other. Subsequent examination has revealed evidences of both tendencies to evaluate based on policy or political leader.

On the other hand, the two explanations can be synthesized as the reflection of cognitive schemas adopted by people in evaluating political trust. Human are not sophisticated enough to exhaust every considerations when evaluating politics. They tend to adopt shorthand way to categorize cognitions and formulate evaluations, attitudes and beliefs (Rumelhart 1984). Schematic categorization is the shorthand way including ideological schema such as liberal or conservative, and partisan schema such as Republicans or Democrats. Many evidences have shown that people do structure their political thinking based on presumed schema (Hamill et al. 1985). A person probably evaluates political trust based on what the incumbent party is consistent with his or her partisanship and how liberal or conservative the incumbent government seems. In this sense, it's rather reasonable to establish a linkage between partisanship, ideology and political trust.

Previous literature has suggested that perception of polarized parties may cause dissatisfaction (Fiorina 1996; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Dionne 1991; King 1997). But the measurement of political polarization in previous literature is mostly unidimensional, which covers either the polarization behavior of political elites in Congress (Poole and Rosenthal 1997) or the gap between political elites and common people. The polarization should be unfolded in two sides (King 1997). One is the ideological gap between average people and strong partisans. The other is the ideological distance of individuals with their own party and the other party based on the self-reported evaluations of individuals themselves and the two parties. The key point of the unfolded polarization here is emphasizing the ideological perception of the public. The

polarization of political elites in this study emphasizes what the public feels about political parties instead of actual behavior of elites.

Enlarged ideological gap between average and elites

The NES survey also asks respondents to place themselves in a 7-point liberal-conservative scale. Therefore, the ideology of oneself can be measured based on this scale with 1 representing extremely liberal and 7 indicating extremely conservative. The midpoint is moderate with a value of 4. And also, respondents are asked to indicate their partisanship in a 7-point scale with 1 indicating strong Democrat and 7 representing strong Republican. The midpoint 4 indicates independents.

Figure 2 illustrates the ideological trend of American people among different partisan groups. The dash lines in the figure describe the general trends of respective lines. On average, American people only become slightly conservative. But strong partisans become much more extreme toward the dominant ideology of each party. Strong Republicans become more and more conservative since 1970s. Strong Democrats also approach nearer to liberal side along the scale. Strong partisans become polarized, while average Americans become only slightly conservative. The ideological gap between partisan elites and average people emerges.

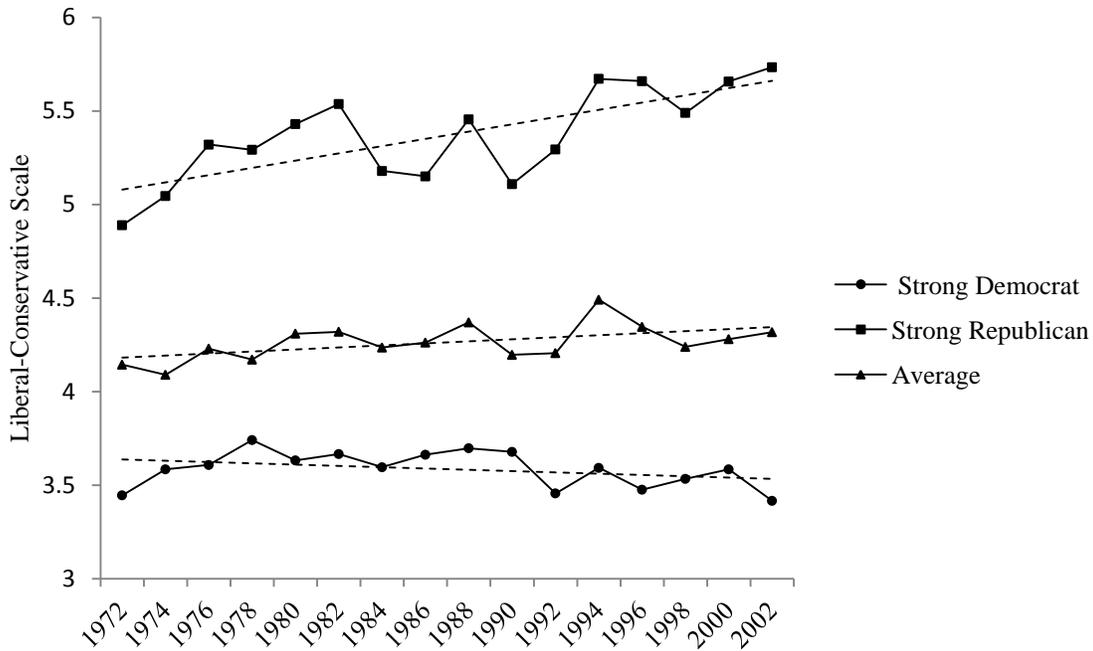


Figure 2 Ideological Trends of Strong Partisans and Average

The ideological gap between average people and strong partisans reflects the difference between the public and political elites. This difference is accelerated during the Reagan and post-Reagan eras. The election of Ronald Reagan progressed the most prominent conservative movement in recent America and eventually resulted in a remarkable increase in ideological polarization among party leaders and activists (Stone et al. 1990).

The polarization of political elites probably causes public disaffection toward policies and incumbent leaders, since public policies are mostly made by these elites rather than always consistent with public's preferences. Party activists are less likely to compromise core beliefs in issue positions. As ideological purists, these elites hardly shift policy positions to attract median voters or follow public's preferences. Public distrust is very likely to occur once the positions of incumbent government can't represent electorates' concerns.

Besides the placement of oneself along ideological scale, respondents are also asked in ANES to respectively evaluate how liberal or conservative the Democratic Party and the

Republican Party are. Since the Democratic Party will be definitely perceived more liberal than the Republican Party on average, the absolute comparison of ideological perception of the two parties may not be heuristic. Therefore, the distances of each party from the moderate position are examined to reveal how extreme the two parties are perceived to be. Figure 3 demonstrates the ideological distance of two parties from the moderate position, which is the value of 4 in liberal-conservative scale.

The vertical axis represents the distance of ideological placement of the two parties from the moderate position. So the further from 0 in y-axis, the more ideological the party is perceived to be. The line representing the perceived ideology of the Republican Party is constantly above the line representing the Democratic Party since 1978. It means that the Republican Party is perceived far away from moderate position in ideological placement. In other words, this party is perceived as more extreme in ideology compared with the Democratic Party. Before 1990, the line representing Democratic Party is approaching x-axis, which means the ideological position of Democratic Party during this time is becoming more and more moderate. But the ideological tendency of Democratic Party is resurging after 1990.

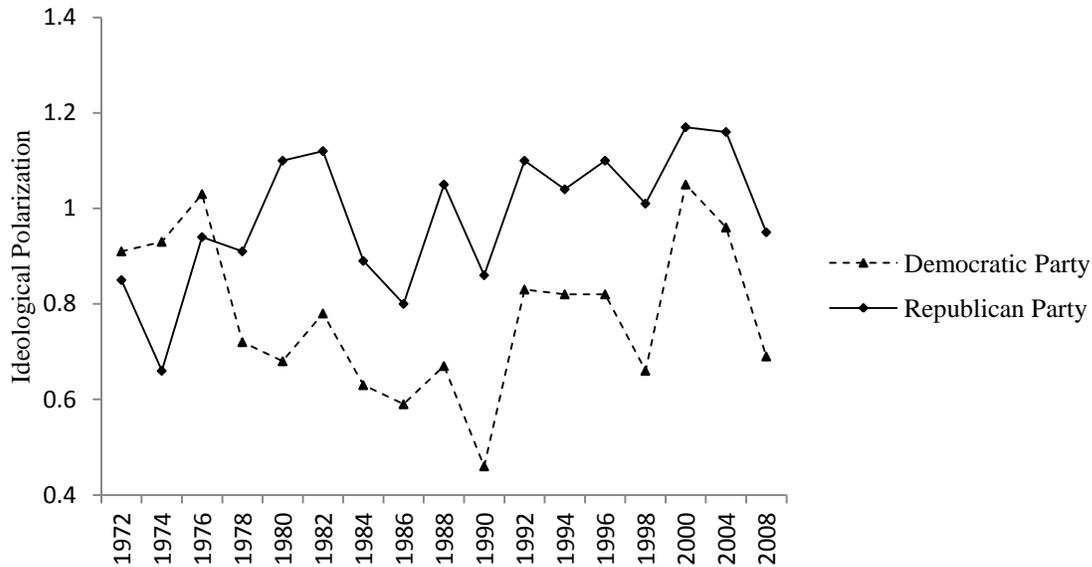


Figure 3 Ideological Polarization of Democratic and Republican Party

Enlarged ideological gap between people and political parties

As mentioned above, the respondents in the survey are asked to evaluate their own positions on the liberal-conservative scale, and also the positions of the two parties according to their own perceptions. The difference on the scale between oneself and his or her own party is the ideological gap between people and their own parties.

Figure 4 shows the absolute distance of ideological placement between people and their own party. The absolute distance is non-directional, which measures the extent of the perceived difference between oneself and his or her own party. The absolute difference is the strength of the difference. Larger values indicate more distant from one's own party on ideological scale. As shown in the figure, the line indicating the absolute distance with Democratic Party among Democrats is always above the other line. It means that Democrats perceive more distant from their party compared with Republicans. This can be considered as a reflection of ideological cohesiveness inside the Republican Party. Compared with Republicans, Democrats are more

ideologically diverse.

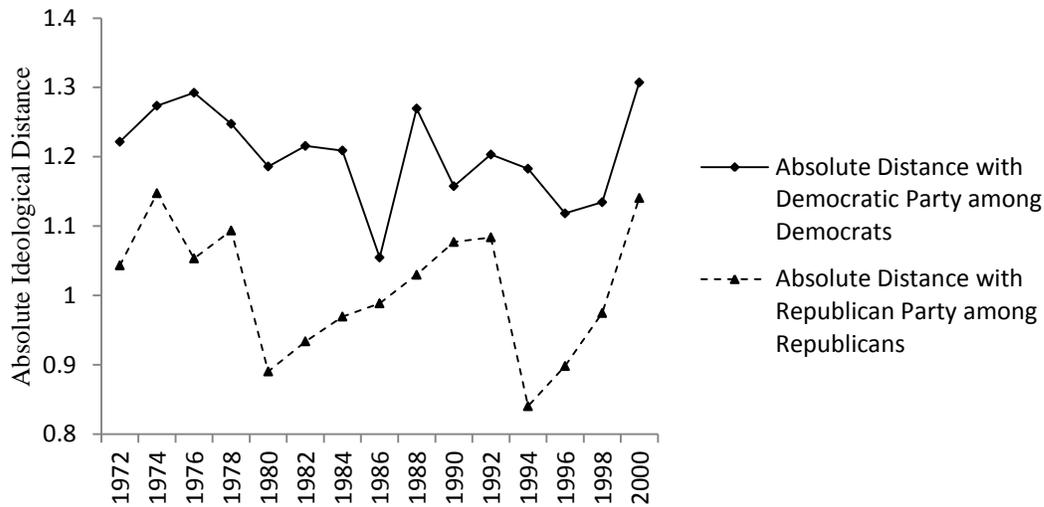


Figure 4 Absolute Ideological Distances between People and Their Own Party

The lack of cohesiveness in the Democratic Party has been covered in previous literature. The Democratic Party has considerable ideological diversity and has shown a broader ideological and policy range than Republicans (Mayer 1996). Meanwhile, the Republican Party has been transformed by an infusion of southern whites and upper-class reinforcements. The ideological position of the Republican Party is more stable and more cohesive than the Democratic Party. But whether the ideological cohesiveness of Republicans is good or bad for the resurgence of political trust is still a question. Some cues may be clarified following the analysis in the subsequent sections of this study.

With the demise of the New Deal Coalition, the electoral bases of the Democratic and the Republican Party changed in ways that have made the parties both more ideologically cohesive and more ideologically extreme. The polarization of political parties has been a recurring theme

in journalistic critiques of modern elections. Political scientists may instinctively suspect that polarization is an irrational strategy for party elites. The party locating its policy positions closest to the preferences of the median voters is supposed to get the most votes (Downs 1957). If the economic model of voting holds, it makes little sense for political parties to become polarized. But this is precisely what is happening since the decline of the New Deal Coalition. And much worse, American public has precisely perceived the polarization. Polarization not only happens among political elites, but also happens among electorates' mind.

The ideological distance between Democrats and Republicans are computed as two components. One is the perceived distance from the Republican Party among Democrats. The other is the perceived distance from the Democratic Party among Republicans. The two should be differentiated as the evidence of asymmetric ideological distances. As illustrated in Figure 5, the trajectories of the two lines are indeed distinct.

These evidences about polarization and ideological distance are consistent with the evidence revealed in previous studies about Congress partisanship (Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Extreme conservatives and extreme liberals are more likely to be represented in Congress. Ideological compositions of each party have become more homogeneous. In other words, intra-party ideological difference has completely disappeared. The positions between the two parties in Congress become more widely separated. That is, the average difference between the two parties increases over time. And there is less overlap in the positions of the two parties. There are less liberal Republican and less conservative Democrat. And also, the moderates are vanishing.

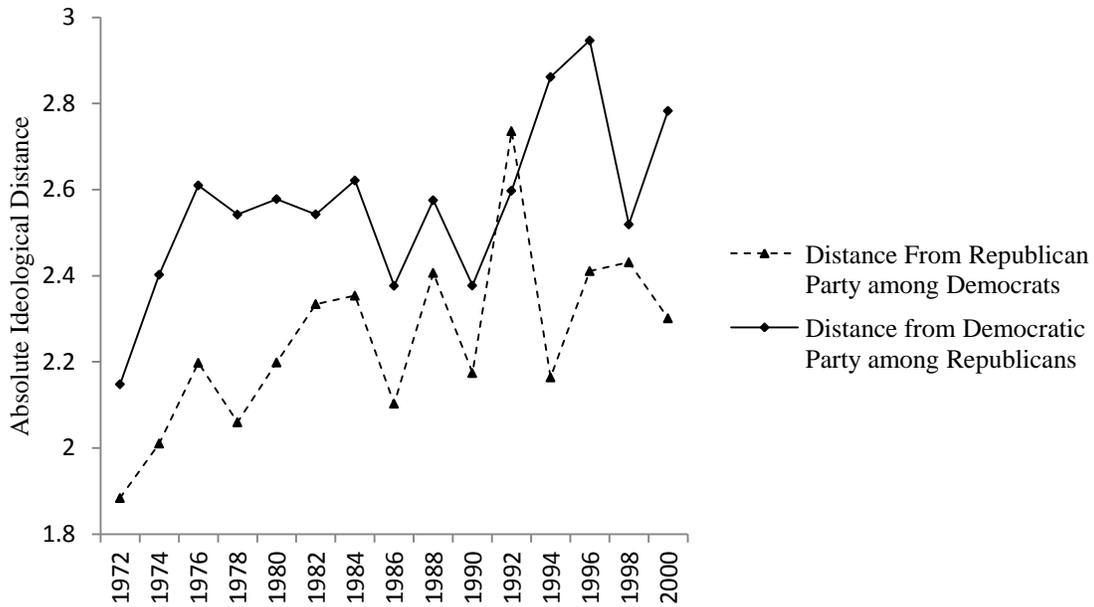


Figure 5 Absolute Ideological Distance between People and the Other Party

The evidence here is the perception of American public about the distinction between the two main parties. It reveals that the ideological positions of the two parties in elite level are more and more clarified. Not only the behavior of political elites in Congress has reflected the polarization of the two parties, but also the public has the consistent perception with the actual behavior of elites.

The asymmetric perception of ideological distance from each other may result in asymmetric fluctuation of political trust among Democrats and Republicans. Since people may adopt ideological schema when reporting political trust, ideological difference from the incumbent party probably attenuates political trust of people. Consequently, when the Democratic Party is in power, Republicans may perceive very large difference from the incumbent government and show very low trust toward the incumbent. This mistrust among Republicans can be more severe than that shown by Democrats when they are out of power. On

the other hand, as illustrated in Figure 5, Republicans perceive much more coherence in ideology inside the Republic Party. Republicans may show very high confidence toward the incumbent government when they are in power. This trust among Republicans can be also much more than that shown by Democrats when they are in power. The abrupt fluctuation between trust and distrust among Republicans can be seen in Figure 1. The amplitude of vibration of political trust is larger in Republicans than that in Democrats. And the two resurgences in 1986 and 2002 are both in Republican administration. A plausible reason why the resurgence of political trust didn't occur in Democratic administration might be that Democrats tend to give relatively moderate evaluation toward government whether they are in power or out of power.

Establish linkage between political trust and ideological distance

The above evidence about perceived polarization and ideological distance with political parties seems to be related to the fluctuation of political trust. The time period and general trend are consistent. But formal tests in individual level have to be conducted to examine if there is significant relationship between perceived polarization and political trust, as well as between asymmetric distance from the two parties and the fluctuation of political trust.

The proposed models need to be specified before going to statistical test. The formal test aims at two propositions. One is that perceived distance with incumbent in-power party will negatively predict political trust. In other words, the more distant one perceive himself or herself from the incumbent party, the less trust he or she will have. The other proposition aims to explain the fluctuation of political trust. More specifically, the research question is why political trust among Republicans fluctuates more abruptly than that among Democrats, and why ups and downs coexist in the fluctuation. Consequently, two models will be examined.

The first model examines the relationship between political trust and the perceived distances from the two parties. This model aims at examining whether distance from incumbent party is negatively associated with political trust. The proposed model can be expressed in following equation:

$$T_{\text{political trust}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Distance from the Democratic Party}) + \beta_2 (\text{Distance from the Republican Party}) + \beta_3 (\text{Partisanship}) + \beta_4 (\text{Strength of partisanship}) + \beta_5 (\text{Demographics})$$

The perceived distance from a specific party is computed as the difference of ideological placement between oneself and the party. Partisanship refers to self-reported party identity as Democrats, Republicans or Independents. Strength of partisanship is measured in a 4-point scale with 0 indicating the strength of independents and 4 indicating strong partisans. Demographics as control variables include age, education, income, gender and race. The model will be run in every survey year separately from 1972 to 2004. The regression coefficients by year are shown in Table 1. To facilitate the examination of the results, Table 1 excludes the regression coefficients of demographic variables and indicates the party identification of incumbent president in each year.

[Insert Table 1 in Appendix A here]

First, let's check whether the distance with incumbent party has a significant effect on political trust. According to the indication of incumbent party in each year shown in the table, the corresponding distance from the incumbent party will be checked. For instance, the distance with the Republican Party will be checked in 1976, and comparatively, the distance with the Democratic Party will be checked in 1996. The results show that the distance with incumbent

party is a negative and significant predictor of political trust in all of the years except 1998. The correlation is nonsignificant in this year. It means that the more distant one perceives from the incumbent party, the less trust the individual will show toward the government. This finding is consistent with previous prediction.

The other noticeable result in Table 1 is that the distances from both parties are negatively related to political trust, although some relationships in some years are not significant. But the direction is consistently negative. It means that perceived distances from the incumbent party and the opposing party both attenuates political trust. The more distant one feels from political parties, the less trust the individual will have with the government. This finding is plausible, since psychological distance from both political parties can be an indicator of political alienation or apathy. If an individual thinks neither party can represent his or her interest, it's very natural for the individual to distrust the incumbent government.

Party strength is positively associated with political trust, although the relationship in some years is not significant. Since partisanship has been controlled in the model, this finding means that strong partisans have higher trust toward the government no matter which party is in power. The more professed affinity one has for a party, the more likely one is to trust the government even when the government is run by the other party. This may be partly due to the sense among strong partisans that their own party is ready to "fight the good fight" (King 1997). Another explanation might be associated with political efficacy. Strong partisans may feel higher efficacy than weak partisans, and consequently show higher trust toward the government than weak partisans.

The other model is inspired by the asymmetric perception of ideological distance between the two parties, which has been illustrated in Figure 6. Republicans perceive more distant from

Democrats than the psychological distance from Republicans perceived by Democrats. On the other hand, political trust among Republicans fluctuates more abruptly than that among Democrats, as illustrated in Figure 1. The crest of trust among Republicans is higher than that among Democrats. And the trough of trust among Republicans is lower than that among Democrats. This model tries to formally test whether the abrupt fluctuation of political trust among Republicans can be attributed to the asymmetric perception of ideological difference.

$$T_{\text{political trust}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Distance from incumbent party among opposing partisans}) + \beta_2 (\text{Strength of partisanship}) + \beta_3 (\text{Demographics})$$

The distance from incumbent party among opposing partisans is computed respectively in each survey year. When the Republican Party is in power, it refers to the distance from the Republican Party perceived by Democrats. As a result, only Democrats will be analyzed in this circumstance. Republicans and Independents will be excluded from the model. Similarly, when the incumbent is the Democratic Party, the distance is computed as the ideological difference between Republicans and their perceptions of the Democratic Party. The above model can be written as two models in different conditions as following:

When the Republican Party is in power,

$$T_{\text{political trust}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Distance from the Republican Party}) + \beta_2 (\text{Strength of partisanship}) + \beta_3 (\text{Demographics}) \quad [\textit{given Partisanship=Democrat}]$$

When the Democratic Party is in power,

$$T_{\text{political trust}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{Distance from the Democratic Party}) + \beta_2 (\text{Strength of partisanship})$$

+ β_3 (Demographics) [*given* Partisanship=Republican]

The results in Table 2 show the unstandardized coefficients of the regressions in each year. When the Republican Party is in power, the effects of perceived distance from Republicans among Democrats are all nonsignificant except the year 1972. But when the Democratic Party is in power, the effects of perceived distance from Democrats among Republicans are all significant except the year 1996. Furthermore, the distance from the incumbent party among opposing party can explain more variance of political trust when the Democratic Party is in power. According to the R squares shown in Table 2, the variance explained by the distance from Democrats among Republicans is much more than that explained by the distance from Republicans among Democrats.

[Insert Table 2 in Appendix B here]

The contrast is significant. The distance with incumbent party is more likely to influence political trust when the Republican Party is out of power. In other words, Republicans are more inclined to associate ideological difference with their subjective evaluation of political trust. When a Republican and a Democrat perceive the same degree of ideological distance from each other, the mistrust of the Republican toward a Democratic administration is probably much higher than the mistrust of the Democrat toward a Republican administration.

Discussion

The major concern of this study is the fluctuation of political trust in American society since 1970s. Although declining political trust has been explained from sociological, political and cultural perspective, there is still some room for aggregate-level analysis. The fluctuation of

political trust is explained in this study as the cumulative product of party polarization and the derivative consequence of asymmetric distance between two major parties in ideology.

On one hand, polarization of political parties results in the gap between elites and mass public, which consequently contributes to public distrust. The tendency of polarization is unfolded based on two sets of evidences. One is the ideological gap between strong partisans and average public. Strong partisans are becoming more extreme toward the dominant ideology of each party. At the same time, the average Americans only become slightly conservative in these years. The other evidence is public's perception of ideological difference between the two parties. Both parties are perceived as far from moderate position in ideological scale, especially the Republican Party.

On the other hand, ideological distance with the other party is not symmetric among Democrats and Republicans. The asymmetric distance is also unfolded based on two sets of evidences. One is the asymmetric distance from one's own party. The distance from the Democratic Party perceived by Democrats is larger than that perceived by Republicans from their own party. The Republican Party is more cohesive in ideology. But the Democratic Party is ideologically diverse. This is one dimension of asymmetry. The other evidence is the asymmetric distance from the other party. The distance from the Democratic Party perceived by Republicans is much larger than that perceived by Democrats from the Republican Party. Republicans are more ideologically opposite to Democrats. And Democrats are relatively moderate in ideological antagonism. In one word, Republicans are more ideologically cohesive and more antagonistic toward Democratic ideology.

Based on the evidence of party polarization and asymmetric distance and also the evidence of fluctuated political trust, this study then examines the linkage between these evidences and the

fluctuation of political trust. Formal models are proposed to test the association between these fragments of evidences. The results confirm the initial predictions. Ideological distance from incumbent party positively predicts political distrust. And this relationship is even more prominent among Republicans when they are out of power. The strong tendency of ideological associations among Republicans might be a source of fluctuation of political trust. The trust of Republicans proliferates when in power and declines rapidly when out of power. The political trust of American public vibrates with the alternation of power and fluctuates in different extents among different partisans. The two-party system is brought back in to elucidate the implication of asymmetric distance of the two parties in ideology.

The clarified difference between the two parties is considered as one of the evidences of political polarization, which consequently accelerates political distrust in American society. In this sense, polarized parties are not good things for a society. But the story always has the other side. The Republican victories in the 1994 and 1996 congressional elections reflected a long-term shift in the relative strength and bases of support of the two major parties and that this shift in the party loyalties of the electorate was in turn based on the increased ideological polarization of the Democratic and Republican parties during the Reagan and post-Reagan eras. Clarified differences between the parties' ideological positions make it easier for electorates to choose a specific party identification based on their policy preferences. A previous study suggested that the polarization in elite level helps to clarify the ideological preferences for ordinary Americans, which may facilitate the increasing of party importance and salience in mass level (Hetherington 2001). Given the abundant evidence about declining partisanship in American electorates (Konda and Sigelman 1987; Nie et al. 1979; Bartels 2000), the polarization of political elites is becoming the last hope of resurgence of mass partisanship and eventually the

legitimate base of the whole election system. This is allegedly the choice benefit of polarization.

The underlying assumption to explain political mistrust based on ideological polarization is that people indeed rely on ideological identification and categorization to evaluate their trust toward the government. This assumption may need further test. There is a possibility that Republicans tend to associate evaluation of political trust with ideological positions. But Democrats tend to evaluate political trust relatively independent from ideology. This is a different explanation from that proposed in this study. This study explains the abrupt fluctuation of political trust among Republicans as their psychological distance from Democrats in ideology is too far. Here the proposed alternative explanation is that Republicans tend to be more ideologically associated. It seems that the two explanations are different from each other. But actually these two are not contradict with each other and can be integrated to influence political trust together. If the perceived ideological distance of an individual from the incumbent party is very large and this individual also has the tendency of ideological association, political distrust can be intensified. If the perceived distance is very large but the individual is less inclined to associate ideology with evaluation, political distrust may be attenuated in this circumstance.

Not only the assumption about people relying on ideological schema in political evaluation needs reconsideration, but also the concept of ideology should be treated carefully. Bennett (1977) has called for a moratorium on empirical research pending the development of better concepts and measures due to the conceptual and methodological problems with ideological belief systems. In addition to the problems that undermine the research efforts on ideological categorizations, one awkward consequence of the emphasis on ideological sophistication has been our inability to analyze the opinions of non-ideological electorates and explain why such a big group of electorates don't think in ideological terms (Kinder 1982). The non-ideological

electorates are automatically excluded from the analysis in this study, since the variables put in the model require a specific placement of oneself and the two parties in ideological scale. To study the change of political trust of non-ideological people may tell another story about the relationship between ideology, partisanship and political trust.

Mistrust in government has been well documented in previous literature as a phenomenon with multiple causes. This study mainly focuses on the aggregate level analysis about ideological polarization and perceived ideological distance with political parties. Although the formal tests go back to individual level, the initial inspiration still aims at explaining political trust in aggregate level. Since aggregate level analysis needs to treat every survey year as one data point, the data in about 30 years is still not enough to run a statistical analysis. There are definitely some competing hypotheses about the causes of political distrust. But this study aims at explaining the influence of ideology and partisanship on political trust. This explanation is only one side of the story, which mainly focuses on the macro-level predictors. Further studies need to be done on micro level aiming at explaining how people process ideology-related or party-related information when establishing political trust.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Regression of Political Trust on Ideological Distance with Political Parties

	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2004
Incumbent Party	R ^a	R	R	D ^b	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	R
Distance with D ^b	-.21 ^c (.53)	-1.1* (.46)	-1.4* (.41)	-2.2* (.47)	-2* (.55)	-1.8* (.68)	-1.4* (.54)	-.30 (.65)	-1.6* (.55)	-1.1* (.52)	-1.9* (.43)	-2.7* (.46)	-1.8* (.54)	-1.2 (.65)	-2.3* (.90)	-.36 (.58)
Distance with R ^a	-3.6* (.51)	-1.2* (.44)	-2.3* (.43)	-.72 (.48)	-.17 (.53)	-1.3* (.64)	-1.8* (.52)	-2* (.63)	-1.7* (.56)	-1.5* (.53)	-1.4* (.43)	-1.7* (.52)	-.14 (.58)	-.75 (.65)	-.91 (.95)	-.45* (.60)
Partisanship	2.99* (.75)	1.0 (.71)	3.15* (.66)	-.75 (.75)	-.23 (.87)	2.62 (1.03)	3.38* (.85)	1.60 (.95)	2.93* (.85)	1.59* (.79)	1.37 (.72)	-.74 (.78)	-.40 (.92)	-2.1* (.99)	-2.17 (1.29)	-.59 (.89)
Party Strength	.56 (.70)	1.75* (.58)	1.92* (.58)	3.19* (.64)	.98 (.74)	2.57 (.90)	.91 (.69)	.97 (.81)	1.60* (.75)	1.46* (.72)	2.57* (.58)	3.34* (.64)	2.85* (.75)	2.83* (.85)	3.21* (1.17)	2.39* (.90)
R square %	6.5	4.1	7.6	5.5	5.7	4.2	4.7	5.4	6.0	3.1	4.1	7.0	3.3	3.8	6.4	10.2

Note. ^a Republican Party. ^b Democratic Party. ^c Unstandardized regression coefficient.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Appendix B

Table 2 *Regression of Political Trust on Ideological Distance with Incumbent Party among Opposing Party*

	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2004
Incumbent Party	R ^a	R	R	D ^b	D	R	R	R	R	R	R	D	D	D	D	R
Distance with R ^a among D ^b	-2.1* (.68)	-.83 ^c (.56)	-.81 (.49)			-.70 (.67)	-.55 (.50)	-.61 (.69)	-.86 (.57)	-.48 (.50)	-.65 (.41)					-1.02 (.82)
Distance with D ^b among R ^a				2.61* (.77)	2.53* (.89)							2.55* (.61)	1.47 (.81)	2.41* (.90)	2.37* (.92)	
Party Strength	-1.53 (1.3)		2.54* (.98)	2.16 (1.2)	1.62 (1.4)	2.85* (1.4)	2.01 (1.1)	.45 (1.5)	-1.33 (1.2)	1.46 (.98)	1.95* (.87)	2.42* (.99)	1.41 (1.2)	2.41 (1.5)	2.99* (1.3)	8.30* (1.3)
R square %	1.7	2.9	3.5	7.5	7.1	2.4	1.2	1.2	2.6	2.6	1.5	3.6	1.4	5.1	3.0	9.6

Note. ^a Republican Party. ^b Democratic Party. ^c Unstandardized regression coefficient.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.