Topic 2: Issue politics and political values

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POLI71042 Understanding Political Change

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Today's lecture

1. Theoretical approach of readings
2. Methodological approach of readings
3. Defining "values," "issue voting" & "issue ownership"
4. Three empirical themes from the readings and my research

Theoretical approach of readings

The readings are examples of political sociology:

1. Motivated by the idea that social structure influences political outcomes
2. Focus on both agreement and disagreement Perrett (2023)
3. Opinions matter: issue positions and values associated with political behaviour

Methodological approach of readings

Public opinion understood in a broad and structural fashion:

1. Multiple survey items analyzed together; aggregated in latent value dimensions or in relation to one another Inglehart (2008); Bornschier (2010)
2. Long-term perspective on public opinion or party positions Abou-Chadi (2016)
3. Documenting heterogeneity across demographic and political groups

What are values?

- "An enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" Rokeach (1973)
- They are persistent dispositions that inform more specific preferences and issue positions
- Political values concern notions of equality, liberty, or justice

What is issue voting?

- Spatial and proximity models of party competition Downs (1957)
- Voters compare their issue positions with those of candidates or party platforms and vote for the candidate whose position in the *n*-dimenionsial issue space is closest
- This provides an incentive for parties to move towards the median voter

What is issue ownership?

- Complicates the picture of strategic movements
- Parties own issues "for which a majority of the electorate has traditionally regarded them as competent and effective problem solvers" Abou-Chadi (2016)
- Green parties and the environment, Labour and the NHS, the Conservatives and crime
- Payoff for a party to increase salience on an issue they own

Caveat: the cognitive demands of issue voting

- Issue voting premised on voters having clear issue preferences & they can differentiate parties or candidates on these issues
- Yet voters have low knowledge of parties and political concepts Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996)
- Ideologically incoherent belief systems Converse (1964)
- Temporal inconsistency Converse & Markus (1979)

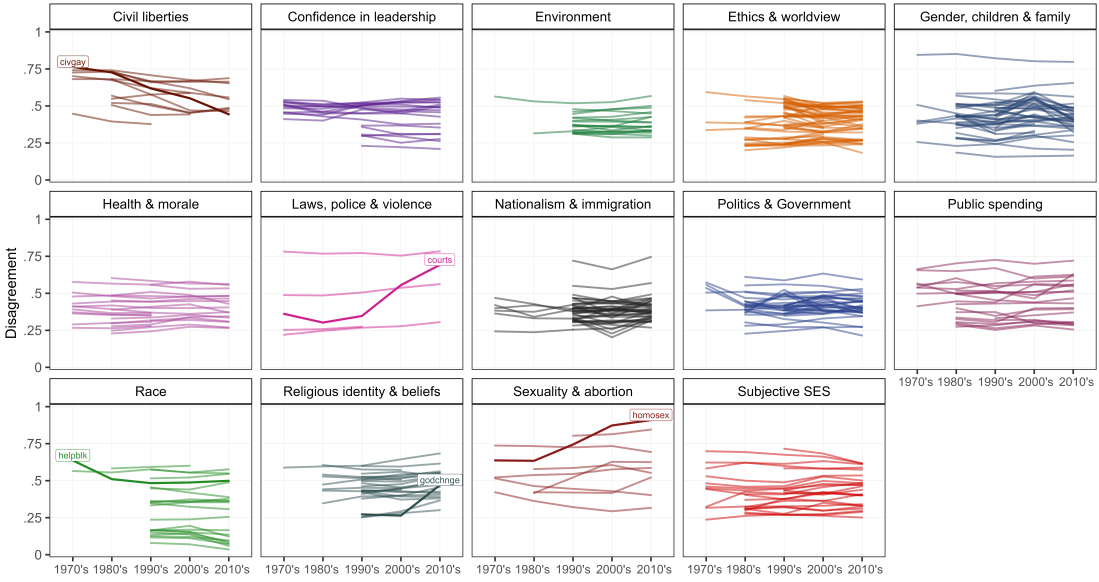
Three empirical themes

1. The stability of issue positions and values
2. The predictability of opinion change
3. The link between disagreement and political outcomes

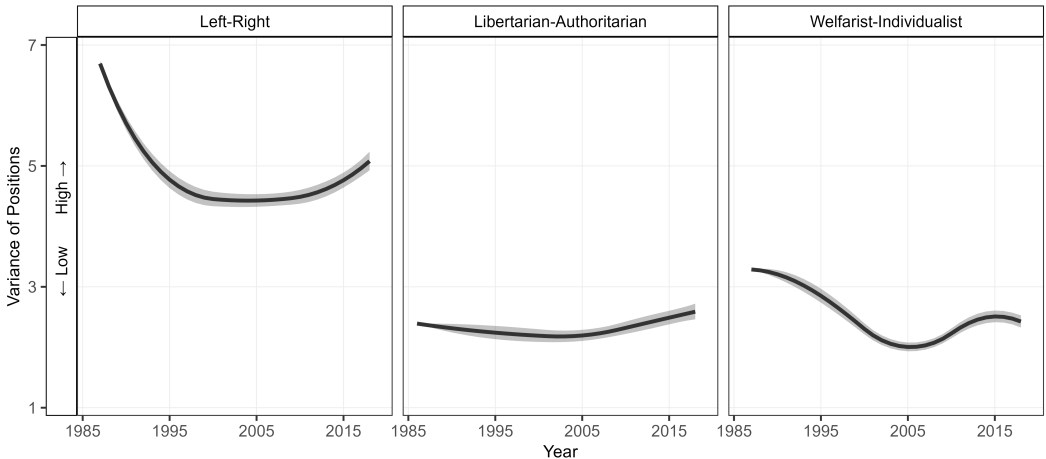
1. Stability

- Stable levels of consensus and moderation
- Where there is disagreement, such differences are durable – both in the extent of disagreement and the content on which Americans disagree

1. Stability – Disagreement item-by-item (GSS)



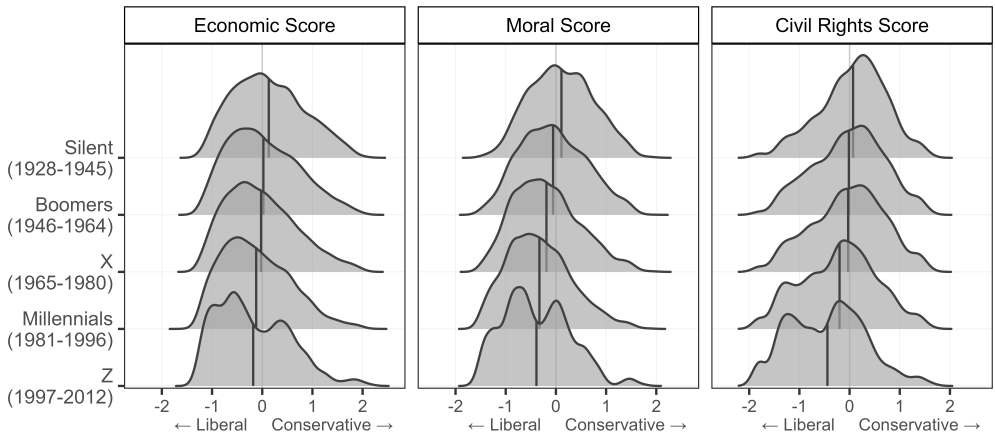
1. Stability – Disagreement as variance of latent positions (BSA)



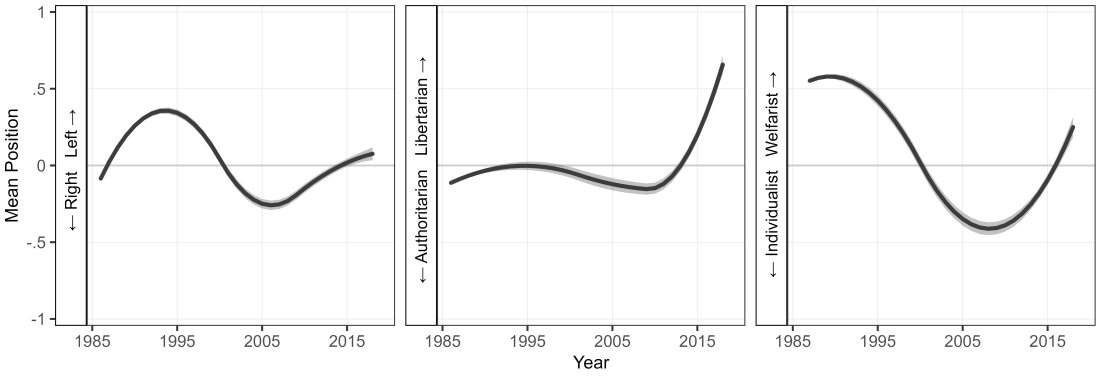
2. Predictable change

- Consistent progressive trends Clements & Field (2014); Schnabel & Sevell (2017)
- Generational replacement produces majority of public opinion change Kiley & Vaisey (2020)
- Consistent period effects: most groups react thermostatically to the government of the day Wlezien (1995); Soroka & Wlezien (2005)

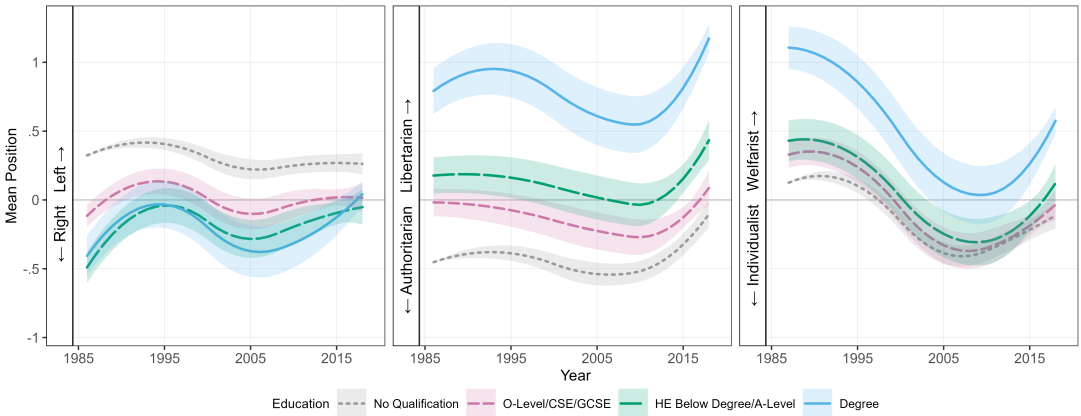
2. Predictable change – Generational differences (ANES)



2. Predictable change – Thermostatic oscillations (BSA)



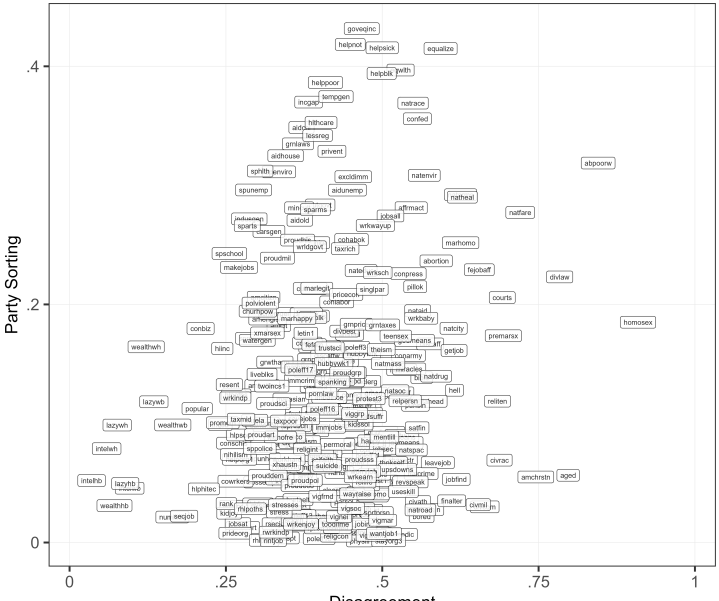
2. Predictable change – Thermostatic oscillations (BSA)



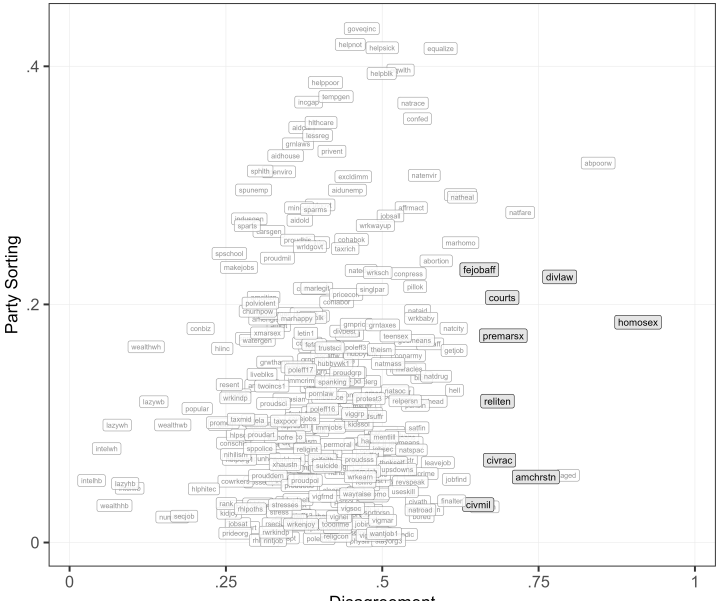
3. Political outcomes

- Controversial issues do not always sort partisans
- Small set of potential wedge issues
- Electoral relevance of disagreement determined by the parties and "issue entrepreneurs" Abou-Chadi (2016)

3. Political outcomes – Identifying wedge issues (GSS)



3. Political outcomes – Identifying wedge issues (GSS)



Recap: our three themes

1. The stability of consensus and disagreement
2. The predictability of opinion change
3. The link between disagreement and political outcomes

Conclusion

- Stability, consistent change, and a limited number of potential wedge issues
- So, why are political outcomes difficult to predict?
  1. Electoral campaigns cover small, idiosyncratic portion of public opinion
  2. Cross-pressure: sociodemographic, ideological, or identity-based
  3. Parties are dynamic and strategic Rovny (2012)