

**POLICYMAKING IN RED AND BLUE:
ASYMMETRIC PARTISAN POLITICS AND AMERICAN GOVERNANCE**

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Abstract:

Scholars use the same theories of the policy process to explain American policymaking regardless of the party in charge of government and have largely ignored differences between the goals and governing styles of Democrats and Republicans. We argue that the Republican Party is united by ideological goals whereas the Democratic Party is a coalition of social groups. The demands of the two parties' bases and the sources of their public support differ, leading Republican politicians to discuss policy in broad strokes and Democratic politicians to emphasize particular policies aimed at each constituency. Democratic governance brings forward a coalition of diverse interest groups with programmatic demands, leading to more extensive policymaking. Republican governance breeds skepticism within a base opposed to expanded government. This divergence necessitates revisions to each of the major theories of the policy process, especially to enable scholars to explain the intransigence of the contemporary Republican Party.

John Boehner, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, does not believe that the institution over which he presides should be judged by the rate of its policymaking activity. Asked in 2013 about the historically low volume of legislation enacted during his speakership—the 112th Congress of 2011–2012 passed only 561 mostly minor laws, the lowest total in the modern era, and the 113th Congress is on pace to be even less productive—Boehner responded by dismissing the notion that the number of bills approved was an appropriate measure of congressional success: “Most Americans think we have too many laws. What they want us to do is repeal more of those. So I reject the premise to the question.”¹ With significant ideological polarization in both houses of Congress and an active Tea Party movement dedicated to enforcing conservative purity within Republican ranks, Boehner has faced strong incentives as Speaker to choose partisan confrontation over the compromise necessary for legislative accomplishment in an era of divided party government; his remarks can therefore be interpreted as a rhetorical defense of this simple political calculation. Yet Boehner’s comments also reflect the prevalent belief among conservative Republicans that congressional inactivity is a positive goal in itself. While Democrats tend to view policymaking as an effort to find new public-sector solutions to specific social problems (with institutional gridlock representing a perennial challenge to this objective), Republicans usually perceive it as a broader ideological battle over the proper size of government. If achieving a reduction in the scope of government power is infeasible, maintaining the status quo via legislative inertia is, from their perspective, the next-best outcome.

Existing theories of the policy process are not well equipped to account for this difference in kind between the preferred governing styles of Republicans and Democrats. To be sure, all major theoretical traditions recognize the influence of party affiliation and the shifting winds of liberal and conservative opinion, but none acknowledge a fundamental asymmetry in how the two parties approach policymaking. We argue that this difference reflects an important distinction in the two

parties' bases of support. Specifically, the Republican Party is dominated by ideologues who are committed to small-government principles, while Democrats represent a coalition of social groups seeking public policies that favor their particular interests. Republicans view policymaking as a terrain for pursuing the broad goal of limiting government power—an objective shared in principle by most of the electorate—while Democrats champion particular government initiatives, programs, and regulations that also tend to command majority support among voters. When in office, Democrats govern by satisfying the programmatic demands of the groups within their party coalition through legislative and executive action, but Republicans are comparatively skeptical of active policymaking, seeing it as a tool to expand government. The distinct approach of each party challenges the validity of general theories of the policy process, but also suggests some helpful modifications for each theoretical tradition.

In the following analysis, we describe and demonstrate these partisan differences and investigate their implications for theories of the policy process. First, we review the inattention of existing theory to the unique attributes of the two parties, arguing that traditional accounts of policymaking are much more applicable to the behavior of Democratic officeholders than to contemporary Tea Party-influenced Republican governance. Second, we show that Democratic and Republican partisans think about public policy debates in distinct terms at both the mass and elite levels. Third, we demonstrate that the interest group coalition of the Democratic Party supports and enables repeated legislative and administrative action, whereas Republicans are less driven by their own partisan base to prioritize substantive policymaking. Fourth, we find that these governing styles reflect a divergence in the ideological pattern of policy change: historically, change has more frequently expanded the scope of government than contracted it, giving liberals more collective influence than conservatives over changes in federal policy. Finally, we propose specific

modifications of each prominent theory of the policy process to better account for this partisan asymmetry.²

Partisan Asymmetry and American Policymaking

Theories of the policy process are designed to apply across multiple nations, governing systems, and institutions. As a result, they tend to understate the role of political party competition in American national government. All of the major theoretical traditions account for changes in the partisan control of institutions, but seldom focus on the differences between America's two major parties. For example, Paul Sabatier's volume summarizing the theories of the policy process (Sabatier 2007) includes only one reference to Republicans or the Republican Party (in an aside referring to their similarity with Democrats). This omission contrasts with theories of Congress (see Rohde 2013; Cox and McCubbins 2005) and American national institutions, in which parties are given central importance.

Moreover, most theories of policymaking were developed in the United States, using primarily American examples, during the long period between the 1950s and 1980s when Congress was dominated by an ideologically moderate and internally factionalized Democratic Party, potentially rendering them somewhat blind to the role of political party context. The post-1980s growth of partisan polarization in Congress, now at its highest level in more than a century and principally driven by a contemporary Republican Party that is both much more ideologically conservative than at any time in the history of public policy studies (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006) and increasingly powerful (currently controlling the House of Representatives while maintaining the capacity to block legislative action in the Senate), has changed the political environment considerably. The view that policy solutions were, or at least should be, a response to social problems and past choices has historically justified the study of policy as an independent field.

In contemporary Washington, however, only one major party—the Democrats—conforms to this baseline conception of the policy process and sees legislating and administrative action as a primary means to achieve its goals. The behavior of current Republican officeholders is thus out of synch with the traditional assumptions guiding policy theory.

Of course, all of the major policy process theories have moved beyond the traditional model and incorporate political competition with some attention to parties. In independent streams theory, John Kingdon (1984) includes partisan change in the politics stream: changes in public identification with the parties or in the partisan or ideological composition of government could help open windows of opportunity for new policy. In punctuated equilibrium theory, Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones (1993) include partisan change as a potential source of punctuation and emphasize how party agreements can sustain more incremental change within subgovernments. In the Advocacy Coalition Framework, Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (1993) include partisan election outcomes and partisan shifts in the public mood as sources of instability in policymaking communities. Each of these theories, however, assumes symmetry between the parties: leftward and rightward trends are treated equivalently as instigators of policy change.

In our view, the two parties' distinct styles of governance reflect the different natures of each major party's popular base, which in turn shape party leaders' approaches to public policy. Because the Democratic Party is composed of a coalition of social groups making specific programmatic demands on government, Democratic officeholders seek to initiate large-scale legislative and administrative action to address a catalog of social problems in order to simultaneously appease this diverse set of interests and appeal to a larger majority of the mass public. Democrats tend to divide public policy into issue areas, often associated with specific party constituencies, and enlist experts to develop potential solutions, aiming for a high rate of productivity and policy change—thus fulfilling the ideal-typical model of policymaking.

Republican officials, in contrast, treat policymaking as a broader fight over the proper size and scope of government because their party is an agent of an ideological movement united by conservative values and skeptical that government action can ameliorate social problems. Republicans tend to debate policy in general terms guided by widely accessible principles; they are less likely to divide into issue networks or trust policy professionals. Because government need not produce much new policy to meet their goals, and because they are often in the position of opposing ambitious proposals for policy change advanced by Democrats, Republican officeholders are relatively content with inaction or legislative gridlock. Existing theories of policymaking that presume otherwise are therefore less successful at accounting for Republican approaches to governance.

These party differences are tendencies, rather than absolute and essential features of each side. Many Republican politicians and constituencies seek concrete policy change, though moderate officeholders open to compromise in order to achieve legislative success are disappearing from Republican ranks; some Democrats are likewise more rigidly liberal, or less motivated by the goal of legislative productivity, than others. Yet the distinct approaches of each party to policymaking are longstanding, reflecting the relatively stable basis of their respective coalitions. Neither party's propensities require a wholesale revision of policy theory, but attention to their differences is critical for properly applying theory to contemporary American politics.

Asymmetric Reasoning in Party Coalitions

The partisan asymmetry in the governing style of political elites has its roots in the mass public. Party identifiers in the electorate perceive political choices differently: Republicans are more likely to reason ideologically whereas Democrats are more likely to think of politics as a competition among groups over benefits. This difference is durable over time. Since the 1960s, the American

National Election Studies (ANES) has asked citizens what they like and dislike about each political party and each presidential candidate. Philip Converse (1964) used the open-ended responses to these questions to construct a scale of citizens' "levels of conceptualization." The two highest-ranked categories were "ideologues," covering anyone who used ideological language or general principles to explain their preferences, and "group benefits," for anyone who referenced the social groups supported or opposed by the parties or candidates (but used no ideological reasoning). Most voters did not fall into either category, but strong partisans were more likely to do so. Paul Hanger and John Pierce (1982) and Michael Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) updated these categorizations for more recent elections.

Figure 1 illustrates the over-time difference between the percent of strong Democrats and strong Republicans that were categorized as ideologues and as respondents oriented towards group benefits. Republican identifiers have always been much more likely to be ideologues than Democrats, with differences ranging from 12 to 32 percentage points. Republicans use general concepts and principles to justify their political beliefs more often than Democrats do, frequently emphasizing the need to limit the scope of government or protect traditional social norms. Democrats have always been much more likely than Republicans to explain their preferences in terms of group benefits—e.g. by claiming that Republicans are the party of the rich while their own candidates champion the disadvantaged—by margins varying from 25 to 48 percentage points. The strongest Democratic identifiers consistently view politics as a competition among social groups for favorable concrete policies and benefits, whereas the strongest Republicans view politics as a more abstract conflict over the proper role of government.

[Insert Figure 1]

These consistent differences in political reasoning between Democrats and Republicans reflect a longstanding contradiction in collective public opinion that allows each party to claim

popular support for its policy objectives. A majority of the American public paradoxically agrees with conservative preferences on general questions regarding the size of government even as it favors the liberal position on most specific policy issues. As Figure 2 shows, this apparent inconsistency has remained remarkably stable since at least 1981, according to data from hundreds of public opinion polls collected by Christopher Ellis and James Stimson (2012). The dashed line in the figure represents an average of the liberal share of all non-centrist responses on hundreds of specific public policy questions; it reveals a modest but consistent liberal majority. The solid line is based on poll questions measuring respondents' general preferences on the power and scope of national government: here the public shows an equally consistent preference for the conservative position. Americans simultaneously believe that government should do less in general and that the reach of most individual government programs should be maintained or increased. This pattern of philosophical conservatism matched with operational liberalism persists across a number of policy areas. For example, surveys of public opinion have demonstrated that most Americans express disapproval of the Affordable Care Act, with the vast majority of opponents agreeing that the law represents "too much government involvement in health care," even as nearly all of its specific provisions receive strong popular support (Kaiser Family Foundation 2013; Pew Research Center 2014).

[Insert Figure 2]

Republican politicians and interest groups thus represent both their partisan base and a wider public majority when they think, speak, and act ideologically, advocating restrictions on government activity in a broad sense. By contrast, Democratic politicians and affiliated interests prefer to stress their advocacy of particular policies that have wider public support and that offer targeted benefits to members of their electoral coalition, placing themselves on the side of social groups favoring government action to ameliorate perceived disadvantages. For Democrats,

difficulties in governing tend to reflect the complex task of uniting a diverse party around a shared agenda and avoiding backlash to policy activism from an American electorate that remains skeptical of “big government,” while Republican policymakers face the very different challenge of responding to public demands for popular policy “solutions” without provoking opposition from an ideologically-oriented partisan base that is opposed to further extending the reach of the federal government.

How Democrats and Republicans Discuss Policy

The language used by Democratic and Republican politicians expresses their distinct aspirations and sources of public appeal. Table 1 reveals several differences in policy rhetoric between Democratic and Republican presidents. First, using data from the Policy Agendas Project, it summarizes the topics raised in each president’s annual State of the Union Address. Presidents of both parties dependably use these speeches to urge congressional action on a laundry list of policy proposals, but the policy content is somewhat higher when the orator is a Democrat. Between 1961 and 2008, 87% of the sentences delivered by Democratic presidents concerned public policy, compared to 80% of the sentences delivered by Republicans. Republican presidents do address one category of policy more than Democrats, however: general government operations, or appeals about the broad shape of government. When Democrats do talk in broader terms, they tend to mirror conservative rhetoric in the hopes of tempering public opposition; it was Bill Clinton, for instance, who announced in the 1996 State of the Union Address that “the era of big government is over” even as he used the same speech to make an extensive set of new specific policy proposals.

[Insert Table 1]

Differences in partisan rhetoric are even more apparent in presidential campaigns. Table 1 also summarizes an original content analysis of candidate responses in the first televised debate in

each of the past five presidential elections (1996 to 2012). In these initial debates, typically the most-watched and most pivotal single events of the campaign season, Democratic candidates referred 60% more often than Republicans to social problems requiring specific government solutions, giving more attention to particular social groups such as women and racial minorities. In contrast, Republican candidates placed more emphasis on advancing a broader ideological orientation, speaking 28% more often than Democrats about the overall size and scope of government. Republicans tended to discuss specific policy proposals in the context of broader arguments about the ideological direction of government, whereas Democrats offered them as solutions to social problems.

The parties also differ in how they connect elections to governing. Table 1 summarizes data from a study by Julia Azari (2014) examining when and how newly elected presidents claim a mandate for their substantive agenda. Republican presidents are more likely to declare a popular mandate, doing so in 33% more of their speeches than Democrats. Republicans' mandate claims, however, tend to be broad in nature; they are less likely than Democrats to cite specific policy positions supposedly approved by the public at the ballot box. These findings suggest that Republicans are likely to publicly interpret—and, perhaps, privately view—electoral victories as constituting referendums on general orientations toward government, whereas Democrats treat them as popular endorsements of specific proposals.

Partisan Support Coalitions for Candidates and Policy Proposals

The pattern of interest group support for candidates and policy proposals also differs between the parties. Most importantly, the Democratic Party is composed of more connected interest groups than the GOP. Democratic national convention delegates report more organizational memberships than Republicans and mention more interest groups tied to their party (Heaney et al.

2012). The same is true among state convention delegates (Rapoport, McGlennon, and Abramowitz 1986). A study of organizational mailing lists also found that Democratic-affiliated groups shared their lists at three times the rate of Republican groups (Koger, Masket, and Noel 2009). More interest groups also endorse candidates in Democratic primaries than in Republican primaries (Dominguez 2011).

The greater ties between the Democratic Party and interest groups also emerge in policymaking. Figure 3 illustrates the ties between interest groups that endorse the same candidates (gray lines) and those that support the same legislation (black lines) within each political party, based on an analysis of pre-primary candidate endorsements in the 2002 congressional elections and of coalitions favoring or opposing specific legislation in the prior Congress (see Grossmann and Dominguez 2009). The top schematic represents relationships among Democratic groups; the bottom network is composed of Republican groups. Lines connect actors that endorsed more than one of the same candidate or bill. As Figure 3 reveals, there are many more groups in the Democratic network.

[Insert Figure 3]

There are also other key differences between the party networks. The Democratic network reflects the party's constituency ties: there are groups representing specific issue positions, general economic interests, and social identities. The Republican network has few central players, mostly businesses. The Democratic network is highly interconnected with dense ties across the issue spectrum for both candidate and legislative endorsements. Most importantly, the Democratic Party contains strong links between its electoral and legislative coalitions. The two types of network ties are strongly correlated. The diverse groups that come together to support the same candidates also ally when it comes to passing bills in Congress. The Republican Party lacks similar ties between its electoral and legislative coalitions, mostly because few of its groups regularly join coalitions to

support or oppose legislation. Only the Democratic Party is organized to transform its electoral coalition into a governing coalition. Democrats must satisfy the demands of many competing interests, but they do so as a largely unified coalition with clear legislative aims.

Congress in Red and Blue

Congress operates very differently under the leadership of each party. Democratic control of the House or Senate is associated with higher rates of legislative productivity and a more active policymaking process. Table 2 reports characteristics of the average session of Congress under each party's leadership between 1961 and 2012. On average, more than twice as many bills were introduced, and nearly 50% more passed, under Democratic House majorities (though the legislative success rate is therefore correspondingly lower). Committees also met significantly more often under Democratic leadership. Though this difference might be assumed to reflect the Democratic dominance of Congress during the era of strong committee government in the 1960s and 1970s, restricting our analysis to the period after Jim Wright's elevation to the speakership in 1987 did not substantially change our findings: Democrats still introduced and passed many more bills and held substantially more committee meetings, though the differences in both categories declined. Bill introductions under Democrats have averaged approximately 6,600 per year since 1987; committee meetings have declined to 4,100. The Senate was also more active in terms of bills introduced (and especially passed) under Democratic control during the same period (we lack an equivalent measure for committee meetings in the Senate).

[Insert Table 2]

These differences appear, though to a more modest degree, in comparisons of Democratic and Republican members of Congress, whether in the majority or minority. Table 3 reports the average number of bills sponsored and co-sponsored by members of each party in each chamber

between 1981 and 2012. Democrats sponsored and co-sponsored more bills than Republicans in both the House and the Senate, though some differences were modest. Calculating the average word count of bills by party (only available for the 112th Congress of 2011–2012) reveals that bills sponsored by Democrats are somewhat longer, indicating that the lower introduction rate of Republican legislators does not reflect a preference for larger and more complex legislative proposals.

[Insert Table 3]

Congressional activity during periods of Republican control is often dominated by symbolic acts demonstrating support for conservative ideology, rather than practical efforts to enact substantive legislation. Between 2011 and 2014, for example, the Republican-led House held more than 50 votes to repeal all or part of the Affordable Care Act—all of which had no chance of success in the Democratic-controlled Senate—even as the rate of bills enacted into law sank to the lowest level in decades. While congressional Republicans maintain aggressive oversight of the executive branch during Democratic presidencies, holding numerous hearings and conducting frequent investigations of the Clinton and Obama administrations, other types of committee activity, such as mark-up sessions or hearings to choose among competing bills, tends to recede under Republican rule (Mann and Ornstein 2012). Republican rhetoric exhibits strong support for a significant reduction in the role of government in American society, yet this ideological commitment is not commonly translated into an ambitious legislative agenda. The pressure placed on Republican officeholders by party activists to undertake symbolic acts designed to communicate philosophical loyalty—rather than deliver practical legislative accomplishments to their constituencies—sharply distinguishes the contemporary Republican Party from its Democratic counterpart.

Red and Blue Policymaking in the Executive Branch

The partisan difference in policy productivity also extends to the executive branch. Table 4 displays the average number of total legislative proposals and domestic policy proposals made by Democratic and Republican presidents per Congress since 1945. Democratic presidents made 39% more proposals than Republicans overall and 62% more domestic policy proposals; a higher share of Republican proposals is dedicated to foreign policy or government reorganization. We also report a more recent comparison of the 12 years under Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton on the Democratic side and the 12 years under Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush on the Republican side. Presidential legislative activity has declined since its peak in the 1960s, but the differences between Democrats and Republicans are just as stark.

[Insert Table 4]

The rate of total policymaking in the bureaucracy also differs between Democratic and Republican administrations. Here, the pattern is more complex due to a substantial linear time trend: as government has expanded, executive agencies have produced more rules in general. Table 5 reports the average number of pages in the Federal Register (the official docket of regulatory and rulemaking announcements) per year under each president since 1968. For more recent presidents, the Government Accounting Office provides better data on the number of final rules published and the subset that they consider major rules. Bureaucratic policymaking was low under Richard Nixon, moderate under Gerald Ford, and high under Jimmy Carter. It abruptly reversed trend under Ronald Reagan but then started growing again, especially after the transition from George H. W. Bush to Bill Clinton. George W. Bush and Barack Obama have not completely conformed to the partisan average; Bush's presidency produced more final rules on average than Obama's administration, though Obama has overseen more major rules.

[Insert Table 5]

The differences in how Democratic and Republican presidents discuss policy are thus reflected in their policymaking records while in office. Democrats seek to engage in policymaking across branches and across the issue spectrum, whereas Republicans propose less to Congress and make less policy directly in the executive branch. This asymmetry reflects the distinct demands placed on officeholders of each party: Democrats are faced with many separate interests and constituencies pressuring them to deliver concrete policy change, whereas Republicans must balance the broader electorate's preference for governmental responsiveness against an ideological base opposed to extensive government action.

Significant Policy Change and the Conservative Dilemma

The distinct partisan approaches to public policy are apparent in their most important policymaking achievements. Significant laws pass more frequently under Democratic presidents and Congresses (Coleman 1999). There is a good reason for this asymmetry: Democrats and liberals are more likely to focus on policymaking because any change that occurs is much more likely to be liberal than conservative. New policies usually expand the scope of government responsibility, funding, or regulation. There are occasional conservative policy successes as well, but they are less frequent and are usually accompanied by expansion of government responsibility in other areas (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002).

Figure 4 depicts the comparative scarcity of pro-conservative policy change, using data from a content analysis of 268 policy area histories (mostly books) that describe the most significant policy changes in each branch of government across domestic policy areas between 1945 and 2004 (Grossmann 2014). Because the 1960s and 1970s were an era of particularly explosive policy change, and because the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 is often cited as marking a new period of conservative ascendancy, Figure 4 divides this timespan into two sections, 1945–1980 and 1981–

2004. On average, liberal policy changes occurred more than three times as frequently as conservative policy changes. Federal policymakers typically debate what additional actions government should take, not whether it should maintain its existing reach. Contracting the scope of government is difficult because prior policies create beneficiaries who act as constituencies for their continuation and expansion. The same patterns are even more evident when policymaking moves to the executive branch via executive orders or agency rules. Conservative policy changes in the executive branch are quite rare.

[Insert Figure 4]

Because many more policy innovations expand government than contract it, increased productivity does not tend to meet conservative goals. As rates of policymaking increase, policy outcomes usually move in a liberal direction. Figure 5 illustrates the association over time between the total number of significant policy changes in each biennium (represented by the black line) and the number of net liberal policy changes (liberal changes minus conservative changes, represented by the gray dotted line). However, this tendency became less prevalent after the 1970s. In the wake of the massive growth of government activity that occurred in the 1960s, efforts to contract its scope or exchange expansions for contractions subsequently found occasional success. Nevertheless, there have been few periods of both active and conservative governance; the closest examples are the two years following Reagan's election to the presidency and the two years following the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994.

[Insert Figure 5]

As a result, Republican politicians and conservative interest groups are less involved in significant policymaking. Table 6 reports the number of actors in each category that policy historians credited with bringing about policy change (from Grossmann 2014). Democratic politicians were more active than Republicans, especially when it came to involvement in multiple policy changes

across issue areas. The most active Republicans, Richard Nixon, Jacob Javits, and Bob Dole, were open to expansion of government power and activity to serve particular substantive ends; Javits, who represented New York in the U.S. Senate between 1957 and 1981, was widely known as a “liberal Republican,” while Nixon and Dole, though self-identified conservatives, pursued specific policy goals in ways that regularly drew criticism from ideological purists within their own party.

[Insert Table 6]

This historical analysis confirms the existence of a long-standing dilemma that is particular to Republican officeholders. Democrats’ penchant for policy activism can at times produce a popular backlash from an American public that remains wary of “big government,” as arguably occurred in the decisive Republican electoral victories of 1980, 1994, and 2010. Once restored to power, however, Republicans achieved very limited success at rolling back previous expansions of federal authority, in large part because the public’s preference for smaller government in the abstract rarely translates into support for specific proposals to reduce or remove existing government programs, regulations, and benefits. Yet failing to deliver on prior rhetorical commitments to reduce the scope of government risks alienating a Republican popular base that remains devoted to conservative principles and that has become increasingly aggressive in using primary elections to enforce ideological purity on the party in government. Republican leaders often find themselves unable to satisfy the general public’s desire for new policies to address major issues such as unemployment, health care, and immigration while simultaneously avoiding opposition to policy change from the party’s own most loyal constituencies—a challenge that has become particularly vexing for the current Republican congressional leadership.

Modifying Policy Process Theory for Asymmetric Policymaking

Traditional theories of the policy process are therefore more applicable to the goals and governing styles of Democrats. Although none of the primary theoretical traditions focuses on the constituency politics of the Democratic Party, they do account for common Democratic practices such as dividing the issue agenda into specific problems and seeking to enact new policies to address each item. The behavior of Republicans, who see policymaking as a broader struggle over the size and scope of government in which their side is often at a disadvantage, is not as clearly anticipated by current policy theories that assume policymakers of both stripes prefer action.

This imbalance does not imply a need to restart theory-building from scratch, proposing separate theories of policymaking for each party. After all, the stark differences we find are still just disproportionate tendencies: Republicans still pass some policies, Democrats still sometimes talk in ideological terms, Republicans still seek to address some problems, and Democrats still often favor the status quo. Instead of rejecting current theories entirely, we have sought to outline the key differences in Republican and Democratic approaches to governance and to show how they derive from the distinct sources of each side's popular constituency. Although current theories fit the Democratic Party more closely, modest amendments could allow each theoretical tradition to take better account of the Republican governing style. In that spirit, we offer potential challenges and revisions to each of the three major theoretical traditions we identified.

For punctuated equilibrium theory, we recommend attention to the extent to which incremental and punctuated policymaking fit into each party's goals. First, the expectation that policy change follows a build-up of information about social problems and signals of past policy failures is better able to capture the concerns of Democrats. Democratic politicians wish to appear responsive to social problems, which are often disproportionately borne by one or more of their constituent groups. By contrast, Republicans are less likely to change their issue positions in response to new information, as they are often based on ideological principles. Second, punctuated

policy change tends to expand the scope of government. It is thus likely to be viewed as a victory by Democrats, but may provoke conservative opposition from Republican elites or from a Republican base that is hostile to any participation by its party leaders. Rather than constitute major policy change, conservative successes may be incremental in nature. Republican victories in the policy arena often consist of blocking policy initiatives proposed by Democrats or slowing the gradual growth of government. Either is often associated with policy drift, under which past policies become less effective (see Hacker 2002) over time if not regularly revisited; the most common example of this phenomenon is the minimum wage, which loses its real value if Congress does not act to increase it at the rate of inflation.

Third, punctuated equilibrium theory should interrogate the partisan context that gave rise to it, with an eye to acknowledging the limits of its generalizability. The examples used by Baumgartner and Jones (1993), for example, tend to date from the apex of both policy productivity and liberalism in the 1960s and 1970s, when Democrats controlled Congress by wide margins (though some examples were conservative or originated in other eras). Significant policy change may be harder to replicate in the contemporary era, especially under conditions of divided government, Republican intransigence, and routine use of the filibuster. Fourth, the theory's critical notion of an agenda constraint may be a more pressing matter for Democrats. For a constituency-based party, a primary problem is to select issues to address from the array of possible topics. Republicans, meanwhile, may consider it advantageous if a foreign policy crisis, symbolic gesture, or scandal takes up significant time and space in the policy debate. The constrained nature of their policymaking may be by design.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework could also be modified to better account for partisan asymmetries. First, the prototypical advocacy coalition may be easier to form among liberals and Democrats. The American left more readily divides by issue concerns and delegates responsibilities to experts. The presumption that a government policy can be developed to address each social

problem is characteristic of Democrats but not Republicans. Second, when advocacy coalitions do arise on the conservative side, as of course they do, they may take different forms. Advocacy coalitions consisting of Republicans are likely to be more ideologically motivated and less responsive to empirical evidence about policy success. Belief consistency, a key concept in advocacy coalition research, may take on increasing importance on the right. As the theory recognizes, policy debates will often entail competing advocacy coalitions, but we should not expect these coalitions to be configured as mirror images to each other.

The third lesson for the Advocacy Coalition Framework is that Republicans are likely to view policy areas as more interconnected, seeing most as aspects of the broader debate over budgets, spending, and revenues. They may not benefit from allowing policies to develop in separate issue networks. This may make the response of central Republican policymakers to advocacy coalitions more skeptical and reduce delegation to them. Fourth, Democratic advocacy coalitions may be more closely tied to constituency politics. If the civil rights advocacy coalition comes to be seen as the leadership of minority constituencies, it may signal a greater role than if it is seen as a group of experts on a particular issue. Constituencies help create demand for policy among Democrats.

Multiple streams theory can also be reconciled with party differences with some additional attention. First, the political stream may be asymmetric. Movement in a conservative direction may bring policymaking to a halt, rather than redirect attention to new problems and solutions. Republicans may look for windows of opportunity for inaction, rather than new policies. Second, Republicans may be more skeptical of the active participants in the policy solution stream and less affected by indicators from the problem stream. Although many Republicans will participate in developing policy proposals and monitoring problems, their willingness to buck their conservative base should be most dependent on the direction of the political stream.

Our third suggestion for modifying multiple streams theory is to differentiate problems developing from past policy choices from those associated with social problems. Republicans see trends in the growth of government, the level of taxation, and the deficit as qualitatively distinct from other trends in the problem stream. Policy feedback provides a better resource for Republicans than problem indicators such as changing crime rates. Finally, Republicans may look for windows of opportunity for symbolic action to mollify their ideological constituency, rather than windows for new policy. For example, the continuing public focus on the Affordable Care Act for years after its passage in 2010 provided an opportunity for regular position-taking in congressional votes to demonstrate ideological fidelity, even though it did not actually provide an opportunity for repeal.

None of the current theoretical traditions is thus ill-equipped to incorporate party differences. In most cases, it will simply require the differential reapplication of prior concepts and expectations to each party's behavior. Each theory will offer insights for Democratic and Republican policymaking, but each will also benefit from more attention to the asymmetries between them.

Partisan Asymmetry in the Policy Process

Successfully reforming policy process theory to account for partisan asymmetry will be a long and collective effort that cannot be fully accomplished here. We have demonstrated that Republicans and Democrats derive their support from different sources, ideology and social group identification respectively. Their distinct coalitions produce different rhetoric in policy debates, different resources for translating interest group support into policy change, and different rates of policymaking activity when in charge of government.

We have offered suggestions for incorporating our findings into each theoretical tradition, but have yet to show that partisan asymmetries are regularly reflected in specific policy processes. Assessing how these differences will emerge in each debate and how they might affect policy

development will require more issue-specific data and investigation. We do not yet know how profoundly the broad differences in each party's tendencies will affect their participation in each policy debate. We may find, for example, that Republican intransigence is more important in tax policy and Democratic constituency politics plays a greater role on civil rights issues. Republicans also may focus their more limited policymaking role in budget and financial areas, where they are more likely to succeed in contracting government.

We also acknowledge that our data provide specific context for American policymaking, mostly at the national level. The strongly and increasingly ideological Republican Party does not have obvious parallels in the center-right parties of other nations, for example. Policy process theory may be more easily applied in contexts where all parties more readily consent to the need to address social problems through government action. For policymaking in the United States, we can also not be sure that the future will bring an intensification of asymmetry rather than a convergence of approach. We have shown that the coalition differences are long-term and appear in many contexts, but there is also evidence that the Republican Party has become better matched with its ideological coalition in recent years.

We are also hopeful that our bifurcated view of policymaking enables liberals and conservatives to better understand one another's efforts in government. The difference in worldview between right and left is a key source of many allegations that each side is talking past one another: liberals view conservatives' opposition to government-based solutions to social problems as reflecting a belief that such problems are not serious; conservatives view liberals' support for action to address social problems as faith in "big government" for its own sake. Neither side's caricature of the other is apt, but each reflects an understanding that policy discussion is often asymmetric. Understanding policymaking will require adapting theory to properly account for both red and blue

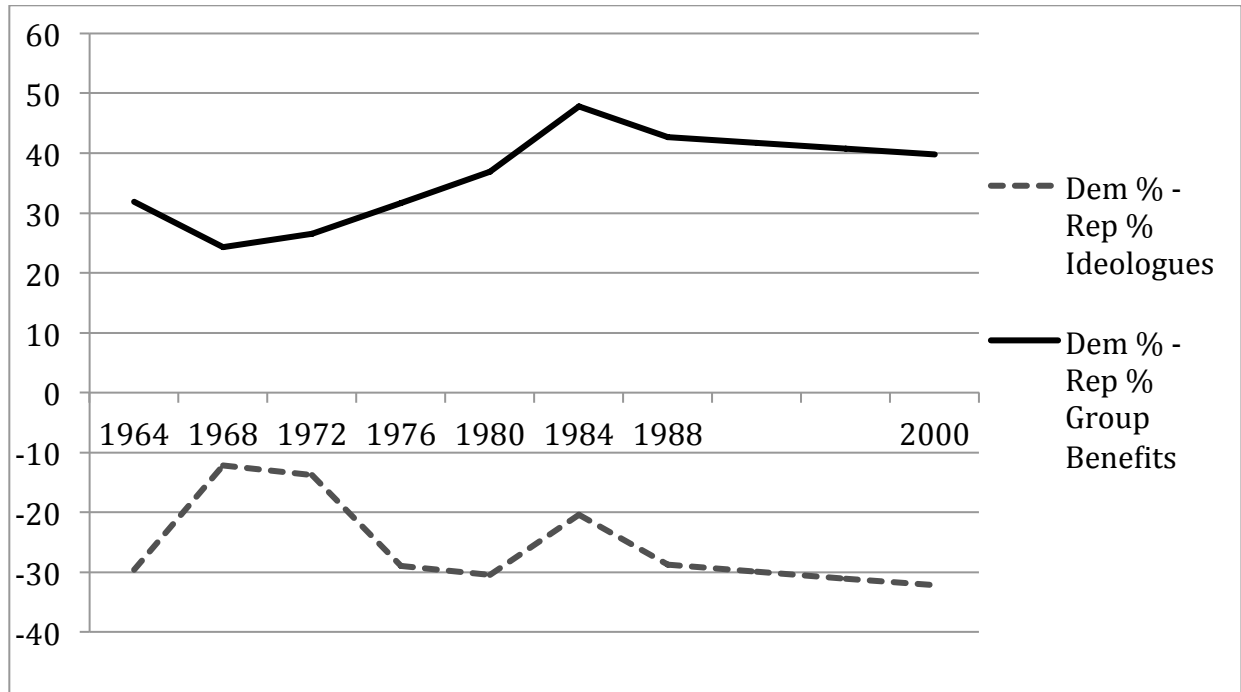
examples. In the process, actors on each side may gain a better appreciation for how the other side pursues its goals.

¹ Boehner made the remarks on July 17, 2013. A video is available here:

<<http://cnsnews.com/news/article/unproductive-congress-boehner-most-americans-think-we-have-too-many-laws>>.

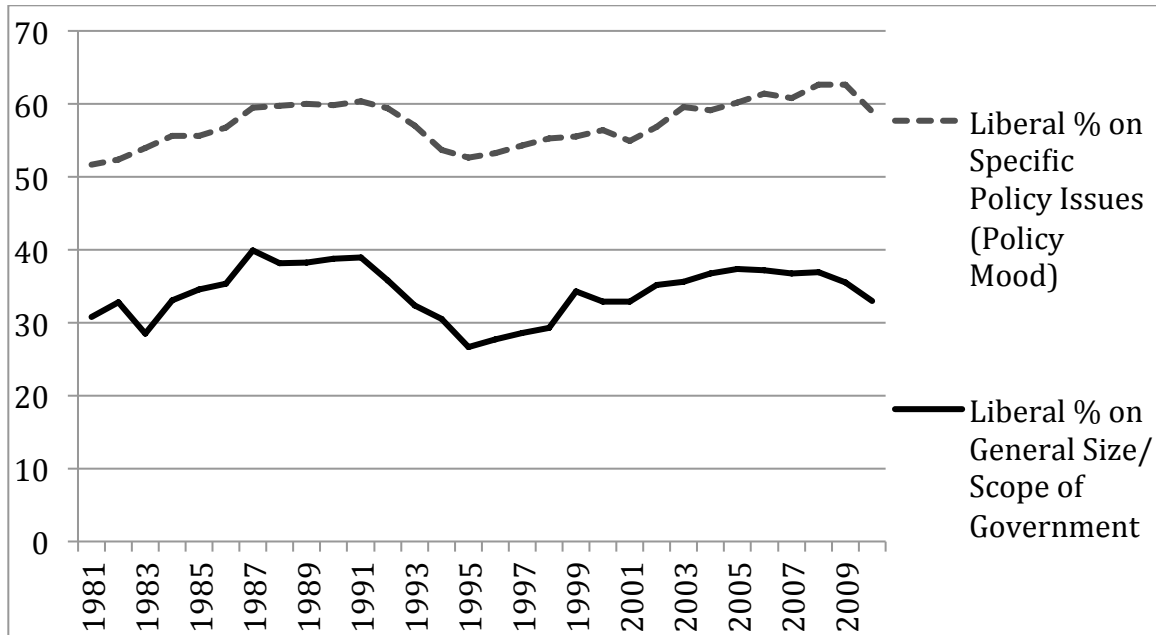
² Our analysis offers a broad view of how the distinct foundations of the American right and left make red and blue policymaking diverge, rather than a specific application to any single ongoing policy debate. We thus draw from re-analysis of data from public opinion surveys, content analyses, network studies, and policymaking outputs that were collected for different purposes. Our aim is to compile and integrate these findings, rather than develop new theoretical tests. We recognize that this approach limits us to amending prior theory and providing context for future research, but we hope that attention to party differences will improve the application of policy process theory.

Figure 1: Differences in Types of Conceptualization among Democrats and Republicans



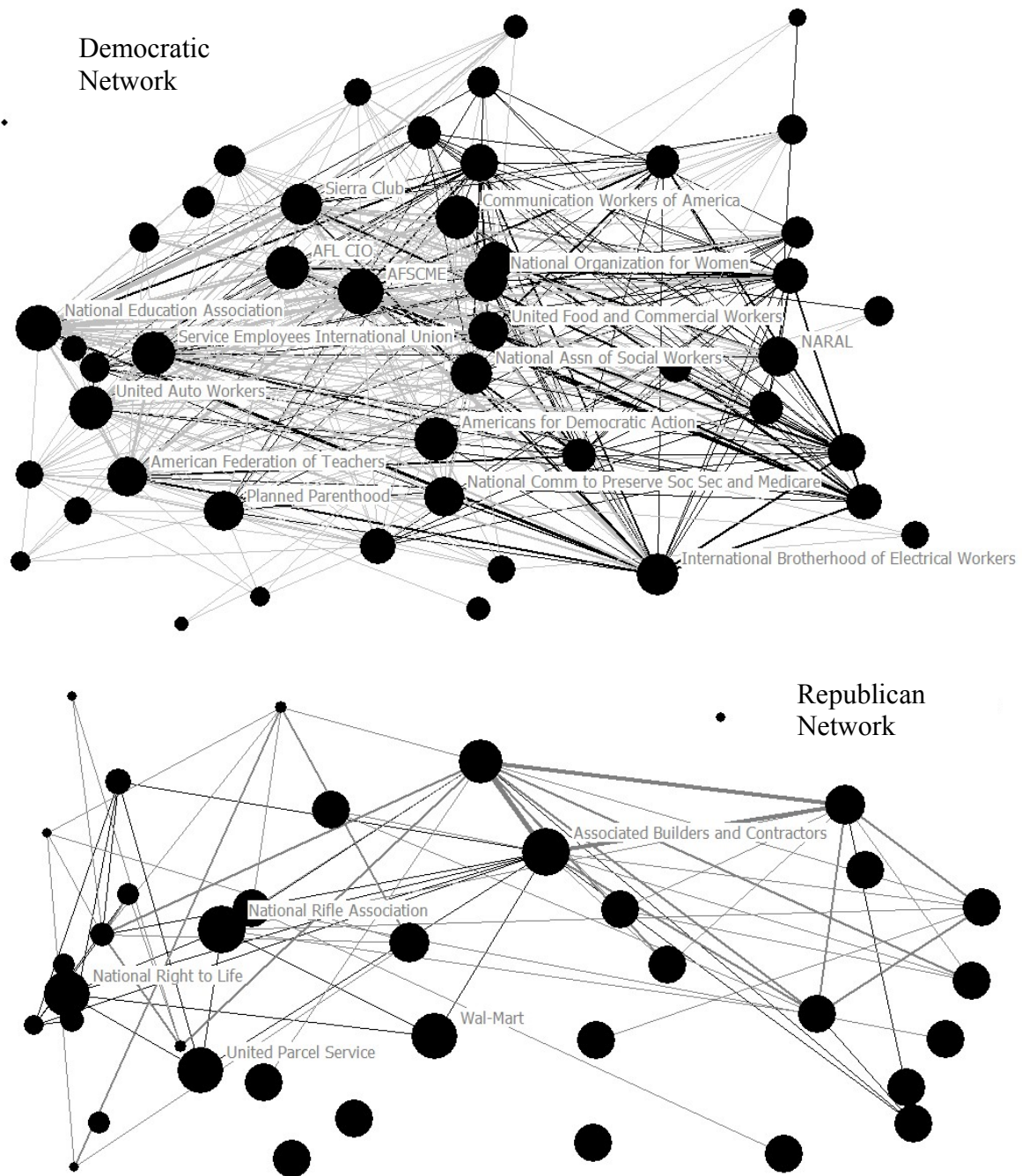
The figure reports the difference between the percent of strong Democrats and strong Republicans that were categorized as ideologues and the difference in the percent that were categorized as thinking in terms of group benefits on the levels of conceptualization scale in each election year. The categorization uses their open-ended responses to questions about the likes and dislikes of the political parties and the candidates on the American National Election Studies Time-Series Study.

Figure 2: Average Percent of Liberal Responses to Poll Questions on Policy and Ideology



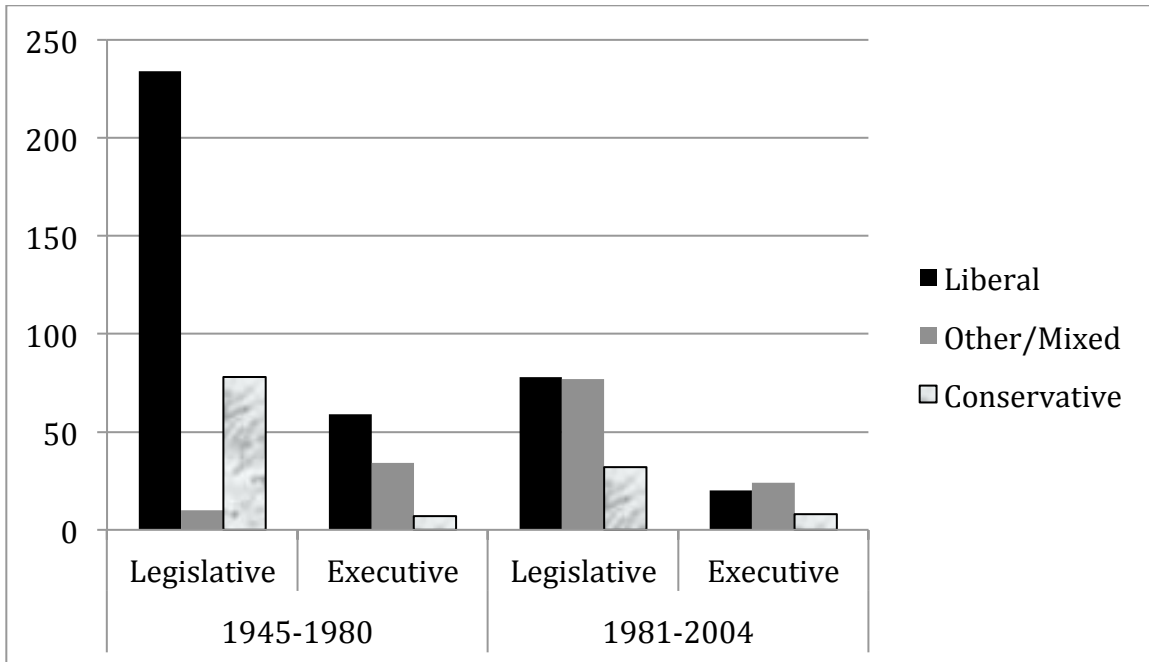
The figure reports average percent of respondents giving liberal answers on questions about specific policy issues and about the general size and scope of government (out of all non-centrist responses). The measures are from data collected by James Stimson and made available at policyagendas.org.

Figure 3: Interest Group Support Networks for Party Candidates and Legislation



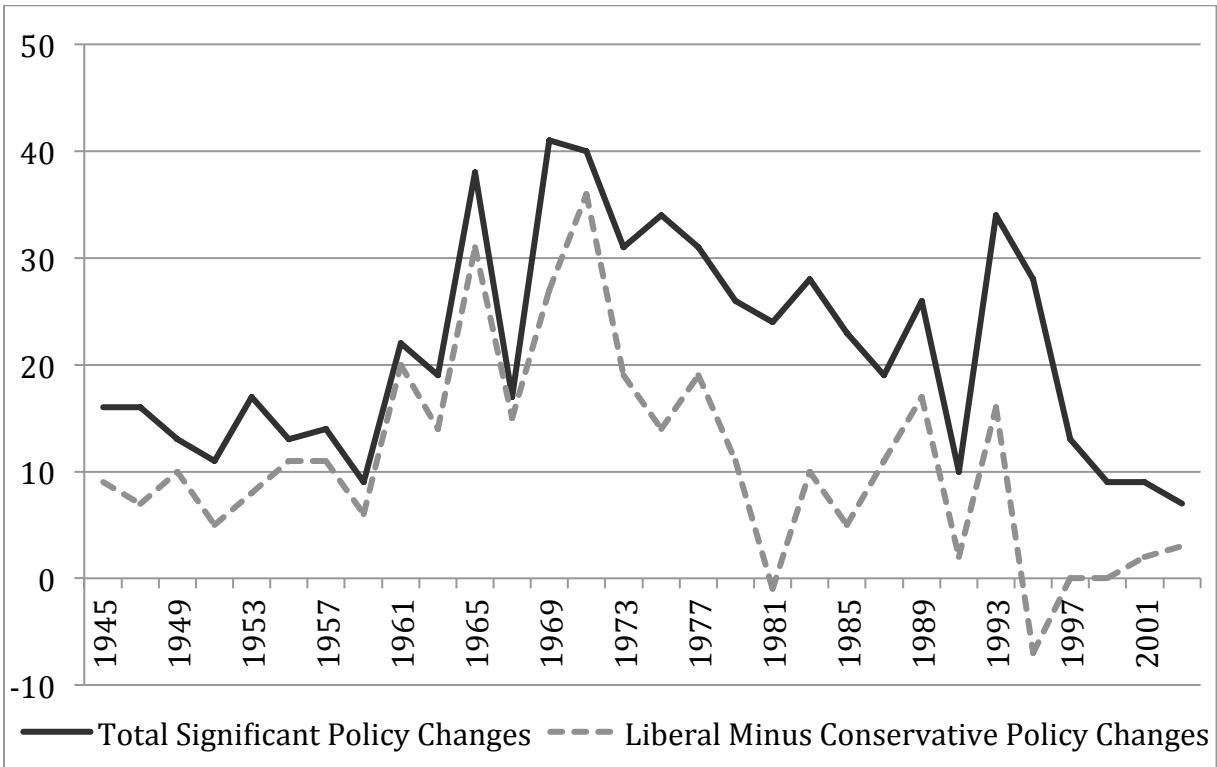
The figure illustrates the ties between interest groups that support the same candidates (grey lines) and legislation (black lines) within each political party. The top network is composed of Democratic groups; the bottom network is composed of Republican groups. Lines connect actors that share >1 candidate or bill with line width proportional to number of ties. Size of nodes is determined by number of coalition partners (degree centrality); nodes with >30 ties are labeled. The data stem from an analysis by Casey Dominquez of pre-primary candidate endorsements in the 2002 Congressional elections and an analysis by Matt Grossmann of coalitions for or against specific legislation in the prior congress. The dataset is further explained in "Party Coalitions and Interest Group Networks."

Figure 4: Significant Policy Changes by Branch of Government, Ideology, and Time Period



The figure reports the number of significant policy changes in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government in two periods. Liberal changes are those that expand the scope of government regulation, funding, or responsibility. Conservative changes are those that contract the scope of government regulation, funding, or responsibility. Other changes have no or mixed ideological content. Legislative changes are laws; executive changes include executive orders and agency rules. The identification of significant changes comes from policy area histories and was compiled by Matt Grossmann and reported in *Artists of the Possible*.

Figure 5: Trends in Policymaking Productivity and Ideological Direction



The figure reports the number of significant policy changes and the difference between the number of liberal and conservative policy changes per biennium. Liberal changes are those that expand the scope of government regulation, funding, or responsibility. Conservative changes are those that contract the scope of government regulation, funding, or responsibility. Other changes have no or mixed ideological content. The identification of significant changes comes from policy area histories and was compiled by Matt Grossmann and reported in *Artists of the Possible*.

Table 1: Party Differences in Public Policy Rhetoric

		Democratic Presidents	Republican Presidents
State of the Union Address	Specific Public Policy Issues	87.1%	79.6%
	General Government	5.4%	7.1%
Presidential Debates	Social Problems	42	26.6
	Size and Scope of Government	41.4	52.8
Presidential Speeches	Electoral Mandate Claims	9%	12%
	Policies With Claimed Mandate	5.25	2.4

*The table reports data from three different projects. First, we report the average percent of State of the Union address quasi-sentences dedicated to discussion of public policy issues and general government operations from 1961-2008. The dataset was created by the Policy Agendas Project and is available at www.policyagendas.org. Second, we report the average number of mentions of social problems and governing ideology (the size or scope of government) by Democratic and Republican candidates in presidential debates since 1996. These data stem from our original content analysis of the first presidential debate of each election year. Third, we report the average percent of presidential communications that claim an electoral mandate and the average number of specific policies that presidents claim they have a mandate to achieve. The data is from Julia Azari, *Delivering the People's Message*.*

Table 2: Bills and Committee Meetings Under Democratic and Republican Control

	Bills Introduced	Bills Passed	Committee Meetings
Democratic House	12,215	1,066	5,011
Republican House	5,742	727	2,941
Democratic Senate	3,867	1,004	
Republican Senate	3,226	754	

The table reports the average number of bills introduced and passed and the average number of committee and subcommittee meetings held in years that the Democrats and Republicans had a majority in each house of Congress from 1961-2012. The information is recorded in Vital Statistics on Congress and is available from the Brookings Institution.

Table 3: Average Bill Sponsorship per Member by Party Since 1981

	Democrats	Republicans
House Bills Sponsored	13.9	12.1
Senate Bills Sponsored	32.2	29.0
House Bills Co-Sponsored	159.9	140.8
Senate Bills Co-Sponsored	75.8	71.1
Average Word Count of Bills	1781.7	1669.9

The table reports the average number of bills sponsored and co-sponsored by members of each political party in the U.S. House and Senate Since 1981. These data stem from the Congressional bills Project and the Cosponsorship Network Data. Word count only includes the 112th congress. Information is available at <http://congressionalbills.org/> and <http://jhfowler.ucsd.edu/cosponsorship.htm>

Table 4: Average Presidential Legislative Proposals per Congress

	Democrats	Republicans	Carter/Clinton	Reagan/H.W.
All Legislative Proposals	366	264	339	205
Domestic Policy Proposals	273	169	216	119
Percent Domestic Policy	75	64	65	58

*The table reports the total number of legislative proposals made by the presidents and the number concerning domestic policy. Democratic and Republican averages are for all presidents from 1945-2012. The last two columns provide a more contemporary comparison between two 12-year periods. Jeffrey E. Cohen created the dataset. The authors created the averages from information reported in his book, *The President's Legislative Policy Agenda, 1789-2002*.*

Table 5: Federal Agency Rules Per Year by Presidential Administration

	Pages in Federal Register	Final Rules Published	Major Rules Published
Nixon	31,167		
Ford	58,647		
Carter	72,350		
Reagan	54,334		
H. W. Bush	59,518		
Clinton	71,641	4,183	66
W. Bush	76,784	3,429	64
Obama	77,983	3,302	83

The table reports the average number of pages in the Federal Register (the publication of agency rules), the number of final agency rules, and the number of major rules published per year by presidential administration. The pages data is from Vital Statistics on Congress. The rules data is from the Government Accounting Office.

Table 6: Politicians and Interest Groups credited with Significant Policy Changes

	Democratic Politicians	Republican Politicians	Liberal Groups	Conserv. Groups
Credited with a Policy Change	277	204	101	46
Credited with >1 Policy Changes	118	69	38	17
Credited in >1 Issue Areas	91	54	27	6
Of 100 Most Often Credited	39	26	14	3

The table reports the number of actors credited with significant policy changes in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government since 1945. The identification of significant changes and the actors credited with those changes come from policy area histories; they were compiled by Matt Grossmann and explained in Artists of the Possible. A politician or interest group is credited when any policy historian views their involvement as instrumental in bringing about a policy change; most policy changes are credited to more than one actor.

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