Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

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Red and Blue States

2004 election
Rich States are More Democratic...

The graph shows the relationship between the average income within a state and the Republican vote share for George Bush in 2004. States with higher average incomes tend to have a lower Republican vote share, indicating a correlation between wealth and Democratic votes.
...But Rich People are More Republican!

Bush vote in 2004 by income

2006 House exit polls

Vote share for Bush

Bush vote in 2004 by income

2006 House exit polls

Republican vote share

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Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State
The Book

red state
blue state
rich state
poor state

Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

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“Like upscale areas everywhere, from Silicon Valley to Chicago’s North Shore to suburban Connecticut, Montgomery County supported the Democratic ticket by a margin of 63 percent to 34 percent.”

“In Red America churches are everywhere. In Blue America Thai restaurants are everywhere. In Red America they have QVC, the Pro Bowlers Tour, and hunting. In Blue America we have NPR, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and socially conscious investing.”
Starbucks and Walmart

Wal−Marts per capita

Starbucks per capita
Counterexample: Texas

Income and voting in Texas counties

Vote share for George Bush

$20,000 $40,000 $60,000 $80,000

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Collin

Austin

Zavala

Median household income within county

$20,000 $40,000 $60,000 $80,000
The Key to the Answer: Context Matters

- How wealthy you are affects how you vote (and think)
- But how much it does depends on where you live — context matters
- “Varying slopes”
  - Where people live conditions the individual effect of things like income differently
  - In some states the rich are very different from the poor but not in other states
  - Explains Maryland and Texas
Anna Karenina and the Paradox Solved

The graph shows the probability of voting for Bush among poor, middle-income, and rich voters in Mississippi, Ohio, and Connecticut. The probability increases from poor to rich voters in all three states.
These Effects are Systematically True
What if Only X Voted?

State winners (rich voters only)

State winners (middle-income voters)

State winners (poor voters only)
How Journalists See the Country

“One of the Republican Party’s major successes over the last few decades has been to persuade many of the working poor to vote for tax breaks for billionaires.” — Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times* columnist

“Who are the trustfunders? People with enough money not to have to work for a living, or not to have to work very hard. These people tend to be very liberal politically. . . .” — Michael Barone, author of the *Almanac of American Politics*
Thomas Frank and Kansas

![Graph showing vote for Bush by individual income in Kansas for 2000 and 2004. The graph indicates a trend where lower income groups are more likely to vote for Bush, and this trend increases with higher income levels.]
Thinking Like a Scientist

▶ What’s your evidence?
▶ How does this fit in with what else you know?
▶ What have you found beyond what people thought before?
▶ How did all those smart people who came before get things wrong?
Pauline Kael and Availability Bias

- “I can’t believe Nixon won. I don’t know anybody who voted for him.” — attributed (in error) to Pauline Kael, movie critic for the *New Yorker*

- *Availability bias*: the tendency to generalize based on nearby information
“It evidently irritates many liberals to point out that their party gets heavy support from superaffluent ‘people of fashion’ and does not run very well among ‘the common people.’” — Michael Barone

Second-order availability bias: generalizing from observed correlations

The people you know are high-income and vote Democratic. Therefore . . .
30 Years Ago, Things Were Different

1976 election

Republican vote by state in 1976

Vote share for Gerald Ford

Average income within state

30% 50% 70%

$15,000 $20,000

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Rich Voters Remain Republican

Vote among rich voters minus Republican vote among poor voters

- All Voters
- Southern Voters
- Non-Southern Voters
Rich States Now Vote for Democrats

Republican vote in rich states minus Republican vote in poor states

-20% 0 20%

All states

Southern states

Non-Southern states

1940 1960 1980 2000
Putting It Together

Rich-state, poor-state gap in Republican vote among poor, middle-income, and rich voters

Republican vote in poor states, minus Republican vote in rich states


0% 10% 20%

High-income voters
Middle-income voters
Low-income voters

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Incomplete Explanations for the Change in State Vote

- **Is it rich people who are changing?**
  - No. We showed that in the beginning

- **Is it race?**
  - Mostly no. Excluding blacks from the analysis diminishes the effects we see only partly

- **Is it the South?**
  - No. We see the effects in the South and outside of it.

- **Is it inequality?**
  - No. Interstate income inequality has changed little, and intrastate income inequality is more tied to immigration trends
Our explanation I

- The poor are similar across states; but the rich are different
  - In poor states, the rich are more socially and economically conservative than poor people.
  - In rich states, the rich are more economically conservative than poor people, but they’re more socially liberal, too (and less observant).
Our explanation II

- **Voters** haven’t changed within states — and **states** haven’t changed much either, but **parties** have
  - Parties are more polarized than they’ve ever been.
  - Democrats and Republicans are further apart than ever before.
  - Positions by elites are more uniform than they’ve been in the past. The end of Rockefeller Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats.

- Wealthy people in rich, blue states are conflicted in their party choice; hence the flat slope. Wealthy people in poor, red states are not conflicted in their party choice; hence the high slope.
“Opiate of the Masses” vs. “Postmaterialism”

- “I don’t know that atheists should be considered citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God.” — George H. W. Bush

- Opiate of the Masses: Rich people vote their interests, poor people vote “Gods, guns, and gays”

- Postmaterialism: Poor people vote based on economics, rich people have the luxury to vote on social issues
“Opiate” No, “Postmaterialism” Yes

Bush vote in 2004 by income and religious attendance

- Probability of voting for Bush
- Poor: 40%
- Middle-income: 50%
- Rich: 60%

if you attend church more than once/week
if you attend once or twice/month
if you never attend church
Takeaway points

- Democrats win rich states, but Republicans do better among richer voters within each state
- There really is something new under the political sun
  - What’s the matter with Connecticut?
  - If you want to understand the differences between states, study the wealthy
  - The culture war is real but is concentrated among upper-income voters
- It’s easy to get confused: “media center” states don’t look like the rest of the country
End — Time for Your Questions
Race Doesn’t Explain Things

Whites only: Rich–state, poor–state gap in Republican vote among poor, middle–income, and rich voters

- High-income white voters
- Middle-income white voters
- Low-income white voters
Religion and State Income

The scatter plot illustrates the relationship between average state religious attendance and average state income across different states. The x-axis represents average state income, ranging from $25,000 to $35,000, while the y-axis shows average state religious attendance, ranging from 2.5 to 3.5. Each state is labeled with its abbreviation, such as CA for California, NY for New York, and so on. The data points suggest a trend where states with higher incomes tend to have higher average religious attendance.
Inequality in the States
Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy

Partisan disagreement over the Iraq war

Percentage supporting the war

- Republicans
- Independents
- Democrats

2003 2004 2005 2006
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%
Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy

Support for Korean war

Support for Vietnam war

Percentage supporting the war

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%

Republicans

Democrats

1951 1952

1966 1968 1970

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Polarized Parties: Domestic Policy

Polarization on abortion by party

- Democrats
- Independents
- Republicans
Other Countries: Income and Voting

- **Asia and Oceania**: Australia, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan
- **Europe**: Bulgaria, Czech, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Belgium, Finland, Italy, Netherlands, Iceland, Switzerland
- **North and South America**: Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Canada, United States
Other Countries: Income, Religion, and Voting

Conservative vote, compared to national average

-25% 0 25%
Poor Rich Poor Rich Poor Rich Poor Rich Poor Rich Poor Rich

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