

Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State

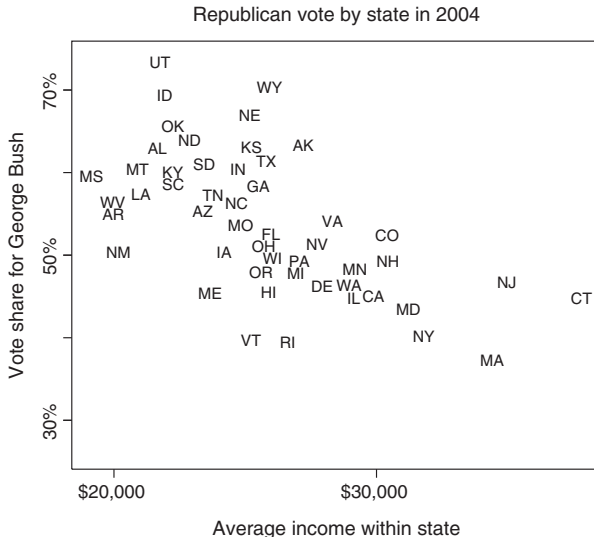
Why Americans Vote the Way They Do

Andrew Gelman

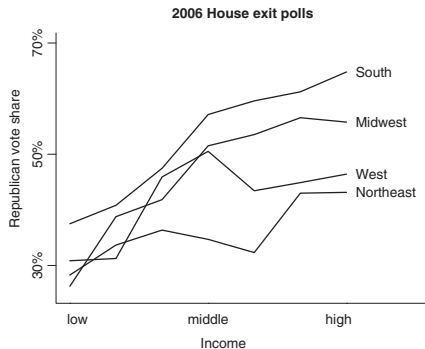
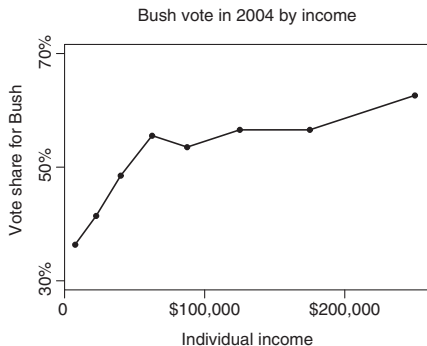
Department of Statistics and Department of Political Science, Columbia University

22 September 2008

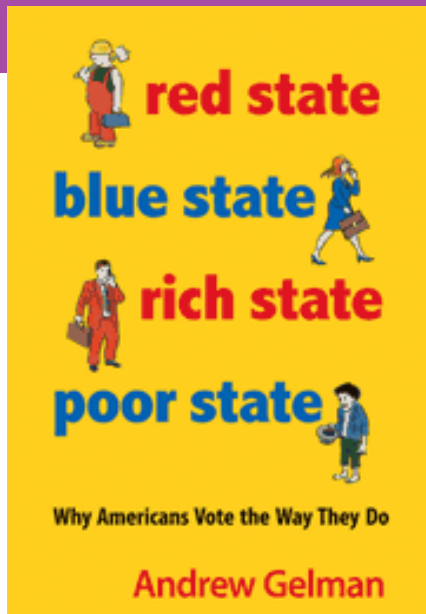
Rich States are More Democratic...



...But Rich People are More Republican!

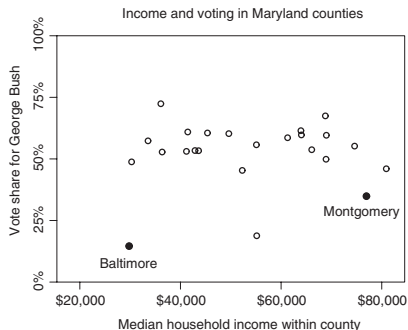


The Book



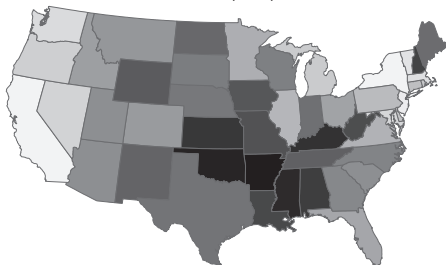
David Brooks and Maryland

- ▶ “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.”

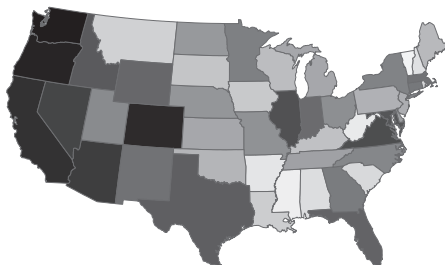


Starbucks and Walmart

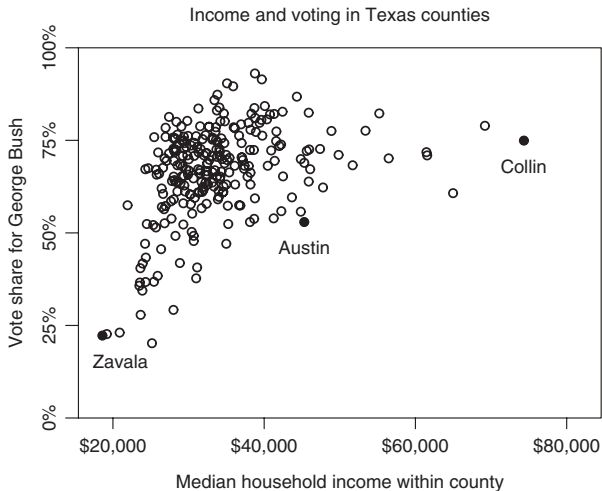
Wal-Marts per capita



Starbucks per capita



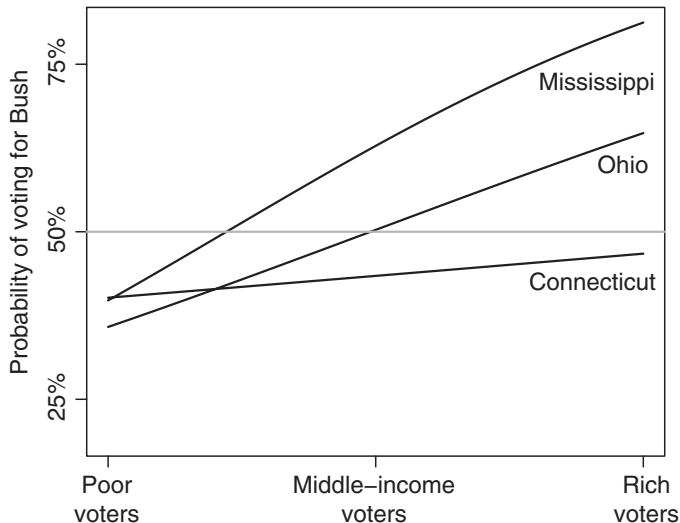
Counterexample: Texas



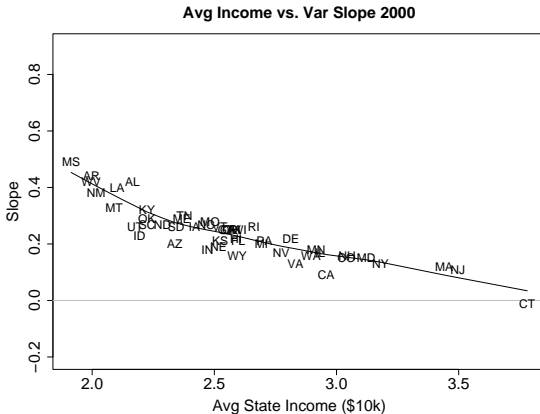
The Key to the Answer: Context Matters

- ▶ 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



These Effects are Systematically True



What if Only X Voted?

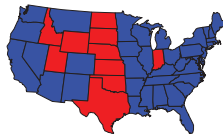
State winners (rich voters only)



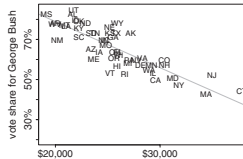
State winners (middle-income voters)



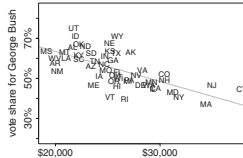
State winners (poor voters only)



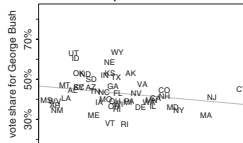
rich voters



middle-income voters



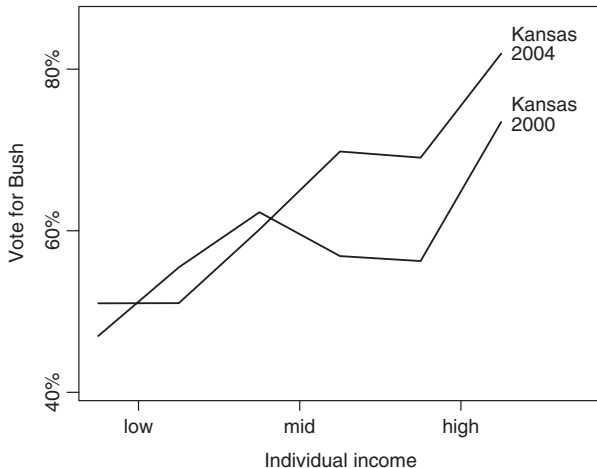
poor voters



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



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

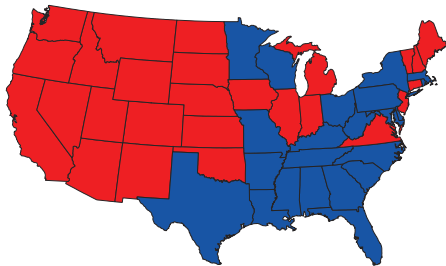
- ▶ “I can’t believe Nixon won. I don’t know anybody who voted for him.” — attributed (in error) to Pauline Kael, movie critic for the *New Yorker*
- ▶ *Availability bias*: the tendency to generalize based on nearby information

Michael Barone and Availability Bias

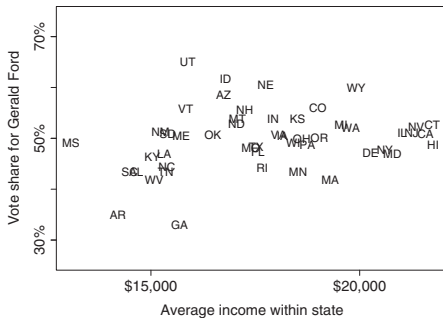
- ▶ “It evidently irritates many liberals to point out that their party gets heavy support from superaffluent ‘people of fashion’ and does not run very well among ‘the common people.’” — Michael Barone
- ▶ *Second-order* availability bias: generalizing from observed correlations
- ▶ The people you know are high-income and vote Democratic. Therefore . . .

30 Years Ago, Things Were Different

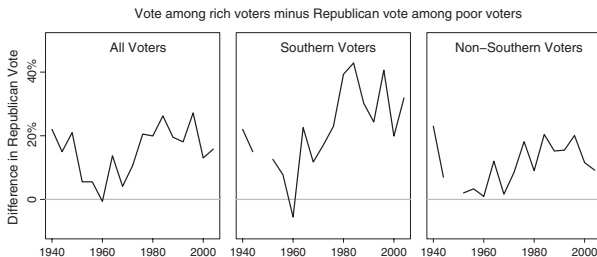
1976 election



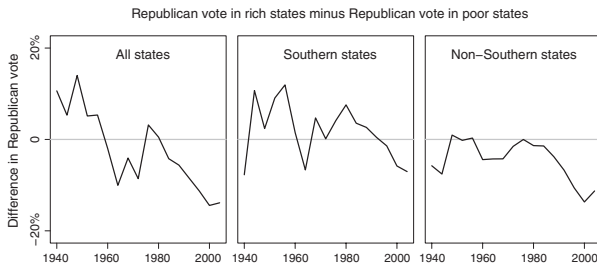
Republican vote by state in 1976



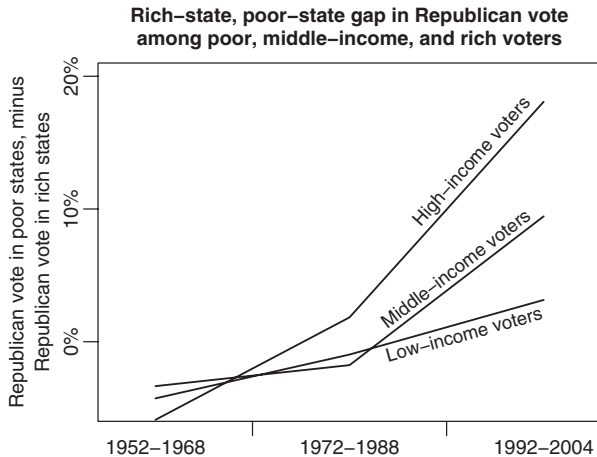
Rich Voters Remain Republican



Rich States Now Vote for Democrats



Putting It Together



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

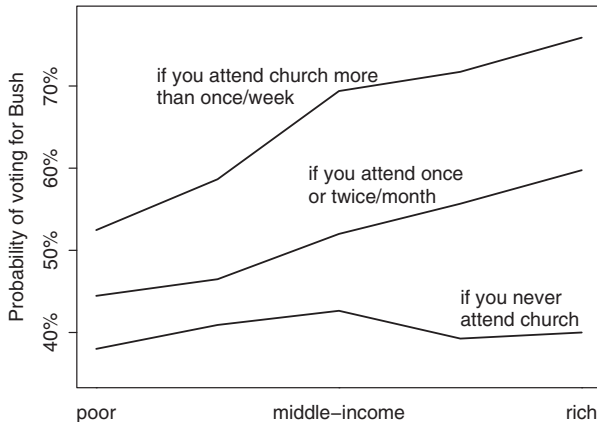
- ▶ *Voters* haven't changed within states — and *states* haven't changed much either, but *parties* have
 - ▶ Parties are more polarized than they've ever been.
 - ▶ Democrats and Republicans are further apart than ever before.
 - ▶ Positions by elites are more uniform than they've been in the past.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



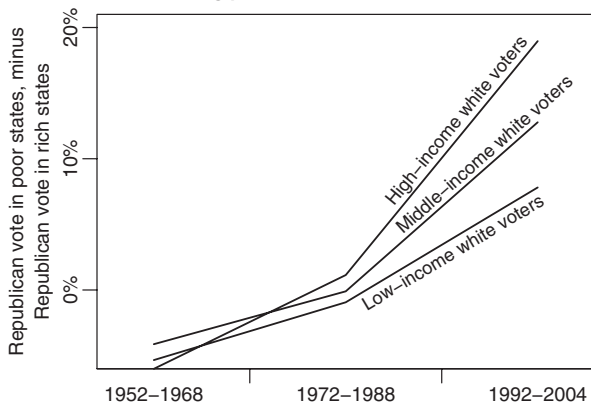
Takeaway points

- ▶ 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

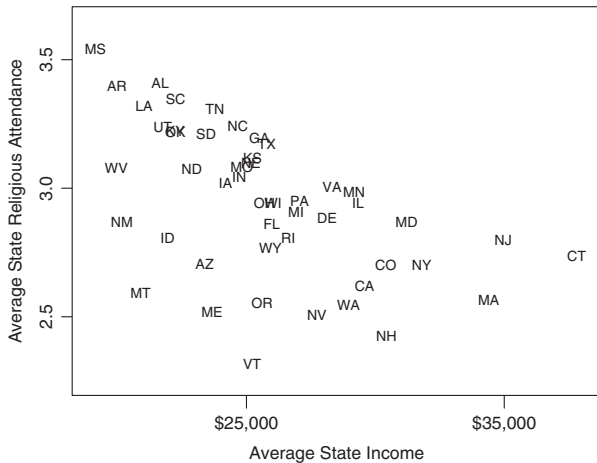
End — Time for Your Questions

Race Doesn't Explain Things

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

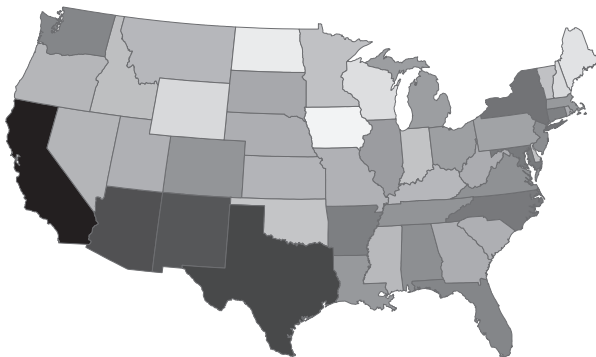


Religion and State Income

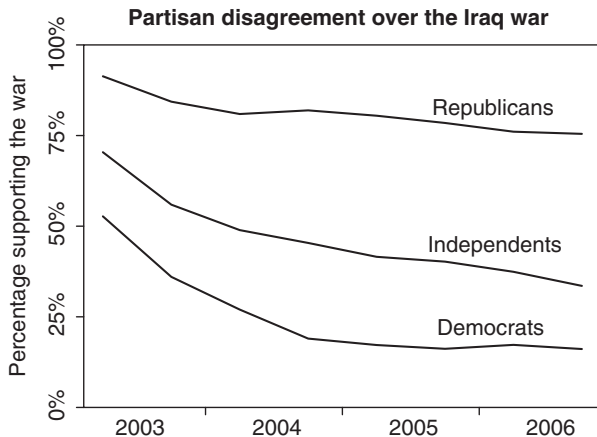


Inequality in the States

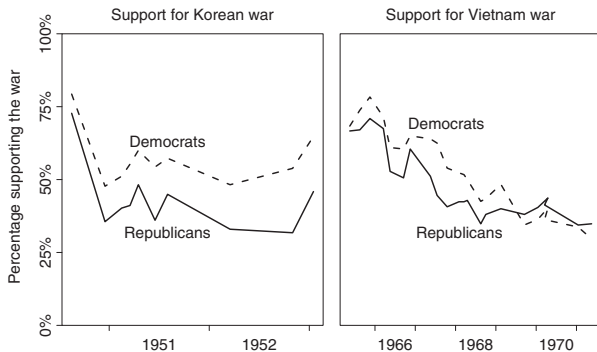
States with high and low income inequality



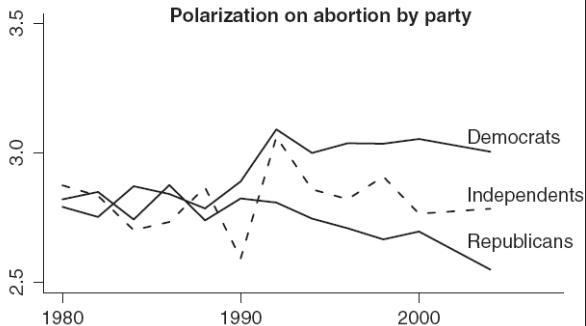
Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy



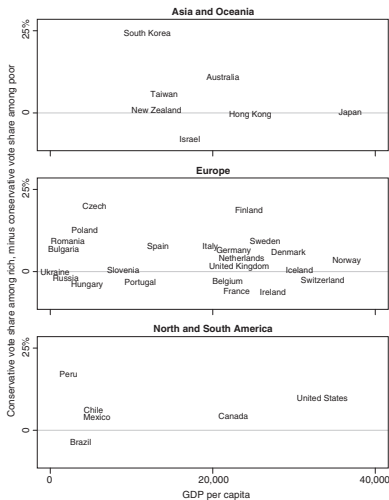
Polarized Parties: Foreign Policy



Polarized Parties: Domestic Policy



Other Countries: Income and Voting



Other Countries: Income, Religion, and Voting

