Unmoved Mover, Running Tally, or Malleable Anchor? A Reassessment of Partisanship's Long-Term Durability

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Abstract

Scholars have long debated whether partisanship is an "unmoved mover" that crystallizes in young adulthood, or a "running tally" that updates in response to the parties' performance and positions. To investigate both accounts by modeling durable, long-term partisan change, I analyze Monitoring the Future, a public health panel series that surveys annual cohorts of high school seniors up to thirteen times from ages 18 to 60. My results complicate both sides of the debate. Contrary to the unmoved-mover view, party ID moves by 0.41 (on a 0–1 scale) across a lifetime. Furthermore, movement after age 30 persists at roughly half the rate of young adulthood, challenging the "formative years" theory of partisan development. Yet contrary to the running-tally view, this movement rarely crosses party lines: Fewer than one in five partisans at age 20 identify with the opposite party by age 50. Most change instead reflects the strengthening or weakening of a consistent partisan orientation. I further show that the degree of absolute partisan movement among young adults has essentially remained at the same level since the 1970s, but that rates of partisan conversion have declined by one third over time. Finally, random-intercept cross-lagged panel models suggest that partisanship and both symbolic and operational ideology shape each other. In light of these findings, I argue that partisanship is best understood as a "malleable anchor" because it genuinely, durably changes throughout adulthood, but most change reflects consistent partisan orientations becoming stronger or weaker rather than voters changing sides.

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INTRODUCTION

While partisanship is widely recognized as one of the most important variables governing American political behavior, scholars have long debated the extent of its durability and influence. The traditional view, established more than six decades ago, holds that partisanship crystallizes in young adulthood and thereafter shapes voters' other, endogenous attitudes while remaining stable (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002). Scholars have come to refer to this conception as the "unmoved mover" (Johnston 2006). The revisionist account, in turn, has claimed that partisanship is an instrumental reflection of various substantive considerations, including a "running tally" of retrospective performance evaluations and assessments of one's ideological proximity to the parties (Fiorina 1981; Kollman and Jackson 2021).

Prior work, however, has had to address these questions with limited data. Available panels have either spanned too few years or included too few waves to distinguish durable change from short-term fluctuation. I introduce a long-running public health panel, Monitoring the Future (MTF), that has measured respondents' party identification up to thirteen times between ages 18 and 60. With this data, I track long-term change in party ID, separating durable movement from short-term fluctuations. Because MTF has begun tracking a new cohort every year since its inception, I can also track how partisan development in young adulthood has changed from the late 1970s to the 2010s.

My findings hold surprises for both the traditionalist and revisionist accounts, so I propose a synthesis. On the one hand, partisanship undergoes plenty of change over the course of voters' lives, and this movement is far less concentrated in the formative young adult years than the "unmoved mover" theory implies. On the other hand, movement for most voters is bounded between one party affiliation and independence—less than a fifth of partisans at age 20 identify

with the opposite party at age 50. These patterns are largely constant across cohorts: From 1976 to 2021, young voters' rates of party ID change have been stable, although party switching has become less common and young voters appear to be undergoing less short-term instability. Finally, analyses using random-intercept cross-lagged panel models suggest that partisanship has significant influence over symbolic and operational ideology, but it also appears endogenous to them.

Ultimately, I argue partisanship is best understood as a malleable anchor. It is "malleable" because it genuinely and durably changes across adulthood, shaped in part by symbolic and operational ideology. However, it remains an "anchor" because most change reflects the strengthening or weakening of a consistent partisan orientation rather than conversion to the opposite party, and party ID itself exerts considerable influence on voters' broader political beliefs. These patterns appear largely unchanged across 33 cohorts spanning decades of rising polarization, suggesting that this conception of partisanship generalizes across political contexts.

BACKGROUND

The concept of party *identification* is foundational to contemporary political science because of the case made by Campbell et al. (1960) for party ID as an "affective orientation to an important group-object" (121). In their seminal work, Campbell et al. characterize party ID as a psychological attachment based on its over-time stability, substantial intergenerational transmission, and strong influence on political evaluations and vote choice. They further demonstrated the value of measuring strength of attachment in addition to direction: Strong identifiers showed greater partisan loyalty and political interest. While much of their evidence came from respondents' recollections of prior votes and parental partisanship, later research bolstered their claims by measuring party ID directly at multiple points in time and finding

considerable stability, as well as finding considerable alignment between the measured party IDs of adolescents and their parents (Converse 1969; Jennings and Niemi 1968). Thus, the advancements of the 1960s Michigan School in studying public opinion established the traditional view of partisanship as what Johnston (2006) would later term an "unmoved mover."

In response to this conventional wisdom, a "revisionist" school emerged to question whether party ID was truly as stable and insulated from other attitudes as many claimed. Research began to indicate that partisanship was responsive to voters' policy preferences and party evaluations (Brody and Rothenberg 1988; Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Page and Jones 1979). These findings suggested party ID, while influential, was meaningfully shaped by factors that had previously been seen as byproducts of partisanship. Critically, these challenges emerged in an era of apparent partisan "dealignment," with fewer Americans identifying as Republicans and Democrats and an apparent decline in the influence of partisanship on voter behavior (Abramson 1976; Nie et al. 1976; Wattenberg 1984).

In response to these critiques, the traditional school argued that both the apparent instability of party ID and its responsiveness to voter evaluations were largely artifacts of measurement error (Green and Palmquist 1990; Schickler and Green 1995; Green et al. 2002). Evidence from the symbolic politics literature bolstered the traditional characterization of partisanship as a powerful symbolic attachment acquired early in life (Sears 1993; Sears and Funk 1999). In the meantime, partisan loyalty saw a resurgence (Bartels 2000), and rising partisan conflict bolstered the traditionalist view of party ID as primarily a social identity (Achen and Bartels 2017; Huddy et al. 2015; Mason 2018; cf. Fowler et al. 2026; Orr and Huber 2020).

Nevertheless, scholars continue to debate the degree to which partisanship influences substantive attitudes and vice versa—evidence of the former supports the traditional view, while

the latter supports the revisionists. In brief, prior work has found evidence suggesting causal influence in both directions, with considerable variation over time, domain, and degree of issue salience (Carsey and Layman 2006; Engelhardt 2021; Goren 2005; Highton and Kam 2011; Zingher 2022).

Prior Data Limitations in Studying Partisan Stability

This paper focuses primarily on the partisan *stability* component of the traditional-revisionist debate (but see Analysis #4). Previous work has most commonly measured stability with inter-wave correlation coefficients or R^2 estimates for party ID at two different points. Higher stability estimates are interpreted as showing stronger attitude durability, and party ID shows some of the highest stability of any survey measure used in political science research (Green et al. 2002).

However, these findings are predominantly based on panels that are short in duration, such as the 1956–1960, 1972–1976, and 1992–1996 ANES panels. As scholars readily acknowledge, using these short-term datasets to learn about party ID's long-term durability requires considerable extrapolation. Green and Platzman (2024) recently conducted similar analyses on three panels from the 2010s that span up to a full decade, but they still emphasize that they cannot rule out "substantial changes" over a longer timespan (397).

A handful of panel datasets have tracked individual party ID for an extended period: the Bennington College Study (1935–1984), the Terman Study of the Gifted (1940–1977), and the Youth-Parent Socialization Study (1965–1997). However, these panels face a different problem: They have too few waves to assess over-time change in partisanship with precision (see Figure 2). These panels contain, at best, one wave per decade, so they cannot support the kind of modeling of durable change that can be done with denser wave coverage (see Bartels et al. 2011; Green and Platzman 2024).

Unfortunately, pairwise correlations also provide less clear information about the degree of genuine change over time, because the longer-time span correlations are far lower than those seen in short-term panels.[1] This could indicate greater change over the long term, but lower inter-wave correlations do not necessarily indicate that more durable partisan change has occurred—the difference could be driven by transient, short-term fluctuations instead. Indeed, scholars who differentiate between the persistence and transience of party ID find that most movement is in fact a short-term shift that reverts back in subsequent waves (Green et al. 2002; Green and Yoon 2002; Bartels et al. 2011; cf. Wawro 2002; Kiley and Vaisey 2020). Thus, relatively modest or moderate correlations based on data spanning a long time may provide a stronger impression of durable party change than is warranted.

The core issue is that, when only comparing party ID measured at start and end points, researchers cannot assess whether apparent movement represents persistent over-time change, temporary fluctuations, or respondent uncertainty and other sources of measurement error. This limitation applies to both inter-wave correlations and inter-wave crosstabs, as Green and Palmquist (1994) note, while lamenting, "This is unfortunate because it would be useful to get a sense of how far individuals actually move along the partisan continuum" (452). Thus, researchers who wish to differentiate between durable movement and short-term change over a lifetime require a panel that both spans several decades and has granular enough wave coverage.

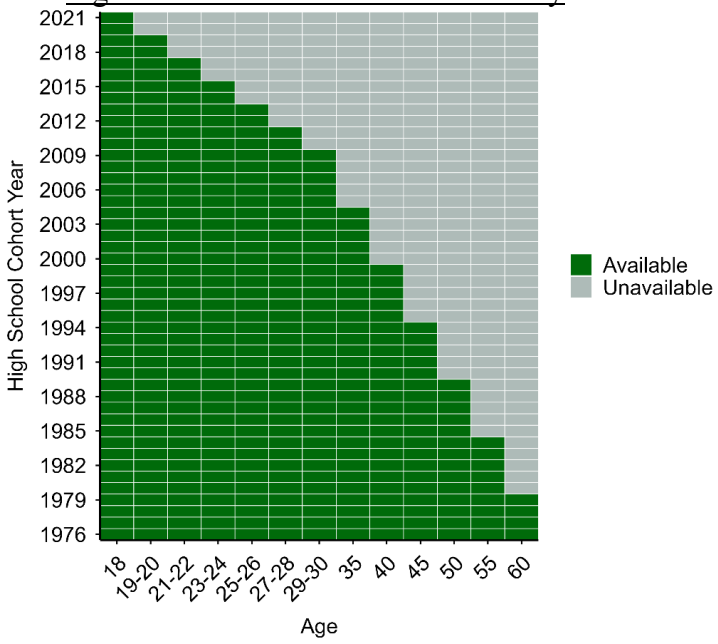
DATA

Monitoring the Future (MTF) is a long-term study of adolescents' behaviors and attitudes, with a primary focus on substance use (Patrick et al. 2026). Since 1976, MTF has conducted annual cross-sectional surveys of eighth, tenth, and twelfth graders. From each year's base of 15,000 high

[1] The inter-wave correlations of each panel's first and last measure of party ID for the Bennington, Terman, and Youth-Parent Socialization panels are .50, .50, and .29, respectively.

school seniors, MTF recruits a random sample of approximately 2,450 respondents for follow-up waves. MTF re-surveys these panelists every two years from ages 19 to 30 and then every five years from ages 35 to 60.[2] Even with attrition, sample sizes for each cohort rival those of ANES panels, and merging multiple cohorts together provides substantial statistical power.[3] Thus, as Figure 1 illustrates, MTF panel data provides seven-wave coverage of voters from ages 18 to 30 every year from 1976–2008, ages 18 to 50 every year from 1976–1989, and ages 18 to 60 from 1976–1979.

Figure 1: MTF Panel Data Availability

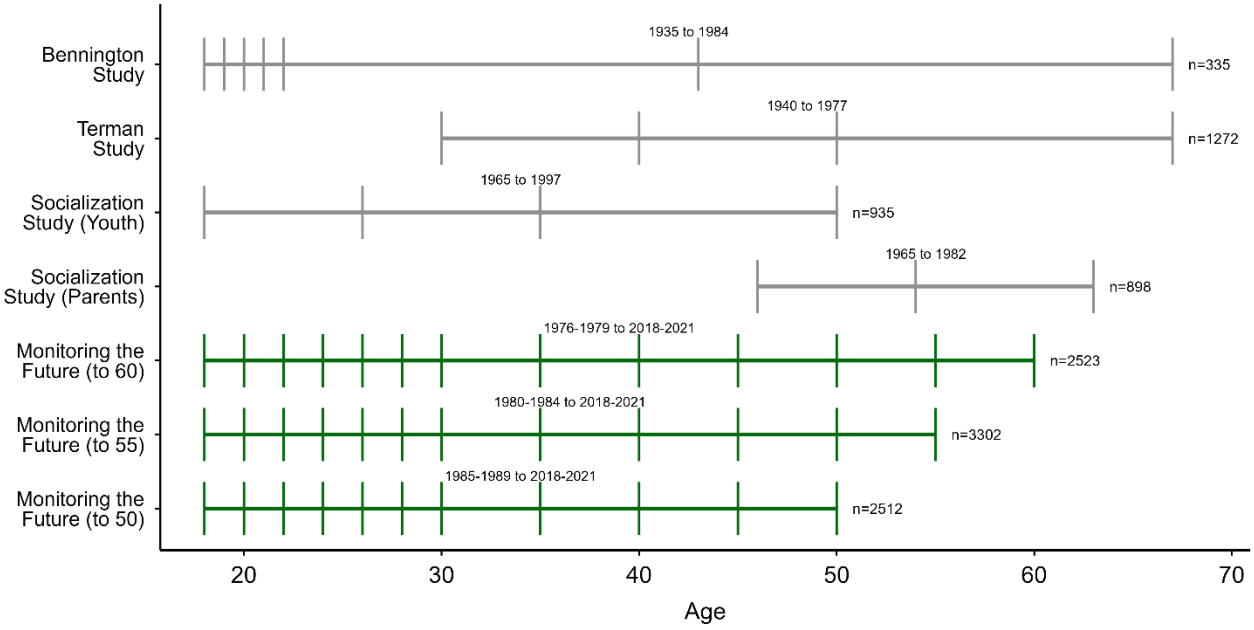


MTF panel data has scarcely been used in political science scholarship—to my knowledge, only one political science paper has previously analyzed it (Wray-Lake et al. 2019). Without question, that should change. As Figure 2 illustrates, MTF panel data dramatically expands our ability to study long-term political development at the individual level without facing the trade-off

[2] Half of each cohort is randomly assigned to receive their first follow-up survey one year after twelfth grade and then to be re-surveyed every two years from ages 19 to 29. The other half receives follow-up waves starting two years after high school, participating every other year from ages 20 to 30. After age 30, all panelists participate in the remaining waves at the same ages: 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, and 60.
[3] Sample sizes for all analyses are listed in Appendix A.

of either short panel duration or sparse wave coverage. Furthermore, because MTF begins a fresh panel each year, researchers can compare dozens of cohorts to properly test whether their results generalize across samples and over time.

Figure 2: Panels Tracking Long-Term Party ID



However, MTF also has limitations. Unlike many panels used to study political socialization, this panel was primarily designed to study the long-term consequences of substance use, not the development of political attitudes. This may help avoid priming respondents to think about politics in their answers, but it comes at the cost of unconventional measurement. Whereas many items on the Youth-Parent Socialization Study are identical to those used by the American National Election Studies, MTF items do not match the ANES or any other benchmark surveys.

The most important difference for this paper is MTF's measure of party ID. Partisanship is typically measured with a two-question branching sequence that results in a seven-point scale. The first item asks whether respondents identify with a party. The second item then asks identifiers about the strength of their identification, or it asks non-identifiers whether they lean toward the Republican or Democratic Party. By contrast, MTF uses only one item to measure partisanship:

"How would you describe your political preference?" Respondents choose among "strongly" or "mildly" Republican or Democrat, as well as four other options that I code at the midpoint.[4] Thus, the MTF party ID item differs from standard measures and has a coarser five-point scale. Nevertheless, prior work has found comparable results when using seven- and three-point party ID (e.g., Green et al. 2002). Therefore, I proceed with five-point party ID with some confidence that the measure will not distort the findings shown below. I code it from 0 for strong Republicans to 1 for strong Democrats (meaning adjacent categories are 0.25 apart).

A final limitation of MTF data is one that, to some degree, affects all panels: respondent attrition. While the analyses below use MTF's attrition weights to account for respondents dropping out of the panel, these weights do not necessarily ensure politically disengaged respondents are properly represented. Therefore, attrition may be concentrated among less politically engaged respondents with less stable party IDs. However, this paper primarily tracks durable change rather than short-term instability, and attrition should mainly affect the latter.

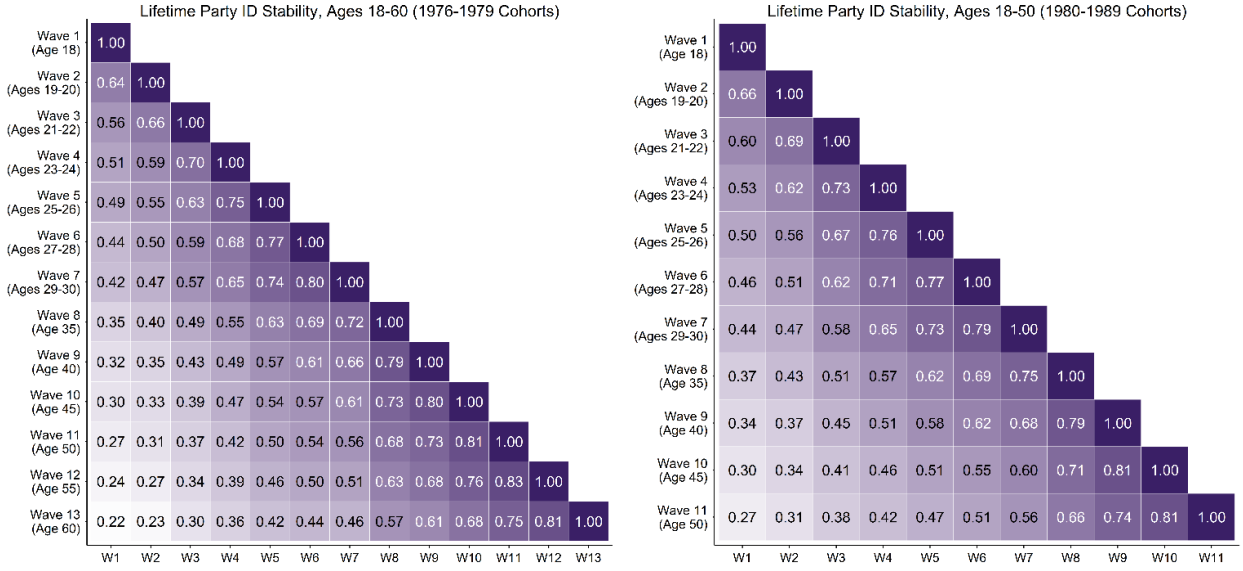
ANALYSIS #1: HOW MUCH DOES PARTY ID CHANGE OVER A LIFETIME?

I begin with the four cohorts who have been surveyed through age 60 and the ten additional cohorts observed through at least age 50. This provides a sample of respondents who came of age every year from 1976 to 1989. Figure 3 presents listwise correlation matrices for the 1980–1989 and 1976–1979 cohorts. Adjacent inter-wave correlations rise from around .65 for ages 18–20 to about .80 in full adulthood. Correlations decay steadily across longer time spans, with party ID at ages 18 and 50–60 correlating at .22–.27.[5] As discussed above, however, these low correlations do not necessarily mean there has been a great deal of durable party ID change.

[4] In the following analyses, the options "independent," "no preference," "other," and "don't know, haven't decided" are all coded at 0.5.

[5] Encouragingly, the inter-wave correlations of .27 from ages 18–50 shown in Figure 3 are quite consistent with the Youth-Parent Socialization Study, which shows a .29 correlation between party ID at ages 18 (1965) and 50 (1997).

Figure 3: Lifetime Party ID Inter-Wave Correlation Matrix



Matrices are based on respondents who participated in all waves (N=2,523 for 1976-1979 cohorts; N=5,822 for 1980-1989 cohorts).

Estimating Long-Term Party ID Change (Linear and Hierarchical Approaches)

Because Figure 3 does not provide evidence on how much meaningful over-time change has occurred, I use two approaches to assess long-term change. The first is an adaptation of Green and Platzman's (2024) linear trend approach. This analysis measures the degree to which each panelist's party ID moves in a consistent direction over time, as opposed to minimal or haphazard movement. Specifically, Green and Platzman fit separate regressions for each panelist's responses, with party ID on the left-hand side and wave count on the right. The idea is that respondents who either do not undergo party change or move randomly without deviating from their underlying affiliation will have tiny coefficients, while respondents who durably move will have larger coefficients.

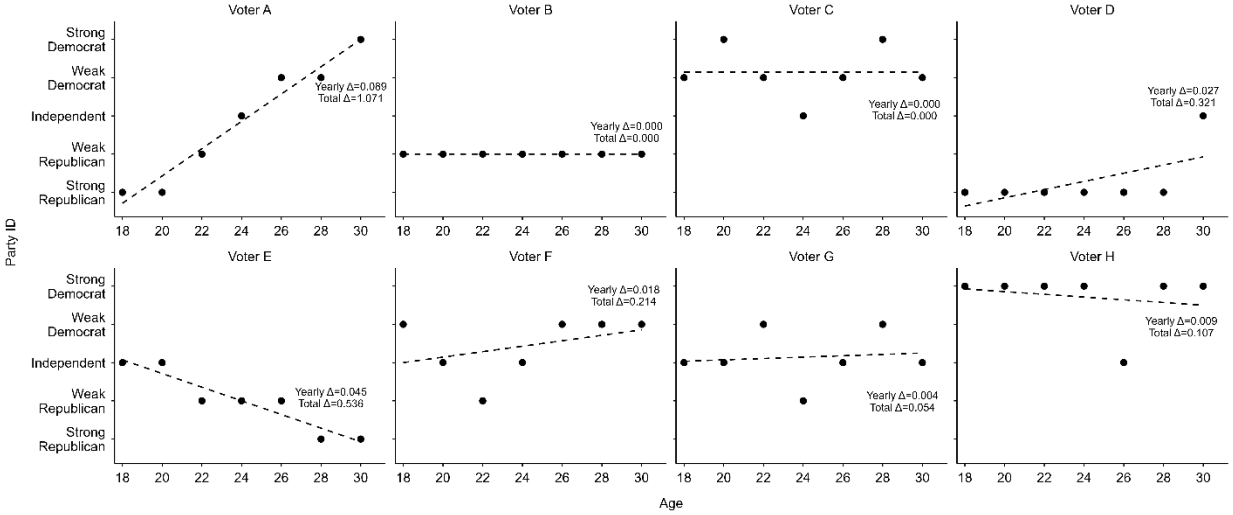
Equation #1 shows what a simple adaptation of Green and Platzman's (2024) approach looks like for this study: The same individual regressions are run for each panelist, but with respondent age swapped in for wave number to account for differences in the amount of time between waves. With this, δ_i provides an estimate of a respondent's yearly rate of long-term party

ID change. Taking the absolute value of δ_i provides the absolute magnitude of change, absent direction, and multiplying $|\delta_i|$ by the length of the time series results in an individual estimate of how much that respondent's partisanship moved from start to finish.

$$PartyID_{it} = \alpha_i + \delta_i(Age_{it} - 18) + e_{it} \qquad (1)$$

Figure 4 shows this approach being applied to eight simulated voters across the first seven MTF waves. The figure contains several examples of the approach working as intended: Voters B and C undergo zero and fully haphazard movement, respectively, and as a result they have δ_i values of 0. Voters A and E steadily move their partisanship over time and therefore receive substantially higher δ_i values that, when multiplied by the 12-year timespan, roughly correspond to their degree of movement. Finally, Voter D is a steady, strong Republican for six waves before identifying as an independent at age 30. A simple cross-tabulation of Waves 1 and 7 would indicate Voters D and E changed by the same amount, but modeling the movement as a linear trend allows us to differentiate between these patterns.

Figure 4: Measuring Partisan Movement with Individual OLS Regressions



Figures are based on eight simulated responses. Yearly Δ = δ_i from Equation #1. Total Δ = Yearly Δ × 12.

However, these examples also demonstrate two problems with the OLS approach. First, these slopes are noisy estimates of individual trajectories. With only seven coarse observations of

party ID, estimation error will distort estimates of δ_i. This can be seen by comparing Voters C and G: Both undergo seemingly directionless fluctuation, but Voter G's ordering results in a modestly higher absolute trajectory that could easily be attributed to residual noise. Similarly, Voters D and H exhibit the same level of stability, but because Voter D's single deviation occurred near the end of the time series, they are estimated to have a much larger change-over-time trajectory than H.

Crucially, for respondents with genuinely flat trajectories ($\delta_i = 0$), positive and negative errors should cancel each other out when calculating the mean level of *directional* change ($\hat{\delta}_i$). However, the key estimand is the degree of *absolute* change, estimated by averaging $|\hat{\delta}_i|$. As a result of taking absolute values of coefficients, the same errors will no longer offset each other and should mechanically overstate the amount of long-term change.

Second, the model's linearity assumption can fit some trajectories poorly. For example, Voter F begins as a Democrat, temporarily switches to the Republican Party, and then returns to the Democratic side. The OLS model treats this trajectory as modest long-term movement. This is not quite incorrect—Voter F shifts from being an unstable Democrat to a stable Democrat—but it is clearly imprecise.

Given these limitations, I replace individual OLS regressions with a hierarchical trajectory model. This allows me to separate between-respondent variation in trajectories and within-respondent deviations from those trajectories, ensuring residual variation is not automatically treated as genuine long-term change. Instead of estimating each panelist's movement separately, I use a single model that estimates the average population-wide trajectory while allowing individual-level deviations (see Equation #2). Specifically, fixed effects β_0 and β_1 estimate, respectively, the average starting party ID and yearly directional movement, while the random intercept (b_{0i}) and slope (b_{1i}) estimate respondent-specific deviations from the averages.

$$PartyID_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(Age_{it} - 18) + b_{0i} + b_{1i}(Age_{it} - 18) + \epsilon_{it} \qquad (2)$$

Assuming each random effect pair (b_{0i}, b_{1i}) is drawn from a bivariate normal distribution centered at 0 (see Equation #3), I can use restricted maximum likelihood estimation across the complete set of respondent-wave observations to estimate the model's variance components, including $Var(b_{1i})$. Because I assume a bivariate normal distribution, this implies $b_{1i} \sim N(0, Var(b_{1i}))$. Finally, the model uses partial pooling: Panelists with large but noisy estimated trajectories (such as Voter D in Figure 4) will be pulled more strongly toward the estimated population trajectory compared to those with more internally consistent response histories.

$$\begin{pmatrix} b_{0i} \\ b_{1i} \end{pmatrix} \sim \mathrm{N}\left(\begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} \mathrm{Var}(b_{0i}) & \mathrm{Cov}(b_{0i}, b_{1i}) \\ \mathrm{Cov}(b_{0i}, b_{1i}) & \mathrm{Var}(b_{1i}) \end{pmatrix}\right) \qquad (3)$$

Recall that the goal is to estimate panelists' average absolute trajectory. If $\gamma_i = \beta_1 + b_{1i}$, this estimand is represented by $E(|\gamma|)$. Given this, the addition of constant β_1 to the distribution of b_{1i} simply yields $\gamma_i \sim N(\beta_1, Var(b_{1i}))$. With this estimated normal distribution of individual-level trajectories, I can estimate $E(|\gamma_i|)$ from the folded mean of that distribution, via Equation #4:

$$E(|\gamma_i|) = \sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(b_{1i})}\sqrt{\frac{2}{\pi}}\exp\left(\frac{-\beta_1^2}{2\mathrm{Var}(b_{1i})}\right) + \beta_1\left[2\Phi\left(\frac{\beta_1}{\sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(b_{1i})}}\right) - 1\right] \qquad (4)$$

Thus, $E(|\gamma_i|)$ provides our estimation of the expected amount of durable party ID movement per year ($\Delta\, Yearly$). With this, I can also estimate the total amount of cumulative movement ($\Delta\, Total$) by simply multiplying $\Delta\, Yearly$ by the number of years in the time series.

In Appendix B, I compare OLS and hierarchical model estimates for each 18–30 cohort from 1976 to 2008. My results illustrate the benefit of the hierarchical approach. The two estimates of average *directional* movement closely align for each cohort, which indicates the hierarchical

models and partial pooling accurately replicate the overall trajectories shown by simple, individual regressions. Critically, however, the hierarchical models consistently produce lower estimates of *absolute* movement. This suggests the hierarchical approach substantially reduces the tendency of noise to inflate estimated absolute change.

The hierarchical model still assumes that underlying change is approximately linear—a particularly tenuous assumption when estimating change across multiple decades. Therefore, when estimating long-term movement from ages 18 to 50–60 below, I partially relax that assumption and allow respondents' trajectories to have two distinct linear segments: one from ages 18 to 30 and another from age 30 onwards. To do so, I define:

- $Young_{it} = \min(Age_{it} - 18, 12)$, which increases from zero to twelve from ages 18–30 and remains at twelve thereafter; and
- $Adult_{it} = \max(Age_{it} - 30, 0)$, which remains at zero until age 30, at which point it begins increasing by one each year.

I then modify Equation #2 to form a continuous piecewise model containing corresponding fixed and random effects for *both* trajectories:

$$PartyID_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_Y\, Young_{it} + \beta_A\, Adult_{it} + b_{0i} + b_{Yi}\, Young_{it} + b_{Ai}\, Adult_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \qquad (5)$$

Consistent with my prior definition of γ_i, Equation #5 contains respondents' latent slopes for both young adulthood and full adulthood in the form of $\gamma_{Yi} = \beta_Y + b_{Yi}$ and $\gamma_{Ai} = \beta_A + b_{Ai}$. Using the same procedures described for Equations #3–4, I then estimate both $E(|\gamma_{Yi}|)$ and $E(|\gamma_{Ai}|)$.

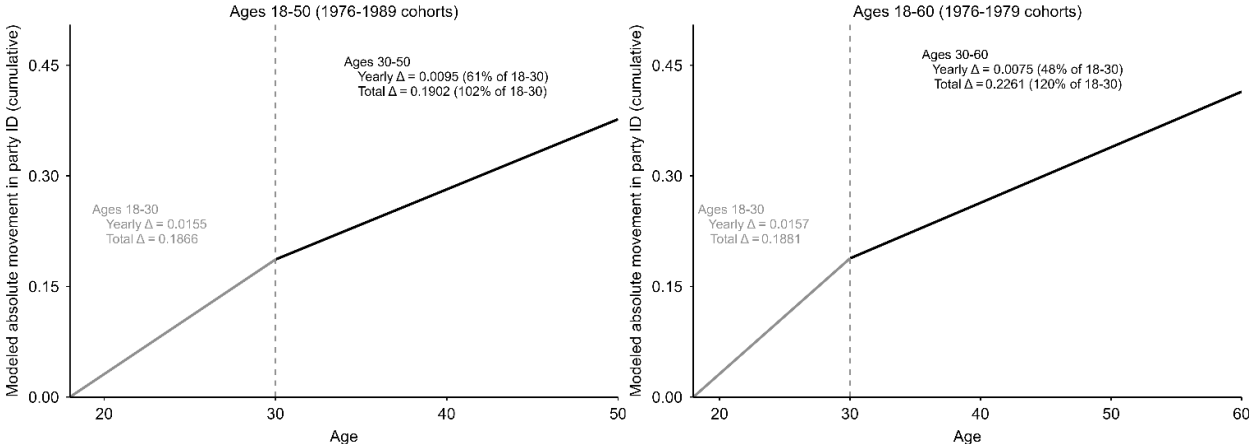
$$\gamma_{Yi} \sim N\big(\beta_Y, \mathrm{Var}(b_{Yi})\big) \qquad (6a)$$
$$\gamma_{Ai} \sim N\big(\beta_A, \mathrm{Var}(b_{Ai})\big) \qquad (6b)$$

$$E(|\gamma_{Yi}|) = \sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(b_{Yi})}\sqrt{\frac{2}{\pi}}\exp\left(-\frac{\beta_Y^2}{2\mathrm{Var}(b_{Yi})}\right) + \beta_Y\left[2\Phi\left(\frac{\beta_Y}{\sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(b_{Yi})}}\right) - 1\right] \qquad (7a)$$

$$E(|\gamma_{Ai}|) = \sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(b_{Ai})}\sqrt{\frac{2}{\pi}}\exp\left(-\frac{\beta_A^2}{2\mathrm{Var}(b_{Ai})}\right) + \beta_A\left[2\Phi\left(\frac{\beta_A}{\sqrt{\mathrm{Var}(b_{Ai})}}\right) - 1\right] \qquad (7b)$$

Splitting at age 30 has the additional benefit of providing directly comparable estimates of long-term party ID movement before and after age 30, allowing for a direct test of the "formative years" account of party ID development. Thus, in Figure 5 below, I display $\Delta\, Yearly$ and $\Delta\, Total$ estimates for both young adulthood and full adulthood from ages 18–50 and 18–60.

Figure 5: Modeled Partisan Movement in Young Adulthood and Beyond



Figures visualize the estimated average individual (absolute) trajectory of party ID, as determined by hierarchical models (see Equations #5-7b). For ages 18-30, Yearly Δ = $E(|\gamma_{Yi}|)$ from Equation #7a, and Total Δ = Yearly Δ × 12. For ages 30+, Yearly Δ = $E(|\gamma_{Ai}|)$ from Equation #7b, and Total Δ = Yearly Δ × 20 (ages 30-50) or Yearly Δ × 30. Analyses were conducted based on all respondents who participated in at least two waves ($N_{1976\text{-}1989}$=29,938, $N_{1976\text{-}1979}$=8,601); partial pooling reduces the influence of respondents with fewer completed waves.

In young adulthood, the average respondent's party ID durably moves by 0.19 (on a 0–1 scale) by age 30. After age 30, the yearly rate of change falls by around 39 percent from ages 30–50 and by 52 percent from ages 30–60. However, because this time span lasts longer than young adulthood, this means that cumulative durable movement after age 30 matches or exceeds the movement in young adulthood: 0.19 from ages 30–50 and 0.23 from ages 30–60. Thus, durable partisan change slows down after the formative years, but by no more than half the pace of young adulthood. Ultimately, the average respondent's party ID cumulatively moves by more than a third of the 0-to-1 party ID scale across their lifetime.

Absolute Change in Party ID: Multi-Item Approach

The preceding estimates rely on a hierarchical model and several assumptions. Given this, I investigate whether a simpler approach—reducing measurement error with multi-item measures of partisanship—produces similar results (see Ansolabehere et al. 2008). While party ID is only measured once each wave, I follow Green and Platzman (2024) and take the average of party ID values across three adjacent waves. Specifically, I average party ID at ages 18, 20, and 22 to measure partisanship at age 20; ages 28, 30, and 35 to measure partisanship at age 30; and ages 45, 50, and 55 to measure partisanship at age 50.

Of course, estimating party ID at a single point in time based on three survey responses spanning up to ten years is relatively imprecise. Nevertheless, this loss of precision is made up for by the benefit of requiring fewer assumptions about the forms and distributions of long-term party ID trajectories. These two approaches are therefore complementary analyses.

I estimate long-term party ID change in both young and full adulthood from the following formulas:

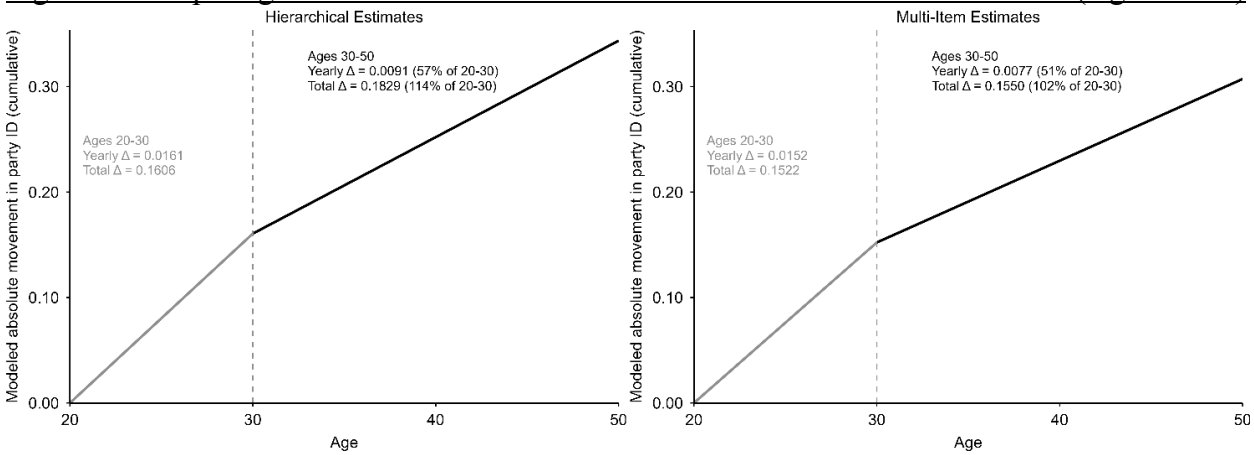
$$\Delta\, Total_Y = |\text{PartyID}_{28-30-35} - \text{PartyID}_{18-20-22}| \quad (8a)$$
$$\Delta\, Total_A = |\text{PartyID}_{45-50-55} - \text{PartyID}_{28-30-35}| \quad (8b)$$

I also adapt the hierarchical models described above to focus on ages 20 to 50, and I run both analyses on the same cohorts: 1976–1984, which is the full set of cohorts that have completed the MTF's twelfth wave at age 55.

As Figure 6 shows, the two approaches arrive at similar estimates. While the multi-item estimates of long-term change are slightly smaller than the hierarchical estimates, they reproduce most of the change estimated by the hierarchical model (0.152 vs. 0.161 from 20–30; 0.155 vs. 0.183 from 30–50). Furthermore, they continue to demonstrate that, after age 30, party ID continues to change at roughly half the rate of young adulthood. Thus, although the hierarchical

and multi-item methods both have limitations, they produce roughly the same findings, suggesting the results are not artifacts of a particular modeling strategy.

Figure 6: Comparing Hierarchical and Multi-Item Estimates of Partisan Movement (Ages 20-50)



Figures visualize the estimated average individual (absolute) trajectory of party ID. Left-side estimates come from hierarchical models (see Equations #5-7b, N=18,195); right-side estimates come from the multi-item approach (see Equations #8a-8b, N=6,382). For ages 20-30 (left), Yearly Δ = $E(|\gamma_{Yi}|)$ from Equation #7a, and Total Δ = Yearly Δ × 10. For ages 30-50, Yearly Δ = $E(|\gamma_{Ai}|)$ from Equation #7b, and Total Δ = Yearly Δ × 20. For ages 20-30 (right), Total Δ comes from Equation #8a, and Yearly Δ = Total Δ ÷ 10. For ages 30-50 (right), Total Δ comes from Equation #8b, and Yearly Δ = Total Δ ÷ 20.

ANALYSIS #2: HOW MUCH PARTY ID MOVEMENT IS PARTISAN CONVERSION?

The multi-item measures of partisanship provide an additional benefit: They allow for a closer investigation of the kinds of party ID movement occurring, rather than just gauging its overall magnitude. The $\Delta\, Total$ estimates of Analysis #1 do not differentiate between party ID strengthening and weakening, movement to and from independence, and outright flipping from Republican to Democrat or vice versa.

Prior work has often analyzed these changes using simple cross-tabulations of partisanship at multiple waves (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Jennings and Markus 1984; Sears and Funk 1999). However, as Green and Palmquist (1994) warn, "[T]here is no direct way to distinguish between real change and measurement error in cross-tabular presentations" (451). Since multi-item measures mitigate measurement error and other short-term instability, they allow me to overcome this limitation.

Table 1: Partisan Conversion, Ages 20 to 50 (1976–1984 cohorts)

Ages 20–30

	Democrat (Age 20)	Independent (Age 20)	Republican (Age 20)
Democrat (Age 30)	15.4% (14.6%)	9.1% (9.9%)	1.3% (2.2%)
Independent (Age 30)	6.2% (5.4%)	29.7% (28.0%)	4.1% (4.3%)
Republican (Age 30)	2.9% (5.0%)	14.4% (13.9%)	16.8% (16.8%)

Baseline at Age 20	Outcome at Age 30	Share
Partisan	Maintain party ID	69.0% (65.0%)
	Become independent	22.0% (20.1%)
	Flip party ID	9.0% (14.9%)
Independent	Remain independent	55.8% (54.0%)
	Acquire party ID	44.2% (46.0%)

Ages 30–50

	Democrat (Age 30)	Independent (Age 30)	Republican (Age 30)
Democrat (Age 50)	18.1% (17.3%)	8.4% (8.0%)	1.9% (3.6%)
Independent (Age 50)	4.8% (5.0%)	20.8% (20.9%)	5.6% (6.3%)
Republican (Age 50)	3.0% (4.4%)	10.8% (8.8%)	26.7% (25.8%)

Baseline at Age 30	Outcome at Age 50	Share
Partisan	Maintain party ID	74.7% (69.1%)
	Become independent	17.2% (18.0%)
	Flip party ID	8.0% (12.9%)
Independent	Remain independent	52.0% (55.5%)
	Acquire party ID	48.0% (44.5%)

Ages 20–50

	Democrat (Age 20)	Independent (Age 20)	Republican (Age 20)
Democrat (Age 50)	12.9% (12.1%)	12.5% (12.9%)	2.9% (3.8%)
Independent (Age 50)	5.9% (5.8%)	20.6% (21.4%)	4.6% (4.9%)
Republican (Age 50)	5.7% (7.0%)	20.1% (17.5%)	14.7% (14.5%)

Baseline at Age 20	Outcome at Age 50	Share
Partisan	Maintain party ID	59.0% (55.1%)
	Become independent	22.5% (22.3%)
	Flip party ID	18.4% (22.6%)
Independent	Remain independent	38.7% (41.3%)
	Acquire party ID	61.3% (58.7%)

Top estimates in each cell come from multi-item party ID measures (see Equations #8a-8b); panelists are classified as Republicans and Democrats at a given point in time if multi-item party ID ≤ 0.333 or ≥ 0.667, respectively. Parenthetical numbers contain estimates based on single-item, 3-point party ID measured at only age 20, 30, or 50. Analyses conducted on respondents who participated in all waves (N=6,382).

Table 1 presents three-category partisan classifications of respondents at ages 20, 30, and 50 using the same pool of 1976–1984 cohorts as before. Panelists are classified as Republicans and Democrats at a given point in time if their multi-item party ID scores are less than or equal to 0.33 or greater than or equal to 0.67, respectively. This classification scheme ensures that, to be classified as a partisan, respondents must at least identify mildly with their party in two out of three waves without ever identifying with the opposite party.

Table 1 helps clarify Analysis #1's findings. Although party ID undergoes considerable, durable movement over time, only a small proportion of partisans fully switch parties: Only 9 percent of respondents who affiliate with a party at age 20 convert to the opposite affiliation by age 30, and only 8 percent of age-30 partisans convert by age 50 (4 percent per decade).[6] Across three full decades, less than a fifth of partisans convert. Instead, most party ID movement involves the strengthening or weakening of a single partisan orientation, with most voters bounded between this affiliation and independence across multiple decades. Thus, a distinction must be made in order to reconcile considerable partisan movement with modest partisan conversion: Party ID strength is the malleable aspect of partisanship, whereas overall affiliation is a durable anchor.

ANALYSIS #3: HAS THE PROCESS OF PARTY ID DEVELOPMENT CHANGED?

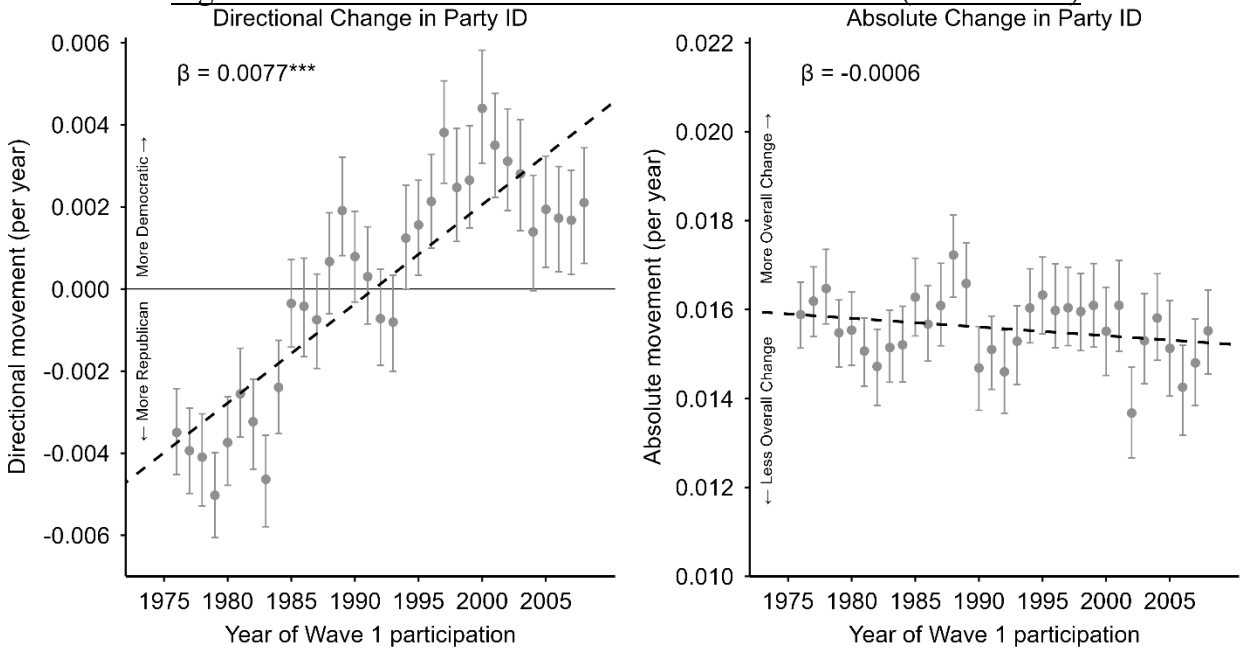
The preceding analyses were based on cohorts that came of age in the late 1970s and 1980s—slightly past the peak of party dealignment (Abramson 1976; Bartels 2000; Wattenberg 1984). This makes the low rate of partisan conversion in Analysis #2 relatively surprising, while raising questions about whether the considerable movement shown in Analysis #1 still occurs in a modern era of political "calcification" (Sides et al. 2022). Fortunately, MTF contains 33 cohorts who have participated in the panel's first seven waves (through age 30), which allows me to assess how the process of partisan development has changed as America has become more polarized.

I track hierarchical model estimates of directional and absolute party movement, as well as uncorrected and corrected inter-wave party ID correlations. For each set of 33 cohort-level estimates, I test for significant change over time with a simple linear regression of estimated value on cohort's high-school graduation year (with 1976 to 2008 rescaled from 0 to 1).

[6] Table 1 also displays the percentages based on single-item, three-point party ID in parentheses. Using these measures yields more than 60 percent higher rates of partisan conversion from ages 20 to 30 and 30 to 50. This demonstrates the importance of accounting for short-term instability when comparing start- and end-points.

To begin, I apply the hierarchical models established in Equations #2–4, estimating both $E(\gamma)$ and $E(|\gamma|)$ for each cohort to track over-time trends in both directional and absolute partisan movement (see Figure 7). Since the 1970s, young voters have, perhaps unsurprisingly, shifted from becoming more Republican throughout their twenties to becoming more Democratic. By contrast, the degree of absolute partisan movement has changed remarkably little, if at all (p=0.147). Thus, cohorts coming of age more than three decades apart still durably shift at around the same rate (roughly 0.19, cumulatively, on a 0–1 scale).

Figure 7: Cohort-Level Estimates of Partisan Movement (Hierarchical)



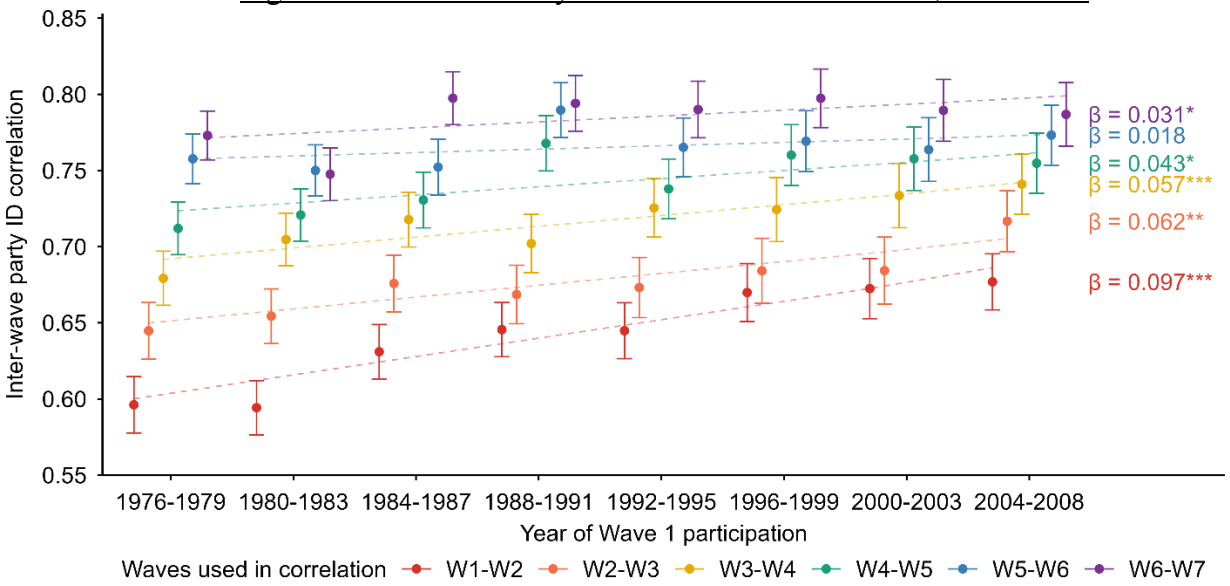
These plots display hierarchical model estimates of the net level of directional change each year (left side) and the mean level of absolute change each year (right side). Net directional change is estimated by β_1 from Equation #2, mean absolute change is estimated by $E(|\gamma_i|)$ from Equation #4. Each plot's β and dashed trend line come from regressing the 33 observations on year (with 1976-2008 rescaled from 0-1). Sample sizes for each year range from 1,584 to 2,242.

Differences in Uncorrected and Corrected Inter-Wave Party ID Stability Trends

Inter-wave correlations, however, provide a different conclusion. As Figure 8 shows, two-year party ID stability has strengthened at nearly every point in young adulthood, with particularly large gains at earlier ages. Taken at face value, this pattern would suggest that the process of political socialization has either sped up or moved earlier, with young voters becoming more

anchored to their party ID at earlier ages. This, however, is difficult to reconcile with the stable rate of durable change shown in Figure 7.

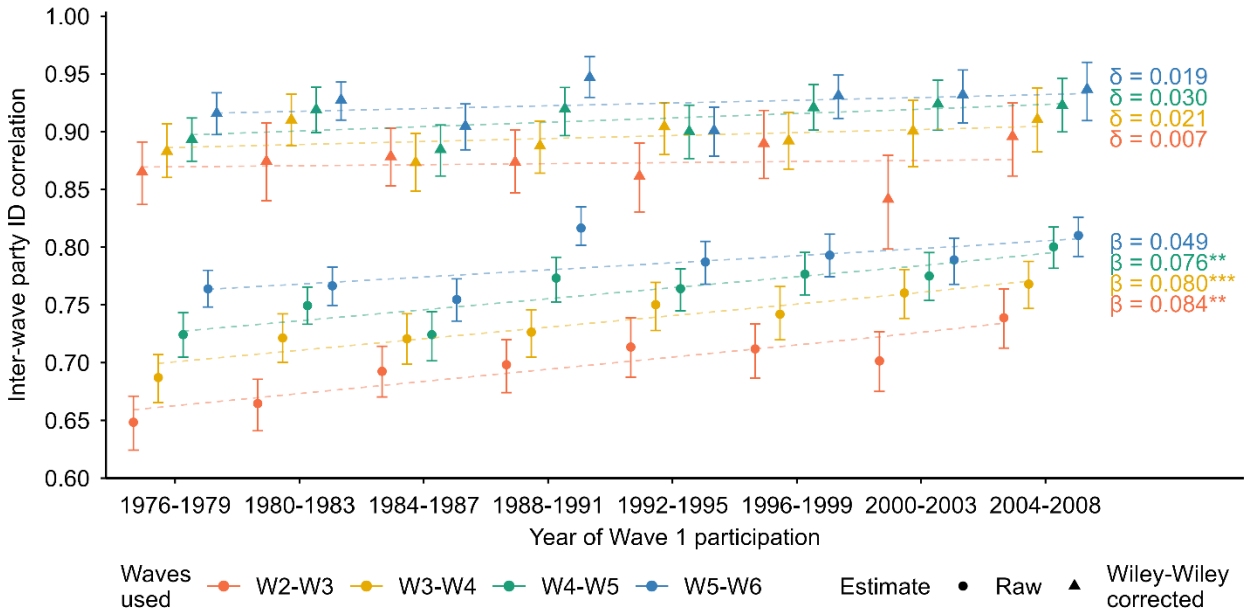
Figure 8: Two-Year Party ID Inter-Wave Correlations, Over Time



This plot tracks party ID's inter-wave correlations over time, with separate trends for each pair of adjacent waves. To improve readability, displayed correlation coefficients are based on groups of four or five cohorts. However, regression coefficients and trendlines are based on all 33 individual years' observations regressed on year (with 1976-2008 rescaled from 0-1). Estimates are based on all panelists who participated in both adjacent waves. Sample sizes for each year range from 1,145-2,000 for W1-W2; 876-1,760 for W2-W3; 848-1,703 for W3-W4; 771-1,639 for W4-W5; 747-1,597 for W5-W6; and 363-1,532 for W6-W7.

Fortunately, comparing uncorrected and corrected correlations resolves this tension. I use the four-wave Wiley-Wiley correction approach, which uses the first and last of four waves as instrumental variables to estimate measurement-error variance for the two middle waves, and then corrects for this error in a disattenuated correlation capturing just latent trait stability (for a longer explanation, see Green and Platzman 2024, 390–393). As Figure 9 shows, corrected inter-wave stability shows no sign of strengthening over time—no increase exceeds 0.03, and none are statistically significant. This suggests that, for young voters, latent partisanship's stability has not changed over time. Thus, rising uncorrected stability appears to reflect a decline in *short-term* fluctuations in party ID.

Figure 9: Comparing Corrected and Uncorrected Party ID Stability Trends



This plot tracks party ID's uncorrected and corrected inter-wave correlations over time, with separate trends for each pair of adjacent waves. To improve readability, displayed correlation coefficients are based on groups of four or five cohorts, but regression coefficients and trendlines are based on all 33 individual years' observations regressed on year (with 1976-2008 rescaled from 0-1). Estimates are based on all panelists who participated in the four contiguous waves needed for the Wiley-Wiley correction. Sample sizes for each year range from 876-1,760 for W2-W3; 848-1,703 for W3-W4; 771-1,639 for W4-W5; and 747-1,597 for W5-W6.

As Achen (1975) explains, "measurement error" covers more than just respondent inattentiveness or clerical mistakes; it involves all random variation in responses (1221–1222). A steady decline in random error across multiple decades seems unlikely, so the most plausible explanation is that a decline in randomness in responses comes from a decline in voter ignorance, indifference, and ambivalence with respect to partisanship (see Converse 1980; Feldman 1989; Zaller 2012). In other words, the difference in trends between corrected and uncorrected stability suggests that more young adults have developed meaningful attitudes toward America's parties, but those attitudes have not become less susceptible to movement over time.

Table 2: Partisan Conversion, Ages 20 to 28 (1976–2008 cohorts)

1976–1986

	Democrat (Age 20)	Independent (Age 20)	Republican (Age 20)
Democrat (Age 28)	16.4% (15.1%)	8.7% (9.8%)	1.0% (1.9%)
Independent (Age 28)	5.9% (5.5%)	32.0% (29.7%)	4.2% (4.4%)
Republican (Age 28)	2.3% (4.1%)	12.4% (13.0%)	17.1% (16.6%)

Baseline at Age 20	Outcome at Age 28	Share
Partisan	Maintain party ID	71.4% (66.5%)
	Become independent	21.6% (20.9%)
	Flip party ID	7.0% (12.6%)
Independent	Remain independent	60.2% (56.6%)
	Acquire party ID	39.8% (43.4%)

1987–1997

	Democrat (Age 20)	Independent (Age 20)	Republican (Age 20)
Democrat (Age 28)	16.4% (14.9%)	9.8% (10.3%)	1.4% (2.8%)
Independent (Age 28)	5.6% (5.8%)	32.3% (31.3%)	5.5% (5.5%)
Republican (Age 28)	1.2% (2.1%)	9.2% (9.4%)	18.5% (18.0%)

Baseline at Age 20	Outcome at Age 28	Share
Partisan	Maintain party ID	71.8% (66.9%)
	Become independent	22.9% (23.0%)
	Flip party ID	5.3% (10.0%)
Independent	Remain independent	63.0% (61.4%)
	Acquire party ID	37.0% (38.6%)

1998–2008

	Democrat (Age 20)	Independent (Age 20)	Republican (Age 20)
Democrat (Age 28)	20.7% (18.6%)	11.4% (12.3%)	1.4% (2.1%)
Independent (Age 28)	5.4% (5.6%)	28.9% (29.0%)	6.3% (6.5%)
Republican (Age 28)	0.9% (2.0%)	8.4% (8.3%)	16.5% (15.6%)

Baseline at Age 20	Outcome at Age 28	Share
Partisan	Maintain party ID	72.6% (67.8%)
	Become independent	22.8% (24.0%)
	Flip party ID	4.6% (8.2%)
Independent	Remain independent	59.3% (58.4%)
	Acquire party ID	40.7% (41.6%)

Top estimates in each cell come from multi-item party ID measures (see Equations #8a-8b), with party ID at age 28 now calculated by averaging age 26, 28, and 30 party ID. Panelists are classified as Republicans and Democrats at a given point in time if multi-item party ID ≤ 0.333 or ≥ 0.667, respectively. Parenthetical numbers contain estimates based on single-item, 3-point party ID measured at only age 20 or 28. Analyses on respondents who participated in all waves ($N_{1976\text{-}1986}$=12,383; $N_{1987\text{-}1997}$=8,447; $N_{1998\text{-}2008}$=5,866).

Finally, I construct additional multi-item measures of party ID for ages 20 and 28 based on Waves 1–3 and Waves 5–7, respectively, and replicate Analysis #2 based on three groups of pooled cohorts: 1976–1986, 1987–1997, and 1998–2008. As Table 2 shows, party conversion falls by roughly 34 percent, from 7.0 percent in the 1976–1986 cohorts to 4.6 percent for the 1998–2008 cohorts. Table 2 also shows a modest increase in the proportion of 20-year-olds identifying with a party (from 46.9 percent to 51.3 percent). Conversely, age-20 partisans appear to become

independents at a consistent rate over time, and the same is true for age-20 independents' rate of becoming partisan identifiers.

Ultimately, these cross-cohort analyses suggest young adults' partisanship has become less susceptible to both short-term instability and full partisan conversion, but not less prone to meaningful movement. Put another way, partisanship may be becoming a stronger anchor, while remaining just as malleable in an absolute sense.

ANALYSIS #4: DO PARTY ID AND IDEOLOGY SHAPE EACH OTHER?

As discussed above, the traditionalist and revisionist schools of partisanship have opposing expectations for the causal relationships between party ID and politically relevant attitudes (such as policy preferences). Prior work has generally found evidence of reciprocity, though party ID typically has shown more influence on attitudes than vice versa (Carsey and Layman 2006; Engelhardt 2021; Goren 2005; Highton and Kam 2011; Zingher 2022).

However, this prior work has mostly relied on cross-lagged panel models, which have important, inherent limitations. Because they do not separate between- and within-person effects, they risk inflating causal effect sizes when the two variables are correlated (Hamaker et al. 2015; Lucas 2023). In light of this, social scientists have increasingly looked to random-intercept cross-lagged panel models (RI-CLPMs), which address this problem by adding random intercepts to absorb stable between-person differences, allowing researchers to properly isolate within-person effects. Unfortunately, many analyses struggle to meet RI-CLPMs' power requirements, particularly when a panel only has three waves (which is common in political science). But fortunately, MTF offers plenty of wave coverage, making this dataset particularly well suited to RI-CLPMs.

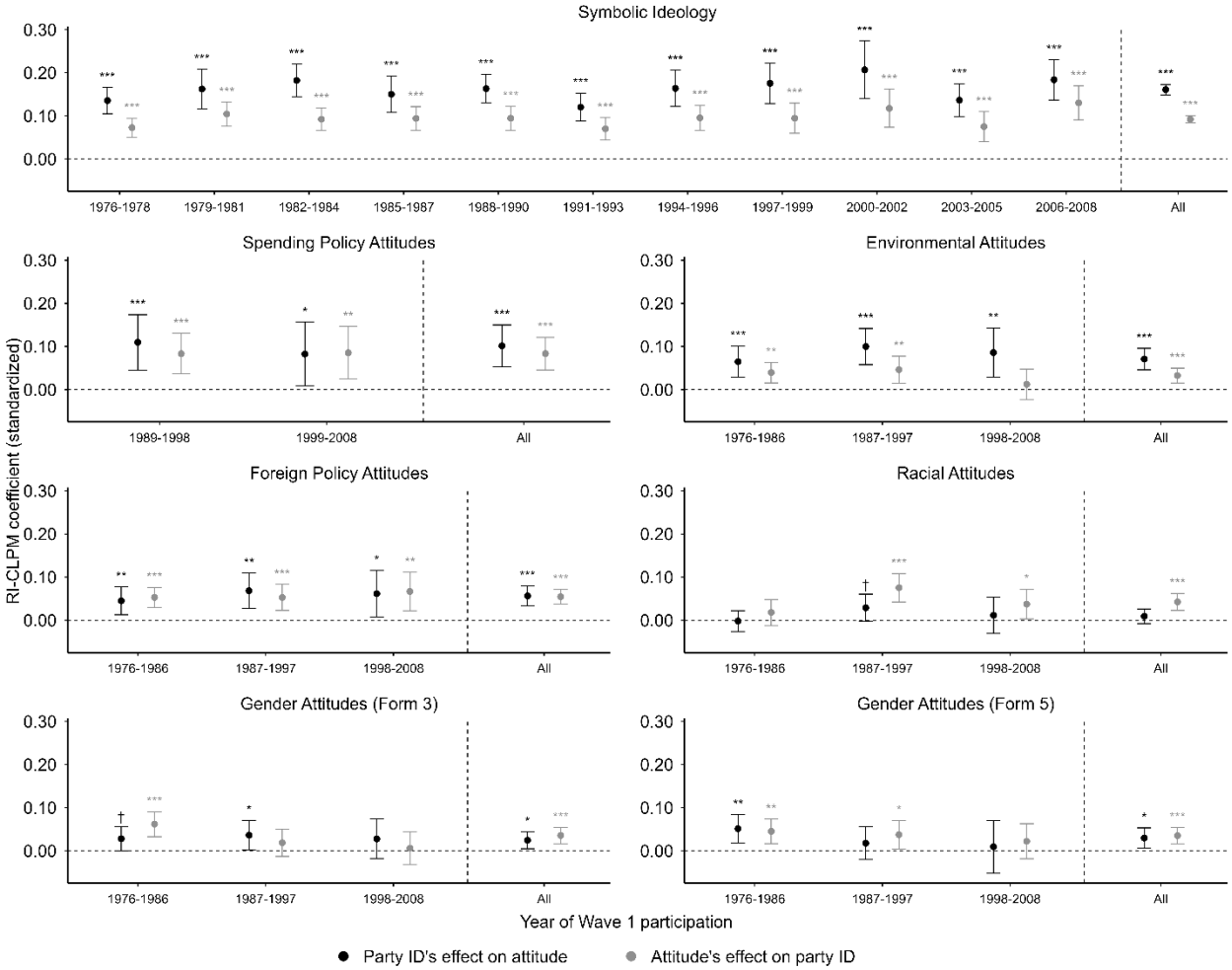
I therefore use MTF to assess the reciprocal influence of partisanship and ideology (symbolic and operational). Even after removing between-person confounding, RI-CLPMs do not provide properly identified causal effects because they cannot guard against bias due to time-varying confounders. Nevertheless, the following analyses provide stronger evidence than standard CLPMs, and they allow me to assess whether there has been over-time change in these relationships.

MTF measures symbolic ideology for all respondents, and it also contains a variety of multi-item scales of spending policy preferences, environmental attitudes, foreign policy views, attitudes about racial integration, and views on gender roles and discrimination for the first seven waves. Appendix C lists the wording for each scale's items, along with density plots and Cronbach alphas (which are mostly in the 0.7–0.8 range, with exceptions concentrated in the environmental attitudes and foreign policy scales). Unfortunately, each set of items is only included on one out of six forms that are randomly assigned to each panelist, meaning the sample size for each year is fairly small.[7] I therefore pool cohorts into groups of ten or eleven—or three, for symbolic ideology—to preserve statistical power while still conducting over-time comparisons.

For each RI-CLPM, I estimate the following three elements for both partisanship and ideology: a random intercept to capture respondent-level stability, an autoregressive path that estimates the persistence of within-person changes across waves, and a cross-lagged path that estimates the variable's influence on its counterpart. I constrain the paths to be equal across waves and report standardized estimates in Figure 10 below.

[7] Fortunately, after their initial assignment to a form at Wave 1, panelists continue to receive the same form for Waves 2 to 7.

Figure 10: The Reciprocal Influence of Party ID and Political Attitudes



Displays the results of random-intercept cross-lagged panel models that assess the influence of party ID on within-person changes in substantive attitudes, and vice versa. See Appendix C for information on how each scale was constructed. Sample sizes range from 702-3,487 for analyses based on 10-11 cohorts, and they range from 1,841-24,645 for pooled analyses (see Appendix A).

My results are broadly consistent with prior findings. They indicate party ID has significant influence on all domains of symbolic and operational ideology except racial attitudes, while ideology shows significant influence over party ID across all domains (when looking at estimates based on all pooled cohorts). For symbolic ideology and environmental attitudes, party ID's cross-lagged coefficient is substantially higher than its attitudinal counterpart. By contrast, racial attitudes appear to shape partisanship without countervailing influence. Effect sizes are largely modest; the only standardized coefficients that are consistently greater than 0.1 are for party ID's

influence over symbolic ideology. Finally, there is no clear evidence of most relationships changing over time, with the possible exception of gender attitude estimates weakening among more recent cohorts.

These results provide further evidence that party ID acts as a malleable anchor. As an anchor, party ID appears to significantly influence many politically relevant attitudes for voters. However, partisanship also seems to be responsive to those same attitudes, which could help explain some of the partisan malleability shown in Analyses #1–3.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analyses are not without limitations. First, because MTF begins tracking respondents in twelfth grade, I cannot compare partisan movement in young or full adulthood to movement earlier in adolescence. Prior work often includes adolescence as part of voters' formative years (see Ghitza et al. 2023; Sears 1993; Sears and Valentino 1997; Tyler and Iyengar 2023), and partisan movement during this period may surpass the movement observed in young adulthood. However, this would not change the fact that partisanship continues to change durably after young adulthood.

Family transmission has long been a central focus of political socialization research, with young adults' party ID aligning with their parents' partisanship, though this alignment tends to fade with time (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Beck and Jennings 1991). Unfortunately, MTF does not survey the parents of any high school cohort, so I cannot assess the influence they have over their children's partisan development. Similarly, MTF provides little information about where panelists have lived after the first wave, which prevents the study of how geographic context influences partisanship (see Martin and Webster 2020).

Finally, MTF uses a five-point measure of partisanship—a notable departure from the standard seven-point measure derived from a two-item branching sequence. This makes each wave's party ID measure coarser and prevents me from distinguishing pure independents from those who lean toward one party (and are typically treated as partisans by researchers). Fortunately, MTF's unusually dense wave coverage partially mitigates this limitation by allowing me to estimate long-term trajectories and construct multi-item measures, both of which provide more granular information about respondents' latent party ID than a single five-category response allows.

Ultimately, this paper uses a panel with unprecedented scope to the long-running debate between the traditional and revisionist views of partisanship. By making use of MTF's long time span and granular wave coverage to distinguish between genuine movement and short-term fluctuations, I find evidence consistent with both perspectives within different dimensions of partisan change. On one hand, party ID undergoes substantial, durable movement over the long term, and much of this movement persists after young adulthood. On the other hand, this movement does not result in much partisan conversion. Only 9 percent of partisans at age 20 switch to the opposite party by age 30, and only 4 percent switch per decade thereafter. Thus, party ID strength is malleable, but partisan affiliation is largely anchored for most voters.

Tracking the partisan development of more than three decades of young-adult cohorts, I demonstrate that the absolute amount of partisan movement has been stable, whereas short-term instability has decreased. In other words, young adults have become more consistent in expressing their partisanship without becoming correspondingly less susceptible to meaningful partisan change (though rates of party switching have significantly declined). Finally, RI-CLPMs provide suggestive evidence that party ID shapes most forms of symbolic and operational ideology while

also being shaped by them. Taken together, these results suggest party ID acts as a malleable anchor: It genuinely, durably changes across adulthood, but most change reflects consistent partisan orientations becoming stronger or weaker rather than voters actually changing sides.

This finding demonstrates the importance of differentiating between partisan affiliation and partisan strength. While some work on partisan stability explicitly distinguishes between the two (see Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Converse 1976), most research in this area simply focuses on how much overall party ID changes over time (e.g., Green and Platzman 2024; Sears and Funk 1999). One promising way to understand this paper's results is through the literature on conflicted and "ambivalent" partisans in the electorate—the strengthening and weakening of voters' attachment to their preferred party could reflect the degree of ambivalence they feel toward that party (see Groenendyk 2013; Lavine et al. 2012).

These findings are also consistent with theories emphasizing how partisan attachments respond to changes in the parties themselves (Kollman and Jackson 2021). As party programs and issue positions evolve, voters may gradually become more or less aligned with their preferred party—a process that can continue even as voters age and as the parties become more ideologically differentiated. This mechanism could help explain why durable partisan change continues after young adulthood and why the overall magnitude of change has persisted across cohorts coming of age in increasingly polarized political environments: Even as voters age and the parties polarize, the parties themselves continue to change in ways that give voters reason to update their attachments.

Put another way, growing differences between the parties may make it easier for voters to understand where they fit politically and to express their partisanship more consistently across survey waves. However, as party programs continue to evolve, voters can still become more or

less aligned with—and more or less ambivalent about—their preferred party. This distinction is consistent with Smidt (2025), who argues that growing partisan divides do not necessarily imply more durable partisan attachments:

> Partisanship's stronger relevance to politics makes it easier for partisans to demonstrate consistent and uniform behavior in politics today, but these changes are not indicative of stronger personal affinities or people being less likely to switch parties in the future. Indeed, there is good reason to expect today's hyper-clear, polarized coalitions make mass partisan change just as common in contemporary politics. (7–8)

This distinction suggests a possible explanation for the results of Analysis #3. Young voters may have become more consistent in reporting their partisanship across waves—but no less prone to durable movement over time—because they are increasingly aware of what the parties stand for without becoming, in aggregate, less ambivalent about those positions or less responsive when those positions change.

Overall, even research associated with the "unmoved mover" literature regularly concedes that partisanship moves to some degree over a lifetime. Campbell et al. (1960) describe partisan attachments as "firm but not immovable" (148), while Green et al. (2002) note that "small changes in underlying party attachments do tend to add up over time" (71). Data limitations have, until now, made it difficult to determine just how much these changes add up, when they occur, and what form they take. The results presented here show that they add up to substantial, durable movement that continues well beyond young adulthood, yet only rarely carries voters across party lines. Thus, partisanship is neither an unmoved mover nor a running tally. Rather, it is best understood as a malleable anchor that is durable enough to keep most voters oriented toward the

same party across decades, even as the strength of that attachment meaningfully changes over a lifetime.

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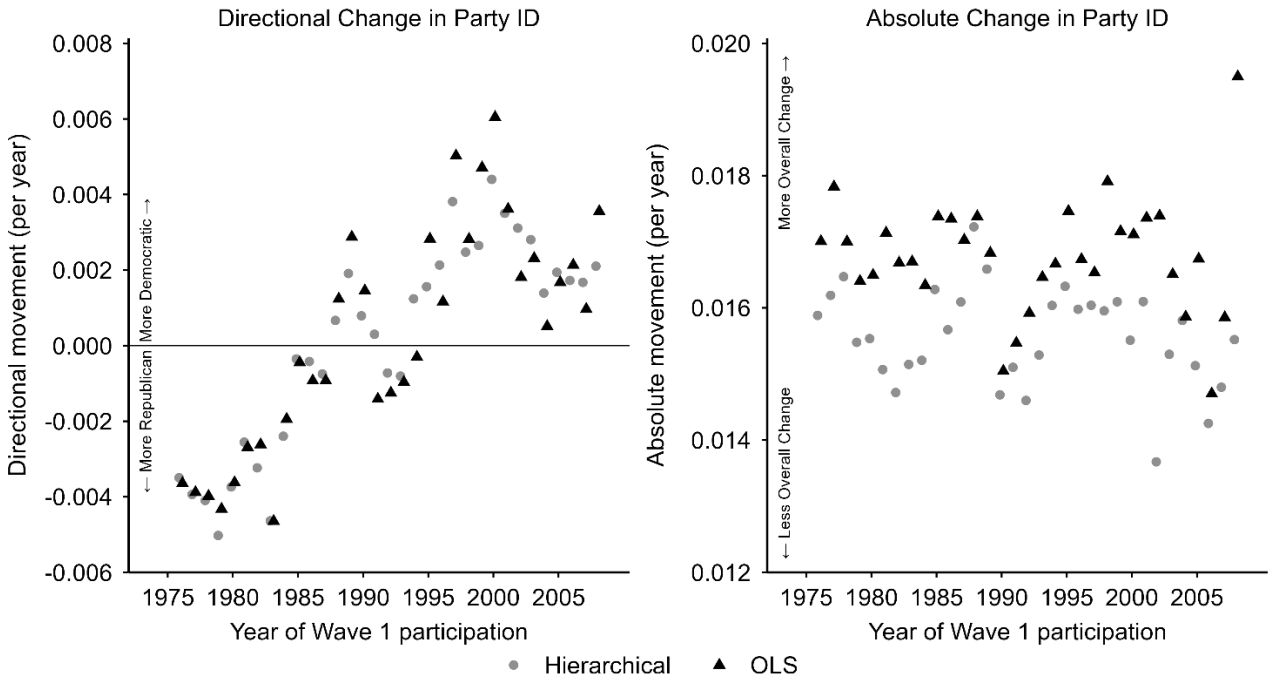
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Appendix A: Sample Sizes for Each Analysis

Analysis	Cohorts	Ages	Sample	N (total)	N (breakdown)
			Lifetime stability and change		
Correlation matrix (Figure 3)	1976–1979	18–60	Complete case respondents	2,523	560–682 per cohort
Correlation matrix (Figure 3)	1980–1989	18–50	Complete case respondents	5,822	3,310 (1980–1984) / 2,512
Piecewise hierarchical model (Figure 5)	1976–1989	18–50	All respondents	29,938	2,018–2,242 per cohort
Piecewise hierarchical model (Figure 5)	1976–1979	18–60	All respondents	8,601	2,018–2,197 per cohort
Piecewise hierarchical model (Figure 6)	1976–1984	20–50	All respondents	18,195	1,877–2,092 per cohort
Multi-item change (Figure 6 + Table 1)	1976–1984	20–50	All three composites	6,382	541–839 per cohort
			Cohort trends in young adulthood		
Hierarchical models (Figure 7)	1976–2008	18–30	All respondents	64,108	1,584–2,242 per cohort
Two-year correlations (Figure 8)	1976–2008, 8 groups	18–30	Participants for both waves (pairwise)	—	3,345–7,817 per wave pair and cohort group
Wiley-Wiley corrected correlations (Figure 9)	1976–2008, 8 groups	20–28	Participants in all four waves used in Wiley-Wiley correction window	—	2,153–4,716 per window and cohort group
Multi-item transitions (Table 2)	1976–1986 / 1987–1997 / 1998–2008	20–28	Complete case respondents	26,696	12,383 / 8,447 / 5,866
			RI-CLPMs (Figure 10)		
Symbolic ideology	1976–2008, 11 groups	18–30	All respondents	24,645	1,108–3,487 per group
Spending preferences (Form 6)	1989–2008, 2 groups	20–30	Respondents assigned Form 6	1,841	1,104 / 737
Environmental attitudes (Form 4)	1976–2008, 3 groups	18–30	Respondents assigned Form 4	3,940	797–1,933 per group
Foreign policy attitudes (Form 2)	1976–2008, 3 groups	18–30	Respondents assigned Form 2	3,924	773–1,929 per group
Racial attitudes (Form 3)	1976–2008, 3 groups	18–30	Respondents assigned Form 3	4,085	809–2,023 per group
Gender attitudes (Form 3)	1976–2008, 3 groups	18–30	Respondents assigned Form 3	4,068	702–2,084 per group
Gender attitudes (Form 5)	1976–2008, 3 groups	18–30	Respondents assigned Form 5	3,811	729–1,882 per group

Appendix B: Comparing OLS and Hierarchical Estimates of Partisan Movement



These plots display estimates of the net level of directional change each year (left side) and the mean level of absolute change each year (right side), based on both individual OLS regressions (see Equation #1) and yearly hierarchical models (see Equations #2-4). Sample sizes for each year range from 1,584 to 2,242.

Appendix C: Operational Ideology Scale Information

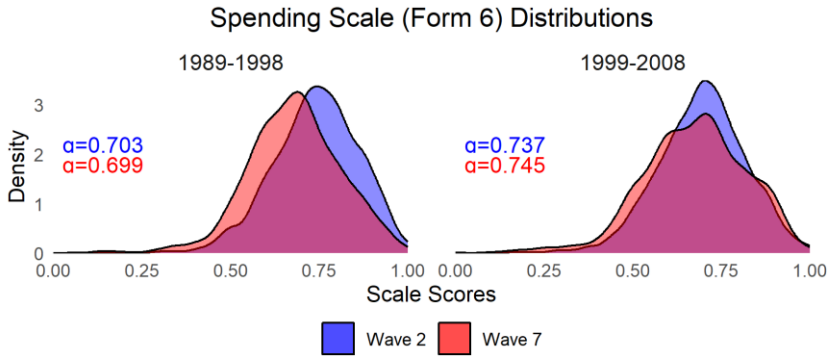
Spending Policy Scale (Form 6)

Spending policy is measured with a series of eight items from MTF's Form 6 (introduced in 1989). All use the following prompt: "In each of the following areas do you think that this nation should spend more or less of its resources, or about the same as it does now?"

- Education
- Health care
- Military*
- Drug abuse
- Hunger and poverty
- Pollution control
- Environmental conservation
- Crime and violence

*Reverse-coded

The forward-coded response options are "Much less"=0, "Less" =0.25, "Same as now" =0.5, "More"=0.75, "Much more"=1, "No opinion"=0.5.



Environmental Attitudes Scale

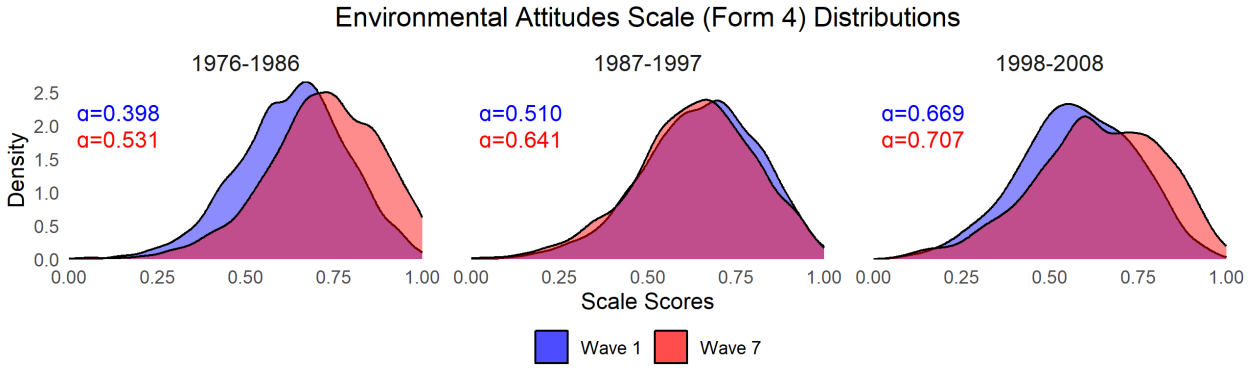
Environmental attitudes are measured with a series of seven items from MTF's Form 4. All use the following prompt: "These questions are about pollution and the environment. Please mark the circle that shows how much you agree or disagree with each statement below."

- The dangers of pollution are not really as great as government, the media, and environmental groups would like us to believe*
- America needs growth to survive, and that is going to require some increase in pollution*
- People will have to change their buying habits and way of life to correct our environmental problems

- Government should take action to solve our environmental problems even if it means that some of the products we now use would have to be changed or banned
- Government should place higher taxes on products which cause pollution in their manufacture or disposal, so that companies will be encouraged to find better ways to produce them
- I wish that government would ban throwaway bottles and beverage cans
- Within the next 25 years, engineers and scientists will probably have invented devices that will solve our pollution problems*

*Reverse-coded

The forward-coded response options are "Disagree"=0, "Mostly disagree"=0.25, "Neither"=0.5, "Mostly agree"=0.75, "Agree"=1.



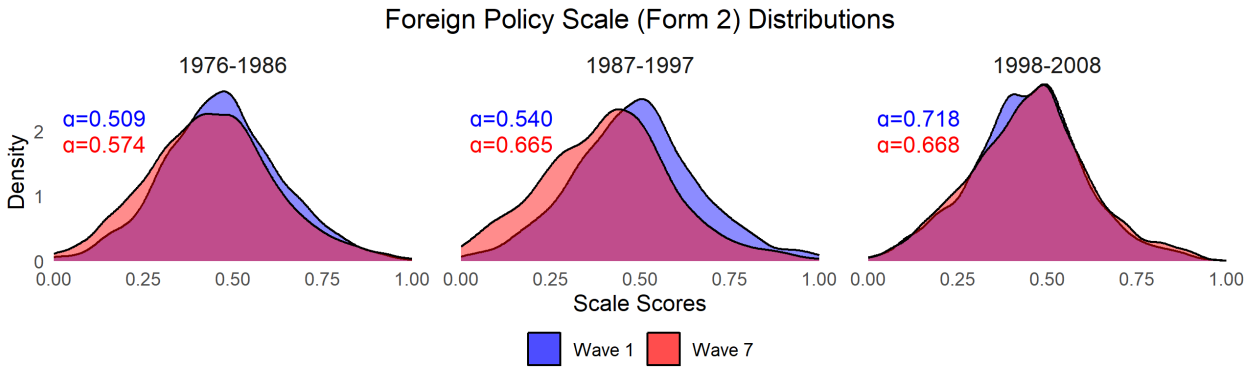
Foreign Policy Scale

Foreign policy is measured with a series of seven items from MTF's Form 2. All use the following prompt: "How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?" The scale is coded so that higher values indicate more dovish, non-interventionist positions.

- The U.S. should begin a gradual program of disarming whether other countries do or not
- There may be times when the U.S. should go to war to protect the rights of other countries*
- The U.S. should be willing to go to war to protect its own economic interests*
- The only good reason for the U.S. to go to war is to defend against an attack on our own country
- The U.S. does not need to have greater military power than Russia
- The U.S. ought to have much more military power than any other nation in the world*
- Our present foreign policy is based on our own narrow economic and power interests

*Reverse-coded

The forward-coded response options are “Disagree”=0, “Mostly disagree”=0.25, “Neither”=0.5, “Mostly agree”=0.75, “Agree”=1.



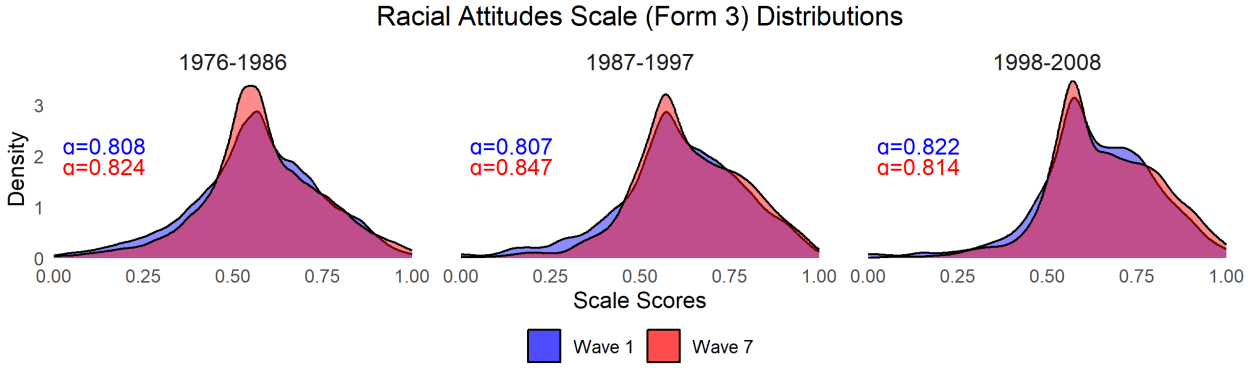
Racial Attitudes Scale

Racial attitudes are measured with a series of seven items from MTF’s Form 3. All ask respondents how they would feel about the following scenarios:

- Having close personal friends of another race
- Having a family of a different race (but same level of education and income) move next door to you
- Having your (future) children’s friends be all of your race*
- Having some of your (future) children’s friends be of other races
- Living in an area where all the neighbors are of your race*
- Living in an area where some of the neighbors are of other races
- Living in an area where most of the neighbors are of other races

*Reverse-coded

The forward-coded response options are “Not at all acceptable”=0, “Somewhat acceptable”=0.33, “Acceptable”=0.67, “Desirable”=1.



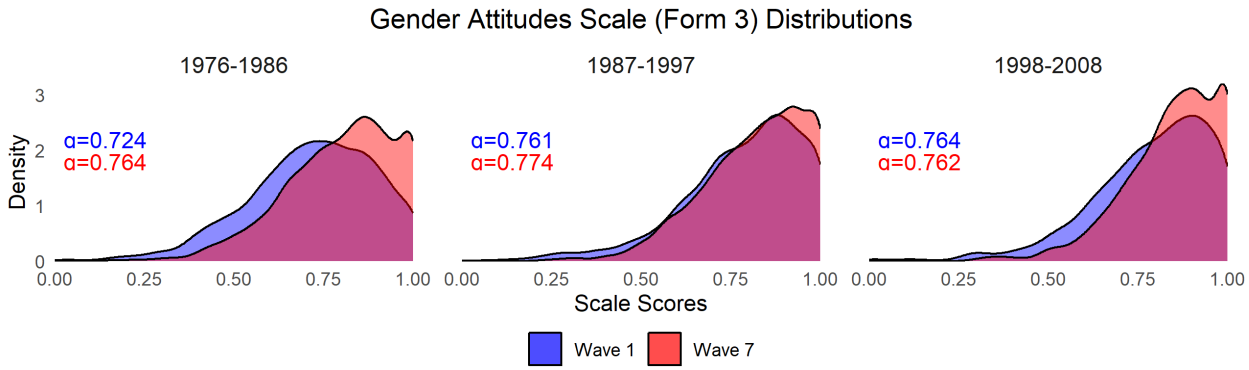
Gender Attitudes Scale (Form 3)

Gender attitudes on MTF's Form 3 are measured with a series of seven items, all using the following prompt: "The next questions ask your opinions about a number of different topics. How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below?"

- Men and women should be paid the same money if they do the same work
- Women should be considered as seriously as men for jobs as executives or politicians
- A woman should have exactly the same job opportunities as a man
- A woman should have exactly the same educational opportunities as a man
- It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family*
- A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work
- A preschool child is likely to suffer if the mother works*

*Reverse-coded

The forward-coded response options are "Disagree"=0, "Mostly disagree"=0.25, "Neither"=0.5, "Mostly agree"=0.75, "Agree"=1.



Gender Attitudes Scale (Form 5)

Gender attitudes on MTF's Form 5 are measured with two combined batteries, each with a different format.

The first battery consists of four items concerning family gender roles, all using the following prompt: "How much do you agree or disagree with each statement below?"

- Parents should encourage just as much independence in their daughters as in their sons
- Being a mother and raising children is one of the most fulfilling experiences a woman can have*

- Most fathers should spend more time with their children than they do now
- The husband should make all the important decisions in the family*

*Reverse-coded

The forward-coded response options are “Disagree”=0, “Mostly disagree”=0.25, “Neither”=0.5, “Mostly agree”=0.75, “Agree”=1.

The second battery consists of seven items concerning perceived discrimination against women, all using the following prompt: “These questions are about whether you think women are discriminated against in each of the following areas. To what extent are women discriminated against . . .”

- in getting a college education?
- in gaining positions of leadership over men and women?
- in obtaining executive positions in business?
- in obtaining top jobs in the professions?
- in getting skilled labor jobs?
- in getting elected to political office?
- in getting equal pay for equal work?

All seven items are forward-coded, with the following options: “Not at all”=0, “Very little”=0.25, “Some”=0.5, “A good deal”=0.75, “A great deal”=1, “Don’t know”=0.5.

