

Negative Partisanship: Why Americans Dislike Parties But Behave Like Rabid Partisans

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One of the most important developments in American politics over the last 40 years has been the rise of negative partisanship—the phenomenon whereby Americans largely align against one party instead of affiliating with the other. Though it has the power to reshape patterns of political behavior, little is known about the microfoundations driving negative partisanship. In this article, we show how the growing racial divide between the two major parties, as well as the presence of partisan-friendly media outlets, have led to the rise of negative partisanship. We also utilize the growing literature on personality and politics to show how the Big Five personality traits are predictive of negative partisanship. The results suggest that the psychological roots of negative partisanship are both widespread and, absent drastic individual and structural-level changes, likely to persist.

KEY WORDS: negative partisanship, political parties, negative affect

In the twenty-first century, partisanship in the American mass public has been shaped by two seemingly contradictory trends. First, opinions of both major parties have become increasingly negative. According to data from the American National Election Studies (ANES), on a feeling-thermometer scale running from zero through 100 degrees, the average rating of the Democratic Party fell from 59 degrees in 2000 to 49 degrees in 2016 while the average rating of the Republican Party has fallen from 54 degrees in 2000 to 43 degrees in 2016. The percentage of Americans with favorable opinions of both parties is now the lowest it has been since the ANES began asking this question in 1978.

But while both major parties are less popular than at any time in recent history, the large majority of voters still feel some psychological attachment to a party, and party loyalty in voting has reached record levels. Thus, according to the 2016 American National Election Study, 68% of voters identify with one of the two major parties, and another 23% describe themselves as independents who usually felt closer to one of the two parties. Less than one voter in ten feels no attachment at all to either the Democrats or the Republicans. Moreover, partisanship has a stronger influence on vote choice than at any time since the 1950s. According to ANES data, partisan-defection rates in recent presidential elections have been extraordinarily low. In 2016, despite the unpopularity of both major-party nominees,

89% of Democratic identifiers and 81% of Independents who leaned toward the Democratic Party voted for Hillary Clinton, while 88% of Republican identifiers and 80% of Independents who leaned toward the Republican Party voted for Donald Trump.

The growing impact of partisanship can also be seen in the dramatic decline in ticket splitting by voters. During the 1970s and 1980s, according to ANES surveys, about a quarter of voters split their tickets—voting for presidential and congressional candidates of different parties. In recent elections, however, only about one voter in ten has cast a split-ticket ballot. The result has been a growing nationalization of elections below the presidential level: The outcomes of elections for U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and even state and local offices are now largely consistent with the outcome of the presidential election. Thus, in 2016, all 34 Senate elections and 400 of 435 U.S. House elections were won by the party winning the presidential election in the state or district.

Partisanship also has a powerful influence on Americans' opinions of political leaders including the president. As the Gallup Poll has documented, the party divide in evaluations of presidential performance has increased dramatically since the 1960s. Under both George W. Bush and Barack Obama, that divide reached record levels. During much of Bush's second term, more than 80% of Republicans generally expressed approval of the president's job performance compared with barely 10% of Democrats. Similarly, during most of Obama's presidency, 80–90% of Democrats approved of the president's performance compared with just over 10% of Republicans.

The most important factor in the growing partisan divide in public evaluations of presidential performance has been a sharp drop in approval by those identifying with the opposing party. Recent presidents have typically received approval ratings from supporters of their own party that are comparable to those received by presidents during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. However, while presidents like Eisenhower, Kennedy, and even Nixon frequently enjoyed approval ratings of 40% or higher from supporters of the opposing party, recent presidents have rarely received approval ratings as high as 20% from opposing partisans.

The party divide in evaluations of presidential performance has reached new heights under Donald Trump. During his first few months in office, Trump has received extraordinarily low approval ratings for a new president. In fact, he was the first president in the history of the Gallup Poll, going back to Harry Truman, to begin his presidency with an approval rating below 50%. In addition to these low overall approval ratings, however, what is especially striking about opinions of Trump's presidency has been the extraordinarily large divide in approval between supporters of the two parties—a divide that was evident immediately after his inauguration. After only one week in office, President Trump's approval rating in the Gallup tracking poll was 89% among Republicans but only 12% among Democrats.

By early September of 2017, according to the Gallup Poll, not much had changed: Eighty percent of Republican identifiers continued to approve of President Trump's job performance compared with only 9% of Democratic identifiers. Moreover, from the beginning of his presidency, the large majority of Americans had very strong feelings about Donald Trump's performance with those who strongly disapprove far outnumbering those who strongly approve. Thus, in an August 17–22, 2017 Quinnipiac University Poll, 27% of Americans strongly approved of President Trump's performance while 54% strongly disapproved. Once again, these opinions were sharply split along party lines: Sixty percent of Republican identifiers strongly approved of President Trump's performance while an astonishing 90% of Democratic identifiers strongly disapproved of his performance.

The Rise of Negative Partisanship

The patterns of public opinion toward recent presidents, including President Trump, reflect a long-term shift in the attitudes of Americans toward the two major parties and their leaders—the rise of negative partisanship (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016). For the most part, opinions of partisans

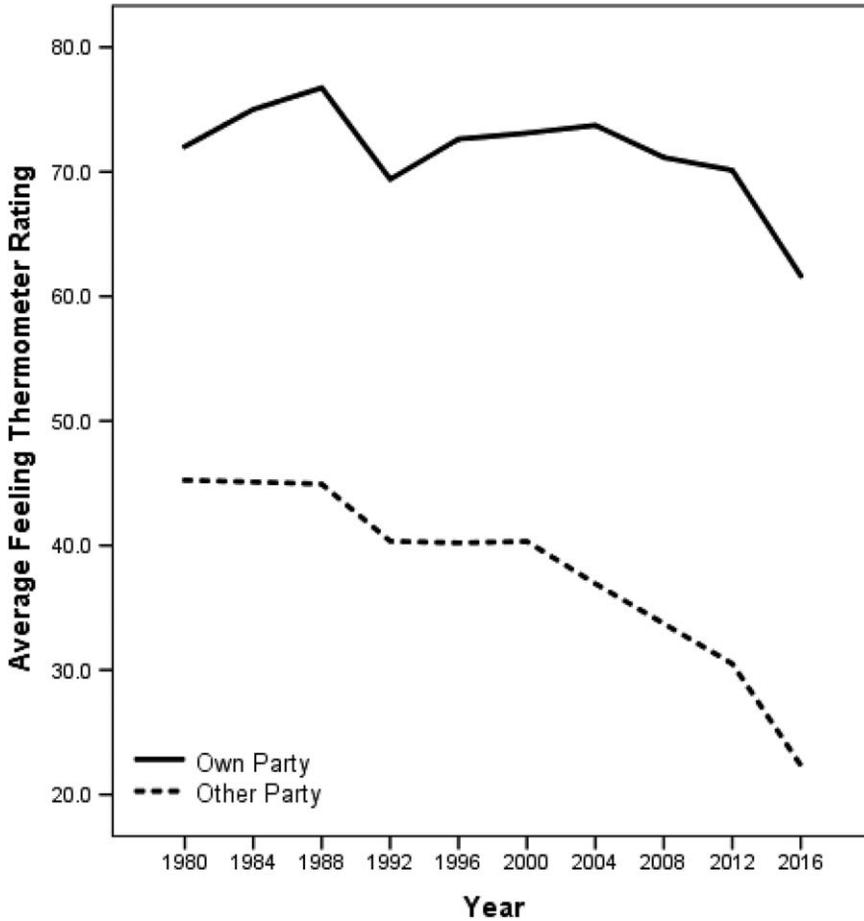


Figure 1. Average feeling-thermometer ratings of own party and opposing party, 1980–2016.
 Source: American National Election Studies.

toward their own party and its leaders have been fairly stable; since the 1970s, however, opinions toward the opposing party and its leaders have become much more negative. This trend is very clear in Figure 1 which displays trends in average feeling-thermometer ratings by party identifiers and leaners of their own party and presidential candidate and the opposing party and presidential candidate based on data from ANES. The party feeling-thermometer ratings go back to 1980 while the presidential candidate ratings go back to 1968.

The data displayed in Figure 1 show that between 1980 and 2012, ratings by party identifiers and leaners of their own party fluctuated within a fairly narrow range between the upper 60s and low 70s. Similarly, Figure 2 shows that, between 1968 and 2012, ratings by party identifiers and leaners of their party’s presidential candidate showed little evidence of change—hovering around the mid-70s. Over the same time period, however, the data show that ratings of the opposing party and its presidential candidate have fallen sharply. Ratings of the opposing party fell from just under 50 degrees (the neutral point) in 1980 to about 30 degrees in 2012 while ratings of the opposing party’s presidential candidate fell from close to 50 degrees between 1968 and 1976 to just below 30 degrees in 2012.

The data in this figure show that something remarkable happened in 2016—ratings by voters of the opposing party and candidate and of their own party and candidate fell sharply. In fact, the average

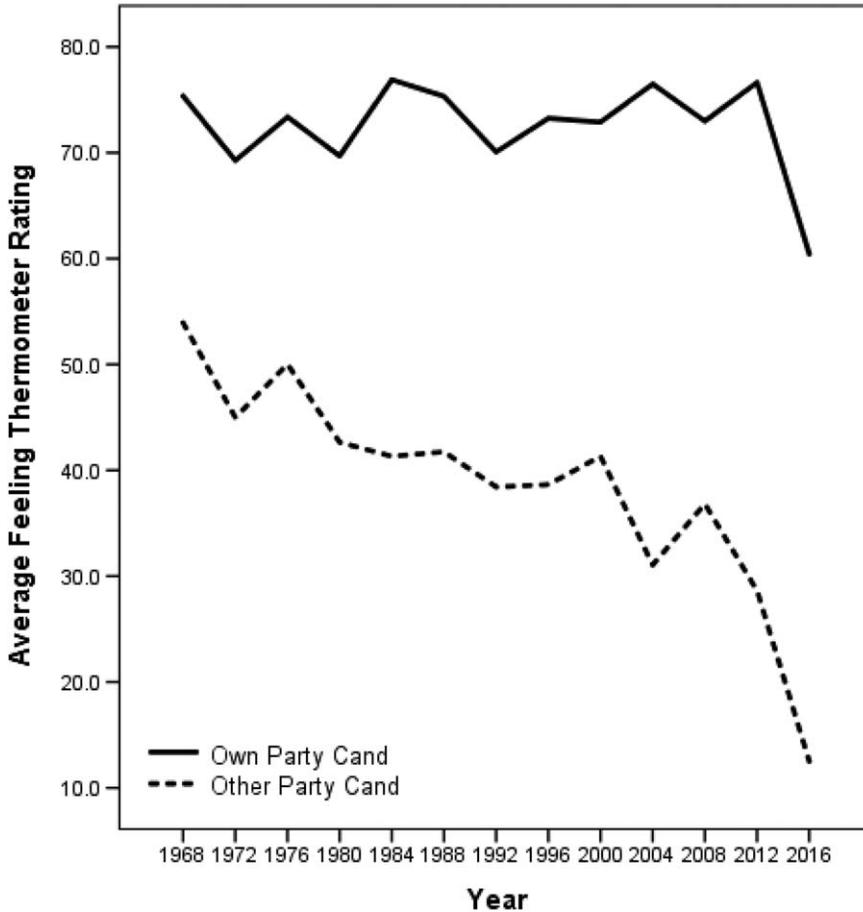


Figure 2. Average feeling–thermometer ratings of own–party and opposing–party presidential candidates, 1968–2016. *Source:* American National Election Studies.

ratings by voters of their own party, the opposing party, their own party’s presidential candidate, and the opposing party’s presidential candidate were the lowest ever recorded in ANES surveys. And this was true for both Democrats and Republicans. On average, voters gave their own party an average rating of only 62 degrees on the feeling-thermometer scale while they gave the opposing party an average rating of only 23 degrees. And the declines in ratings of the presidential candidates were even more dramatic. On average, voters gave their own party’s nominee an average rating of only 60 degrees while they gave the opposing party’s nominee an average rating of only 11 degrees. In fact, well over half of Democratic and Republican voters gave the opposing party’s nominee a rating of zero on the feeling thermometer which is the lowest possible score.

The data in Figure 1 show that record numbers of voters in 2016 were dissatisfied with their own party’s presidential nominee and the opposing party’s nominee and that these negative feelings carried over to some degree to the parties themselves. Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were the most unpopular major-party candidates for president since the ANES introduced the feeling-thermometer scale in 1968 and probably in the entire postwar era. Many Democratic voters, especially among those who had supported Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primaries, were less than enthusiastic about Hillary Clinton’s candidacy. Likewise, many Republican voters, especially among those who had supported mainstream Republicans like John Kasich and Marco Rubio in the Republican primaries,

were less than enthusiastic about Donald Trump’s candidacy. However, in terms of understanding the current state of partisanship in the United States, the most important finding that emerges from Figure 1 is that large majorities of Democrats and Republicans truly despised the opposing party’s nominee. Given these results, it is hardly surprising that despite the qualms that many Democrats and Republicans felt about their own party’s candidate, very few ultimately defected to the opposing party in the presidential election.

The Racial Divide and Negative Partisanship

The findings presented above raise an important question—what explains the increasing negativity in the way supporters of both major parties in the United States view the opposing party and its leaders? There are undoubtedly a variety of explanations for the rise of negative partisanship in the United States over the past few decades including increasingly expensive and negative political campaigns, the growing influence of partisan and ideological media outlets, and the increasing salience of divisive cultural issues such as abortion and gay rights. In our view, however, the single most important factor underlying the rise of negative partisanship has been the growing racial divide between supporters of the two parties.

While Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 presidential election was one of the most shocking upsets in modern political history, it can be seen as the natural outgrowth of the racial realignment that has transformed the American electorate since the 1970s (Black & Black 2002; Hood, Kidd, & Morris 2004). For decades before Donald Trump came on the political scene, Republican-elected officials and candidates sought to lure racially conservative White Democrats in the South and elsewhere into the GOP camp with racially tinged messages about the dangers posed to Whites by African-American crime, forced busing of schoolchildren, and affirmative action and by emphasizing the complicity of Democratic politicians in these threats. Those efforts clearly paid electoral dividends, helping to elect Republican presidents from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush and to transform the South from the most Democratic region of the nation into a Republican stronghold.

Between the 1970s and the 2000s, the American party system underwent a realignment that transformed the racial, regional, and ideological bases of the two major parties (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998; Black & Black 2007). That realignment resulted not only in a growing gap between the racial composition of the Democratic and Republican electoral coalitions but a dramatic increase in racial resentment among White Republican voters. The data displayed in Table 1, which are based on national exit polls between 1976 and 2012, indicate that the racial realignment of the American party system really took place in two phases. Between 1976 and 1992, the non-White share of the American

Table 1. Non-White Percentage of Voters in U.S. Presidential Elections, 1976–2012

Year	All Voters	Democratic	Republican
		Voters	Voters
1976	11	15	4
1980	12	23	3
1984	14	29	4
1988	15	26	4
1992	13	21	4
1996	17	25	7
2000	19	29	7
2004	23	34	12
2008	26	40	10
2012	28	45	10

Source: National Exit Polls.

electorate was fairly stable, varying between 11 and 15% with no clear trend. Following the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, African Americans had surged into the electorate in the southern states, aided by the presence of federal registrars in areas, mainly in the Deep South, where White resistance to Black voting rights was the strongest. By 1976, Black registration rates in the South were comparable to those of Whites and the non-White share of the electorate in the region and in the nation had stabilized. During this first phase of racial realignment, African Americans made up the overwhelming majority of non-White voters in the nation. As late as 1992, Hispanics and Asian-Americans combined made up only 3% of the national electorate.

In presidential elections between 1976 and 1992, the non-White share of Republican voters remained extremely low, never rising above 4%. The Republican Party clearly had very little appeal to African-American voters during this era. However, the non-White share of Democratic voters varied considerably in these elections depending on the appeal of individual Democratic candidates to White voters. While Democratic candidates consistently won the overwhelming majority of the African-American vote during this era, their share of the major-party vote among Whites ranged from only 34% in 1984 to 48% in 1976 and 49% in 1992. There was a consistent pattern to these results—moderate southern Democrats like Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were much more successful in holding down the Republican margin among White voters than liberal northern Democrats like Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis. As a result, the racial realignment of the party system appeared to be proceeding rather slowly and unevenly during this era.

After 1992, however, racial realignment began to occur much more rapidly and steadily. That was mainly because of the impact of demographic trends on the composition of the American electorate. Due to the effects of large-scale immigration to the United States from Latin America and Asia between the 1980s and the 2000s as well as the much younger average age and higher fertility rates of the non-White population, the non-White share of the U.S. population increased dramatically between the 1980s and the 2000s—a trend that is expected to continue well into the twenty-first century. And as the population was becoming more diverse so, more gradually, was the electorate.

Between 1992 and 2012, the non-White share of voters in presidential elections more than doubled, going from 13% to 28%. But growing racial and ethnic diversity had very different effects on the two major parties. The non-White share of Republican voters increased modestly between 1992 and 2004, going from 4% to 12%, mainly due to the ability of Republican candidates to attract a sizeable chunk of the growing Hispanic vote. After 2004, however, the non-White share of Republican voters fell slightly to 10% in both 2008 and 2012. Meanwhile, the non-White share of Democratic voters increased steadily—going from 21% in 1992 to 45% in 2012. This trend reflected the attraction of the party and its presidential candidates to non-White voters but also the continued drift of White voters to the GOP, especially in the South. Barack Obama lost the White vote by an astonishing margin of 20 percentage points according to the 2012 national exit poll—by far the largest deficit among White voters of any successful Democratic presidential candidate. Yet he won the national popular vote by nearly 4 percentage points due to an overwhelming 82 to 16% margin of victory among non-White voters.

There were two major components to the racial realignment of the U.S. party system between 1992 and 2012—the overwhelming preference of a growing non-White voting bloc for the Democratic Party and the continued movement of White voters from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party, especially in the South. By 2012, according to data from the American National Election Study, the GOP enjoyed a record 55% to 39% advantage in leaned party identification among White voters nationwide and an astonishing 66% to 39% advantage among White voters in the South.

There were several factors that helped to drive White voters into the Republican camp during the years between 1992 and 2012—economic issues such as government spending and taxation (Shafer & Johnston, 2006) and cultural issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage (Hillygus & Shields, 2008) clearly played a role in this shift. But there is little doubt that issues surrounding race played a major role in the realignment of the White electorate. As the nation's population and its electorate

Table 2. Racial Resentment Among White Voters From Reagan to Obama

Presidential Era	Racial Resentment Level			Total	(n of cases)
	Low	Moderate	High		
Reagan-Bush1	27%	31	42	100%	(1781)
Clinton	24%	32	44	100%	(2113)
Bush2	23%	28	49	100%	(1419)
Obama	22%	27	51	100%	(1228)

Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative File.

were becoming more diverse, there is clear evidence that a growing number of White voters felt threatened by the loss of their previous dominant status in American society and American politics (see, also, Acharya, Blackwell, & Sen, 2017). This can be seen in data from ANES surveys on the level of racial resentment among White voters.

The concept of racial resentment, as used by social scientists, refers to subtle feelings of hostility toward African Americans. It is different, in that sense, from old-fashioned racism which involves beliefs about the inherent superiority and right to dominance of the White race. In the data from ANES, the racial-resentment scale is constructed from how strongly respondents agreed or disagreed with the following assertions: (1) Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors. (2) Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class. (3) Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve. (4) It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as Whites. And while these questions focus directly on attitudes toward African Americans, scores on the racial-resentment scale also correlate highly with feelings toward other racial minorities and outgroups.

The data displayed in Table 2 show that between the Reagan-George H. W. Bush era and the Obama era, there was a marked increase in the level of racial resentment among White voters in the United States. Over these three decades, the proportion of White voters scoring at the high end of the racial-resentment scale rose from 42% to 51%. But this increase in White racial resentment was not uniform. As the data displayed in Figure 3 show, the increase was limited to Republicans. There was actually a modest decline in racial resentment among White Democrats between the Reagan-Bush era and the Obama era. Among White Republicans, however, racial resentment increased dramatically. The proportion of White Republicans scoring at the high end of the racial-resentment scale rose from 44% during the Reagan-Bush years to 64% during the Obama years.

As recently as the late 1980s, there was little difference between White Democrats and Republicans when it came to racial resentment. By 2008, however, there was a yawning gap between White Democrats and Republicans on this scale. And that gap would grow even wider by 2016. But it is important to note that the increase in racial resentment among White Republicans did not occur suddenly after Barack Obama’s emergence on the national political scene in 2008. Instead, racial resentment rose steadily over this entire time period. It was not Obama who sparked the rise in racial resentment among White Republicans; it was the growing visibility and influence of African Americans and other non-Whites within the Democratic Party, along with ongoing efforts by Republican candidates and strategists to win over racially conservative White voters by portraying Democrats as soft on crime and favoring policies benefiting minorities at the expense of Whites such as welfare and affirmative action.

There is no way of knowing from these data whether the growing divide between White Democrats and Republicans was the result of racially motivated party switching—voters choosing a

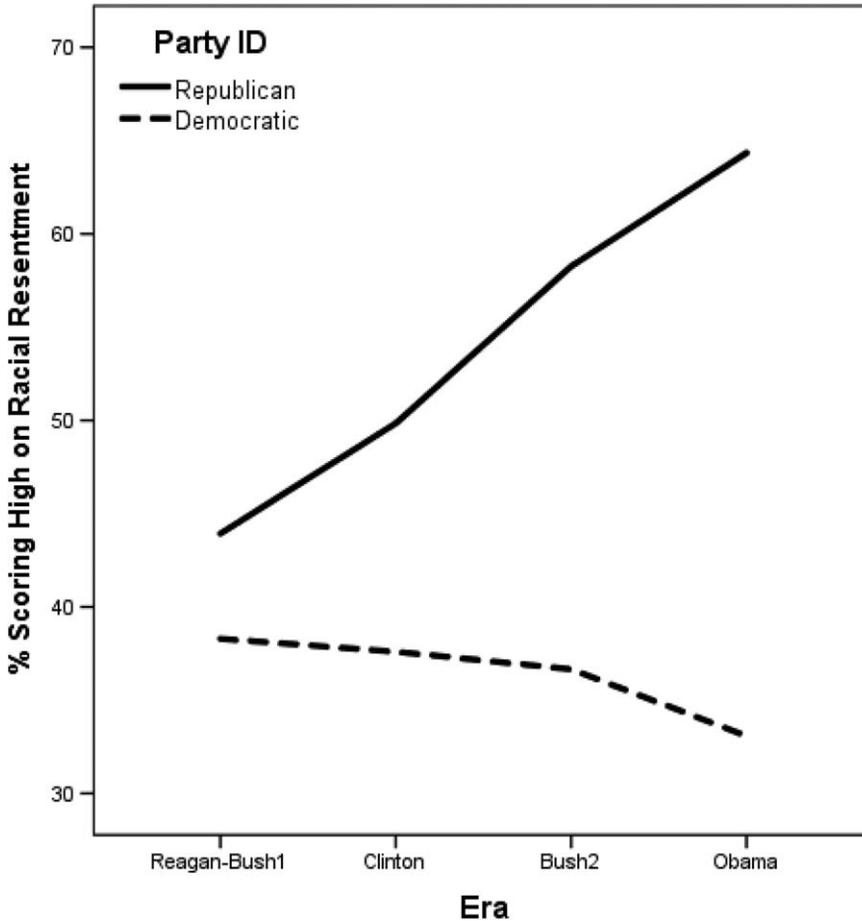


Figure 3. Trends in racial resentment among White Democrats and Republicans from Reagan to Obama. Leaning independents included with party identifiers.

Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative File.

party based on their racial attitudes—or partisan persuasion—party supporters adopting liberal or conservative racial attitudes in response to cues from party leaders (see, e.g., Layman & Carsey, 2002). In all likelihood, both of these forces were at work over this time period. Regardless of the direction of influence, however, the end result was a much closer alignment between racial and partisan attitudes among White voters.

Between 1988 and 2016, the correlation between the racial-resentment scale and relative ratings of the Democratic and Republican parties on the feeling-thermometer scale increased from .26 to .56 while the correlation between the racial-resentment scale and relative ratings of the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates increased from .27 to .61. In terms of shared variance, the correlations were 4.6 and 5.1 times stronger in 2016 than in 1988. During these same years, the correlation between the racial-resentment scale and party identification itself increased from .21 to .52. In terms of shared variance, the correlation was more than six times stronger in 2016 than in 1988.

It is clear from these data that race and racial attitudes have become increasingly central to voters' feelings about the parties and their presidential candidates. Race and racial attitudes have been driving the increases in negative feelings toward the parties and presidential candidates among large segments of the electorate. Thus, among non-White voters, who made up a much larger share of the

electorate in 2016 than in 1988, feelings toward the Republican Party and its presidential candidate have become far more negative. In 1988, African-American voters gave both the Republican Party and the Republican presidential candidate, George H. W. Bush, an average rating of 43 degrees on the feeling-thermometer scale. In 2016, African-American voters gave the Republican Party an average rating of only 27 degrees and the Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump, an average rating of only 12 degrees. Similarly, in 1988, Hispanic voters gave the Republican Party an average rating of 60 degrees and the Republican presidential candidate an average rating of 59 degrees. In 2016, Hispanic voters gave the Republican Party an average rating of only 36 degrees and the Republican presidential candidate an average rating of only 22 degrees.

Similar trends are evident among White voters with high or low levels of racial resentment. Among Whites with low levels of racial resentment, feelings toward the Republican Party and its presidential candidate have become much more negative over time. These voters gave both the Republican Party and the Republican presidential candidate an average rating of 53 degrees in 1988. In 2016, however, racially liberal White voters gave the Republican Party an average rating of only 25 degrees and the Republican presidential candidate an average rating of only 11 degrees. Meanwhile, feelings toward the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate have become much more negative among White voters with high levels of racial resentment. These voters gave the Democratic Party an average rating of 50 degrees and the Democratic presidential candidate an average rating of 43 degrees in 1988. In 2016, in contrast, racially conservative White voters gave the Democratic Party an average rating of only 24 degrees and the Democratic presidential candidate an average rating of only 13 degrees.

The Growing Media Divide

In addition to the racial, cultural, and ideological divides discussed above, another important cleavage within American society that has helped to perpetuate negative partisanship is the growing media divide. As Prior (2007) notes, the advent of cable television has created a media landscape that is both fragmented and highly polarized. This polarization in the media landscape, combined with talk radio and the rapid growth in Internet news outlets, has allowed partisans to self-select into friendly news sources that present stories and editorials with a distinct ideological bent. Given the fact that these stories and editorials often cast the opposing political party in a negative fashion, those individuals who consume their news from these sources are the most likely to develop and maintain negative attitudes toward the out-party.

According to recent data from the Pew Research Center, there is a growing partisan divide over media preference. Indeed, among Trump-supporting Republicans during the 2016 GOP presidential primaries, 44% listed Fox News as their primary source of news. In contrast, only 4% of Democrats who supported Clinton during the Democratic primaries listed Fox News as their primary news source. The same data reports that Republicans were significantly more likely than Democrats to consume news from Drudge Report, while Democrats showed a strong preference for The Huffington Post.¹

These partisan differences in media preference have the ability to profoundly shape voting behavior, especially for those individuals whose main source of news is Fox News. As DellaVigna and Kaplan (2007) show, the introduction of Fox News to various cable markets increased the Republican share of the vote both through increasing Republican turnout levels and via the mechanism of political persuasion. Moreover, these same authors claim that Fox News affected elections

¹ For more, see <http://www.journalism.org/2017/01/18/trump-clinton-voters-divided-in-their-main-source-for-election-news/>.

below the presidential level, with differences in the quantity of television coverage altering Senate vote shares by 0.7 percentage points.

More recent work argues that the polarization of the partisan media landscape is even more powerful at shaping political behavior than previously thought. Utilizing the channel positioning of Fox News as an instrumental variable, combined with a rich source of data on Nielsen viewership ratings, Martin and Yurukoglu (2017) show that ideological TV channels—such as Fox—can drastically shape political references. Their analysis suggests that “Fox News increases Republican vote shares by 0.3 points among viewers induced into watching 2.5 additional minutes per week by variation in [channel] position” (p. 2565). Remarkably, their results suggest that removing Fox News from the channel lineup in 2008 would have lowered the Republican vote share by over six percentage points.

With partisan-friendly media outlets continuing to grow in popularity and persuasive power, Democrats and Republicans in the electorate are increasingly exposed to fundamentally different points of view. By obtaining their news about politics and political affairs from outlets whose chief goal is ideological persuasion and the reinforcement of partisan identities, members of the electorate have developed vastly different opinions about what constitutes proper governance. These differences, in turn, have helped to perpetuate the deepening of the partisan divide wrought by negative partisanship and affective polarization.

Personality, Anger, and Negative Partisanship

In addition to race, personal characteristics such as personality help to explain the development of negative affect within the American electorate. Indeed, recent years have seen an increase in scholarly interest in the role of personality in shaping political preferences, voting behavior, and public opinion. Most commonly operationalized by the Big Five framework of personality, this schematic includes five factors that are thought to collectively measure the breadth of an individual’s personality: (1) Openness to New Experiences, (2) Conscientiousness, (3) Extraversion, (4) Agreeableness, and (5) Emotional Stability. Though the Big Five is not a complete representation of individual phenotypic differences, it has been shown to capture the majority of the variance across personality types (Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). Moreover, it has been shown to possess a high degree of validity (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Norman & Goldberg, 1996).

Utilizing this framework, the existing body of scholarship has consistently found that Openness to New Experiences and Conscientiousness are associated with ideological liberalism and conservatism, respectively (see, e.g., Mondak, 2010; Gerber, Huber, Doherty, Dowling, & Ha, 2010). Related works have found that personality traits are predictive of the strength of partisan affiliation (Gerber, Huber, Doherty, & Dowling, 2012), frequency of political discussion (Hibbing, Ritchie, & Anderson, 2011), and propensity to vote (Gerber, Huber, Raso, & Ha, 2009). While the literatures on personality and negative partisanship have grown considerably, to date little work has been done to integrate the two (cf. Webster, n.d.). Here, we connect these two separately popular literatures to provide evidence that the Big Five personality traits are predictive of negative partisanship within the American electorate.

To determine whether an individual can be classified as a negative partisan, we utilize the feeling-thermometer ratings toward the Democratic and Republican parties from the 2012 ANES to construct a measure of the relative degree of negativity with which an individual views the opposing party. Following Webster (n.d), this measure is created by first subtracting an individual’s feeling-thermometer rating of the opposing party from 100; from this number, we then subtract that same individual’s feeling-thermometer rating of their own party. Thus, the measure is coded as:

$$(100 - F.T. \text{ rating of opposing party}) - F.T. \text{ rating of own party.}$$

Table 3. Personality and Negative Partisanship in the American Electorate

	Negative Partisan	Negativity
	(Logit)	(OLS)
Openness to Experience	-0.077 (0.042)	0.176 (0.506)
Conscientiousness	-0.005 (0.043)	-0.797 (0.545)
Extraversion	-0.076* (0.035)	-0.625 (0.391)
Agreeableness	-0.086* (0.044)	-1.099* (0.503)
Emotional Stability	-0.106** (0.040)	0.904 (0.478)
Constant	-0.434 (.3440)	34.848*** (5.041)
<i>N</i>	4,298	1,782

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Coefficient estimates for control variables not shown. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

This produces a measure that ranges from -100 to 100 . On the one hand, a score of zero on this measure indicates that the individual likes their own party more than they dislike the opposing party. On the other hand, a score on this variable that is above zero indicates that the individual dislikes their own party more than they like their own party. Because they dislike the opposing party more than they like their own party, we classify individuals who have a score above zero as negative partisans.

To illustrate how personality traits are related to negative partisanship within the American electorate, we utilized the measure of negative partisanship described above to run two separate regressions. The first regression analyzes the degree to which the Big Five personality traits are predictive of whether or not an individual can be classified as a negative partisan. Thus, we regress a dummy variable for negative partisanship status (i.e., scoring above a zero on the above measure) on the Big Five personality traits, each of which is measured on a zero-to-six scale. We also include controls for age, gender, race, educational attainment, and ideological affiliation. Our model estimate also includes a political-activism scale, which is a count of how many of 11 different participatory acts an individual has engaged in.² Estimation is via logistic regression.

Our second model analyzes how personality traits are related to the degree of negativity with which Americans view the opposing political party. Our dependent variable in this analysis is our continuous measure of negative partisanship; however, the analysis is limited to only those individuals who are classified as negative partisans. Thus, the dependent variable ranges from 0 to 100. As before, we include all of the Big Five personality traits as predictor variables and the same set of control variables. Estimation is via ordinary least squares (OLS). The results of these regressions are shown in Table 3.³

The results of the first regression show that three of the Big Five personality traits are predictive of whether or not one can be classified as a negative partisan—Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability. In all cases, higher scores on these personality traits are associated with a lower likelihood of being a negative partisan. That individuals who score high on Agreeableness are less likely to be negative partisans is unsurprising; indeed, being agreeable and pleasant in decorum is, by definition, the opposite of negative partisanship. That Extraversion is associated with a lower probability of being a negative partisan is most likely due to the fact that exposure to individuals with opposing viewpoints can oftentimes reduce animus and increase understanding (see, e.g., Allport, 1954).

In addition to Extraversion and Agreeableness, higher levels of Emotional Stability are associated with a lower probability of being a negative partisan. According to Pervin and John's (1999)

² These acts are attending a rally, talking to others about politics, displaying a yard sign, working for a political party, donating money to a candidate, donating money to a party, donating money to a political group or organization, attending a march, attending a school board meeting, signing a petition, and contacting a Member of Congress.

³ Both models include face-to-face and Internet responses to the 2012 ANES.

analysis, this domain of the Big Five “contrasts emotional stability and even-temperedness with *negative emotionality*, such as feeling anxious, nervous, sad, and tense” (pp. 121; emphasis in original). Other emotional components of negative emotionality include anger and frustration. Thus, being emotionally stable means that individuals are characterized by having lower levels of anxiety, nervousness, sadness, anger, and frustration. By having a disposition that predisposes them to avoid these emotions, individuals who score high on measures of Emotional Stability are less likely to develop feelings of anger and negativity toward the opposing political party. The second model shows that, for individuals who are negative partisans, higher levels of Agreeableness lessen the degree of negativity with which they view the opposing party.

Taken as a whole, these results show that the sources of negative affect and the development of negative partisan attitudes go beyond racial, cultural, informational, and ideological divides. Indeed, the psychological foundation that makes us who we are—personality—is a strong predictor of whether one holds negative affective evaluations of the opposing party and the degree to which they express that enmity.

Consequences of Negative Partisanship for Voting Behavior

Thus far, we have demonstrated a dramatic increase in negative partisanship within the American electorate. This growth in negative partisanship is closely tied to racial, cultural, and ideological differences within the electorate. In addition to these sociodemographic and policy factors, we have also shown how media preferences and personality traits contribute to negative partisanship. Though this growth in negative affect is important in its own right, it is essential to understand the consequences that negative partisanship has had on American political behavior. Here, we outline the ways in which negative partisanship has changed the ways Americans engage with politics and political officials.

Perhaps the biggest consequence of negative partisanship is that it has led to a considerable degree of party loyalty and straight ticket voting. Previous eras of political competition regularly saw voters cast ballots for one party at the presidential level and the other party at the congressional level. As outlined by Abramowitz and Webster (2016), ticket splitting was common until around 1990. This ticket splitting was largely driven by Republicans who voted for their own party’s candidate at the presidential level but defected to conservative Democratic candidates in congressional elections. However, with the rise of Newt Gingrich and the Republican takeover of the House of Representatives, Republicans in the electorate began to more consistently vote for their own party’s candidates at all electoral levels. Figure 4, shown below, illustrates the trends in ticket splitting over time.

As shown in Figure 4, ticket splitting was relatively common from the early 1970s through the 1980s. However, the “Republican revolution” of the 1990s and the twin phenomena of partisan sorting and polarization helped fuel a resurgence in straight ticket voting. This, in turn, has diminished the importance of candidate-specific factors in down-ballot races. While canonical studies have suggested that candidates seek reelection by crafting a personal image and diligently cultivating their constituencies (Fenno, 1978; Mayhew, 1974), the tribal and antagonistic nature of negative partisanship means that there is now very little opportunity for candidates to separate themselves from their party brand. In the era of negative partisanship, Americans care less about what *individual* represents them and more about which *party* controls Congress.

A related measure is the percentage of partisans who were consistently loyal in voting for their own party’s candidates at all electoral levels (President, House, Senate). Figure 5 displays the trend on this metric from 1980 to 2012. The trend suggests that party loyalty has become increasingly normal in American politics. Moreover, this trend toward partisan loyalty persists across all strengths of partisan identification.

During the 2012 elections, approximately 90% of those individuals who had negative ratings of the opposing political party voted consistently loyal for their own party. Perhaps even more striking is

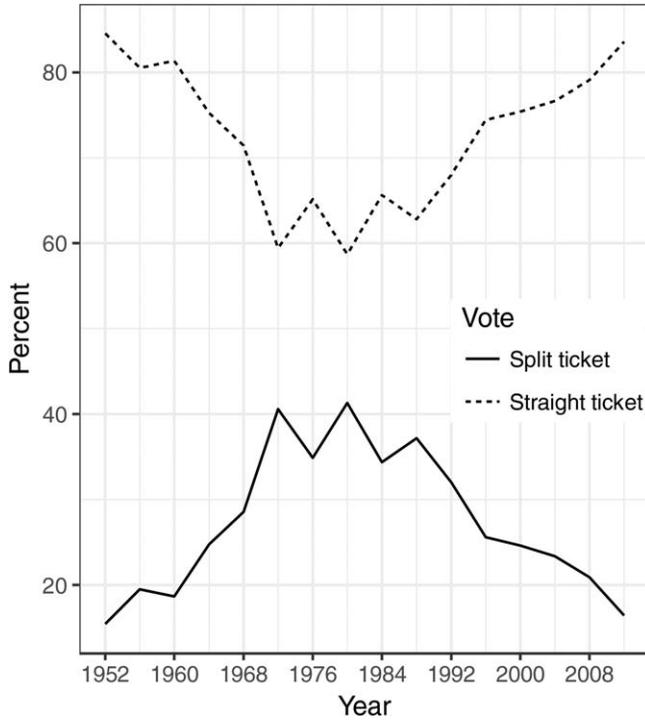


Figure 4. Trends in split-ticket voting, 1952–2012.

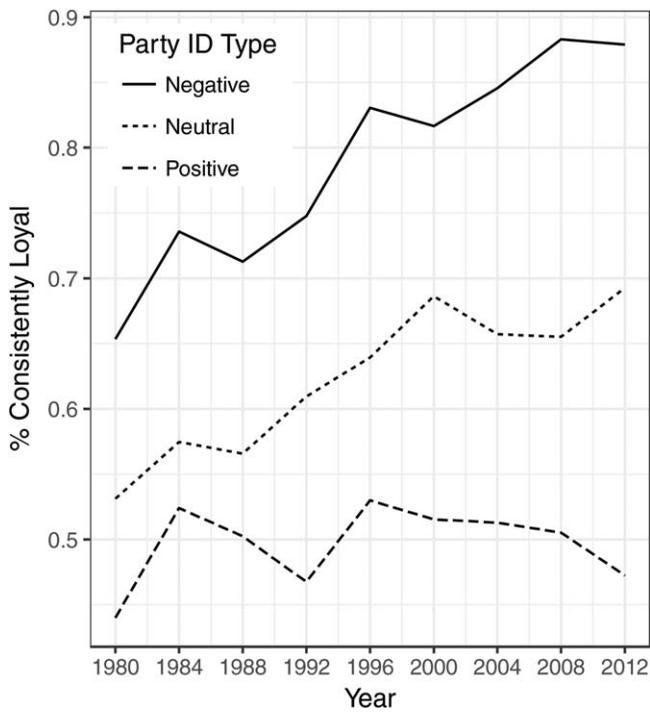


Figure 5. Percentage of partisans voting consistently for their party’s candidates.

Table 4. Explaining Consistent Party Loyalty in Voting Behavior

	(1)
	Vote Loyal
FT own candidate	0.078*** (0.022)
FT opposing candidate	-0.151*** (0.033)
FT own party	0.080** (0.029)
FT opposing party	-0.038 (0.025)
Strong partisan	-1.745 (0.892)
Weak partisan	0.166 (0.834)
Constant	-2.545* (1.176)
<i>N</i>	2,233
<i>AIC</i>	271.4

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

that nearly 76% of respondents in the 2012 ANES held negative views of the opposing party. As we would expect given the psychological nature of negative partisanship, dislike of the opposing political party, its supporters, and its governing elite is a powerful mechanism driving individuals to remain consistently loyal to their own party. With the percentage of Americans viewing the opposing party negatively continuing to increase, negative partisanship is likely to shape voting behavior well into the future.

Negative Partisanship and the Rise of Trump

What is perhaps most noteworthy about the trend toward partisan loyalty is that it remained exceptionally high during the 2016 election. Though it featured historically unpopular candidates and was touted by journalists as one of the most divisive elections in American history, the data suggests that partisans were still overwhelmingly likely to vote for their own party's candidates. Indeed, data from the 2016 ANES indicates that close to 90% of partisans voted for their party's presidential candidate.

To assess the relationship between negative partisanship and partisan loyalty at the presidential level, we utilized data from the 2016 ANES and regressed an indicator variable for party loyalty (e.g., voting for the candidates of one's own party at the Presidential level) on feeling-thermometer ratings of the opposing political party's candidate. As control variables, we also included a series of dummy variables for strong partisans and weak partisans (with independent leaners as the contrast category), and feeling-thermometer ratings toward an individual's own party and the opposing party. The results of this logistic regression are shown in Table 4.⁴

Unsurprisingly, the results of this model suggest that individuals were more likely to vote loyally for their own party's candidate when they had strong affective evaluations of that candidate. Moreover, rating one's party high on the feeling-thermometer score is associated with a higher likelihood of partisan loyalty. The dummy variables for strong partisans and weak partisans had no statistically significant relationship, nor did ratings of the opposing party on the feeling-thermometer scale.

As shown in Table 4, the most important factor in predicting partisan loyalty is how an individual feels about the opposing party's presidential candidate. In fact, this measure is twice as important in predicting a loyal vote as is feeling-thermometer ratings towards the candidate running for an individual's own party. Thus, while the 2016 election saw two highly unpopular candidates, partisan loyalty remained at such extraordinary levels because Americans viewed the opposing party's candidate with such enmity.

⁴ This model excludes pure independents and those who did not vote.

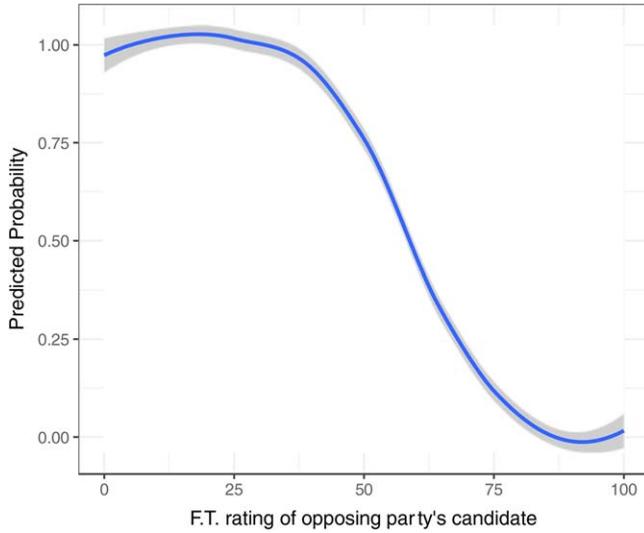


Figure 6. Predicted probability of consistent party loyalty in voting. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

To more clearly show the relationship between feeling-thermometer ratings of the opposing party’s presidential candidate and partisan loyalty, Figure 6 displays the predicted probability of an individual voting loyally for her party’s candidate as the feeling-thermometer ratings of the opposing party’s candidate ranges from its minimum value to its maximum value. To create these predicted probabilities, we set the strong partisan dummy variable equal to one, the weak partisan dummy variable equal to zero, and held the other variables at their means. A loess smoother is included.

The trend in Figure 6 is striking. When individuals rate the opposing party’s candidate at 0 on the feeling-thermometer scale, the probability of voting loyally is .999. When the feeling-thermometer score reaches 50—a neutral rating—the probability of an individual voting loyally for her own party is .796. It is not until an individual rates the opposing party’s candidate at 60 on the feeling-thermometer scale that the probability of voting loyally dips below .5. The overall trend in this figure clearly shows the power of negative partisanship in influencing voter behavior. The rise of negative partisanship within the American electorate implies that fear and loathing of the opposing party and its candidates, rather than affection for one’s own party and its candidates, is the most important factor in maintaining partisan loyalty. Negative partisanship, then, is able to succinctly explain why Republicans who had reservations about Donald Trump nevertheless voted for their party’s standard bearer: fear and dislike of Hillary Clinton.

Conclusions

The past 50 years has seen a sea change in American political behavior. Racial, ideological, and cultural sorting, along with different preferences about the media and sources of information, as well as innate personal differences, have created a political system in which the supporters of the Democratic and Republican parties have very little in common. The absence of commonalities between the two parties’ supporters has made it easy for Democrats and Republicans to see the opposing side as “the other” (Mason, 2015). This, in turn, has helped to perpetuate the phenomenon of negative partisanship.

Though the rise of negative partisanship may bring benefits for American democracy such as increased participation and heightened political awareness, it is also likely that this new style of

partisan behavior has led to a series of deleterious consequences for governance and representation. The anger-fueled nature of negative partisanship within the American electorate has almost certainly reshaped the legislative process in Washington. Indeed, with Democrats and Republicans in the electorate viewing each other with enmity and outright hostility, political elites are encouraged to draw hard lines over political bargains throughout the lawmaking process. Thus, the presence of negative partisanship within the electorate has helped to perpetuate the “unorthodox lawmaking” that has become characteristic of Congress (Sinclair, 2016). Additionally, the prevalence of negative partisanship has served to make partisan identities more salient. This heightened focus on political identities, along with the associated anger it entails, has caused citizens to lose trust in their governing institutions (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015; Webster, 2017).

Given negative partisanship’s ability to reshape the nature of political behavior, governance, and the ways in which citizens engage with their political institutions, future work should continue to explore the causes and consequences of this new style of partisan behavior. Moreover, future work should examine possible ways to mitigate the negativity with which Americans view supporters of the opposing political party. With anger at an all-time high, Washington helplessly gridlocked, and trust in government plummeting, understanding the causes and consequences of negative partisanship could not be more pressing.

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