Week 2
Political Formation and Party Identification

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Jennings (2007); Neundorf and Smets (2017)

Political socialization describes the process by which citizens crystalize political identities, values and behavior that remain relatively persistent throughout later life.

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Hyman (1959, p. 25)

Political socialization as an individual's learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal position as mediated through various agencies of society.

Merelman (1986, p. 279)

Political socialization as the process by which people acquire relatively enduring orientations toward politics in general and toward their own political system.

Early life experiences are generally considered to form the basis for:

- Political attitudes (e.g., political values and identity);
- Political engagement (e.g., political interest), and ultimately;
- Political behaviors (e.g., political participation).

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Why?

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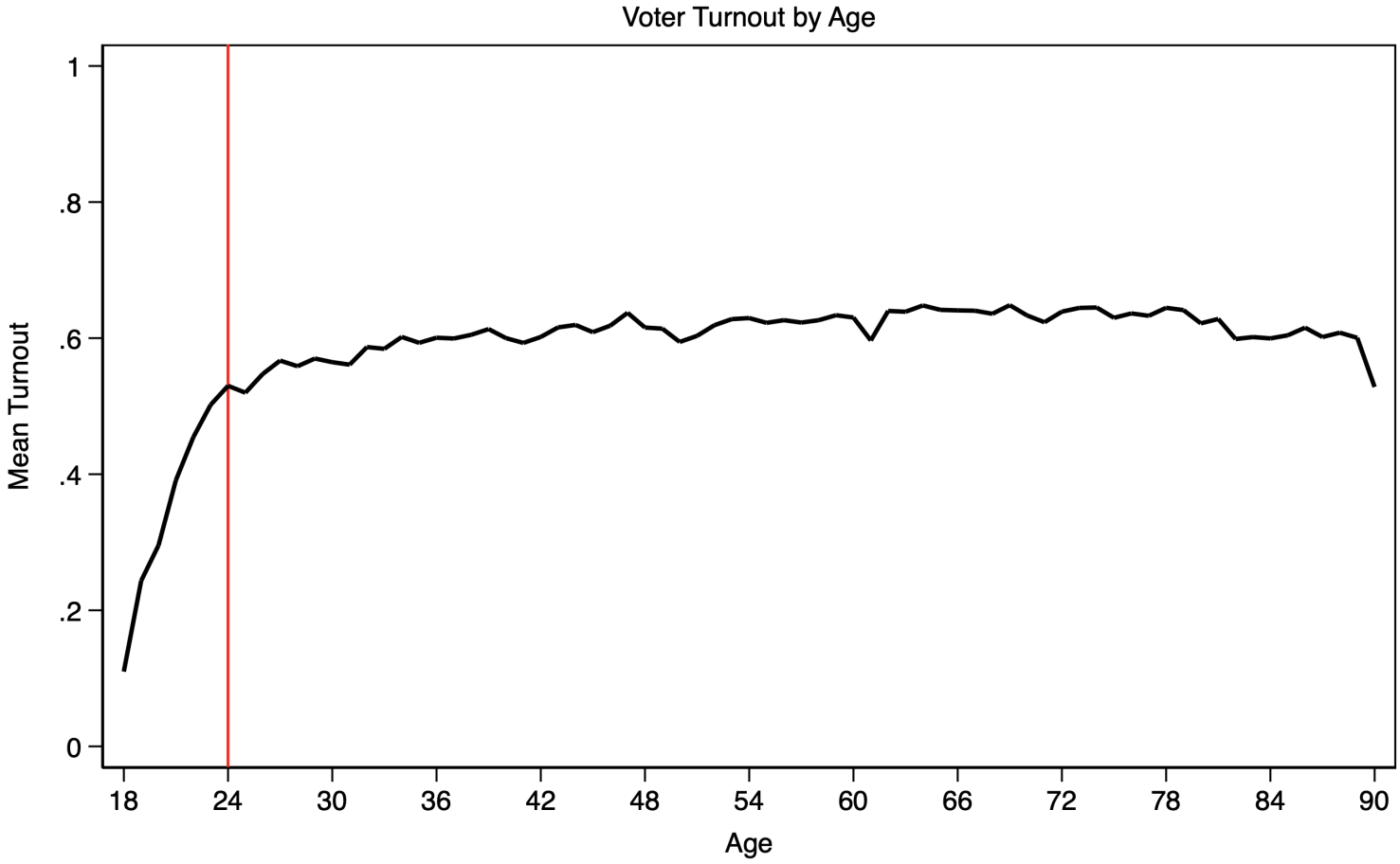
Why?

Assumptions:

1. What is learned earliest in life is most important, as early experiences serve as a value basis for future attitudes and behaviors.

2. Attitudes and behaviors acquired prior to adulthood remained unchanged in later life.



Notes: Data from Fortunato, Silva, and Williams (2022). 39 Countries. Years Covered: 1965-2018. N = 3,668,892.

Later research:

- The persistence of preferences and behaviors developed in early life had been overestimated (Searing, Wright, and Rabinowitz 1976), and;
- It became evident that political ideas developed during childhood are revised later in life (Searing, Schwartz, and Lind, 1973).
- The focus of scientific discussion at this point shifted from early political socialization to more in-depth studies of the effect of performance-based evaluations of government on party identification;
- Political socialization disappeared from the academic agenda for a period of time between the 1970s and 1990s.

Other reasons to the decline in the studies of childhoold studies:

1. Believe that politics is not important for children;
2. Political scientists are not very interested in children;
3. Political socialization is too weak (it does not endure);
4. Sufrage and other political rights are granted after 18.

The state of the art today:

- Political learning is a lifelong process, starting at an early age (Easton and Dennis 1969; Jennings and Niemi 1981; van Deth et al. 2007).
- The impressionable or formative years between childhood and adulthood are generally believed to be a crucial period during which citizens form the basis of political attitudes and behaviors (Jennings 1979; Strate et al. 1989; Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Kinder 2006).
- Personal, social, cultural, political, and historical changes affect young citizens disproportionately, thus creating generational differences in patterns of political attitudes and behavior.
- Young citizens have not yet developed political habits and are therefore more easily influenced by external factors (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Flanagan and Sherod 1998; Sears and Levy 2003).

How does political socialization work?

Sources of *political socialization*:

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- Family
- School
- College
- Church
- Mass media
- Political Campaign
- Salient political events

- Family as a prime agent of socialization has occupied an important place in the literature.
- Family, mainly parents, played a predominant role given the child's early and prolonged exposure to the family,
- Relative degree of continuity observed.

- Some skepticism about direct parental influence (inconsistent results);
- Family influence continues to be assessed by introducing family socioeconomic characteristics into the analysis;
- Resocialization of adults, see for instance:

  Dahlgaard, Jens O. 2018. "Trickle-up political socialization: The causal effect on turnout of parenting a newly enfranchised voter." *American Political Science Review* 112 (3): 698–705.

Long-term dynamics of socialization through the age, period, and cohort (APC) approach

How an individual develops specific political attitudes or behaviors will hold three different——but related——factors accountable:

1. Aging,
2. Enduring intercohort experiences, and;
3. Time.

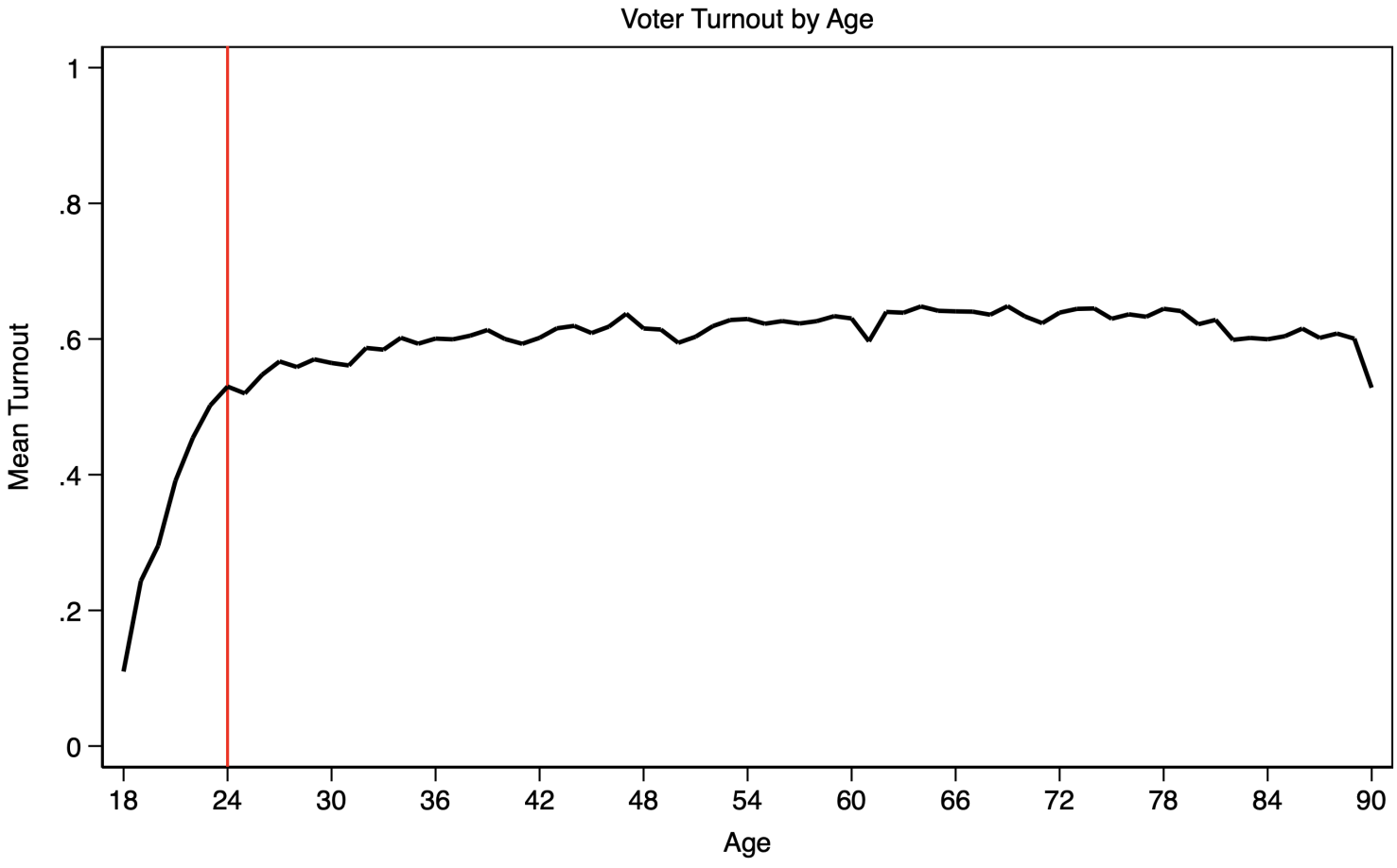
The idea behind the APC approach is that people's patterns of political behavior change as they age:

- Early life: Low attachment to civic life leads to little interest in politics, low levels of political knowledge, and low political participation.
- Middle life: Political participation is enhanced due to increased mobilization, skills, and society pressure. Political socialization stabilized as people experience life-cycle events that mark the transition to adulthood.
- Old age groups: Political participation tends to drop due to general disengagement from social life.

According to the APC approach:

- The relationship between age and political behavior is curvilinear: people are most active in middle life and least active in the earliest and latest stages of the life cycle.

- The relationship between age and voter turnout can indeed be described with an inverted U-shape.



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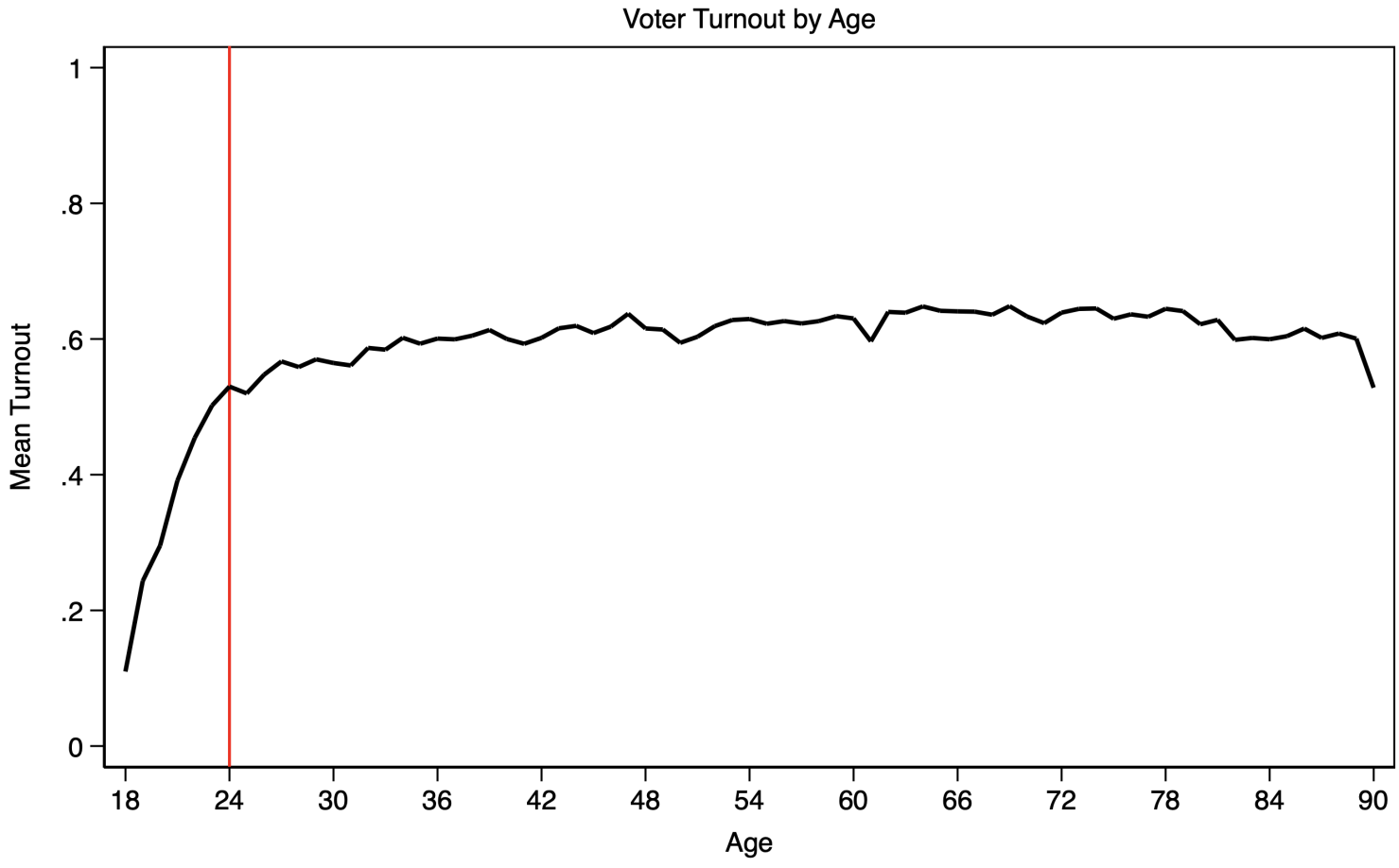

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Any issues?

- Focusing on individuals' life experiences, the APC approach neglects the fact that social, cultural, and historical events can impact political attitudes and political participation.

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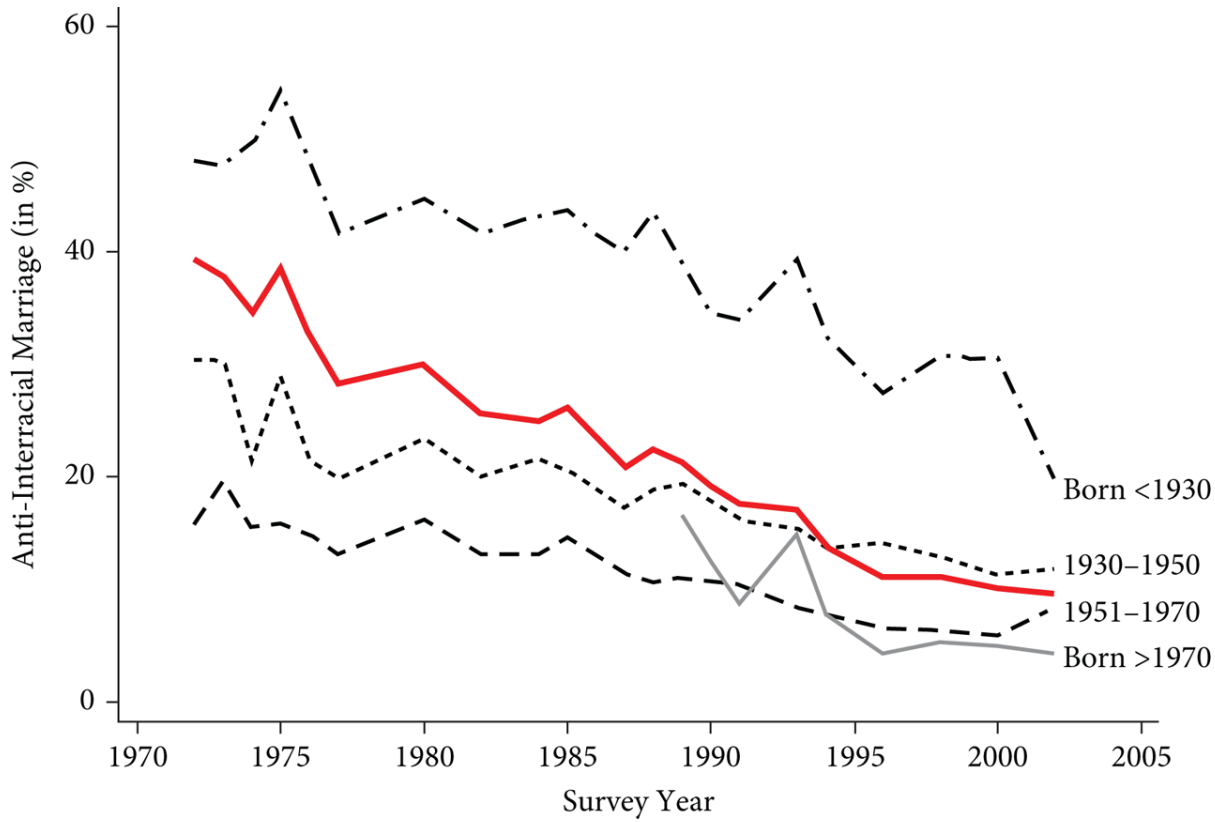

Data source: Neundorf and Smets (2017).

So far, we have discussed:

1. What is it about early life experiences that makes them matter for political attitudes and behavior in later life?

2. What age is crucial in the development of citizens' political outlooks?

3. Who and what influences political behavior in life?

4. How do political preferences and behavior develop over the years?

The problem in finding answers to these questions is usually of an empirical nature.

Party Identification

Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002

Party identification is a sense of personal, affective attachment to a political party based on feelings of closeness to the social groups associated with the parties.

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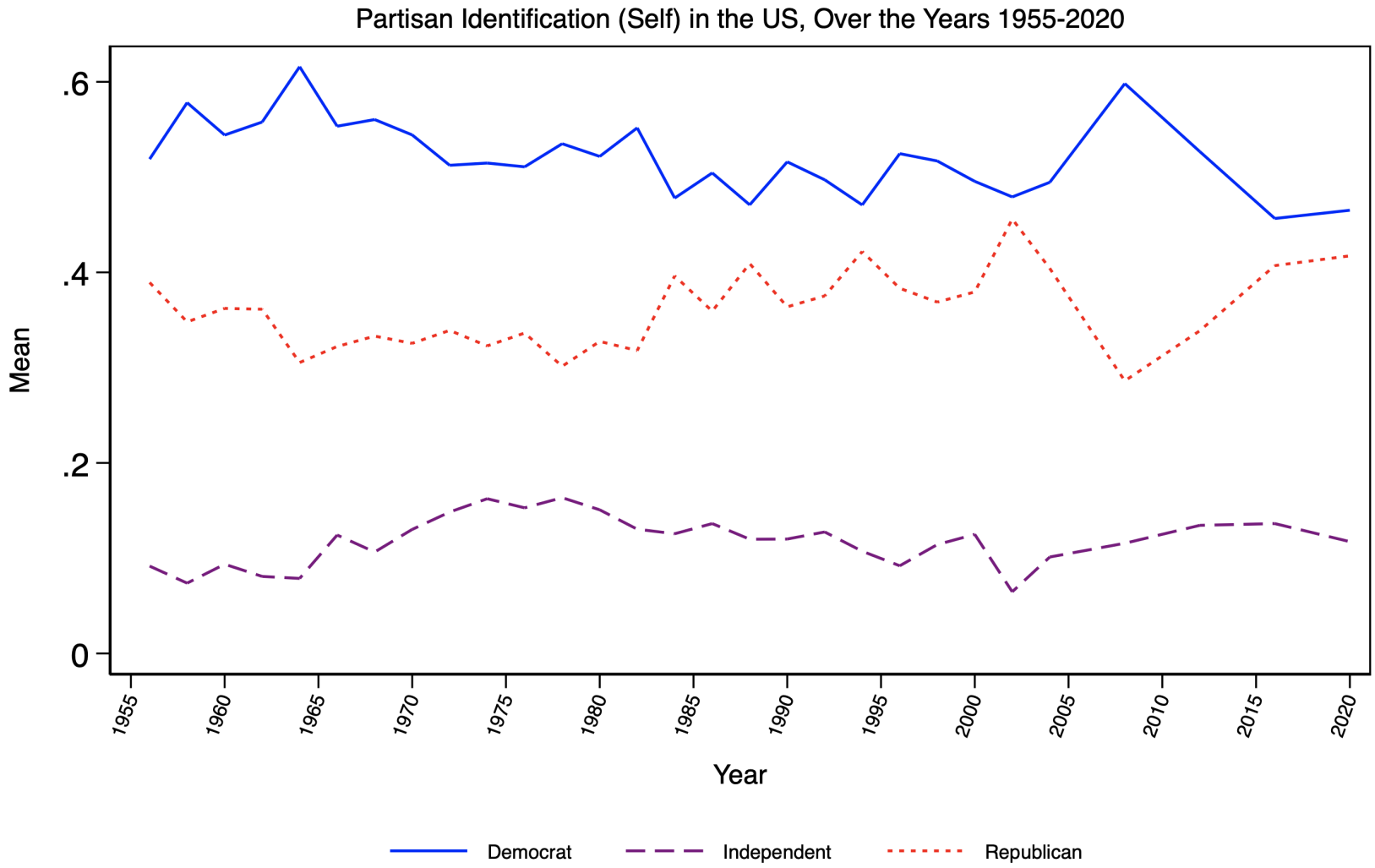
- A person may identify with a group but perceive no membership in it.
- Conversely, people may perceive themselves to be members of a group but feel no affinity for it or its members.
- Disaffected group members may recognize an identification as without feeling an identification with.
- Party identification tends to be correlated with a variety of political attitudes, particularly those directly related to parties.
- Partisanship is correlated with opinions on questions of public policy.

Data: ANES Time Series Cumulative Data File (1955-2020). N = 68,224.



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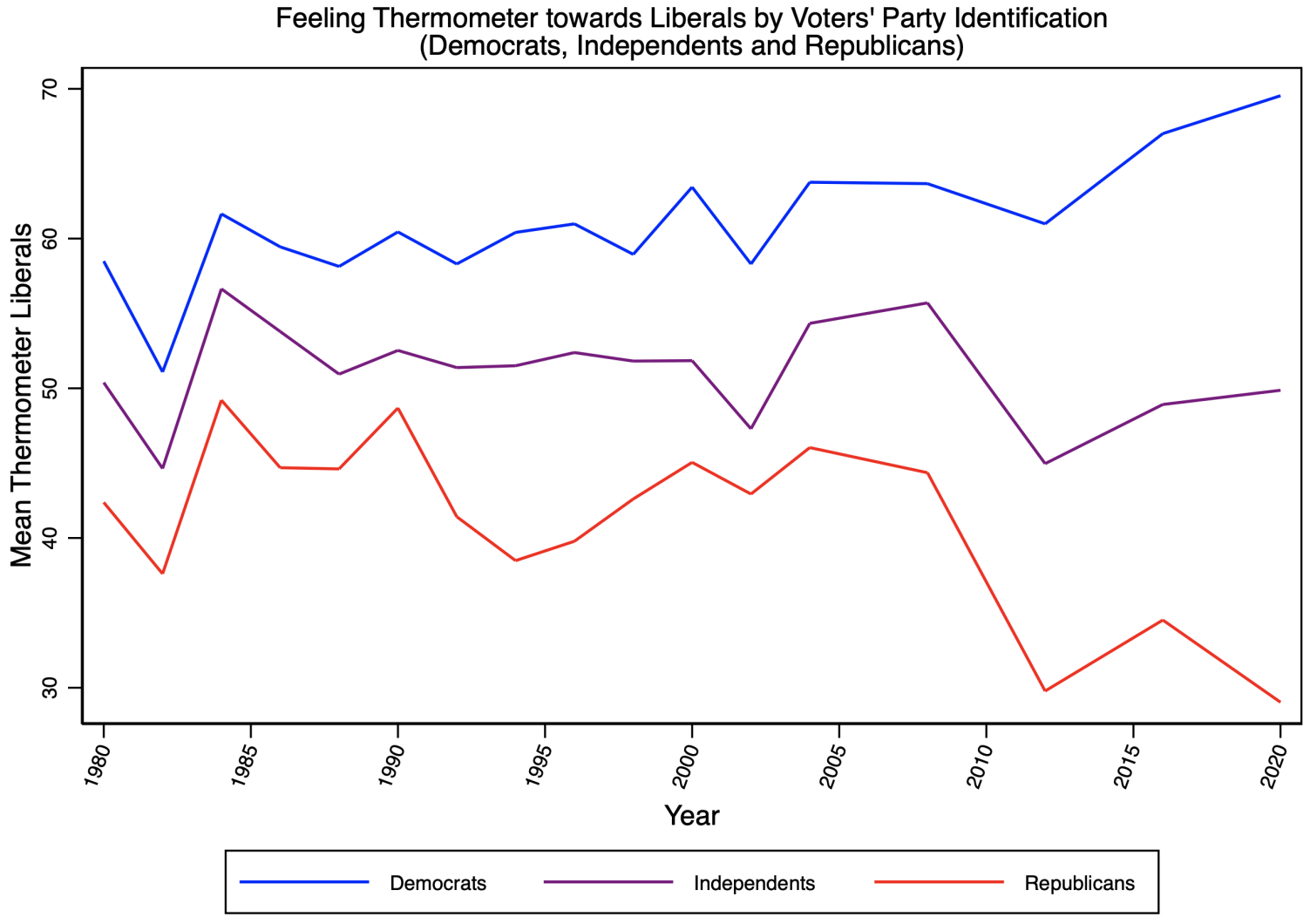

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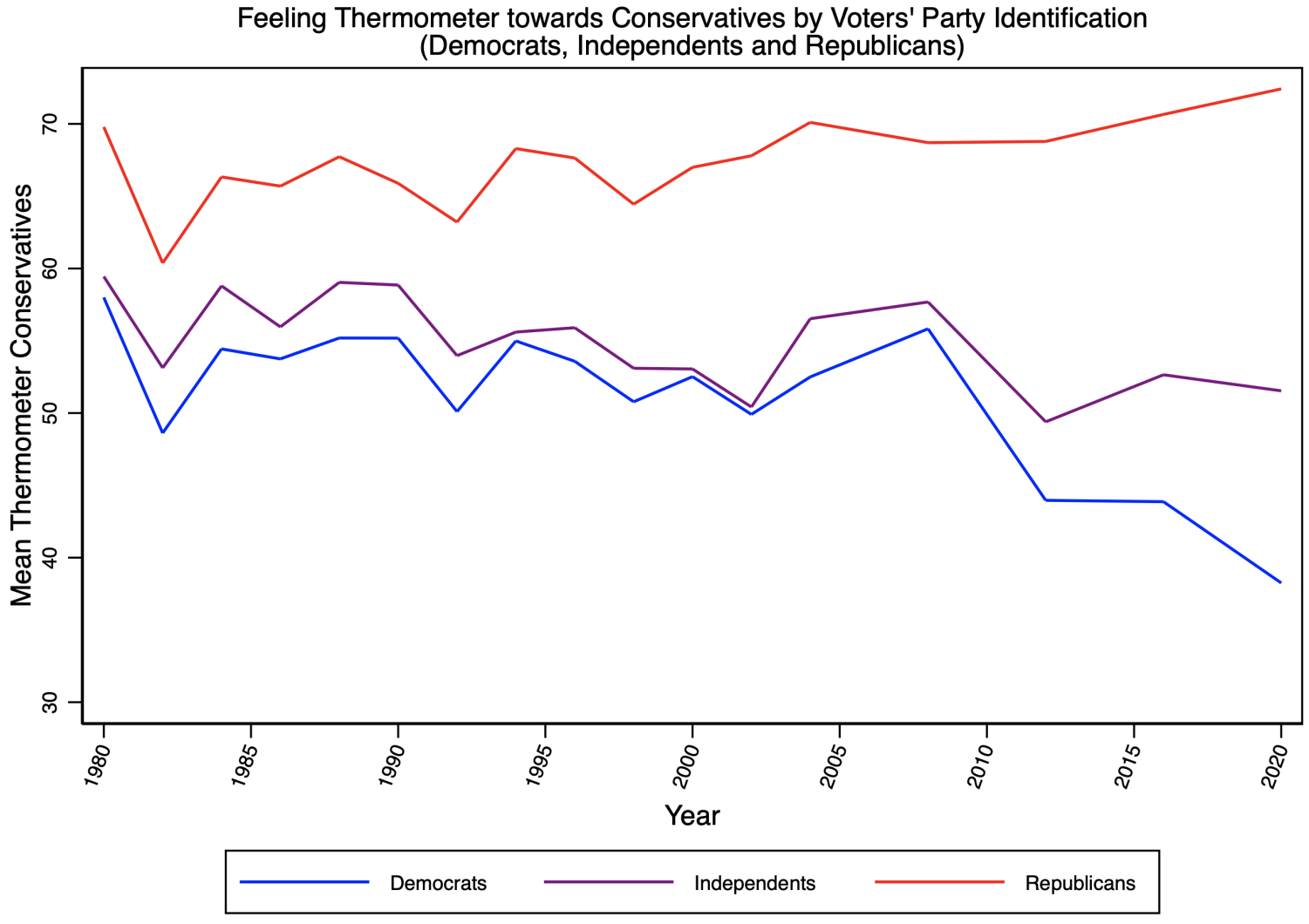

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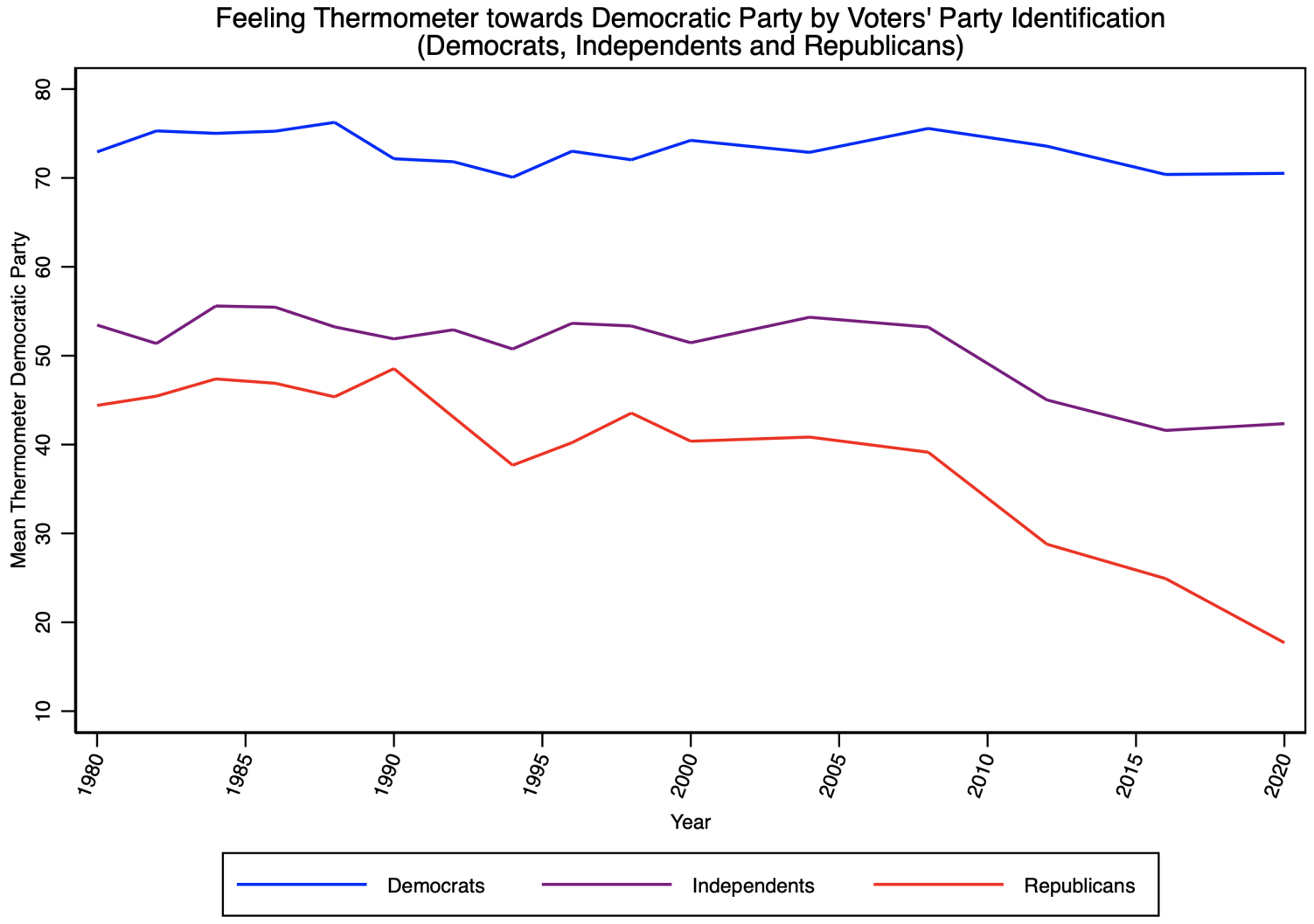

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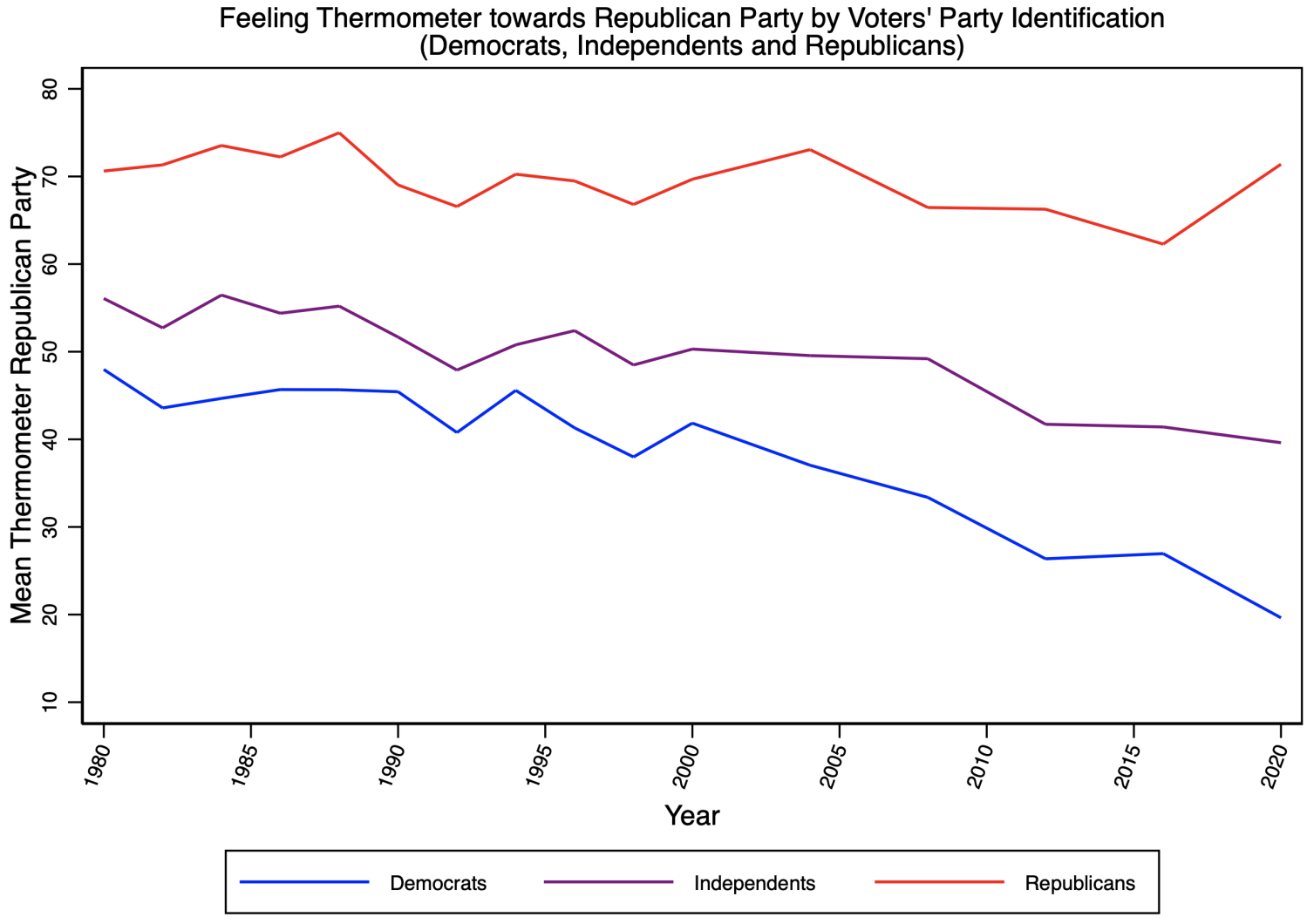

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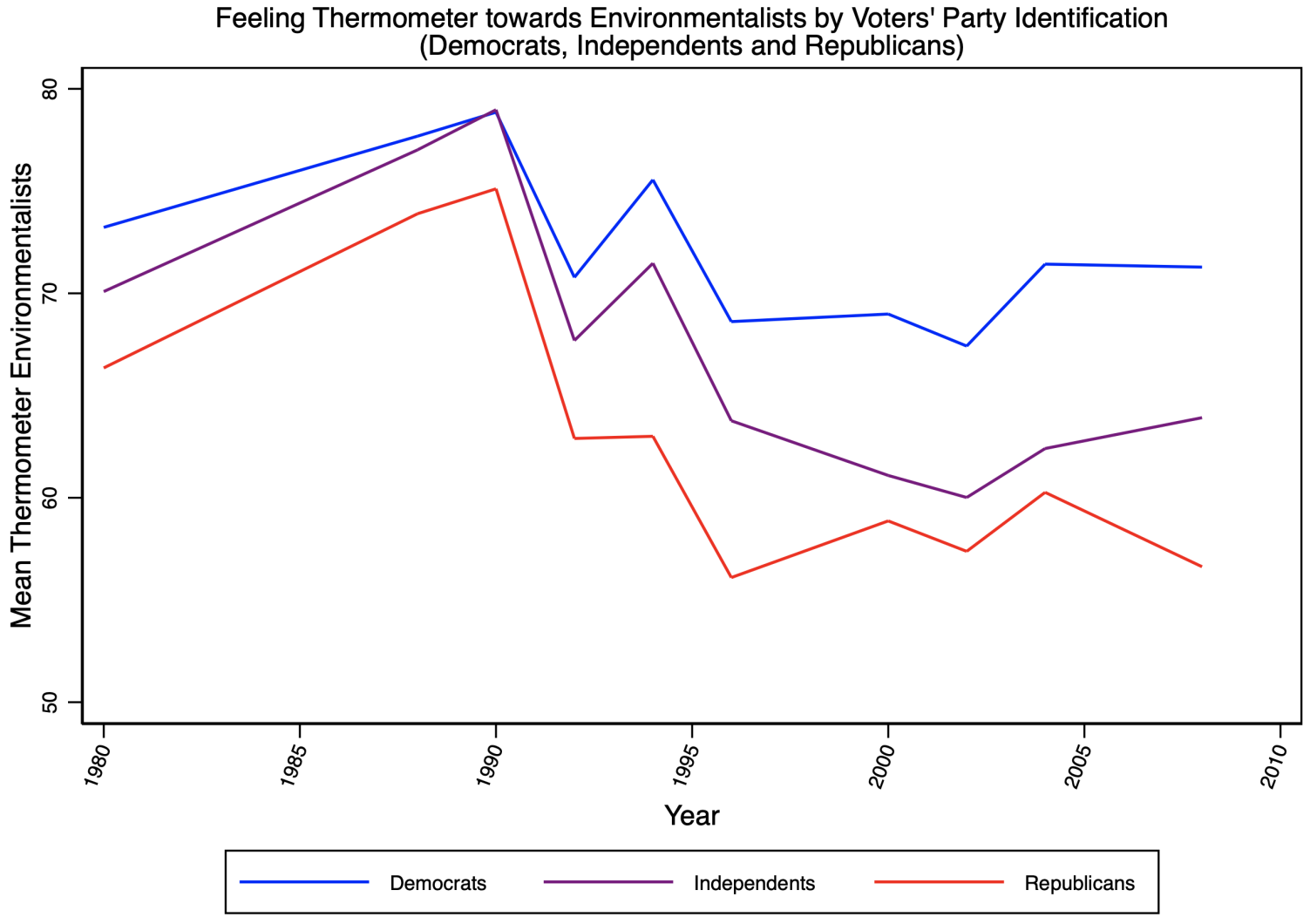

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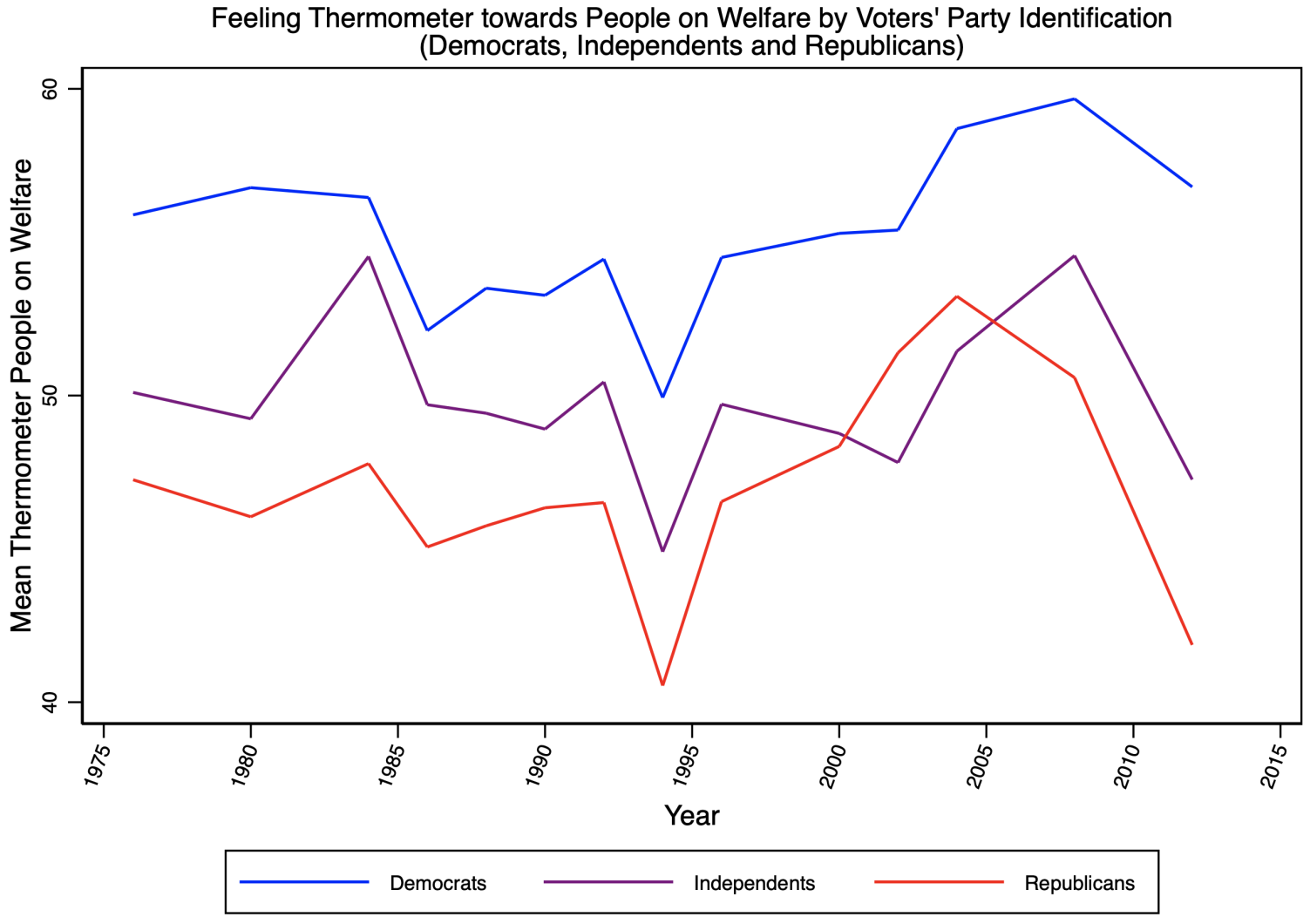

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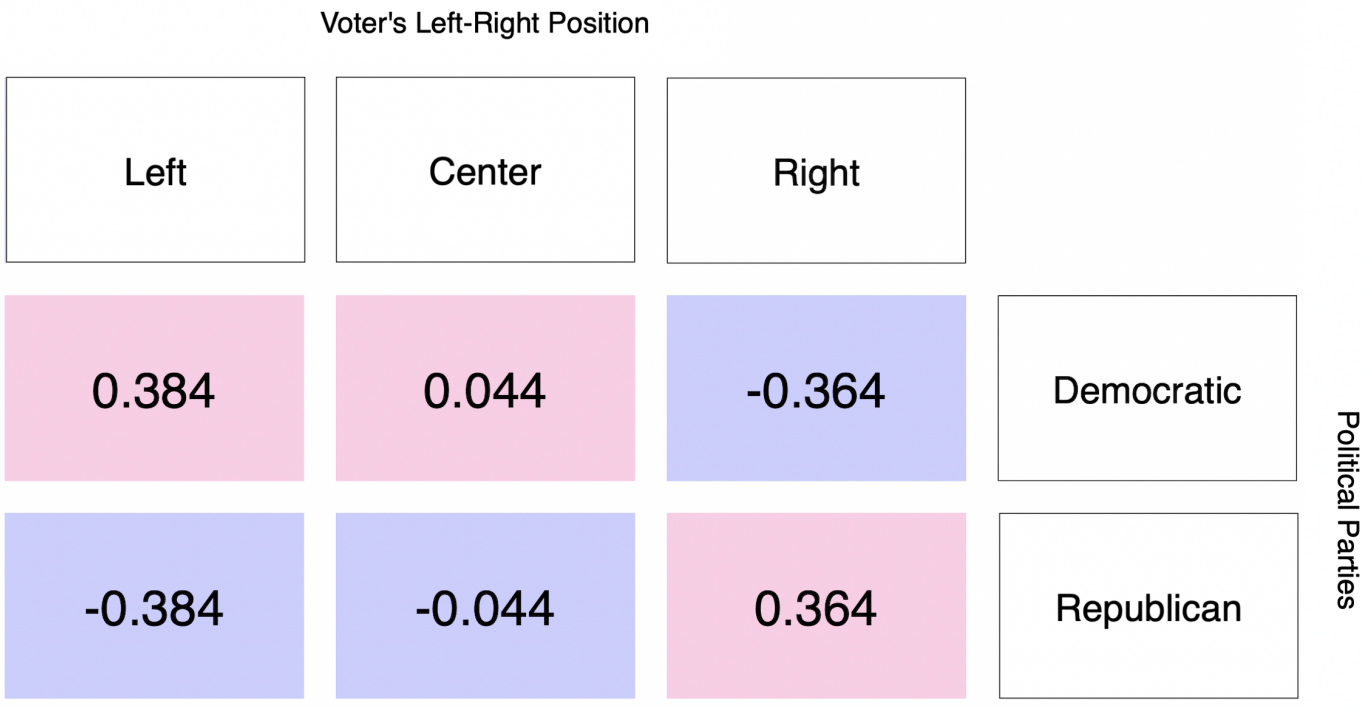

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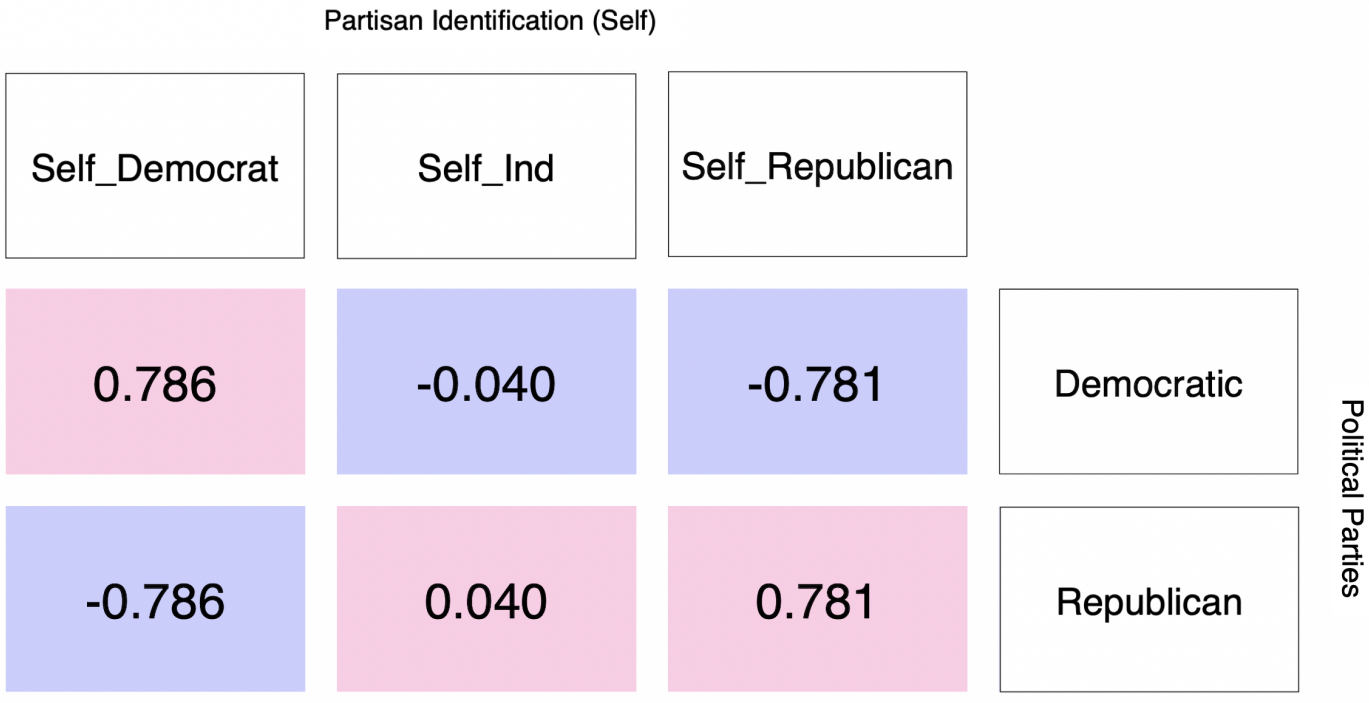
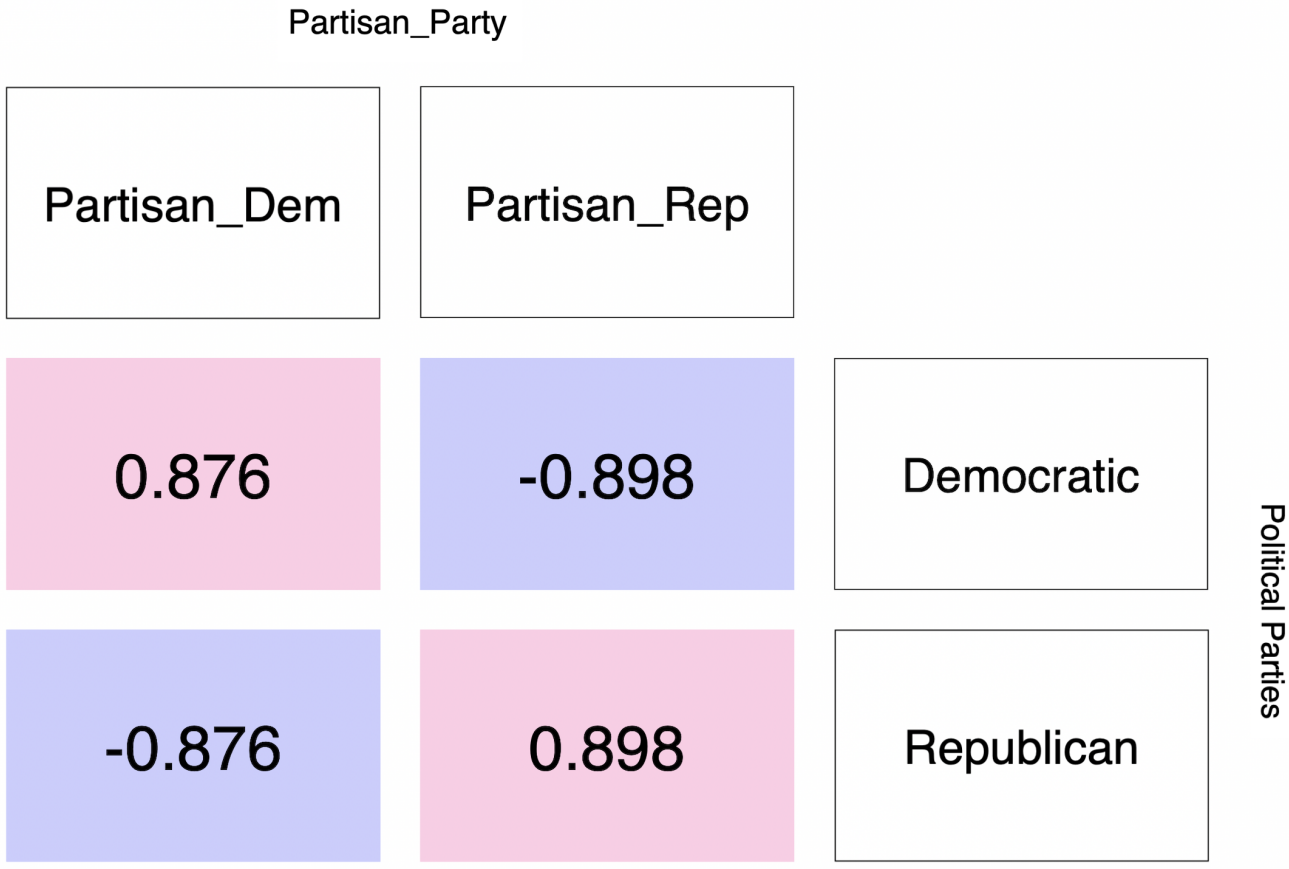
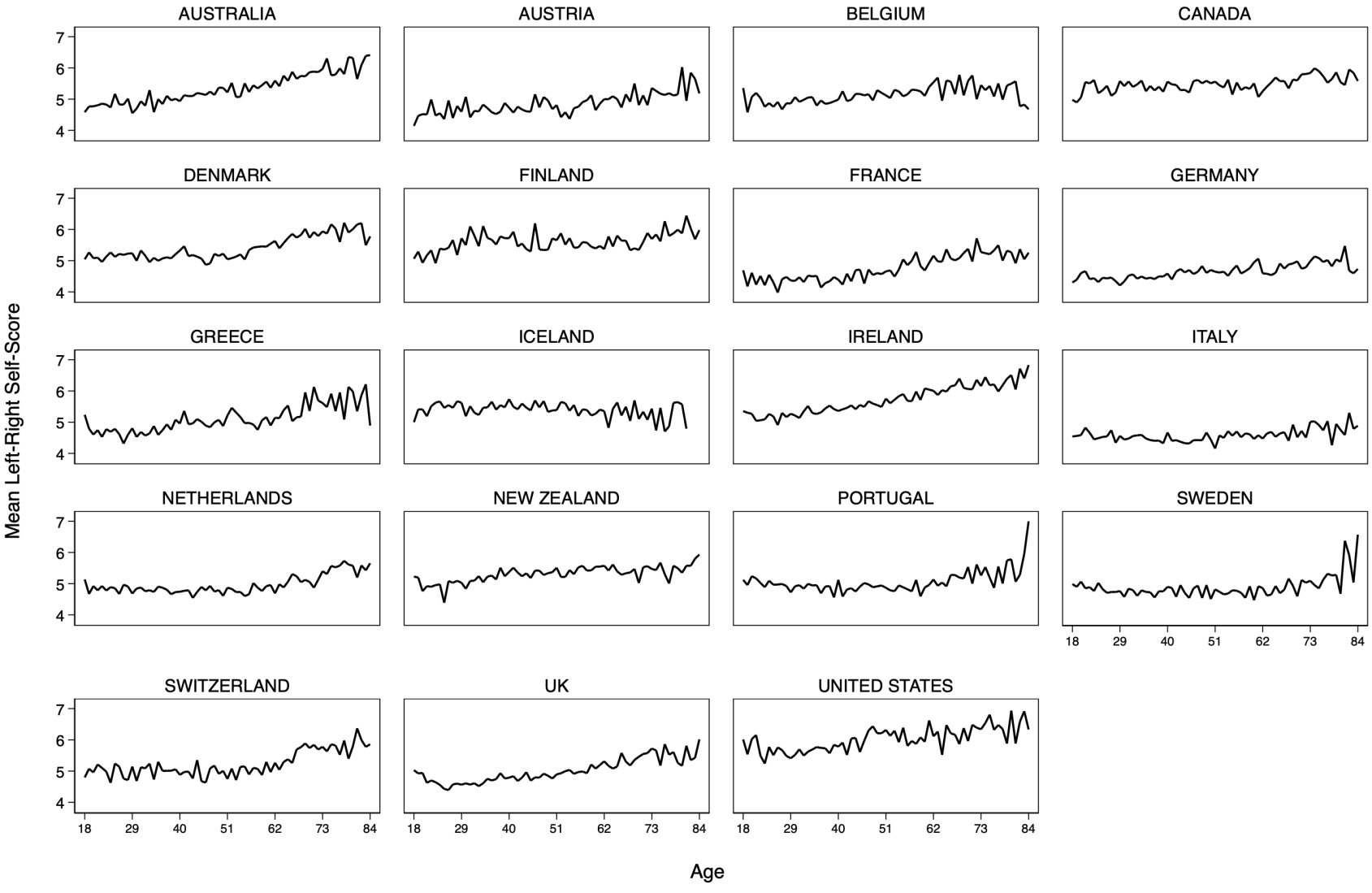
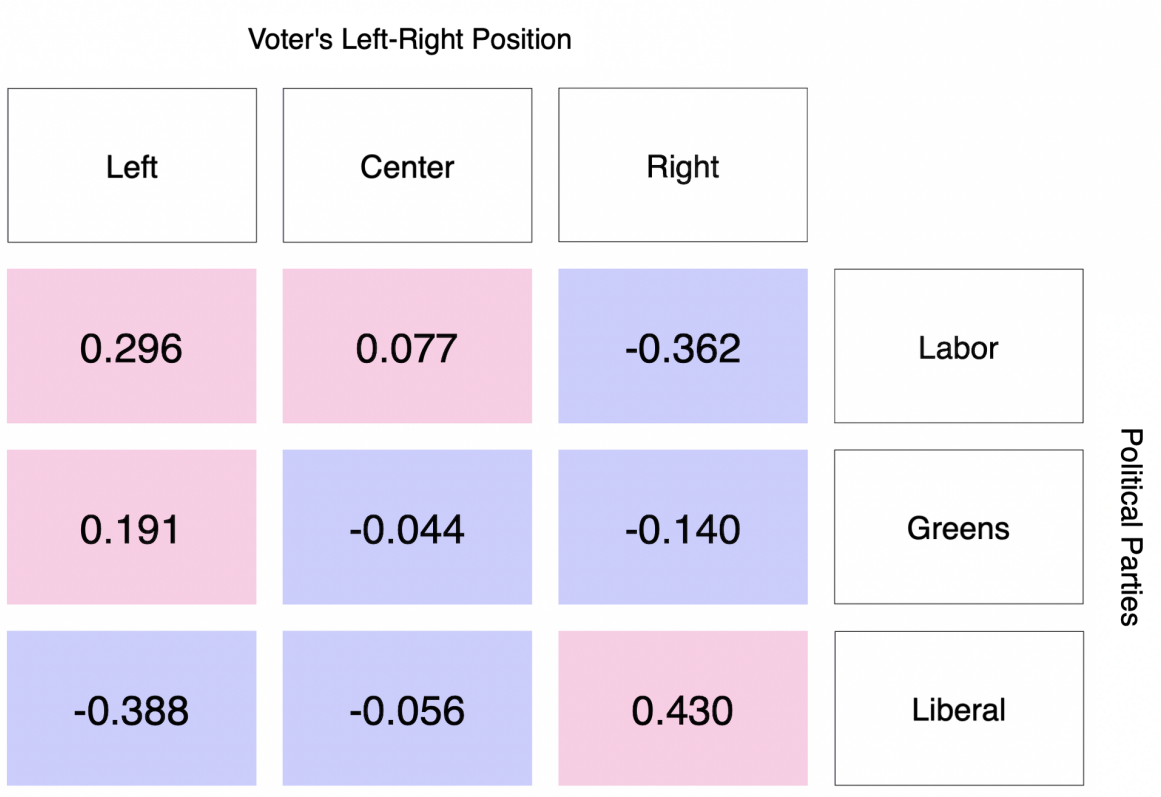
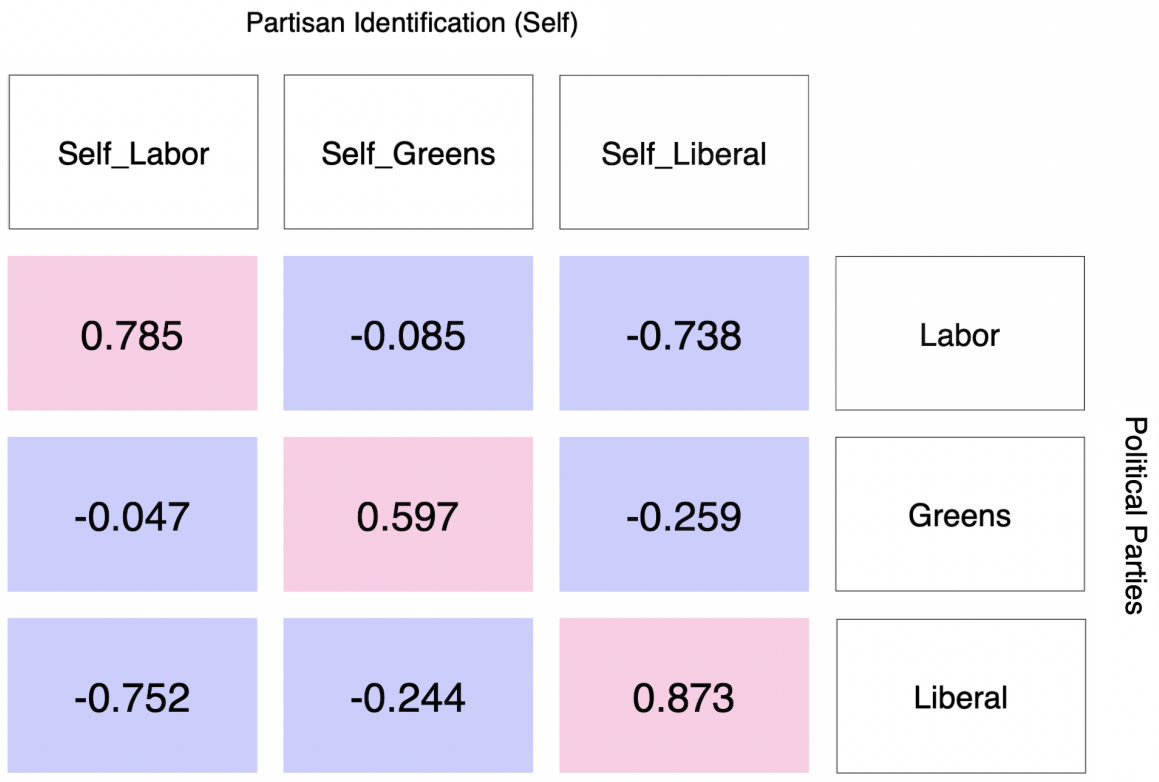



Partisan_Party
Partisan_Dem
Partisan_Rep
0.876
-0.898
Democratic
-0.876
0.898
Republican
Political Parties

Fortunato, Silva, and Williams (2022) [1965-2018]. N = 3,642,492.




Voter's Left-Right Position
Left
Center
Right
0.296
0.077
-0.362
Labor
0.191
-0.044
-0.140
Greens
-0.388
-0.056
0.430
Liberal
Political Parties


Partisan Identification (Self)
Self_Labor
Self_Greens
Self_Liberal
0.785
-0.085
-0.738
Labor
-0.047
0.597
-0.259
Greens
-0.752
-0.244
0.873
Liberal
Political Parties

The correlation between party identification, social groups, and stances on issues is often weak.

- Identification with political parties is both conceptually distinct and empirically quite different in character.
- The statistical association between partisanship and issue stance are weak.

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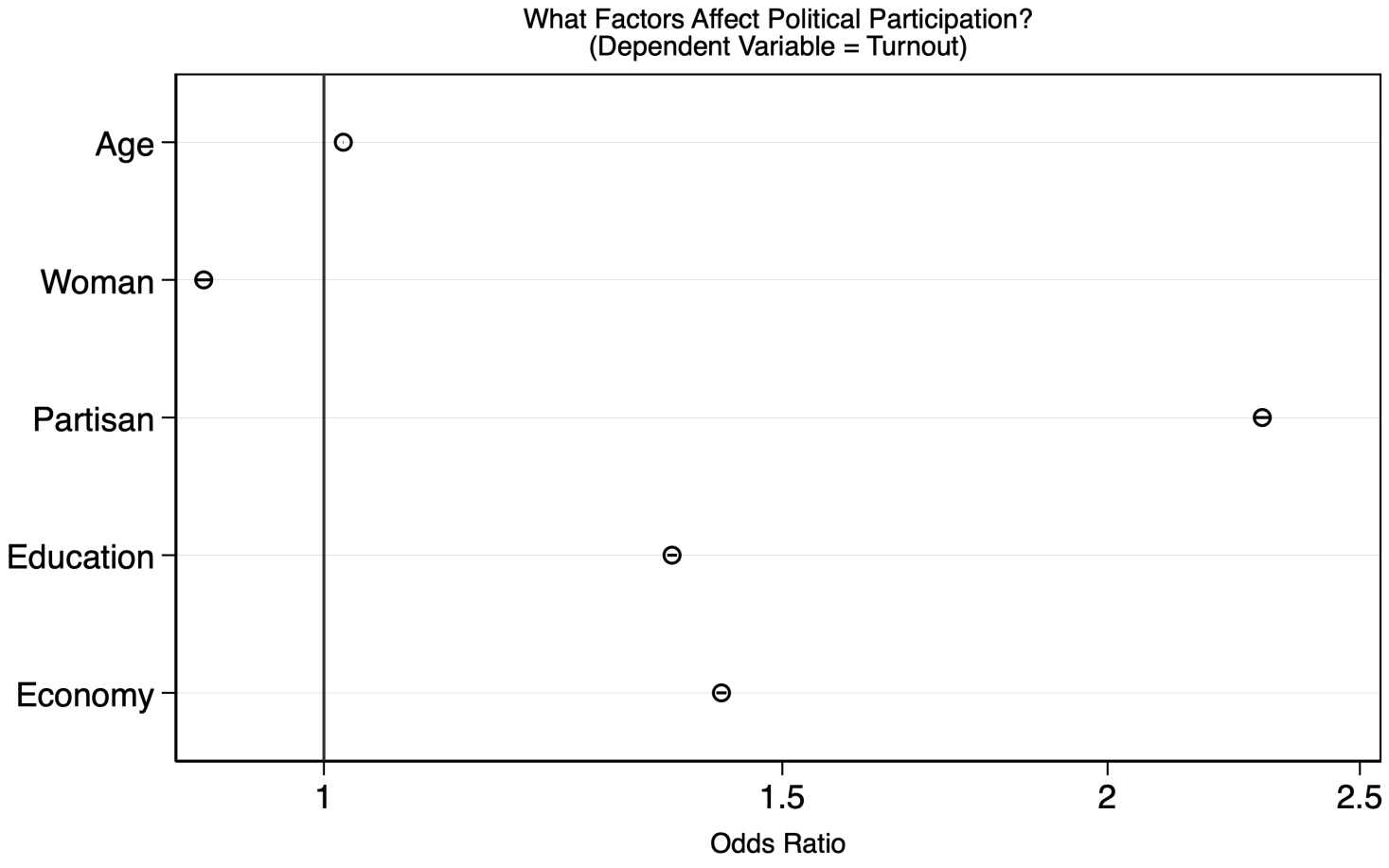
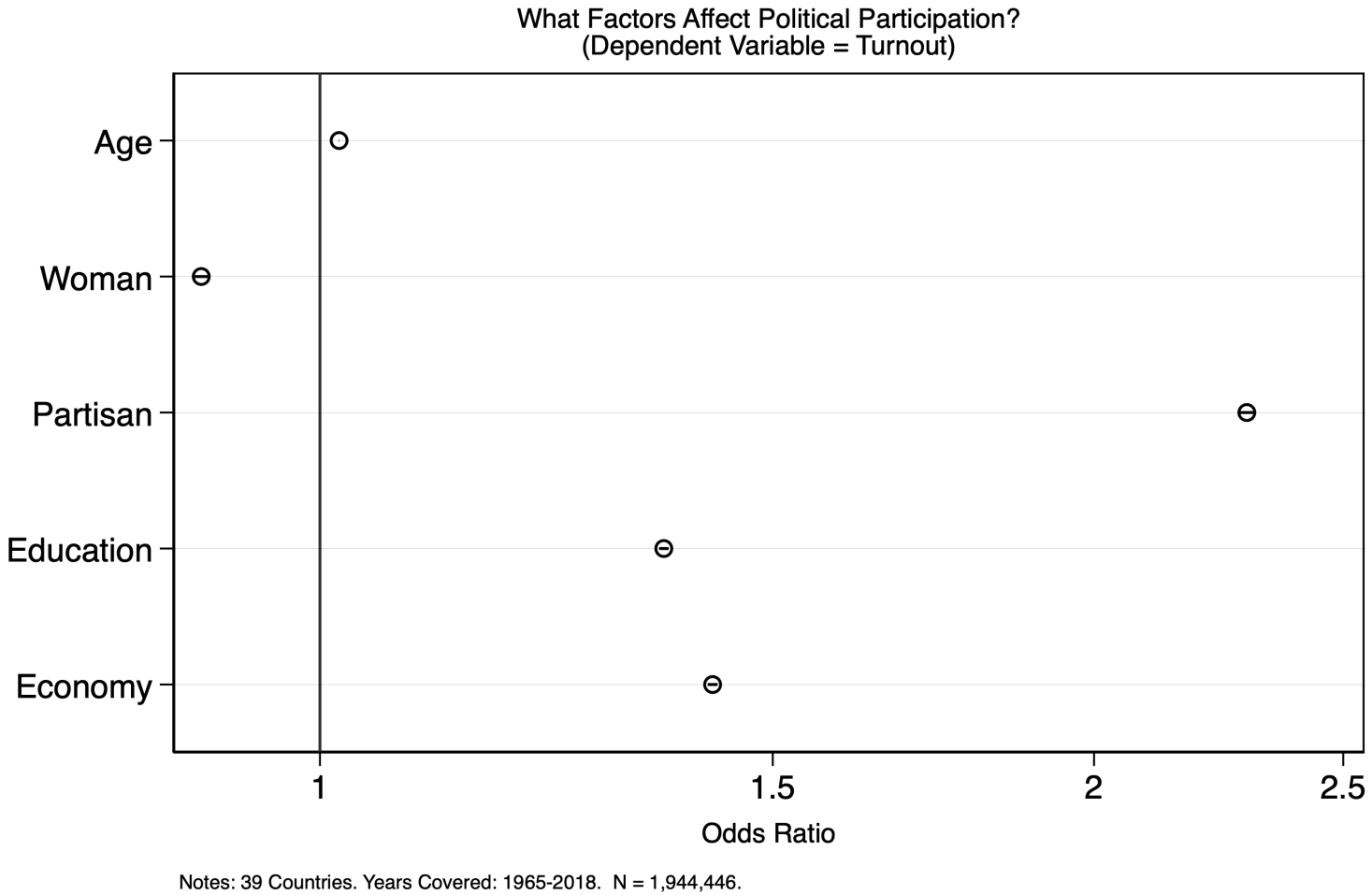
Although not exact, the statistical association between partisanship and vote choice is often strong.



Notes: 39 Countries. Years Covered: 1965-2018. N = 1,944,446.



Partisanship is alive and well, and as far as we can tell, it is as influential for us as it was for our parents and grandparents.

Things to keep in mind when conducting a survey:

- How do you ask questions?
- How do response options are offered to respondents?
- How lenghty is the questionnaire?
- What are the risks for mistakes (e.g., misunderstanding of the question by the respondent or wrong entries by the interviewer)?

- **Thursday, 10 March**
  Week 3. Political Knowledge and Sophistication

Compulsory readings:

- Zaller, John. 1991. "Information, values, and opinion." American Political Science Review 85 (4): 1215–1237.

- Lau, Richard R. and Redlawsk, David P. 1997. "Voting correctly." American Political Science Review 91 (3): 585–598.

– Munger, Kevin et al. 2022. "Political knowledge and misinformation in the era of social media: Evidence from the 2015 UK election." British Journal of Political Science 52 (1): 107–127.