

Political Engagement, Attitude Formation, and Extremization in the 2004 Presidential Election

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Citizens were more engaged in the 2004 election than they were in 2000. This increased engagement was accompanied by attitude formation. Specifically, fewer citizens gave “don’t know” responses. In addition, fewer citizens gave midpoint responses on attitudinal scales; such responses are often a refuge for those lacking meaningful attitudes. Furthermore, attitude formation was accompanied by increased attitude extremization. We find that this extremization occurred for both partisans and for independents. More noticeable differences in extremization occurred as a function of political engagement, with more engaged citizens exhibiting greater extremization than their lesser-involved counterparts.

A week before the 2004 presidential election, Thomas Friedman wrote in the *New York Times* that “American politics is so polarized today that there is no center, only sides” (2004, A29). Friedman’s comment typifies those of journalists and pundits who often claim that Americans have abandoned moderation and adopted increasingly extreme attitudes in recent years.

In addition to journalists and pundits, political scientists have also examined extremization, which is the process of attitudes becoming more extreme over time (Liu and Latané 1998; Mackie 1986).¹ Research examining whether attitude extremization has occurred in recent years has reported mixed results. Using data from 1972 to 1992, DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) find little evidence that attitudes became more extreme. Klinkner and Hapanowicz (2005) find only slight extremization in attitudes between 2000 and 2004. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope (2004) find that attitudes have actually moderated in recent years rather than become more extreme. In contrast, other researchers have found that attitudes have, indeed, become more extreme in recent years (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders 2005; Evans 2003; Jacobson 2007; Layman and Carsey 2002; Pew Research

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Center for the People and the Press 2003). Yet most of this research examines extremization along social group cleavages, which may be little more than a reshuffling of the population among existing groups rather than changes in aggregate public opinion. Thus, very little extant research has examined whether the attitudes of the population as a whole have become more extreme.

Our research examines extremization in the 2004 presidential election within the population at large. In addition, we examine cleavages according to political engagement, moving beyond extremization along social group cleavages. Furthermore, we contribute to the extant literature by exploring attitude formation as an explanation for extremization. Nonattitudinal respondents, who often place themselves at the scale midpoint rather than admit the lack a meaningful opinion (Krosnick 1991), may form opinions during heated political contests, such as the 2004 presidential election. This election saw extraordinary mobilization efforts, record debate viewing, and increased interest—all of which should have spurred citizens without attitudes to develop them. We would expect this to lead to fewer “don’t know” responses on public opinion surveys. In addition, this should cause the appearance of attitude extremization as some previously nonattitudinal midpoint respondents likely adopted non-midpoint positions. That is, as citizens form preferences on issues that they had not thought much about previously, they may move from a moderate response to a more extreme one.

Information Processing and Survey Response

Zaller and Feldman (1992) note that citizens often do not have pre-formed political attitudes in their heads that are ripe for being measured by public opinion surveys. Rather, citizens form responses using “whatever ideas are at the top of their heads at the moment of answering” (579). In other words, they use a memory-based process when responding to survey questions, using whatever information is most prominent in their minds at the time. Since policy issues are abstract and most people lack the will or need to have pre-formed policy attitudes, citizens are especially likely to use memory-based processing when asked about their policy attitudes (Lavine 2002; Zaller 1992; Zaller and Feldman 1992).

Citizens lacking pre-formed attitudes may employ several strategies when prodded for their opinions. Some citizens may simply indicate that they “haven’t thought much about it” or “don’t know” what their opinions are. Others, rather than admit that they haven’t thought much about the issue, may engage in “satisficing” techniques to provide a response that will seem reasonable to the interviewer (Krosnick 1991). One such technique

used by nonattitudinal respondents is to take refuge at the scale midpoint. Rather than admit ignorance or apathy (or simply to avoid the extra effort of conjuring a response to an interviewer's question on the spot), some respondents will claim the midpoint as their preference. This phenomenon is exacerbated by polling techniques designed to minimize the number of respondents who opt out by admitting that they "don't know" or "haven't thought much about it." While minimizing don't-know responses may make analyses easier and results look more robust, doing so can dilute the data by mixing true preferences with nonattitudes. Indeed, other respondents who select the midpoint have meaningful preferences for moderate policies. Thus, the midpoint on attitude scales becomes an amalgam of nonattitudes and true preferences—a "muddle in the middle" (Converse 1995).

When citizens are not engaged in satisficing behavior and do not have pre-formed attitudes, they likely respond to queries about their policy attitudes by sampling the relevant and accessible information stored in memory (Tourangeau and Rasinski 1988; Zaller 1992). In contrast to policy attitudes, however, citizens are rather likely to have pre-formed evaluations of people and groups (Hastie and Park 1986). This is because citizens evaluate people in their everyday lives using "on-line processing" and can easily transfer these tools to evaluating political figures and groups (Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh 1989; Lodge and Steenbergen 1995; Rahn, Krosnick, and Breuning 1994). With on-line processing, citizens update their attitudes as they encounter new information, giving more weight to information that is consistent with their existing attitude. When queried by an interviewer for their evaluation of political objects, citizens pull up and report their most up-to-date assessment. Not only are attitudes created in this way stronger and more stable (Bizer et al. 2006; Fazio 1995), but we are likely to see lower levels of "don't-know" and midpoint responses since these sorts of evaluations are less cognitively taxing.

Attitude Formation, Extremization, and Engagement

Many factors influence attitude formation, including family members (especially one's parents), the media, school, and one's peers (Dawson and Prewitt 1969; Erikson and Tedin 2006; Sears 1975; Simon and Merrill 1998). In addition, attitude formation is likely also influenced by the political context. By many accounts, the 2004 general election strayed from recent trends and saw revitalization in citizen interest in the campaign. Over 200 million viewers tuned in for one of the four presidential debates, an increase of over 50 million viewers from the four debates in 2000 (Commission on Presidential Debates 2004). An impressive 60 percent of the eligible electorate cast a vote in 2004, about 10 percentage points more than did so in

2000 (McDonald 2004). New voters were mobilized to participate at a record rate by various interest groups (Patterson 2004) and campaigns (Jacobson 2007). More citizens gave modest campaign contributions than ever before as candidates tapped the potential of the Internet to solicit funds (Justice 2004).

This increased citizen engagement likely influenced citizens to form opinions about issues and political objects that they had not previously thought much about. This should be evident by fewer citizens giving don't-know responses in 2004. Furthermore, as citizens formed opinions in 2004, we expect to find fewer midpoint responses, resulting in extremization.

Of course, extremization may also occur as a result of those with existing opinions adopting more extreme attitudes. This is more likely to occur when citizens are engaged. Engagement likely influences citizens to encounter more information, internalizing that which supports their predispositions. In addition, citizens selectively expose themselves to one-sided information (Lavine, Borgida, and Sullivan 2000). Thus, when asked for their opinions, they will sample from a more ideologically consistent set of stored information and give more extreme attitude responses (Zaller 1992). Increased engagement may have additional implications for attitude extremization. More engaged citizens should be more likely to think about politics, especially in the months leading up to elections. As individuals think about politics, their attitudes tend to become more extreme (Miller and Tesser 1986; Tesser 1978; Tesser and Leone 1977). Thus, to the extent that engagement increases political thought, citizens with pre-formed attitudes may adopt more extreme attitudes. Engaged citizens are also more likely to participate in democratic dialogue with their fellow citizens. The group polarization literature suggests that talking about politics in small groups might cause attitudes to become more extreme (e.g., Sunstein 2003). Thus, more frequent discussions of politics around family dinner tables and office water coolers may have caused attitude extremization.

With an increase in political engagement since 2000, citizens should have been more likely to watch media coverage of the 2004 presidential campaign. Thus, engaged citizens should have been exposed repeatedly to the candidates, parties, and groups attempting to influence the outcome of the election. As suggested earlier, citizens are more likely to use on-line processing with evaluating political actors and groups. Increased engagement should lead to increased exposure to political information, while selective exposure should work to increase the one-sidedness of such information because citizens filter out information that is inconsistent with their predispositions. Thus, evaluations are likely to be more extreme among an engaged citizenry. Indeed, Downing, Judd, and Brauer (1992) and Zajonc (1980) find that repeated exposure to an object, such as a political candidate,

is likely to lead to more extreme evaluations of the object, suggesting once again that increased engagement may lead to extremization.

In sum, we believe that citizens became more engaged in the 2004 presidential election. This likely encouraged some citizens to develop political attitudes. For nonattitudinal midpoint respondents, this resulted in more extreme preferences, as any movement from the midpoint results in extremization. In addition, the attitudes of other engaged citizens may have become better defined and more extreme between 2000 and 2004, due to selective exposure, increased thought, and increased discussion—each of which might work to make attitudes more extreme. We believe that extremization likely occurred for both policy attitudes, which are typically formed using a memory-based process, and for evaluations of people and groups, which are more likely to be formed using an on-line process.

Data and Methods

To explore our hypothesis that attitude formation leading up to the 2004 presidential election contributed to the extremization of political attitudes, we rely on data from the National Election Studies (NES). In 2000, the NES conducted interviews with 1,807 respondents, either by phone or in person. Of these respondents, 840 were re-interviewed by phone in 2004. Responses from these 840 people make up the panel data we use in our analysis. In addition, the NES administered a questionnaire to a fresh cross-section of 1,212 respondents in person in 2004. When making cross-section comparisons in our analyses, we are referring to the 1,807 respondents interviewed in 2000 (a subsample of whom are also panelists) and the 1,212 respondents interviewed in 2004. In sum, our analyses draw on two main sources: a 2000/2004 panel study and 2000/2004 cross-sectional studies. Results for any given analysis, however, frequently rely on a much smaller sample due to the numerous experimental and split-panel features included in the 2000 NES. Whenever possible, we use measures that are comparable in both 2000 and 2004, being sure to note any differences that nonetheless exist. The NES question numbers for each variable used in our analyses are included in the Appendix for those interested in looking up the specific question wording of any given variable.

We first look for signs of a more-engaged electorate in 2004 using both the cross-sectional and panel data. Specifically, we examine whether 2004 respondents are more interested, knowledgeable, participatory, or otherwise engaged in the election. Because a more-engaged electorate should be more likely to form and have political attitudes, we next examine whether there are decreases in the proportions of don't-know and midpoint responses from 2000 to 2004. In addition to attitude formation, we believe

that extremization of political attitudes is likely to have occurred between 2000 and 2004. While some research examines extremization using a composite left/right policy dimension compiled from several individual variables (e.g., DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996), we regard this as potentially problematic since extremization on one issue may be obscured by moderation on another. Given the low level of attitude constraint found in the American population (Converse 1964), this is likely a serious problem. Thus, we prefer to examine each attitude separately using both the cross-sectional and panel data. To help with interpreting the results and recognizing broad trends, we also include a summary extremity measure, calculated as the average extremity across variables.²

Ideally, we would like to be able to use panel data to directly examine whether the same respondents became more extreme between 2000 and 2004 and to link this extremization with increased interest and engagement. Unfortunately, the 2000-04 NES panel data contains only one seven-point policy item, making such analyses difficult. Nonetheless, we examine this issue along with feeling thermometer measures for evidence of extremization. We augment these panel analyses with cross-sectional analyses that might also suggest extremization.

If aggregate attitudes have become more extreme, then they should also have greater dispersion and increased bimodality, measured with standard deviation and kurtosis, respectively (DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996). To show such movement, it is best to use items that include a large number of possible responses, such as the various seven-point policy scales and feeling thermometer scores. Where necessary, responses on the policy scales are reversed so that all items run from the extremely liberal response to the extremely conservative one.

The final analyses look at who has become more extreme. Most research along these lines has compared the attitudes of Democrats to those of Republicans, often on “cultural” issues. One major drawback of such research is that it ignores independents—a sizeable segment on the electorate. Therefore, we compare extremization among partisans to extremization among independents. Since citizens who are more involved with politics may be less likely to give midpoint responses, we also examine whether there are differences in extremization according to citizens’ levels of engagement, political knowledge, and participation.

Results: Political Engagement

As mentioned above, the American public appeared more engaged in the 2004 election than in other recent elections as evidenced by increased mobilization efforts, debate viewing, and voter turnout. Table 1 presents additional evidence of the engaging nature of the 2004 campaign, confirming

Table 1. Political Engagement in 2000 and 2004

	<u>Cross-Section Surveys</u>		<u>Panel Surveys</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
Follow politics	2.671	2.870†**	2.875	3.342†**
Care about election	0.779	0.856†**	—	—
Political knowledge	0.272	0.483†**	0.102	0.601†**
Turnout	0.760	0.785†	0.852	0.888†**
Political participation	1.468	1.840†**	1.677	2.101†**
Engagement summary	2.673	3.085†**	1.865	2.588†**

Note: Cell entries are mean values.
 †Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.
 *Difference between 2000 and 2004 significant at the .05 level (one-tail test).
 **Difference between 2000 and 2004 significant at the .01 level (one-tail test).

our expectations. The first two columns of data compare the 2000 and 2004 cross-sections on several indicators of political involvement while the last two columns do so for panelists. The extent to which citizens followed politics and public affairs is significantly greater in 2004 than it was in 2000 for both the cross-sectional and panel respondents.³ Likewise, the extent to which respondents cared who won the presidential election increased significantly from 2000 to 2004 (but was not asked in the panel). These results suggest that citizens were, indeed, more engaged in 2004 than they were in 2000, and that individual respondents became more engaged.

Was this increased engagement accompanied by increased political knowledge? Table 1 suggests that it was. In the 2000 and 2004 cross sections, respondents were asked to name the political offices held by several politicians.⁴ The proportion of correct responses showed a significant jump, from 0.272 in 2000 to 0.483 in 2004. Among panelists, knowledge is based on the ability to correctly order the two major political parties and George W. Bush according to their beliefs about the extent of social services that government should provide, even if doing so increases government spending. Specifically, knowledge is measured as the proportion (0, 0.5, or 1) of correct relative placements: placing the Democratic Party to the left of the Republican Party and correctly placing the Democratic Party to the left of George W. Bush.

We expect that a more engaged and knowledgeable electorate would be more likely to participate in politics, including voting. Interestingly, self-reported voter turnout did not increase significantly in the cross section,

even though it did in the panel study. Given the tendency of respondents to overreport their voting behavior (Silver, Anderson, and Abramson 1986; Traugott and Katosh 1970), and given that election returns show a marked increase in turnout, the lack of an increase in self-reported turnout among cross-sectional respondents is not troubling. The fact that other forms of political participation increased further alleviates any concern. Specifically, we created a participation index based on how many different types of participation citizens engaged in during the campaign, and, as expected, citizens were significantly more participatory in 2004 than in 2000, among both cross-sectional and panel respondents.⁵ The average number of participatory activities increased from 1.5 to 1.8 in the cross section and from 1.7 to 2.1 in the panel. The last entry in Table 1 shows a summary measure of political involvement weighing each of the other five variables in the table equally (and thus ranging from zero to five). Significant increases for both cross-sectional and panel respondents on this index provide the final evidence of greater citizen engagement in 2004 than in 2000.

Results: Attitude Formation

If citizens were indeed forming attitudes in the 2004 election, we would expect more citizens to give valid responses to various political attitude items. Table 2 examines whether more citizens gave valid responses in 2004 than in 2000 using a wide variety of political attitudes and summary measures. Because this analysis only looks at whether responses are on or off the scale, we are not limited to variables with seven-point scales or 101-point feeling thermometers as response options. For a majority of the policy items in the cross section (13 of 18), the percentage of don't-know responses decreased between 2000 and 2004, though not always significantly.⁶ In the panel, half (2 of 4) of the policy items show significant decreases.

Closely related to policy items are a series of questions asking respondents whether they want the federal government to increase, decrease, or leave funding unchanged in a variety of areas. For five of eight spending questions in the cross section and six of seven in the panel survey, the percentage of don't-know responses decreased from 2000 to 2004.

Finally, we include results for feeling thermometer evaluations of people and groups. For these variables, the results are overwhelming. For every item (19 in the cross-section studies and 17 in the panel study) and for the summary measure the percentage of don't-know responses drops between 2000 and 2004 in both the cross-section and panel data—clear evidence of attitude formation.

In addition to fewer citizens claiming they “don't know,” our argument about attitude formation suggests that fewer citizens should choose the mid-point on attitudinal scales in 2004 than did so in 2000. We examine this in

Table 2. Percentage of “Don’t Know” Responses in 2000 and 2004

	<u>Cross-Section Surveys</u>		<u>Panel Surveys</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
<i>Policy Items</i>				
Abortion	1.00	1.03	0.60	0.95
Government services	14.83	12.54†	11.91	18.57
National defense	16.82	12.46†**	—	—
Health insurance	7.06	8.25	—	—
Provision of jobs	9.64	8.99†	—	—
Aid to blacks	7.32	11.47	—	—
Environment v. jobs	13.35	15.92	—	—
Women’s role	3.65	4.54	—	—
Immigration	4.10	1.78†**	4.40	2.02†**
Death penalty	5.82	0.26†**	—	—
Gun control	0.55	0.00†**	—	—
Gays in military	6.21	0.29†**	—	—
School vouchers	7.26	1.13†**	—	—
Fair treatment of blacks	2.46	0.31†**	—	—
Laws for homosexuals	5.53	0.00†**	4.96	0.38†**
Imports	44.18	42.87†	—	—
Isolationism	1.80	1.07†	—	—
Gay adoption	8.20	5.16†**	—	—
Policy summary	7.75	7.68†	4.46	5.28
<i>Spending Items</i>				
Highways	1.11	0.74†	—	—
Welfare	1.77	1.82	1.90	1.31†
Foreign aid	2.43	1.40†*	2.50	1.31†
Poor people	1.94	1.65†	1.90	1.18†
Social Security	2.10	1.73†	2.14	2.14
Public schools	0.50	0.91	0.71	0.25†
Crime	0.94	1.16	1.19	0.48†
Child care	2.21	1.98†	2.62	1.90†
Spending summary	1.63	1.42†	1.85	1.33†*
<i>Feeling Thermometers</i>				
Democratic Party	3.27	2.81†	—	—
Republican Party	3.65	2.97†	—	—
Bush	2.55	0.41†**	1.19	0.12†**
Nader	26.90	19.14†**	17.50	5.24†**
Cheney	24.02	5.94†**	16.79	1.79†**
Fundamentalists	17.23	5.91†**	15.01	6.43†**
Feminists	8.23	3.56†**	6.62	4.88†
Federal government	3.79	1.59†**	2.80	1.19†*
Liberals	7.65	4.88†**	6.11	3.21†**
Labor unions	5.59	1.69†**	3.56	1.67†**
Poor people	7.01	1.59†**	7.12	5.00†

... table continues

Table 2 (continued)

	<u>Cross-Section Surveys</u>		<u>Panel Surveys</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
<i>Feeling Thermometers</i> (continued)				
Military	2.44	1.13†**	2.16	0.71†*
Big business	3.86	1.97†**	3.69	2.02†*
Welfare recipients	7.01	1.97†**	7.63	3.21†**
Conservatives	7.46	4.41†**	7.38	3.21†**
Older people	2.83	0.66†**	2.93	1.43†
Environmentalists	4.57	2.16†**	4.07	2.50†
Homosexuals	6.88	2.06†**	7.12	4.29†*
Blacks	6.62	2.25†**	6.74	2.86†**
Feeling thermometer summary	9.08	4.28†**	7.57	2.93†**

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.
 *Difference between 2000 and 2004 significant at the .05 level (one-tail test).
 **Significant at the .01 level.

Table 3. Because midpoint responses are less meaningful for questions with few response options, this analysis is limited to questions that have at least five response options. The results from the cross section show a decrease in the percentage of midpoint responses and, therefore, point to attitude formation. Of the nine policy items in the cross section, six show a smaller percentage of midpoint responses in 2004 than in 2000, and the summary policy measure shows a highly significant decline in such responses. The feeling thermometers show even clearer evidence of attitude formation with 13 of the 19 items displaying significant decreases in the proportion of midpoint responses and five of the remaining six also decreasing (albeit not significantly). The sole exception to decreased midpoint responses is feelings towards Ralph Nader, and this is unsurprising since he played a much bigger role in the 2000 election than he did four years later.

The panel data also provides evidence of attitude formation on policy issues. Both items (and the summary measure) exhibit significant decreases in midpoint responses. In contrast, the feeling thermometers in the panel study show little decrease in midpoint responses from 2000 to 2004, with just as many items having more midpoint responses as having fewer. Despite this balance, the summary feeling thermometer measure shows a significant drop in the percentage of midpoint responses, from about 24.6 percent in 2000 to 20.2 percent in 2004. Taken as a whole, the midpoint analyses presented in Table 3 suggest that fewer citizens gave midpoint responses in 2004 than did in 2000. This is consistent with our hypothesis that citizens formed attitudes in response to the stimuli surrounding the 2004 contest.

Table 3. Percent of Midpoint Responses in 2000 and 2004

	<u>Cross-Section Surveys</u>		<u>Panel Surveys</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
<i>Policy Items</i>				
Government services	29.32	26.79†	31.63	21.64†**
National defense	28.47	27.05†	—	—
Health insurance	20.75	19.42†	—	—
Provision of jobs	19.03	20.40	—	—
Aid to blacks	27.06	25.63†	—	—
Environment v. jobs	30.11	26.99†	—	—
Women's role	8.78	9.33	—	—
Immigration	45.30	42.98†	45.83	37.91†**
Gun control	36.73	38.10	—	—
Policy summary	33.96	26.27†**	41.59	30.70†**
<i>Feeling Thermometers</i>				
Democratic Party	18.25	16.38†	—	—
Republican Party	20.33	18.03†	—	—
Bush	17.49	8.04†**	15.30	8.94†**
Nader	29.83	37.65	26.26	34.42
Cheney	28.19	17.37†**	23.89	12.85†**
Fundamentalists	31.93	23.33†**	30.39	26.59†
Feminists	31.60	27.43†*	29.43	30.66
Federal government	21.19	14.39†**	20.81	20.24†
Liberals	28.27	27.32†	26.83	29.89
Labor unions	22.96	18.80†**	22.43	25.54
Poor people	24.27	17.73†**	25.07	30.83
Military	13.84	6.55†**	12.74	9.35†**
Big business	25.08	18.28†**	26.82	25.52†
Welfare recipients	29.88	25.07†**	31.68	38.50
Conservatives	28.56	23.26†**	25.41	24.72†
Older people	9.46	7.74†	9.83	13.16
Environmentalists	19.34	16.20†*	18.83	22.59
Homosexuals	36.81	33.91†	37.95	32.71†*
Blacks	30.17	21.79†**	29.88	31.74
Feeling thermometer summary	24.61	20.22†**	24.11	24.31

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.

*Difference between 2004 and 2000 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test).

**Difference between 2004 and 2000 values significant at the .01 level (one-tail test).

Results: Extremization

Extremization occurs when attitudes become more extreme over time. To examine the extent to which this has occurred, Table 4 displays the mean extremity of political attitudes in 2000 and in 2004 for seven-point policy scales and 101-point feeling thermometers. For each individual and each attitude, extremity is measured as the absolute distance from the scale's midpoint to the attitude and thus ranges from 0 to 3 for the seven-point scales and from 0 to 50 for the feeling thermometers. For just over half of the policy items in the cross section (four of seven), extremity increases from 2000 to 2004. Furthermore, the summary policy extremity measure shows a significant increase during this time.⁷

Unfortunately, only the government services and spending item is asked in the panel. Nonetheless, it shows that attitudes became more extreme between 2000 and 2004. Among the feeling thermometers, the evidence for increased extremity is fairly strong. For 15 of 19 feeling thermometers in the cross-sectional studies, the mean extremity increased between 2000 and 2004, with most of the changes reaching statistical significance. Individual panelists also demonstrated extremization, becoming more extreme on ten of the 17 thermometers. In addition, the summary measures show a significant increase in extremity for both the cross-sectional and panel respondents. Thus, the available evidence shows that attitudes became more extreme between 2000 and 2004, whether one looks at the cross-sectional or the panel data.

When discussing the so-called “culture war,” commentators often claim not only that individual attitudes have become more extreme, but also that the aggregate result is a population divided into two increasingly polar camps, with nary a moderate between them. In other words, individual extremization may have aggregate-level effects, yielding attitudes that are increasingly dispersed and bimodal, with half of the population occupying each extreme and nearly no one in the middle. Even if claims of a polarized electorate at war with itself are overblown (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2004), political attitudes may nonetheless have become increasingly bimodal and dispersed between 2000 and 2004. As DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) argue, such changes can be captured by an increase in the standard deviation and a decrease in the kurtosis (approaching -2); Table 5 therefore displays these statistics for 2000 and 2004. Because extremization is best measured using attitude scales that allow for considerable variation in response options, the analyses here are limited to the seven-point policy items and the 101-point feeling thermometers. For five of the seven policy items available in the cross-sectional analysis, the standard deviation increased and the kurtosis decreased thereby suggesting that individual

Table 4. Extremity in 2000 and 2004

	<u>Cross-Section Surveys</u>		<u>Panel Surveys</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
<i>Policy Items</i>				
Government services	1.248	1.300†	1.171	1.338†*
National defense	1.214	1.227†	—	—
Health insurance	1.549	1.614†	—	—
Provision of jobs	1.541	1.539	—	—
Aid to blacks	1.476	1.487†	—	—
Environment v. jobs	1.287	1.266	—	—
Women's role	2.345	2.341	—	—
Policy summary	1.491	1.570†**	—	—
<i>Feeling Thermometers</i>				
Democratic Party	21.07	20.12	—	—
Republican Party	18.26	21.54†**	—	—
Bush	20.41	29.44†**	21.21	28.90†**
Nader	16.92	16.14	17.35	16.23
Cheney	17.03	22.66†**	18.65	25.44†**
Fundamentalists	17.02	20.14†**	16.99	18.83†**
Feminists	16.50	16.52†	15.70	15.75†
Federal government	15.72	16.91†**	15.02	16.88†**
Liberals	16.12	15.72	16.25	15.69
Labor unions	18.09	18.28†	17.20	16.72
Poor people	22.55	24.53†**	21.61	20.41
Military	25.72	32.57†**	26.19	31.36†**
Big business	15.51	17.47†**	14.66	15.47†
Welfare recipients	14.95	15.34†	14.17	13.05
Conservatives	15.92	17.73†**	16.88	18.19†*
Older people	31.58	32.97†*	31.03	28.93
Environmentalists	20.19	20.74†	19.42	18.35
Homosexuals	19.59	19.47	18.63	19.50†
Blacks	20.44	23.49†**	19.82	19.95†
Feeling thermometer summary	19.19	21.17†**	17.52	20.19†**

Note: Cell entries are the absolute distance from the scale midpoint.
†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.
*Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test).
**Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .01 level (one-tail test).

extremization affected the aggregate distribution of attitudes.⁸ We also see an increase in the standard deviation and a decrease in the kurtosis for the only policy item available in the panel study.

For the feeling thermometers, we see much less evidence of increased dispersion and bimodality between 2000 and 2004. In the cross-sectional surveys, the standard deviation increases as expected for under half of the

Table 5. Dispersion and Bimodality in 2000 and 2004

	Cross-Section Surveys				Panel Surveys			
	Standard Deviation		Kurtosis		Standard Deviation		Kurtosis	
	2000	2004	2000	2004	2000	2004	2000	2004
Policy Items								
Government services	1.582	1.593†	-0.415	-0.453†	1.549	1.656†	-0.404	-0.650†
National defense	1.449	1.480†	0.107	-0.083	—	—	—	—
Health insurance	1.889	1.921†	-0.998	-1.109†	—	—	—	—
Provision of jobs	1.751	1.865†**	-0.544	-0.961†	—	—	—	—
Aid to blacks	1.695	1.787†**	-0.492	-0.664†	—	—	—	—
Environment v. jobs	1.595	1.575	-0.610	-0.529	—	—	—	—
Women's role	1.616	1.467	1.641	2.223	—	—	—	—
Policy summary	1.024	1.060†	0.134	-0.067†	—	—	—	—
Feeling Thermometers								
Democratic Party	25.07	24.16	-0.312	-0.153	—	—	—	—
Republican Party	23.53	26.95†**	0.003	-0.521†	—	—	—	—
Bush	24.86	33.55†**	-0.324	-1.169†	25.14	31.71†**	-0.370	-1.120†
Nader	23.25	22.61	0.087	-0.248†	23.40	21.67	0.016	-0.262†
Cheney	22.23	28.51†**	0.365	-0.751†	23.11	29.95†**	0.221	-1.045†
Fundamentalists	23.72	24.98†*	-0.041	-0.278†	23.60	24.86†	-0.057	-0.359†
Feminists	22.05	21.68	0.246	0.319	21.51	21.74†	0.271	0.021†
Federal government	19.99	19.97	0.295	0.292†	19.16	21.12†**	0.290	0.160†
Liberals	21.68	20.71	0.341	0.342	21.95	21.77	0.272	0.157†
Labor unions	23.28	22.33	0.004	-0.023†	22.51	21.74	0.068	0.068
Poor people	19.99	18.88	-0.207	-0.059	19.29	19.53†	-0.067	-0.745†
Military	20.45	21.35†	0.644	1.245	20.45	19.17	0.918	0.715†
Big business	20.15	21.56†**	0.422	-0.041†	19.37	20.56†*	0.425	0.098†

Welfare recipients	20.85	20.03	0.414	0.339†	20.22	19.13	0.649	0.751
Conservatives	20.00	20.64†	0.420	0.199†	20.07	21.75†*	0.279	-0.194†
Older people	17.50	17.10	1.102	1.219	16.90	17.28†	0.532	-0.264†
Environmentalists	21.33	20.19	0.325	0.291†	20.59	20.59	0.425	0.487
Homosexuals	27.45	27.06	-0.454	-0.399	26.56	26.56	-0.310	-0.538†
Blacks	20.91	19.13	-0.006	-0.476†	20.30	19.13	0.064	-0.426†
Feeling thermometer sum.	10.91	11.21†	2.336	1.273†	11.01	11.20†	2.692	0.362†

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.

*Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test). **Difference significant at the .01 level.

variables (seven of 19), although the kurtosis decreases as expected for over half of the variables (12 of 19). The results for the panel respondents are somewhat more suggestive of the aggregate effects of extremization, showing an increased dispersion on 12 of the 17 variables and a decreased kurtosis on 16 of them. Thus, there is stronger evidence of dispersion and bimodality in feelings towards various political actors and groups among panelists than in the cross section. Taken as a whole, there is some evidence that extremization affected the aggregate distribution of attitudes, especially on the policy issues. The evidence of increased dispersion and bimodality is not as strong for feelings towards various people and groups.

Results: Partisanship, Engagement, and Extremization

Up to now, we have looked at extremization in the electorate as a whole and have found considerable—though by no means overwhelming—evidence to support our hypothesis that policy preferences in the U.S. became more extreme in response to the highly charged atmosphere surrounding the 2004 election. Perhaps evidence of extremization will be even stronger among certain segments of the population. This is the route followed by most extant research on the topic, which has often examined extremization along partisan, ideological, or “red state” v. “blue state” cleavages (Abramowitz and Saunders 2005; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2004; Jacobson 2007; Klinkner and Hapanowicz 2005; Layman and Carsey 2002).

To explore whether extremization is concentrated among partisans (as is often suggested by the literature cited above), we examine extremity, dispersion, and bimodality separately for independents and for partisans in 2000 and 2004. The results are presented as Table 6, with the analysis limited to the seven-point policy issues for ease of interpretation. (These variables are only available in the cross-sectional study.) The top panel shows that among partisans, extremity increased for five of the seven variables and for the summary measure.⁹ Also among partisans, the standard deviations increased and the kurtosis decreased for five of the seven issues. This is evidence of extremization among partisans. But are independents also becoming more extreme? The results from the bottom half of the table suggest that independents are also experiencing extremization. Independents show increased extremity for five issues, increased standard deviations for three issues, and decreasing kurtosis for four issues. This suggests that limiting research on extremization to partisans seems likely to miss much of the story. While the extent of extremization among independents may not be quite as large as for partisans, it would appear greater than that reported by Jacobson (2007, 35), who argued that the extremity of independents’ attitudes increased only “marginally if at all” between 2000 and 2004.

Table 6. Extremization by Partisans and Independents in 2000 and 2004

	Extremity		Standard Deviation		Kurtosis	
	2000	2004	2000	2004	2000	2004
Policy Items						
Government services	1.279	1.347†	1.595	1.627†	-0.341	-0.575†
National defense	1.191	1.259†	1.381	1.473†	0.078	-0.195†
Health insurance	1.560	1.624†	1.891	1.942†	-1.026	-1.154†
Provision of jobs	1.576	1.560	1.765	1.874†	-0.591	-0.960†
Aid to blacks	1.503	1.511†	1.698	1.805†	-0.611	-0.734†
Environment v. jobs	1.293	1.246	1.619	1.573	-0.663	-0.544
Women's role	2.270	2.308	1.640	1.514	0.959	1.718
Policy summary	1.493	1.574†**	1.010	1.106†*	-0.062	-0.373†**
PARTISANS						
INDEPENDENTS						
Government services	1.199	1.232†	1.556	1.535	-0.459	-0.237
National defense	1.248	1.191	1.543	1.486	0.021	0.008†
Health insurance	1.533	1.595†	1.881	1.870	-0.916	-0.968†
Provision of jobs	1.496	1.507†	1.738	1.850†	-0.487	-0.959†
Aid to blacks	1.442	1.446†	1.690	1.757†	-0.328	-0.553†
Environment v. jobs	1.270	1.299†	1.551	1.557†	-0.536	-0.514
Women's role	2.446	2.390	1.545	1.387	3.100	3.282
Policy summary	1.483	1.563†**	1.026	0.964	-0.355	0.568

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.

*Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test). **Difference significant at the .01 level.

We have argued that extremization occurred between 2000 and 2004 because citizens became more engaged. This suggests that citizens who are less engaged should show fewer signs of extremization than those who are more engaged. In Table 7 we examine extremization by level of engagement. Respondents are divided into two roughly equal groups (high and low engagement) based on their scores on an engagement index that includes the variables caring about the outcome of the election, interest in elections, and closeness of following politics. Among those with low engagement, there is limited evidence of extremization: increased extremity for four variables, increased standard deviation for one variable, and decreased kurtosis for five variables. For the high-engagement citizens, however, there is much clearer evidence of extremization: increased extremity on five of the seven items, increased standard deviation on four items, and decreased kurtosis on six items. As expected, extremization is considerably more evident among the more engaged.

Engagement is likely associated with increased knowledge. In turn, greater political knowledge likely accompanies increased extremization. Table 8 suggests that this is, indeed, the case. Those who were less knowledgeable in 2004 were no more extreme than those who were less knowledgeable in 2000. Among the less knowledgeable, only six of the 21 indicators of extremization (three indicators—extremity, standard deviation, and kurtosis—for each of seven policy items) indicate more extreme attitudes. Among those with more knowledge, however, the story is reversed, with 18 of the 21 indicators suggesting extremization. This is strong evidence suggesting that increased extremity in 2004 was concentrated among those who are more knowledgeable.

Finally, we ask if extremization is also concentrated among more participatory citizens. Here we separate the public into two roughly equal halves according to the number of political activities in which they participated and examine differences in extremization among the two groups. The results are reported as Table 9. Once again, extremization of attitudes is concentrated in the more-participatory half of the population, with evidence of extremization on 16 of the 21 total indicators (compared with only nine of the indicators for the less-participatory group).

In sum, the analyses in this section point to differences across individuals in the extent of extremization. However, these differences do not necessarily fall along those lines typically examined in the polarization and “culture war” literature. Namely, we find little evidence that partisans experienced greater extremization than did independents from 2000 to 2004. Instead, the more relevant distinction between citizens appears to be that between those who are more engaged in politics (those who have higher interest, care more about outcomes, participate at higher rates, and know more) and those who are less engaged.

Table 7. Extremization by Political Engagement in 2000 and 2004

	Extremity		Standard Deviation		Kurtosis	
	2000	2004	2000	2004	2000	2004
Policy Items						
Government services	1.250	1.296†	1.542	1.550†	-0.276	-0.248
National defense	1.200	1.155	1.494	1.419	-0.091	0.130
Health insurance	1.571	1.582†	1.900	1.873	-0.981	-1.063†
Provision of jobs	1.550	1.538	1.807	1.870†	-0.687	-0.978†
Aid to blacks	1.491	1.512†	1.704	1.765†	-0.507	-0.597†
Environment v. jobs	1.256	1.271†	1.590	1.576	-0.473	-0.540†
Women's role	2.354	2.306	1.625	1.507	1.709	1.980
Policy summary	1.496	1.563†**	0.964	0.944†	0.190	0.340
LOW ENGAGEMENT						
Policy Items						
Government services	1.275	1.296†	1.656	1.642	-0.602	-0.658†
National defense	1.254	1.308†	1.377	1.525†**	0.345	-0.209†
Health insurance	1.458	1.639†**	1.822	1.961†	-0.917	-1.154†
Provision of jobs	1.495	1.580†	1.584	1.865†**	-0.258	-0.963†
Aid to blacks	1.382	1.451†	1.621	1.765†	-0.393	-0.635†
Environment v. jobs	1.390	1.269	1.601	1.575	-0.659	-0.530
Women's role	2.383	2.331	1.449	1.384	2.475	2.047†
Policy summary	1.460	1.569†**	1.068	1.137†	-0.241	-0.486†
HIGH ENGAGEMENT						

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.

*Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test). **Difference significant at the .01 level.

Table 8. Extremization by Political Knowledge in 2000 and 2004

	Extremity		Standard Deviation		Kurtosis	
	2000	2004	2000	2004	2000	2004
Policy Items						
Government services	1.336	1.294	1.633	1.520	-0.482	-0.445
National defense	1.271	1.228	1.494	1.487	0.008	-0.053†
Health insurance	1.604	1.617†	1.927	1.902	-1.017	-1.078†
Provision of jobs	1.593	1.569	1.834	1.900†	-0.674	-1.040†
Aid to blacks	1.560	1.517	1.756	1.819†	-0.469	-0.702†
Environment v. jobs	1.363	1.267	1.714	1.599	-0.725	-0.489
Women's role	2.315	2.287	1.711	1.526	1.011	1.798
Policy summary	1.549	1.581†	1.000	1.012†	0.003	0.037
LOW KNOWLEDGE						
Policy Items						
Government services	1.114	1.311†**	1.495	1.664†*	-0.284	-0.676†
National defense	1.126	1.228†	1.372	1.441†	0.205	-0.043†
Health insurance	1.367	1.597†**	1.717	1.916†*	-0.752	-1.113†
Provision of jobs	1.396	1.527†	1.476	1.754†**	-0.463	-0.833†
Aid to blacks	1.229	1.411†*	1.481	1.641†*	-0.483	-0.448
Environment v. jobs	1.215	1.282†	1.360	1.543†*	-0.468	-0.661†
Women's role	2.471	2.390	1.103	1.331†**	4.899	2.678†
Policy summary	1.340	1.537†*	1.029	1.147†*	-0.082	-0.286†
HIGH KNOWLEDGE						

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.

*Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test). **Difference significant at the .01 level.

Table 9. Extremization by Political Participation in 2000 and 2004

	Extremity		Standard Deviation		Kurtosis	
	2000	2004	2000	2004	2000	2004
LOW PARTICIPATION						
<i>Policy Items</i>						
Government services	1.272	1.216	1.576	1.516	-0.431	-0.388
National defense	1.227	1.186	1.504	1.475	-0.068	0.054
Health insurance	1.556	1.573†	1.881	1.889†	-0.979	-1.060†
Provision of jobs	1.544	1.513	1.777	1.853†	-0.592	-0.943†
Aid to blacks	1.505	1.484	1.747	1.771†	-0.469	-0.580†
Environment v. jobs	1.273	1.168	1.588	1.499	-0.578	-0.330
Women's role	2.368	2.349	1.520	1.415	2.075	2.313
Policy summary	1.502	1.540†	0.974	0.982†	-0.103	0.369
HIGH PARTICIPATION						
<i>Policy Items</i>						
Government services	1.240	1.370**	1.624	1.673†	-0.495	-0.595†
National defense	1.210	1.264†	1.353	1.466†	0.294	-0.137†
Health insurance	1.475	1.643†*	1.835	1.942†	-0.914	-1.157†
Provision of jobs	1.502	1.592†	1.630	1.878†**	-0.437	-0.990†
Aid to blacks	1.357	1.481†	1.532	1.758†**	-0.660	-0.635
Environment v. jobs	1.370	1.358	1.614	1.643†	-0.488	-0.683†
Women's role	2.360	2.294	1.635	1.515	1.864	1.884
Policy summary	1.447	1.591†**	1.059	1.125†	0.089	-0.427†

†Change in expected direction from 2000 to 2004.

*Difference between 2000 and 2004 values significant at the .05 level (one-tail test). **Difference significant at the .01 level.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have presented evidence that the public was more engaged in politics in 2004 than in 2000. This engagement was accompanied by attitude formation. One indicator of increased attitude formation was the decrease in the number of don't-know responses; another was a decrease in the number of midpoint responses. As some nonattitudinal respondents moved from the scale midpoint, their attitude reports became more extreme. However, it might be more appropriate to classify such changes as attitude formation rather than extremization. Unfortunately, there is no good way to distinguish these nonattitudinal midpoint respondents from those with truly moderate preferences. Thus, it is difficult to know the extent to which the extremization observed between 2000 and 2004 was due to attitude formation versus other factors related to engagement that may also work to make attitudes more extreme. Future research should work to distinguish between these two very different types of midpoint responses. We believe this problem has its roots in contemporary survey practices, which generally try to minimize missing data in order to facilitate analysis. However, by discouraging don't-know and other opt-out responses, survey designers may unwittingly be encouraging nonattitudinal citizens to place themselves at the midpoint of attitude scales. In short, we need improved ways of distinguishing attitude formation from attitude extremization and better ways of distinguishing true attitudes from nonattitudes.

Future research should also work to delineate the various factors that cause attitudes to become more extreme. While we have argued that attitude formation is one such factor, we acknowledge that there are other contributing factors, such as thought, selective exposure, and discussion. The analyses presented here suggest that attitude formation contributed to extremization in 2004; however, we cannot quantify the size of its effect relative to other variables.

We believe that the extraordinary interest in the 2004 election spurred attitude formation among many citizens who had previously not thought much about politics. As such, citizens moved from the safe haven of their midpoint responses to positions informed by their attention to the 2004 race, attitudes became more extreme. While the evidence we present here shows that citizens became more engaged and attitudes became more extreme, the data do not allow us to examine the extent to which one caused the other. While we believe that engagement caused attitudes to become more extreme, it is possible that the causal effect flowed in the opposite direction. That is, because people had more well-developed, stronger, and more extreme attitudes, they may have decided that it was important to become engaged in the political process in 2004. Future research would be wise to explore this

potential simultaneity in an effort to establish a causal relationship between engagement and extremization.

In addition to implications about the relationship between attitude formation and extremization, our research has implications for current debates about the so-called “culture war.” Specifically, we suggest a different sort of attitude extremization than is usually mentioned in debates about red vs. blue America, which often focus on differences in public opinion between Republicans and Democrats. While we find that the attitudes of partisans did, indeed, become more extreme between 2000 and 2004, we find that the attitudes of independents became more extreme as well. In other words, we find only slight evidence of greater extremization in the attitudes of partisans than in the attitudes of independents. Thus, it would likely be fruitful if research on divisions within the electorate included independents.

An additional implication of our research for the culture war literature is that extremization is not limited to a few key social issues such as abortion, gun ownership, and gay marriage. While extremization may indeed be occurring on cultural issues, it is impossible to know for sure using existing data, as these issues are seldom measured using scales that allows for meaningful measures of extremization. That is, attitudes on these select issues are not typically measured using seven-point scales, making it difficult (if not impossible) to examine extremization on any single issue. Other research attempts to compensate for this by merging several issues into a liberal/conservative ideological dimension, but this has the downside of masking important changes in individual variables. Despite the lack of appropriate data, contemporary dialogue often discusses increased extremization in terms of cultural issues—especially abortion (e.g., Mouw and Sobel 2001). We argue that it is wise to look beyond this small subset of attitudes. In fact, rather than partisan or cultural divisions, we believe that other cleavages more clearly delineate whose attitudes became more extreme and whose did not. At least between 2000 and 2004, extremization is greatest among those who are more engaged, more knowledgeable, and more participatory.

A hint of despair or disappointment usually underlies discussions about the increasing extremization of American attitudes. Indeed, it is often claimed that the current public opinion landscape including increased attitude extremity amounts to a “war” between competing segments of American society. Since civil wars are messy affairs that pit brother against brother and sister against sister, resulting in Pyrrhic victories, such allusions are certainly disheartening. Our interpretation, however, is different. While commentators seem to yearn for days when policy preferences were more moderate and, presumably, reasonable, we argue that moderation may indicate less citizen engagement, knowledge, and participation. Thus, a return to

moderation may be movement in an undesired direction. Rather than being a sign that our nation has turned against itself, extremization may indicate that citizens are forming political attitudes and becoming more engaged in democratic behavior. The environment surrounding the 2004 campaign brought many into the political fold who had previously sat on the sidelines. This is the hallmark of a healthy democracy, not one bent on self destruction.

APPENDIX

National Election Study Variables

	<u>Cross-Section NES Variables</u>		<u>Panel NES Variables</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
<i>Political Engagement Items</i>				
Follow politics	V001367	V045095	V001367	P045057
Care about election	V000302	V043092	V000302	—
Office held by Lott	V001447	—	V001447	—
Office held by Rehnquist	V001450	V045165	V001450	—
Office held by Blair	V001453	V045164	V001453	—
Office held by Hastert	—	V045162	—	—
Office held by Reno	V001456	—	V001456	—
Office held by Cheney	—	V045163	—	—
Turnout	V001241	V045018x	V001241	P045045x
Displaying a sign	V001226	V045012	V001226	P045062
Attending a meeting	V001227	V045011	V001227	P045063
Working for a campaign	V001228	V045013	V001228	P045064
Contributing to a to party	V001229	V045014	V001229	P045065
Contributing to a group	V001231	V045016	V001231	P045067
Influencing voters	V001225	V045010	V001225	P045061
<i>Policy Items (seven-point scales)</i>				
Government services	V000545	V043136	V000545	P045127
National defense	V000581	V043142	V000581	—
Health insurance	V000608	V043150	V000608	—
Provision of jobs	V000615	V043152	V000615	—
Aid to blacks	V000641	V043158	V000641	—
Environment v. jobs	V000708	V043182	V000708	—
Women's role	V000755	V043196	V000755	—
<i>Policy Items (five-point scales)</i>				
Immigration	V000510	V045115	V000510	P045109
Gun control	V000731	V043189	V000731	—
<i>Other Policy Items</i>				
Abortion	V000694	V045132	V000694	P045110
Laws for homosexuals	V001481	V045156a	V001481	P045112x

Appendix (continued)

	<u>Cross-Section NES Variables</u>		<u>Panel NES Variables</u>	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
<i>Other Policy Items</i> (continued)				
Imports	V000511a	V045114	V000511a	—
Gay adoption	V000748	V045158	V000748	—
Death penalty	V000752	V043187	V000752	—
Gays in military	V000724	V045157a	V000724	—
School vouchers	V000744	V045144	V000744	—
Fair treatment of blacks	V000802	V045109b	V000802	—
Isolationism	V000513a	V043113	V000513a	—
<i>Spending Items</i>				
Highways	V000675	V043164	V000675	—
Welfare	V000676	V043169	V000676	P045070
Foreign aid	V000678	V043171	V000678	P045076
Poor people	V000680	V043172	V000680	P045075a
Social Security	V000681	V043165	V000681	P045077
Public schools	V000683	V043166	V000683	P045071a
Crime	V000684	V043168	V000684	P045072
Child care	V000685	V043170	V000685	P045073
<i>Feeling Thermometers</i>				
Democratic Party	V000369	V043049	V000369	—
Republican Party	V000370	V043050	V000370	—
Bush	V000361	V043038	V000361	P045007
Nader	V000363	V043040	V000363	P045012
Cheney	V000367	V043041	V000367	P045009
Fundamentalists	V001317	V045057	V001317	P045032
Feminists	V001326	V045059	V001326	P045039
Federal government	V001307	V045060	V001307	P045022
Liberals	V001311	V045062	V001311	P045026
Labor unions	V001312	V045064	V001312	P045027
Poor people	V001314	V045065	V001314	P045029
Military	V001306	V045066	V001306	P045021
Big business	V001313	V045067	V001313	P045028
Welfare recipients	V001315	V045068	V001315	P045030
Conservatives	V001310	V045069	V001310	P045025
Older people	V001319	V045071	V001319	P045033
Environmentalists	V001320	V045072	V001320	P045034
Homosexuals	V001321	V045074	V001321	P045035
Blacks	V001308	V045077	V001308	P045023

Source: The National Election Studies. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies. Each dataset is available online at http://www.electionstudies.org/studypages/download/datacenter_all.htm.

NOTES

¹Although attitude extremitization is sometimes referred to as polarization (e.g., DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996), we do not use the term polarization because it has additional meanings beyond extremitization, usually related to differences in political attitudes by group affiliation.

²This summary extremity measure does not pose the same problems as a composite ideological dimension because it does not measure citizens' locations on a left/right continuum. Rather, it looks at the average extremity across variables.

³The "follow politics" variable has four response options and is coded so that higher values indicate following politics more closely. The comparison of the 2000 and 2004 values for the cross-sectional data uses a t-test for difference in means of independent samples. This test is also used for the multi-value variables of political knowledge, political participation, and the summary political involvement measure. Because they are dichotomous, both the care about the election and turnout variables necessitate the use of z-tests for comparing independent proportions. For the panel data, paired-differences t-tests are used for the follow politics, political knowledge, political participation, and the summary political engagement variables. McNemar's tests are used for comparing the turnout and care about the election proportions for panelists (see McNemar 1947).

⁴In 2000, respondents were asked what offices were held by Trent Lott, William Rehnquist, Tony Blair, and Janet Reno. In 2004, respondents were asked what offices were held by William Rehnquist, Tony Blair, Dennis Hastert, and Dick Cheney.

⁵Types of participation included: displaying a campaign sign or bumper sticker, attending a political meeting or rally, doing any work for a campaign or party, making a campaign contribution to a political party, making a campaign contribution to a group that supports a party, trying to influence how others voted, and turning out to vote.

⁶The summary policy measure also decreases (though not significantly). This summary measure is based on the proportion of "don't know" responses on all policy items for each respondent. The summary measure then is simply the mean of these individual proportions. Thus, the comparison of the 2000 and 2004 values involves the use of a t-test. The same procedure is used for the summary spending items and feeling thermometer measures both here and in Table 3 for cross-sectional respondents. For panelists, the summary measures are calculated in the same manner. However, the comparisons in those cases use dependent (paired differences) t-tests. For the individual items in Tables 2 and 3 (e.g., government services, Bush feeling thermometer), Z-tests for comparing independent proportions are used for the cross-sectional data while McNemar's tests are used for the panel data.

⁷The summary extremity measure is calculated for each individual respondent as the mean extremity across items. The entries in Table 4 are the mean of these individual means for all respondents in the given year. For the cross-sectional data, statistical significance is evaluated using t-tests for independent samples, while the panel data uses paired differences t-tests.

⁸We use F-tests to compare the standard deviations (variances actually) across the cross-section surveys. We are not aware of any appropriate statistical tests for comparing dependent standard deviations (i.e., the panel data) nor for comparing kurtosis values. Consequently, the lack of asterisks in those columns of Table 5 should not be regarded as evidence against extremitization.

⁹For Tables 6-9 we use t-tests for independent samples to compare extremity in 2000 and 2004 and F-tests to compare standard deviations. We are unaware of any appropriate test for comparing kurtoses.

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