A HOOVER INSTITUTION ESSAY

The Future of the Republican Party

2022, 2024, AND BEYOND

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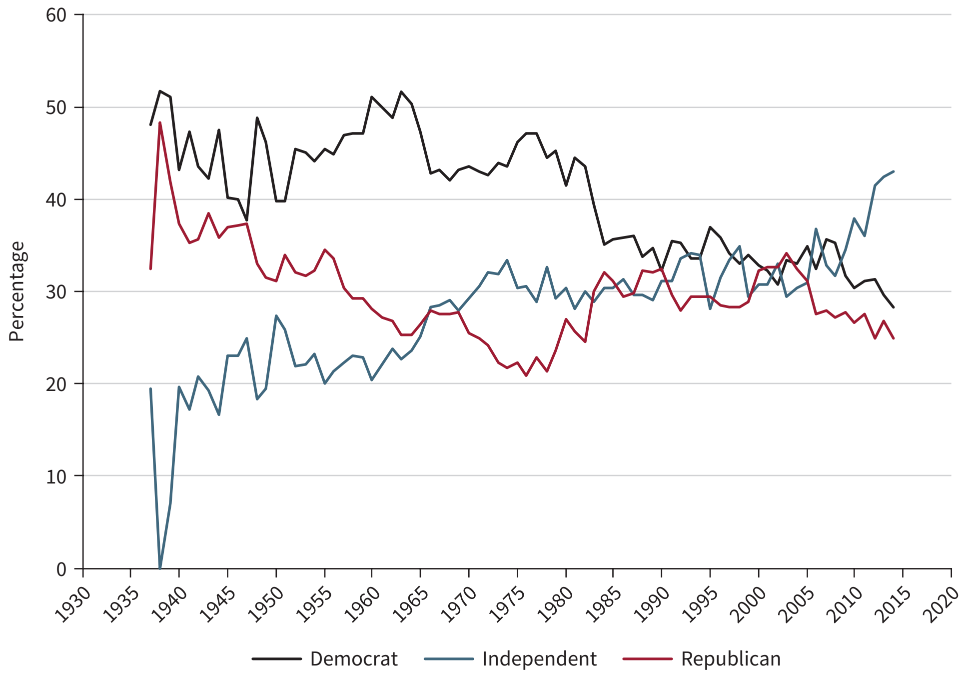
This Hoover Institution essay considers the future of the Republican Party in both the near term—the 2022 and 2024 elections—and in the longer term. The first section traces changes in the Republican Party over the period 1980 to 2021. The second section uses polling data from a 2021 Hoover YouGov survey to examine a wide variety of issues to compare where self-identified Republican voters stand on issues relative to the average voter in the larger electorate to help us better understand how such issues might affect the 2022 and 2024 elections. The third section, also drawing from the Hoover YouGov survey, considers the effect of President Donald Trump on the future of the Republican Party. The focus here is on Trump's popularity, especially how his endorsement of candidates or lack thereof might affect nominations and, ultimately, election results over the next two national elections.

The survey was designed by scholars at the Hoover Institution and the data collected by YouGov, a global polling firm, between May 25 and 31, 2021. The sample of 2,027 adults was selected from YouGov's panel to be nationally representative of US adults in terms of gender, age, race, and education based on the US Census American Community Survey and the US Census Current Population Survey. The survey includes an oversample of 1,024 Republican and Republican-leaning independents. The weights were post-stratified to reflect the general adult population of the United States in terms of gender, age, race, education, and the results of the 2020 presidential election. The margin of error is approximately ±3.4 percentage points.

Changes over Time for Republicans

Party identification is arguably the most important and studied variable in American election research. Having a partisan identification orients one toward voting for and supporting that party and its policies. From the era of the New Deal until midway through President Ronald Reagan's first term in office, Democrats had a clear lead in party identification that was reflected in national election results. Between 1932 and 1982, Democrats won the presidency eight times to the Republicans' five. During this half century, Democrats controlled the House of Representatives for 48 of 52 years and the Senate for 46 of those 52 years. As figure 1 shows, the Democrats' lead in partisan identification among the electorate declined midway in Reagan's first term, and since then Democrats and Republicans have been much more competitive. In the ten presidential elections since 1982, each of the two major parties won five elections.

Figure 1. Three-point party identification. The change in partisan identity is mostly due to a decline in self-identifying Democrats. There is only a small rise in Republican numbers. Most of the Democratic decline shows up as an increase in the number of citizens saying they are independent.



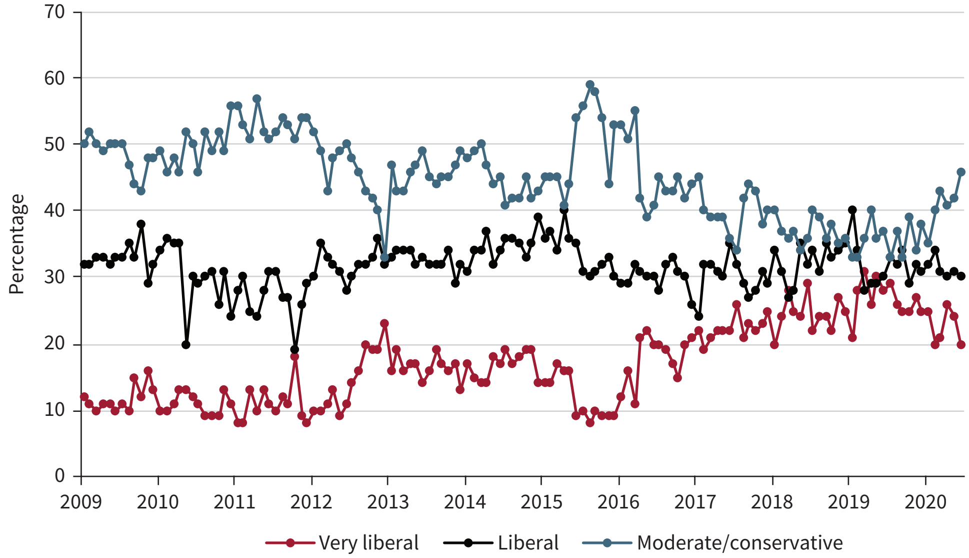
Source: Gallup polling compiled by authors.

In terms of controlling Congress, the score is nearly balanced, with ten Republican-led to ten Democratic-led Houses, and eleven Republican-led to nine Democratic-led Senates, a sharp contrast to the Democratic Party dominance over the 1932 to 1982 period.

Toward the end of this fifty-year span, voters began self-sorting by ideology. In 1980 about 40 percent of self-identified conservatives were Democrats, but with Reagan they began to shift their allegiance to the Republican Party. At the same time, self-identified liberal Republicans began moving to the Democratic Party. This ideological sorting has continued to the present time, as shown in figure 2. In the most recent pre- and postelection polls conducted by YouGov and *The Economist*, slightly over 60 percent of Democrats said they were liberal or very liberal, with only 5 percent saying they were conservative. In March 2009, only 50 percent of Democrats self-identified as either liberal or very liberal, with a full 12 percent saying they were conservative.

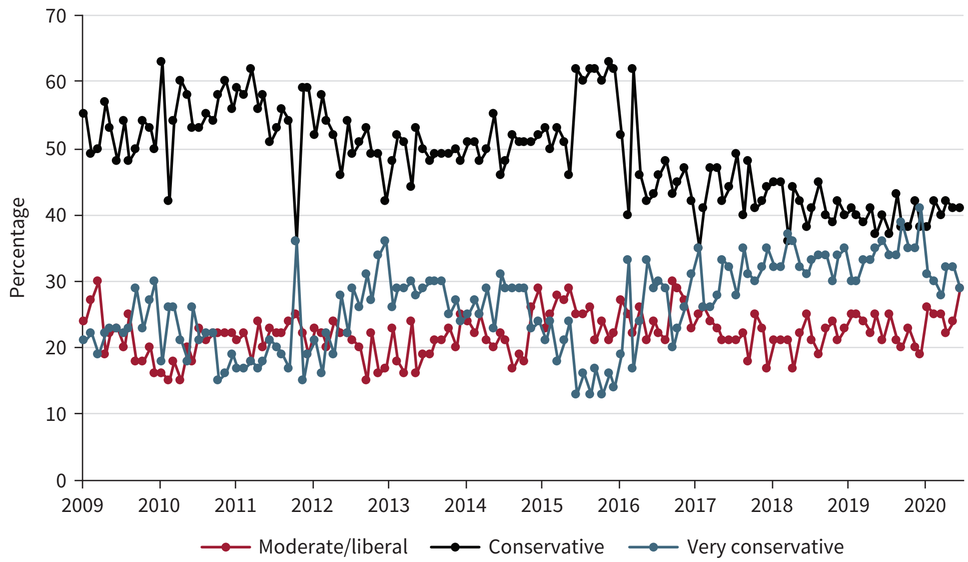
Figure 3 shows the same analysis for Republicans. Here there is less change in the overall percentage of conservatives, although over time there is an increase in the number of Republicans saying they are very conservative and a drop in those claiming to be merely

Figure 2. Ideological change in Democratic Party, polling data by quarter, 2009–2021. Moderate/conservative includes "moderate," "conservative," and "very conservative."



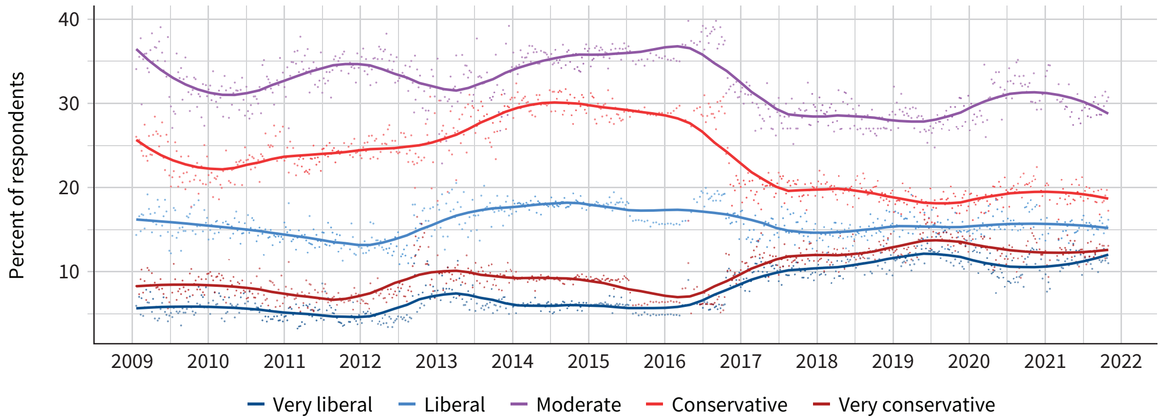
Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

Figure 3. Ideological change in Republican Party, polling data by quarter, 2009–2021. Moderate/liberal includes "moderate," "liberal," and "very liberal."



Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

Figure 4. Ideology among all voters, 2009–2021.



Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

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conservative. In the immediate pre- and postelection polls from early November 2020, 88 percent of Republicans identified themselves as conservative, with only about 1 percent saying they were liberal or very liberal. In contrast, in 2009, 79 percent of Republicans said they were conservative or very conservative, with over 3 percent claiming liberalism. Thus, in recent years there has been an increase in the proportion of conservatives in the Republican Party but to a lesser degree than the liberal shift in the Democratic Party.

The reality of two major parties where members are predominantly left and right has interesting implications for elections where independents and the median voter are more centrist. The most obvious implication is that where the dominant parties are always left and right of the average voter, the party's positions on issues are often competitive precisely because the deciding voter is always less liberal than Democrats and less conservative than Republicans.

Another view of these changes comes from plotting ideology without party over the same time period, 2009 to 2021. Figure 4 shows the results when voters were asked to self-identify as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal. Over the course of the Obama and Trump presidencies, the number of Americans calling themselves very liberal or very conservative has grown, while the number claiming less extreme liberalism or conservativism has declined. Moderates remained at about the same level throughout the two presidencies. These shifts have been absorbed into the already sorted (polarized) parties such that we have one major party dominated by liberals, with some moderates, and another party dominated by conservatives, with a few moderates.

We now turn to a consideration of four major socioeconomic gaps in American electoral politics: race, gender, age, and education. Table 1 shows the gaps represented by these

Table 1. The four gaps in American politics. Percentage of voters within each demographic group voting Democratic in that year's national election.

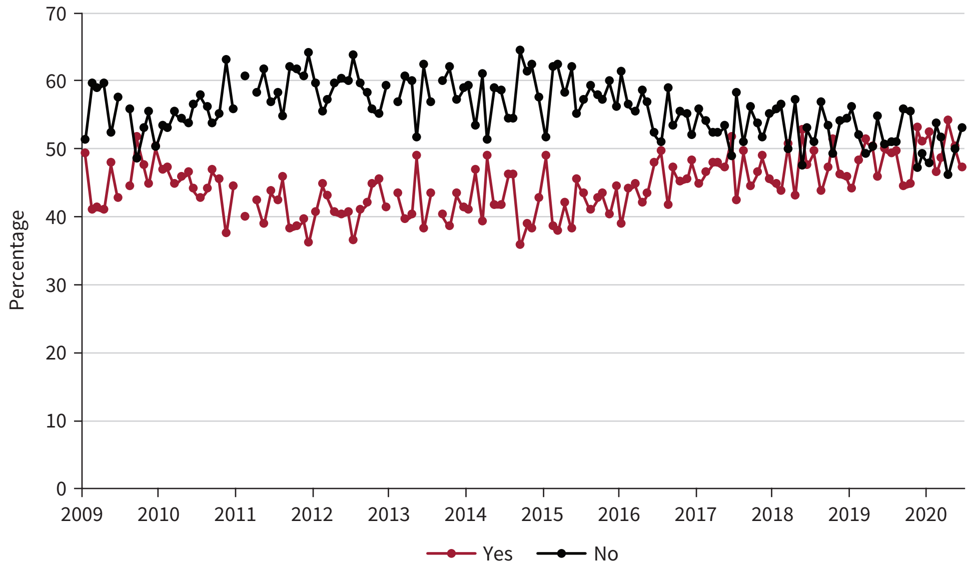
	2012	*2014*	*2016*	*2018*	*2020*
Race					
Non-White	81	75	74	76	77
White	39	38	37	44	46
GAP	42	37	37	32	31
Gender					
Female	52	51	54	59	57
Male	45	41	41	47	47
GAP	7	10	13	12	10
Education					
College	50	46	52	59	59
Non-college	50	46	44	49	43
GAP	0	0	8	10	15
Age					
Under 30	60	54	55	67	61
65-plus	44	41	45	48	48
GAP	16	13	10	19	13

Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

demographic groups among Democratic voters over the past five national elections. From 2012 through 2020, the racial and gender gaps remained relatively constant: women vote more Democratic than men, by a margin ranging between 7 (2012) and 13 (2016) percentage points; and non-Whites vote more Democratic than Whites, by a margin ranging between 42 (2012) and 31 (2020) points. Also relatively unchanged is the age gap: the difference in the percentages of voters under 30 and those over 65 who vote Democratic ranged from 19 points in 2018 to a low of 10 in 2016.

In short, we have known for some time that persons of color, women, and the young are more likely to vote Democratic than Republican, with some variation by candidate and election. The major shift, as the table clearly shows, is in level of education. With the arrival of Donald Trump as a candidate, those without a college degree moved away from the Democratic Party while the college educated moved into the Democratic camp. In the 2012 and 2014 elections, there was no distinction between college-educated and non-college-educated voters among those choosing the Democratic candidate: 50 percent

Figure 5. Members of Republican Party identifying as born-again Christians, polling data by quarter, 2009–2021.



Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

of voters in both categories in the presidential year, and 46 percent in both categories in the midterm election. A gap of 8 percentage points appeared in the 2016 election and grew to 15 points in 2020 as Trump gained non-college-educated voters at the cost of losing college-educated voters. Another group where the Republican camp gained ground during the Trump era is that of evangelical Christians. Figure 5 shows that, beginning in 2016, the number of self-identified born-again Christians in the Republican Party began to increase.

In sum, the Trump candidacy and presidency generated a significant shift in the voting patterns of non-college-educated voters and a similar jump in the voting patterns of evangelical Christians. Furthermore, Republicans managed to narrow the racial gap in 2020 as the Hispanic vote for Trump increased support for the Republican Party both in Florida and along the Mexican-American border in Texas.

These gaps shift when we turn to White voters only. Table 2 shows the gender, education, and age gaps among Democratic White voters over the past four national elections. The gender gap in this group fell in 2020 to 6 percentage points, largely because while White women voted for Joe Biden at about the same level as for Hillary Clinton in 2016, White male voters increased support for Biden by 7 points over their vote for Clinton in 2016.

The gap among White voters between people under 30 and those over 65 voting Democratic fell from its 2018 midterm election high of 13 percentage points closer to the level of

Table 2. Education, gender, and age gaps among White voters. Percentage of voters within each demographic group voting Democratic in that year's national election.

	2014	*2016*	*2018*	*2020*
Gender				
Female	42	43	49	44
Male	33	31	39	38
GAP	9	12	10	6
Education				
College	41	45	53	51
Non-college	34	29	37	32
GAP	7	16	16	19
Age				
Under 30	43	43	56	44
65-plus	36	39	43	41
GAP	7	4	13	3

Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

the 2016 election (4 points) in 2020 (3 points). The decline in the gender and age gap is consistent with the findings of a postelection Pew Research Center–validated voter poll and analysis from the data firm Catalist. Although the percentage differences may vary between the Pew and the YouGov/*The Economist* polls, the results are clear: the education gap is the one most strongly associated with Trump, and that gap among Democratic White voters grew in 2020 to its highest margin yet—19 points—as Trump continued to gain traction with non-college-educated Whites.

Generations: Partisanship and Ideology

Prognosticators often take today's demographics and project them linearly over time to predict the future. Nowhere is this more likely to lead us astray than when we look at age. Cohort and age analyses that project one party's domination of the future assume that young people who voted for a liberal party in the most recent election will continue to vote for that party in the future. In *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (2002), John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira predicted an emerging progressive majority, but since 2002 the results have been more evenly divided: the Democrats have won three presidential elections to the Republicans' two; the House of Representatives has had a Republican majority for twelve years versus the Democrats' eight; and each major party has controlled the Senate for ten total years. That looks more like a very competitive two-party system than a dominant progressive party.

Table 3. Voters identifying with or leaning toward a political affiliation, by age group, 2020 election.

	Under 30 (%)	*30 to 44 (%)*	*45 to 64 (%)*	*65-plus (%)*
Democrats	58	51	48	40
Independents	13	10	7	7
Republicans	29	39	45	53

Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

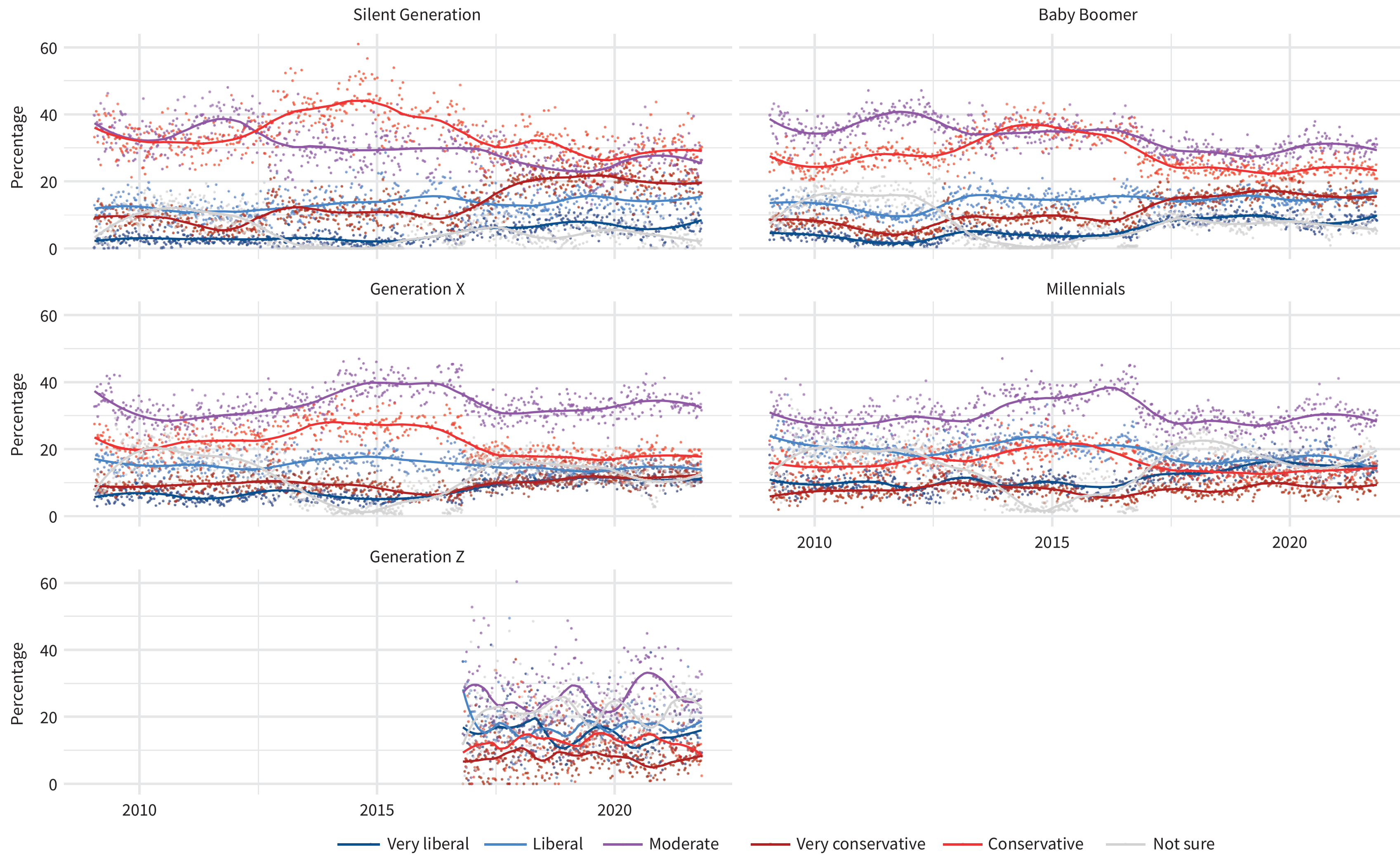
Table 3 shows the current breakdown of party identification among four age groups, as of the 2020 election. The results are clear and consistent with common knowledge: that age is correlated with partisanship, with younger age groups being more Democratic and older groups more Republican. If we set partisanship aside briefly and look at ideology without partisanship, the data show that the younger the age cohort, the more liberal, with Generation Z (born 2000 and later) being by far the most liberal, as shown in figure 6. The Silent Generation (born 1928–45) has the fewest liberals and the most conservatives. The Baby Boomer generation (born 1946–64) has about the same number of liberals and conservatives, while Generation X (born 1965–81) and Millennials (born 1982–99) are more liberal than conservative. We know given history that candidates and specific election issues can shift people's perception of their political views. Nevertheless, the data indicate that age is associated with ideology.

Voter turnout levels also increase with age and life situation (homeownership, marriage, parenting, etc.), which makes Republicans more competitive than if turnout were equal across age groups or cohorts. However, any election like 2018's, where younger voters turn out in larger numbers, is a problem for Republicans.

Issues

The party balance became more competitive after the election of Ronald Reagan, when the parties became more ideological (with Democrats becoming more liberal and Republicans more conservative); the number of independents rose to more than one-third of the electorate; and the relationship of education levels to partisanship shifted, with less-educated Americans moving toward the Republican party and college-educated voters moving to the Democrats. How have these shifts changed the attractiveness of the parties' issue positions among the larger electorate? Issues, of course, do not appear in a vacuum, as voters do not vote directly for policies but rather for candidates and parties, which often do not match a voter's preferences in any exact sense. A lower-tax, small-government, pro-choice voter has to decide between two candidates, one who favors less government and lower taxes but is pro-life, and another who is pro-choice but favors bigger government and higher taxes. The reader should keep this in mind as we look at Republican and Democratic respondents'

Figure 6. Ideology by generation: Silent Generation through Generation Z.



Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling.

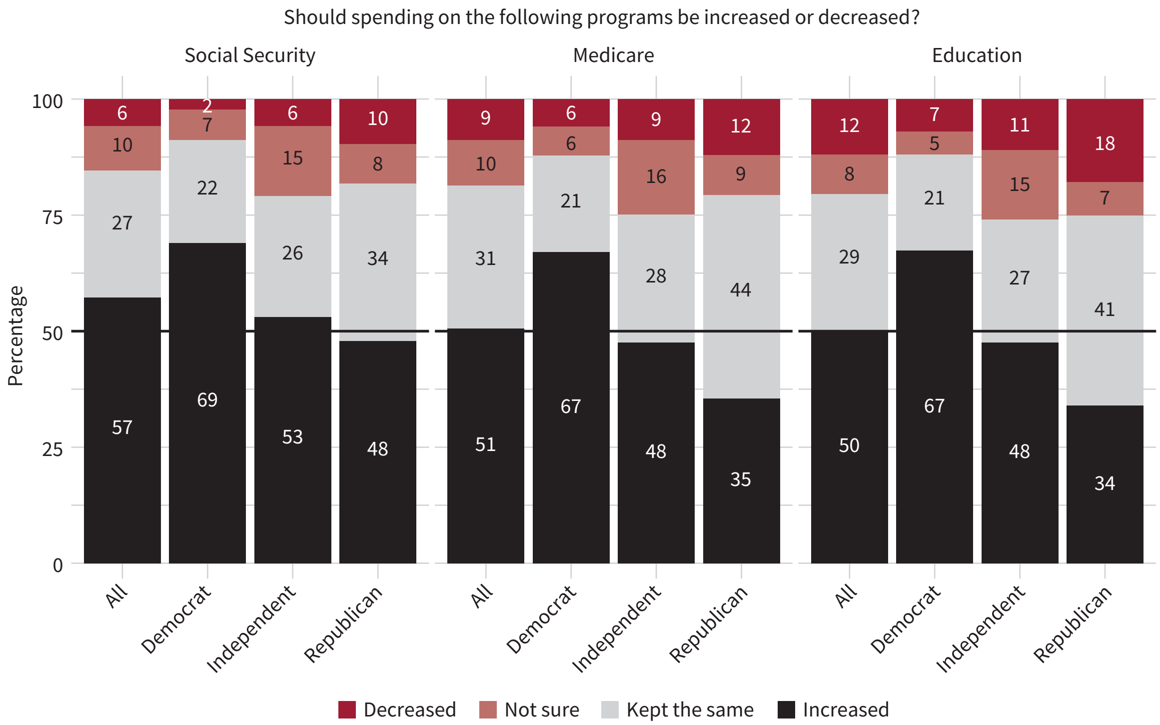
positions on various issues to determine which of the parties are closer to independents, who decide elections. We return to this complication after our survey.

The May 2021 YouGov/Hoover Institution–commissioned survey asked about traditional spending and taxing issues that have long divided the two parties. It asked, “Should spending on the following programs be increased or decreased?” with possible answers of “increased,” “decreased,” “kept the same,” or “not sure.” Majorities of respondents favored increasing (versus decreasing) expenditures on Social Security (57 percent to 6 percent), Medicare (51 to 9), and education (50 to 12). Pluralities were in favor of increases to support aid to the poor (42 to 13), the military (35 to 20), the environment (43 to 19), scientific research (40 to 11), and infrastructure (47 to 8). All other issues were characterized by ties between those favoring increases and those supporting decreases. A few issues, such as foreign aid and space travel, had pluralities favoring spending decreases.

As might be expected, given the ideological sorting of the parties, the results largely mirrored the partisan divide in our survey but to varying extent. Democrats favored increasing expenditures on Social Security, Medicare, and education, in line with the median voter and independents. Figure 7 shows the three expenditure areas where Democrats are most aligned with overall voter preferences. In each of these areas, note that the line indicating approval of increased spending is at or above the 50 percent threshold for all voters and among Democrats; while independent respondents are above or near the 50 percent line; and Republicans are below the line. However, on increasing Social Security expenditures, Republicans are close to reaching the 50 percent threshold—and close to the average voter—meaning that they would be competitive on the issue depending on the context in which it came up.

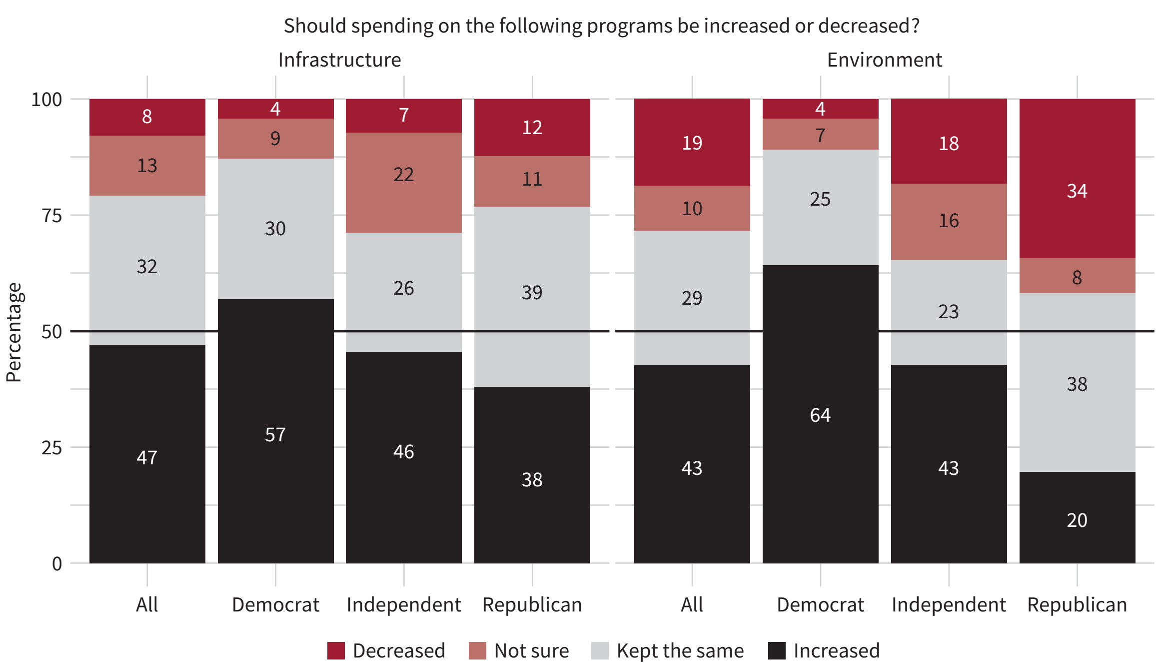
On the issues where a plurality favors increases versus decreases in spending, the partisan pattern is equally clear. In support of aid to the poor, the environment, and scientific research, majorities of Democrats favor increases, while Republicans are either less supportive than Democrats and the median voter—e.g., aid to the poor (23 percent support an increase versus 22 percent a decrease) and scientific research (28 to 16 percent)—or favor decreases. Among the set of issues favored by a plurality but not a majority of voters, the one that is close to garnering majority support is increased spending in infrastructure, favored by 47 percent overall. This increase is supported by a majority of Democrats (57 percent compared to 4 percent for decreases) and a plurality of Republicans (38 to 12 percent). Figure 8 shows the data on infrastructure and the environment—which, after the items shown in figure 7, are closest to having majority approval for increasing expenditures—and the breakdown of support by party alongside all voters. As is clear in the graphs, neither issue has majority support among all voters, and in both cases increases are favored by a majority of Democrats and a plurality of independents. Meanwhile, among Republicans there is less support for increases on either issue, but a plurality of Republicans supports infrastructure increases over decreases. Conversely, the environmental issue has more

Figure 7. Support for spending on Social Security, Medicare, and education, by party affiliation.



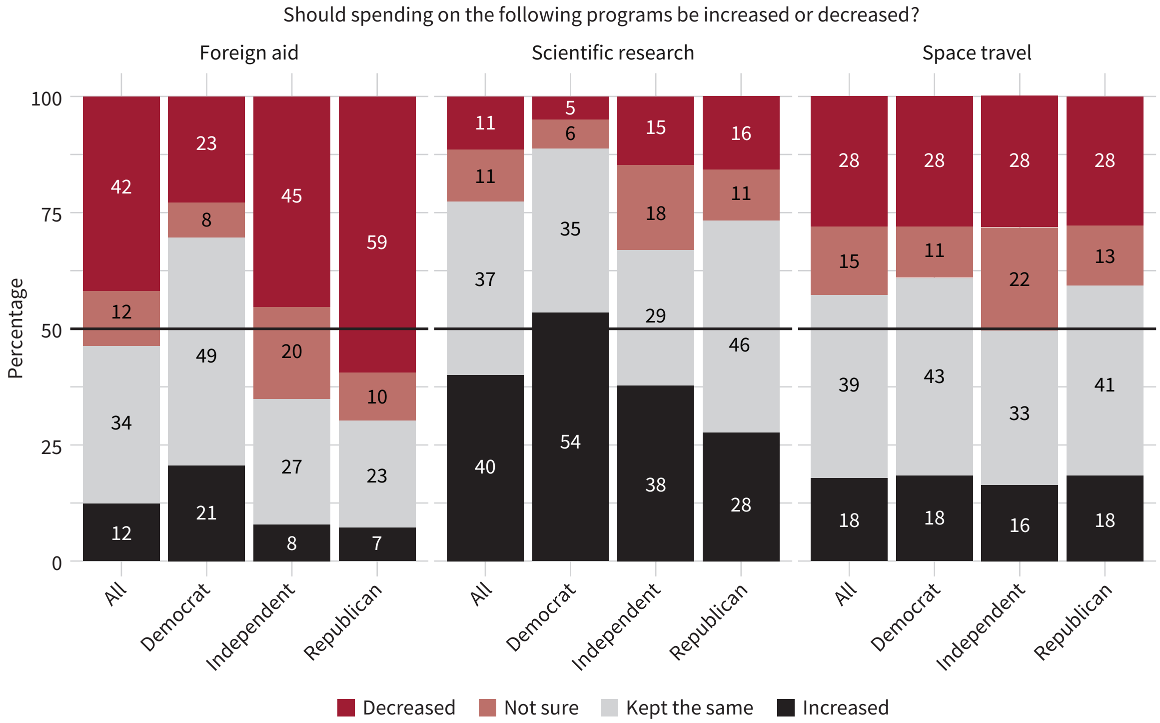
Source: Hoover YouGov survey, May 2021.

Figure 8. Support for spending on infrastructure and the environment, by party affiliation.



Source: Hoover YouGov survey, May 2021.

Figure 9. Support for spending on foreign aid, scientific research, and space travel, by party affiliation.



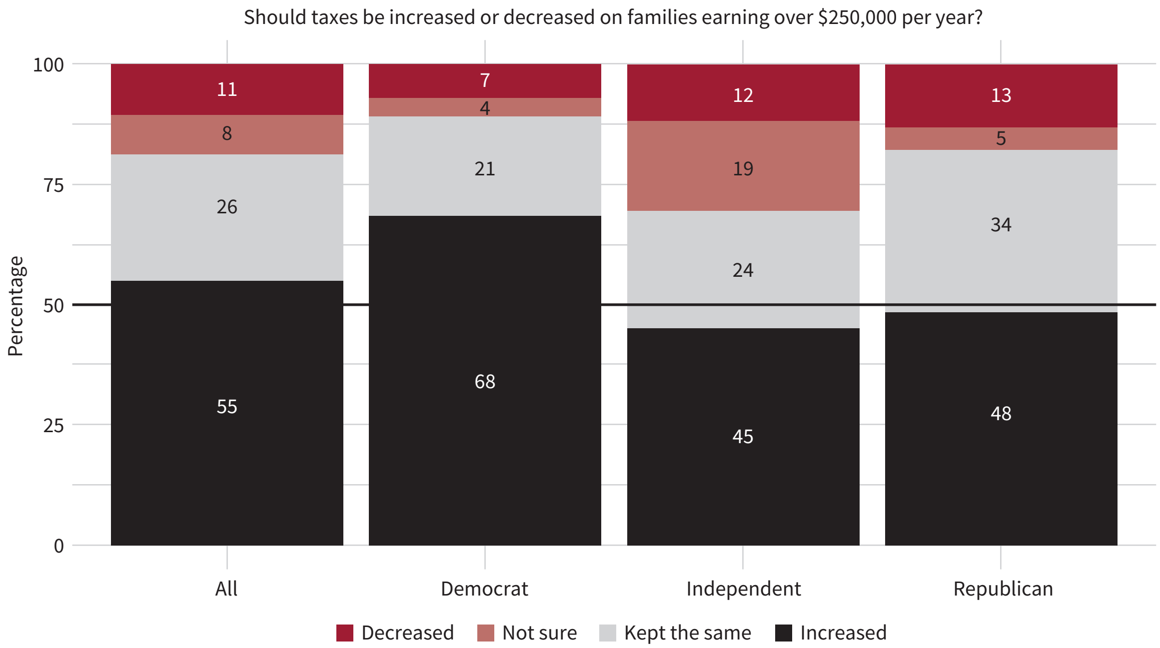
Source: Hoover YouGov survey, May 2021.

Republicans favoring decreases than increases. Thus, the major parties are on opposite sides of both issues, and while neither has a decided advantage in terms of appealing to centrist voters, independents lean toward the Democrats' position in terms of preferring increases to decreases.

On other spending issues such as foreign aid and space travel, there was no support for more activity in these areas among voters of either major party. Figure 9 shows how little support the general public has for these programs. On foreign aid, those favoring decreases in spending far outnumber those favoring increases except among Democrats, where the responses were about equal. On space travel, more respondents in both parties favor decreases than increases. The case is the opposite for scientific research, where all parties favor increases but a majority of voters only among Democrats, suggesting that of these three areas, science is most likely to move forward and become legislation.

When we turn to the tax side of the policy equation, Democrats have the advantage on the issue of increasing taxes on high-income earners. As seen in figure 10, 55 percent of survey respondents favor increasing taxes on families with income over $250,000, with 68 percent of Democrats agreeing and 45 percent of independents assenting as well. While

Figure 10. Support for tax increases on incomes over $250,000, by party affiliation.



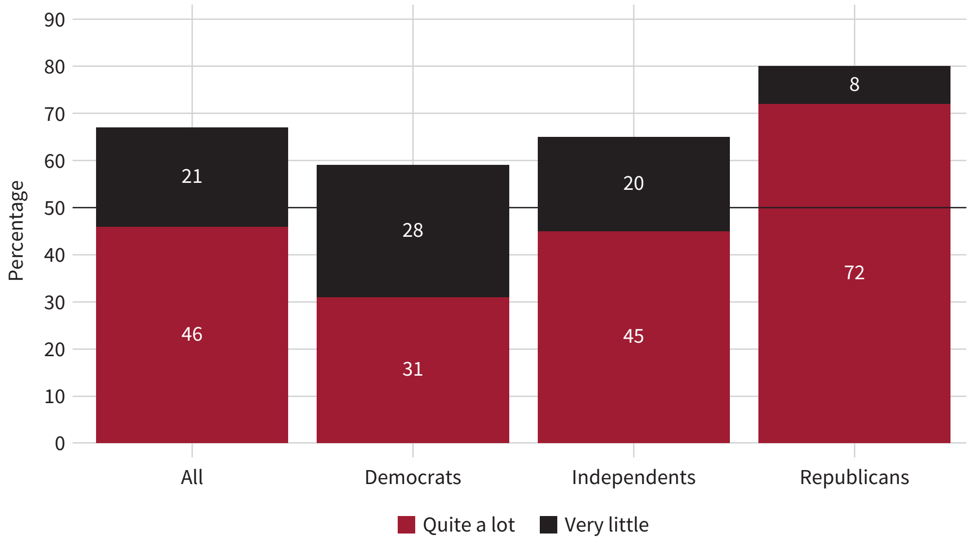
Source: Hoover YouGov survey, May 2021.

the Republicans do not have a majority favoring such increases, a plurality of 48 percent favors a tax increase and only 13 percent support a decrease in taxes. As seen elsewhere in the survey, when the question is shifted to ask about taxes on individuals earning over $1 million a year, 58 percent overall agree to an increase (with over two-thirds of these favoring steep increases). Again, higher percentages of Democrats favor increases, followed by independents with 62 percent and Republicans at almost majority levels favoring increases.

In regard to raising corporate taxes, the same pattern continues. On average 60 percent of respondents support raising corporate taxes, with only 14 percent favoring decreases. A majority of both Democrats (79 percent) and independents (64 percent) favor increases; and again, less than a majority but a strong plurality (44 percent) of Republicans support increases. To be sure, across all these tax issues more Republicans favored increases than favored decreases, but because the issue leans Democratic, any circumstance where voters feel taxes are too high already would provide a boost to Republicans.

Taxes on small businesses is the only tax area where those favoring decreases (42 percent of all voters) outnumbered those favoring increases (16 percent). Pluralities of Democrats and independents and a majority of Republicans favored decreasing small business taxes. Thus, on this issue we would not expect legislation raising these taxes given the lack of support across all groups. However, it appears that Democrats are currently more in line with the country's preferences than are Republicans. The magnitude of spending and taxing that is

Figure 11. Support for police: ratio of respondents indicating "quite a lot" to "very little" support of the police.



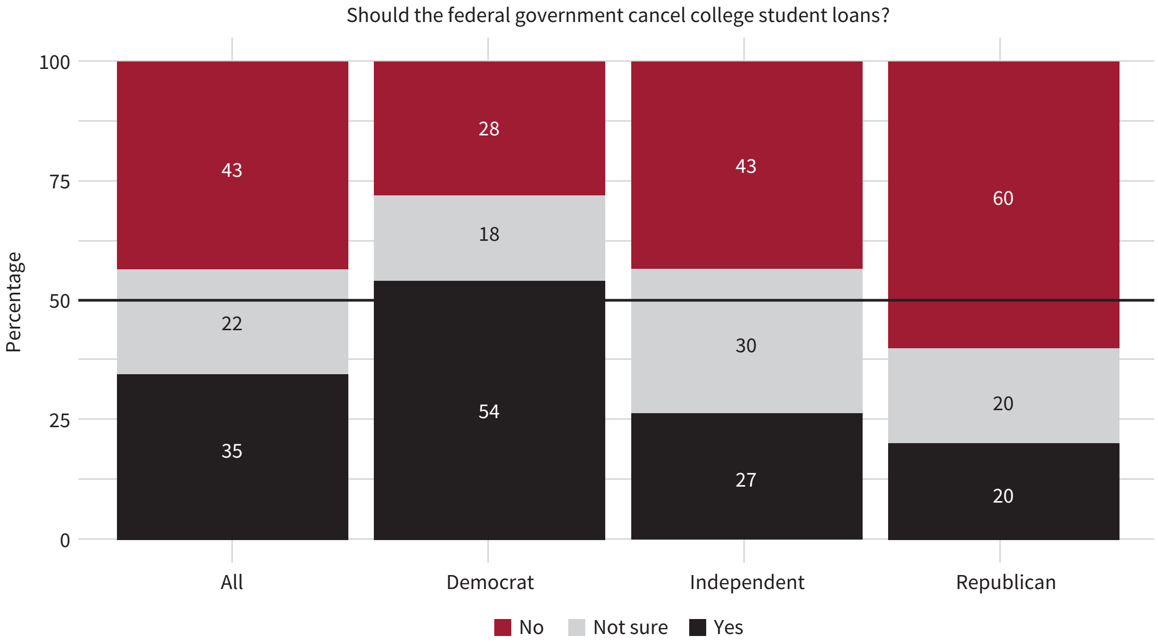
Source: YouGov/*The Economist* polling 2020.

contained in the current Biden-Democrat proposal will affect the outcome, and in further work we will ascertain how the extent of both are expected to shape the parties' future.

There is a set of issues where Republicans are advantaged in terms of sharing the values of the average voter, and these generally are issues where the Democrats press too far to the left, such as tuition-forgiveness policies, law enforcement—especially calls to defund the police—immigration (including proposals for a wall on the border), and the death penalty. On the issue of support for the police, opinion varies as expected. By a margin of 46 percent to 21 percent, Americans have "quite a lot" of support for the police versus "very little" support. Republicans show a huge ratio of high to very little support for the police, as do independents by a smaller ratio. Democrats, on the other hand, are about evenly divided on the issue of strong versus very little support. This was the same result seen in 2020, in a poll taken after the George Floyd murder (figure 11). When pollsters push the issue, as we did in the 2020 poll, to ask about defunding the police, we find by a margin of 45 percent to 29 percent that Democrats favor—while 57 percent of independents and 89 percent of Republicans oppose—defunding the police, putting Republicans in line with the three-fifths of Americans who oppose defunding. On the issue of supporting community policing, Republicans are also more in line with public opinion than Democrats. This does not mean that Republicans and independents support any specific actions by the police; rather it is an indication of a broader support for law and order.

Turning to student-loan forgiveness, figure 12 shows that Republican voters hold a position closer to that of the average American voter than do Democrats. Forty-three percent of the

Figure 12. Support for student-loan forgiveness, by party affiliation.



Source: Hoover YouGov survey, May 2021.

total sample oppose forgiving student loans while 35 percent favor it. By almost two to one, Democrats favor forgiving the loans, while majorities of independents (43 percent) and Republicans (60 percent) oppose forgiveness. This is one of several issues—others include the regulation of small businesses and balancing the budget—where Republicans are more competitive than Democrats in terms of attracting a centrist voter.

Republicans also better mirror the general public on opinions of immigration, affirmative action, and the death penalty. On each of these issues, a plurality of American voters favors the same position as the Republican majority: in support of building a wall, opposing affirmative action for college admissions, and favoring the death penalty. The Democratic position on each of these is out of step with the plurality.

On health care, there is a set of issues where the party advantage shifts depending on the policy. For example, on repealing the Affordable Care Act, the Democrats have the advantage, while on the issue of Medicare for all, it is held by the Republicans. Between these two polar alternatives, public opinion on health care issues swings variously between the two major parties' positions. On the issue of mandating that employers provide insurance to their employees, Democrats have a narrow advantage, with 49 percent of Americans favoring such a policy while only 40 percent of Republicans favor it. In regard to requiring all persons to have health insurance, a majority of Republicans (59 percent) oppose while a majority of Democrats (62 percent) favor this policy, with a narrow plurality

(42 versus 39 percent) of the sample agreeing with the Republicans. There are other issues, such as allowing tax-deductible medical savings accounts, that majorities of both parties favor, in line with the median voter in the country.

Overall, considering the issues we surveyed, there is little to indicate that the Republican Party is so out of touch on issues that they cannot do well in the 2022 and 2024 elections. But two complications make it extremely difficult to extrapolate the role of issues from poll results alone. The first—often overlooked—is intensity of preferences. A candidate may take the position favored by a majority on every issue but still lose the election because some voters feel more strongly about an issue or issues where they are in the minority than about those issues where they are in the majority. Following sequential majorities (i.e., a series of yes-or-no binary choices toward a singular conclusion) is no guarantee of electoral success.

Moreover, even if we took account of voters' intensity of preferences, candidates are constrained in the positions they adopt. If, say, the election revolves around five issues on which voters can take either a supporting or opposing position, there are thirty-two platforms that represent the possible combinations of issues. But an election in the United States generally presents voters with only two of those thirty-two combinations. An educated, affluent voter might agree with Republicans on a series of tax, spending, and regulation issues, but abortion or the environment may be a deal breaker when it comes to voting for a Republican. Similarly, a high school–educated manual worker might agree with the Democrats on a series of tax, spending, and regulation issues, but abortion or defunding the police is perhaps a deal breaker when it comes to voting. Both of these possibilities appear to have been realized in the 2020 presidential election: Some Republicans bemoaned the fact that some affluent suburbanites voted for the party that would raise their taxes, and some Democrats resented that some high school–educated manual workers voted for the party that opposed increases in the minimum wage and expanded unemployment benefits. A party trying to maximize its votes may be prevented from presenting an optimal bundle to the electorate because of the preferences of their deepest supporters, such as activists and donors.

The second complication is that election results depend upon the candidates and the context of the election, neither of which may be clear until much closer to the election, certainly not this far out when speaking of 2022 or 2024. As former British prime minister Harold Wilson famously said, "A week is a long time in politics." If the context in 2022 is "Why was the Democratic majority unable to pass any of its major priorities?" or "Why did the Democrats pass such large spending bills that caused inflation to skyrocket?" the result will be different from a context where the Democrats passed landmark legislation that got the economy growing and brought the spread of COVID-19 under control. The recent state government elections in Virginia and New Jersey, which occurred after this report was written, are proof that both candidates and issues matter. In Virginia a long-favored Democrat lost to a first-time Republican candidate who won based on his positions on education, the economy, and taxes. In New Jersey the economy and the Democrats' infighting and inability to pass legislation almost cost that party the governorship. Given that situations change, our best guess at this point is that the House will probably switch majorities and the Senate will be very competitive, but we hesitate to venture much further ahead than that, and even that prediction might change given some major domestic or international development.

The Trump Factor

Whatever else occurs before the 2022 midterm elections, it is likely that Donald Trump will play a crucial role in the Republican Party's efforts to take back the US Congress. Trump remains popular among Republicans: over 72 percent approve of his handling of the presidency. Republicans in our survey gave Trump high marks on several specific policy areas, with the highest being for his handling of the economy (80 percent approval). He also received high approval (over 70 percent) on his handling of immigration and of Chinese and Russian relations. The only policy areas where he fell below a 70 percent approval rating among Republicans is in his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and of race relations, where he scored approval rankings of 68 and 66 percent, respectively. Moreover, when asked about personal attributes, 82 percent of Republicans thought the former president was authentic and 73 percent found him to be honest and trustworthy. His status compared to other Republicans is quite high. We asked a favorability question comparing Trump to other Republicans such as Mike Pence, Ted Cruz, Nikki Haley, Josh Hawley, and others. None of these other potential candidates came within a double-digit differential of Trump's approval rating. Given these high marks for Trump, it seems clear that he remains the dominant figure in the party, and barring some significant development, what he says and does will matter for the 2022 elections.

Since Trump is not running for office in 2022, his influence will be measured by how he affects who gets the nominations and how well his candidates succeed in the 2022 elections. The results of that election will go a considerable way toward determining how long he can keep his hold on the party. We asked our sample several questions about his potential influence. The first was: If Donald Trump endorsed a candidate, would it make it more or less likely that you would support that candidate? We then followed with two questions asking specifically: Would you consider voting for a candidate that Trump opposed? For a candidate that Trump endorsed? Combing through the replies to these questions, we compiled an overall measure, shown in table 4. The results clearly show that Trump has a role to play in the nomination process. Among Republicans, 21 percent would definitely support, while 14 percent would probably support, a Trump-endorsed candidate, with an additional 10 percent saying they would be more likely to vote for an endorsed candidate. This combined 45 percent is almost evenly matched with 44 percent of respondents saying a Trump endorsement would have no effect, leaving only 10 percent of Republicans to indicate that the Trump stamp of approval would lead to their being

Table 4. Likelihood of support for a Trump-endorsed candidate, by party affiliation.

	All	*Democrat*	*Independent*	*Republican*
Definitely support	10	3	7	21
Probably support	7	2	6	14
More likely to support	7	7	3	10
No effect	40	27	51	44
More likely to oppose	2	3	2	2
Probably oppose	3	5	3	2
Definitely oppose	30	55	27	6

Source: Hoover YouGov survey, May 2021.

more likely to oppose the said nominee. From the candidates' perspective in a Republican primary, it is clear that with almost half of their party members going along with the former president and only 10 percent going the other way, they seem better off with his endorsement. Of course, elections are determined by specific candidates in particular circumstances, as in the recent contest for the Republican nomination in Texas's Sixth District, where the Trump-endorsed candidate lost to Jake Ellzey by six points. Thus, the data in table 4 are not determinative, but they do point to Trump having an outsize effect on the nomination process.

When we turn to the 2024 presidential nominations, we have another indication of the former president's hold on the Republican Party. When we asked respondents if they wanted Donald Trump to run for president again in 2024, a full 53 percent of Republicans replied in the affirmative; however, 20 percent said they did not want him to run again. The remaining 27 percent were not sure. The fact that a majority wants him again as a candidate puts him among the current front-runners for the Republican nomination in 2024. It also puts other potential candidates in a difficult position for the next year or two; they want to run but can't announce, because if Trump decides not to run, his endorsement of them is crucial. In short, until Trump is clear on his 2024 plans, potential Republican candidates will have to walk a very thin line between running and not running. We should also note that the majority of Republicans who want him to run again are firmly convinced that he will do well, as over four-fifths of them think he would win the 2024 election.

One major caveat here is that Trump's campaign strategy in the two Georgia Senate elections—talking about how the presidential election had been stolen—backfired: Republican turnout declined, and Democrats won both seats. The most recent YouGov/*The Economist* poll showed that 73 percent of Republicans believe that Biden did not legitimately win the 2020 presidential election. Thus, the question becomes whether these views will affect Republican turnout in 2022. If you believe that elections have been unfair and that the real winners are not sworn into office, then—as in Georgia—you might be disinclined to vote at all, especially in the less publicized midterm election. In 2022 turnout will be crucial in determining the winners. The 2020 election was the highest-turnout election in a hundred years, and former president Trump is the reason. Of Democrats who voted for Biden, fully two-thirds cast their vote as a rejection of Trump, with less than a third specifically supporting Biden. In contrast, over 80 percent of Republicans voted for Trump because of Trump, and not merely as a rejection of Biden. Thus, Trump is a candidate who, over his two elections and especially after his first four years in office, is a turnout machine for both parties. Over the course of the 2022 campaigns, we will be monitoring the effects of the election fraud claims on potential Republican turnout. The recent campaign of Glenn Youngkin in the Virginia governor's race may be the harbinger of a winning Republican strategy. Youngkin managed to keep voters from the Trump base without seeming to cater to Trump, thus allowing him to capture critical independent voters who in 2020 had voted for Biden and against Trump. The utility of the Youngkin way will hang on exactly how and under what conditions Trump engages in the 2022 and 2024 campaigns. If he behaves as he did in Virginia, without making noise about the validity of the 2020 election, Republicans will benefit. If, however, Trump insists that Republican candidates support claims that he won in 2020, then that will likely generate a different response from independents and other on-the-fence voters.

Our general conclusion is that no firm predictions of success for either Democrats or Republicans are warranted at the present time. The 2020 election has not resolved any major issues in American politics, nor has it altered in a major way the balance of partisanship. The Republican Party is in a good position to recapture Congress in 2022, and depending on circumstances, they could win the presidency in 2024. We see nothing in terms of partisan identification or issue positioning that would lead to a conclusion that the Republican Party will not be competitive in the near term, nor to a conclusion that they will achieve a lasting majority on the one hand or suffer lasting minority status on the other. The fundamental unknown going into next year is what role Donald Trump will play in the nomination process. As the primary season begins to open and we see the results, we will be in a better position to determine how the party will fare in the next election cycle.

Afternote on Competitiveness

When the major parties are evenly sized, as they have been since the late 1980s, small shifts from one party to another by partisans or by undecided voters can shift political control. As coalition theory teaches, the power of a party faction is determined not by its size but by the credibility of its threat to defect and cause the abandoned coalition to lose an election. This creates a centrifugal-centripetal tension between holding the base and attracting swing voters. Frequent turnover of partisan control over government does not derive from a widespread changing of minds but instead from closely contested blocs competing for a

Table 5. US legislative seats by category of state (Democratic, Republican, or competitive).

	Democratic states		*Republican states*		*Competitive states*	
	Democrat	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Republican*
US Senate seats	34	0	3	41	13	9
Percentage of House seats	76.3	23.7	15.3	84.7	43	57

Democratic states (17) = CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, IL, MD, MA, MN, NJ, NM, NY, OR, RI, VT, VA, WA.
Republican states (22) = AL, AK, AR, ID, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, MS, MO, MT, NE, ND, OH, OK, SC, SD, TN, UT, WV, WY.
Competitive states (11) = AZ, FL, GA, ME, MI, NV, NH, NC, PA, TX, WI.

Source: Compiled by authors.

much smaller number of partisan switchers or nonaligned voters. Under the logic of the Electoral College (EC), the key voters are the swing voters in the competitive states, an even tinier sliver.

To emphasize just how few votes in a minority of states can determine a presidential election, we classified the fifty states into three categories: solidly Democratic (17 states with 216 EC votes), solidly Republican (22 states with 150 EC votes), and competitive (11 states with 169 EC votes). We then can demonstrate how these eleven competitive states determine presidential as well as senatorial elections. The last poll before the 2020 election showed that party identification in the competitive states was 32 percent Democratic, 31 percent Republican, and 32 percent independent. The comparable figures for the whole country minus the competitive states was 39 percent Democratic, 25 percent Republican, and 30 percent independent. Because we know that the polls underestimate Republicans, we turned to a comparison of states by category, showing how they vote in national and state elections. Table 5 shows how competitive states stack up against Democratic- and Republican-dominant states in terms of party representation among US congressional seats.

The results clearly show the differences between party-reliable states and the competitive states. Democratic states have elected 34 Democratic and no Republican senators, and over 75 percent of House seats have gone to Democrats. Republican states have elected 41 Republican to 3 Democratic senators, and almost 85 percent of House seats are Republican. In contrast, competitive states have 13 Democratic to 9 Republican senators, while Republicans have 57 percent of the House seats.

These competitive differences carry over to state elections, as table 6 shows. Here the data show Democratic dominance in their 17 states, with control of all 17 state houses, 16 state senates, and 14 governorships. Republican states show similar control of state legislatures and have Republican governors in 19 of the 22 states. The 11 competitive states show a lean toward Republican legislatures—leading both houses in 9 states—with Democrats

Table 6. State-level legislative and gubernatorial seats by category of state (Democratic, Republican, or competitive).

	Democratic states		*Republican states*		*Competitive states*	
	Democrat	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Republican*	*Democrat*	*Republican*
State houses controlled	17	0	1*	21	2	9
State senates controlled	16	1	0	22	2	9
State governors	14	3	3	19	6	5

Democratic states (17) = CA, CO, CT, DE, HI, IL, MD, MA, MN, NJ, NM, NY, OR, RI, VT, VA, WA.
Republican states (22) = AL, AK, AR, ID, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, MS, MO, MT, NE, ND, OH, OK, SC, SD, TN, UT, WV, WY.
Competitive states (11) = AZ, FL, GA, ME, MI, NV, NH, NC, PA, TX, WI.
** The Alaska House is governed by a majority, which is a combination of Democrats and Republicans.*

Source: Compiled by authors.

having more success at the gubernatorial level, with 6 governorships. Across these 11 states, Democrats are competitive, but the three most recent presidential elections tell another story. In 2012, 5 of the competitive states voted Republican (for 109 EC votes) against 6 who voted Democrat (for 60 EC votes), while in 2016 the Republicans won 8 of the 11 states, worth 154 EC votes. In the 2020 election, Biden was able to reverse the numbers, winning 8 of the 11 states for 87 EC votes (out of 169). Over the three elections, Republicans won 68 percent of all available EC votes. Thus, in the competitive states across all three elections, Democrats won a bare majority just once, in 2020, and this in spite of winning the election by over seven million votes. This is clearly a Republican advantage in the Electoral College that Democrats have to overcome to win presidential elections.

This Republican Electoral College advantage also carries over to the US Senate elections, given the population differential between the states categorized as Republican and Democratic: among the roughly 330 million residents in the United States, the 22 Republican states represent slightly over 20 percent, while the Democratic states represent 37 percent. On a pure party vote across partisan states, the Republicans would have an advantage of 10 Senate seats going into elections in the 11 competitive states. The current count across party-dominant states in the Senate is 41 Republican versus 37 Democratic seats. Thus, the Democratic control of the Senate in the current 117th Congress came down to competitive states: most specifically, two runoff elections in Georgia, won by a margin of 109,988 votes, or .012 percent of all votes cast. Moreover, if Georgia election rules allowed a winner by plurality of votes in the general election, rather than requiring a majority, then Republican incumbent David Perdue would have won that election in November 2020. In short, like the presidency, control of the Senate is determined by a sliver of a sliver of the electorate.

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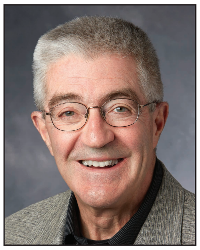

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Synopsis

Examining the deepening impact of party identification on US elections, this essay uses data from recent surveys of American voters to compare self-identified Democrats and Republicans with the median voter on a range of issues. Taking this information, it considers the future of the Republican Party in the upcoming 2022 and 2024 elections and addresses the potential effect of a Trump endorsement on any Republican candidate.

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