

Secular Realignment in the United States, 1937—2010: A Preliminary Analysis

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United States: 1937 - 2010

The 2008 American presidential election results caused many journalists and some political scientists to revive, however briefly, the notion of electoral realignment (Caswell, 2009; Thomas, 2010; Borsage and Greenberg, 2010). The original paper on realignments by V.O. Key appeared in 1955 and argued that some elections result in a “sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate” and that “the realignment made manifest in the voting in such elections seems to persist for several succeeding elections.” (Key, page 4, 1955) The theory of realigning elections and its constituent parts dominated the research on elections throughout the 1980s but by the time of the 2008 elections had clearly fallen from favor (Mayhew, 2002). No election since 1932 had clearly produced Key’s requirement for an alteration of the former political alignment and the subsequent electoral victories of the new alignment. The 1964 and 1972 victories were large in scope but neither coalition persisted for even a single election. In regard to controlling government, Clinton’s victory in 1992 and 1996 and Bush’s 2000 and 2004 victories could not be transferred to their party in the first non-incumbent elections. Ronald Reagan’s 1980 victory and the Republican victories in 1984 and 1988 probably come closest to the notion of a critical election.

Indeed, some prominent scholars (Meffert et al., 2001) argues that 1980 was a realigning or critical election, at least in terms of changes in party identification.

In this paper, we shall not argue that there has been a critical election post 1932; rather, we take a second paper of V.O. Key's on secular realignment (1959) and argue that by a secular realignment criteria, much has changed in American politics post 1930s. Key argued that "the party process is thrown into a different interpretive framework if one supposes the existence of processes of long-term or secular shifts in party attachment among the voters." Most eloquently, he states "Some elections may be "critical" in that they involve far wider movements and more durable shifts than do other elections. Yet the rise and fall of parties may to some degree be the consequence of trends that perhaps persist over decades and elections may mark only steps in a more or less continuous creation of new loyalties and decay of old." (Key, 1959, p. 198) The mechanism(s) through which such change occurs differ from migration to retrospective evaluations of political parties' policy choices (Fiorina). However, the point for our purposes is that the change is gradual, not dramatic.

In this paper, we utilize over 700 Gallup Polls taken from 1937 through 2010 to investigate secular realignment in American politics. We examine shifts in partisan

identifications and electoral representation in the United States at large and across the regions that comprise America. The results clearly show that while there may have been no classical realignment or critical election post 1932, there clearly has been extensive secular realignment.

Beginning in 1937, Gallup polls began asking voters their party identification. Over the 1937 to 2011 time period, Gallup's first question, like the American National Election Studies (NES), asks whether the respondent thinks of herself as a Democrat, Republican or Independent, followed in the NES questionnaire by a strength of party identification question and a follow-up asking if Independents in question 1 lean toward one or the other party. Unlike the NES, Gallup does not ask a strong or weak party identification question but, beginning in the 1960s, they do ask those respondents who have declared their independence on the first question (the Gallup equivalent of the NES) whether they lean Republican or Democrat. In the body of the paper, we use the first question alone to show the relative percentages of Democrats, Republicans and Independents in the electorate over time (Warren Miller, 1991). In the footnotes and the paper, we use leaners as well as party identifiers to create a 5 point scale and compare results with our three point scale. A comparison of Gallup results over time with those of the ANES studies (figure 1) show a reasonably good match. Democrats have been the dominant party over most of this time period, and both Gallup and NES polls show this over the time series.¹ From 1956 through 2008, the Democratic numbers match up for both polls, whereas from 1984 to 2004, the NES has between 3 and 10 percent more

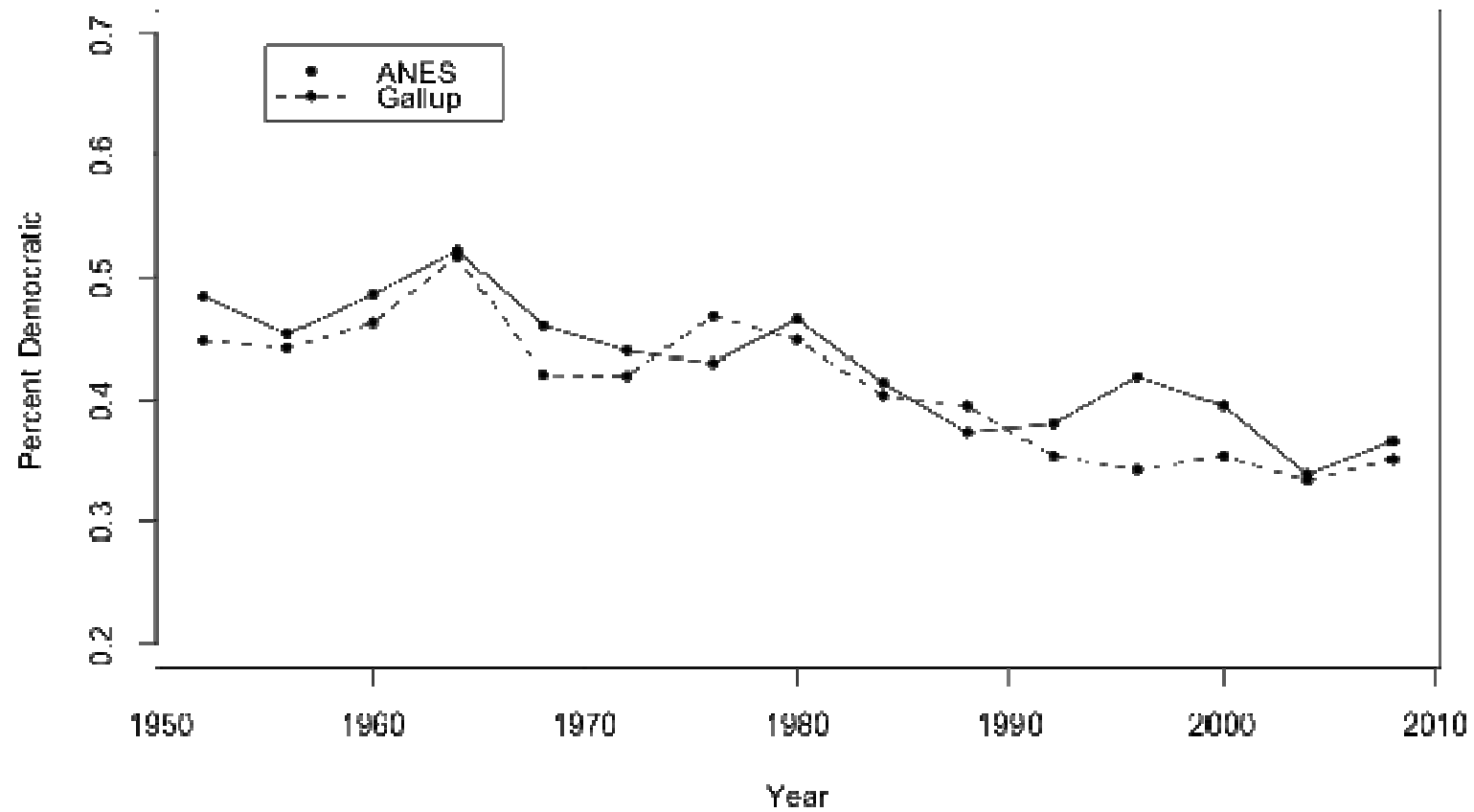
¹ The NES data set begins in 1952, thus the starting point for the comparison.

Democrats than does the Gallup data. The data for Republican party identification shows a pattern where NES and Gallup move around as to who shows the most Republican identifiers. However, beginning in the 1980s, NES consistently shows fewer Republicans than does Gallup. The pattern for Independents does not show consistent polling differences and both show the clear rise of Independents as a proportion of the electorate. On the whole, we believe that our numbers generated by the series of Gallup polls we coded are reasonably accurate at any one point in time and given the number of polls, very accurate over time.

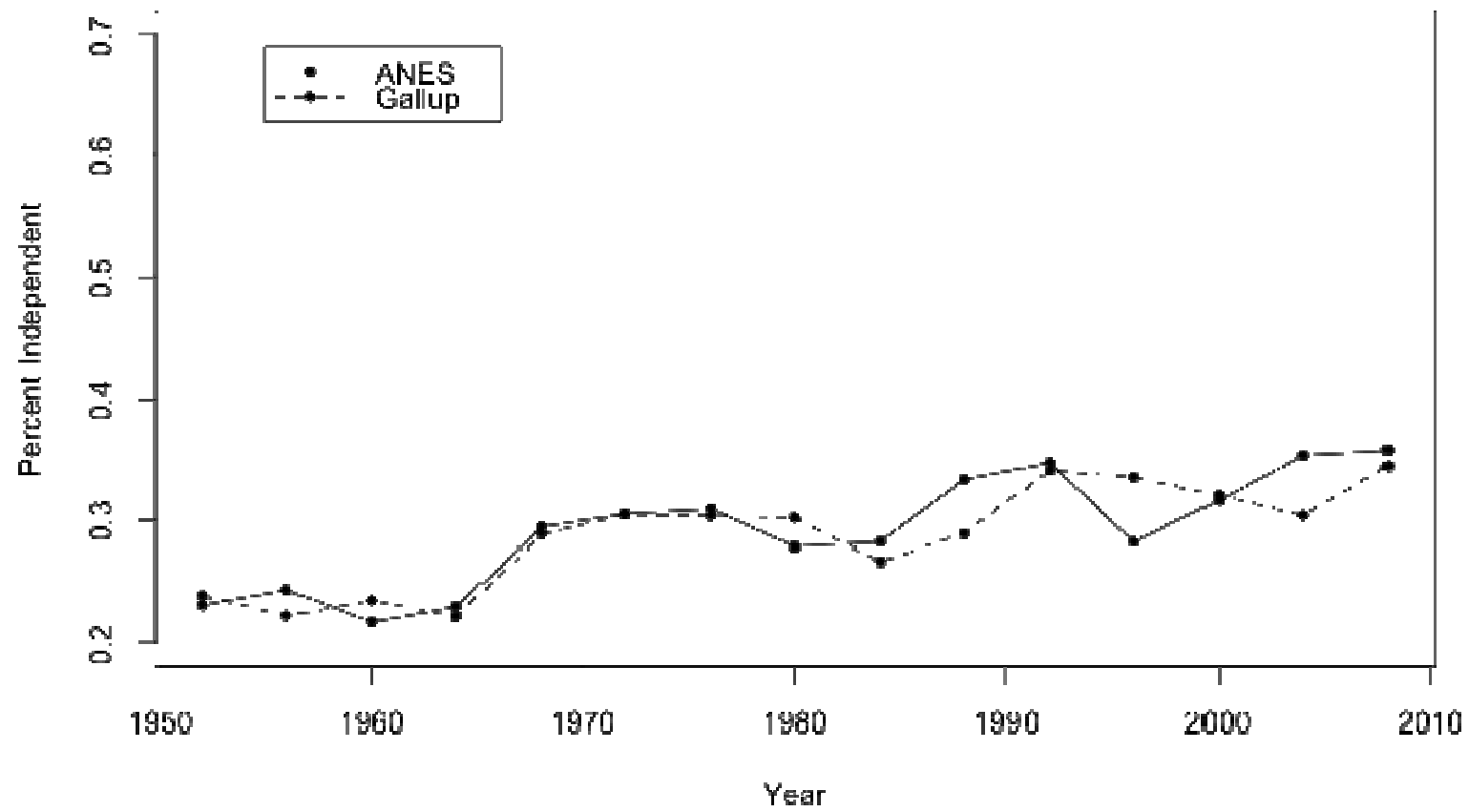
We begin with a presentation of two figures for the United States as a whole and then duplicate those figures for each of the regions of the United States. The figures show first party identification over time with Independents included. The second figure shows Democratic party identification with the percent of House seats won by Democrats over the time period. Analysis in this section is straightforward, describing changing patterns of party identification and the corresponding changes

Figure 1: A Comparison of American National Election Studies Party Identification to Gallup Numbers, 1952—2008

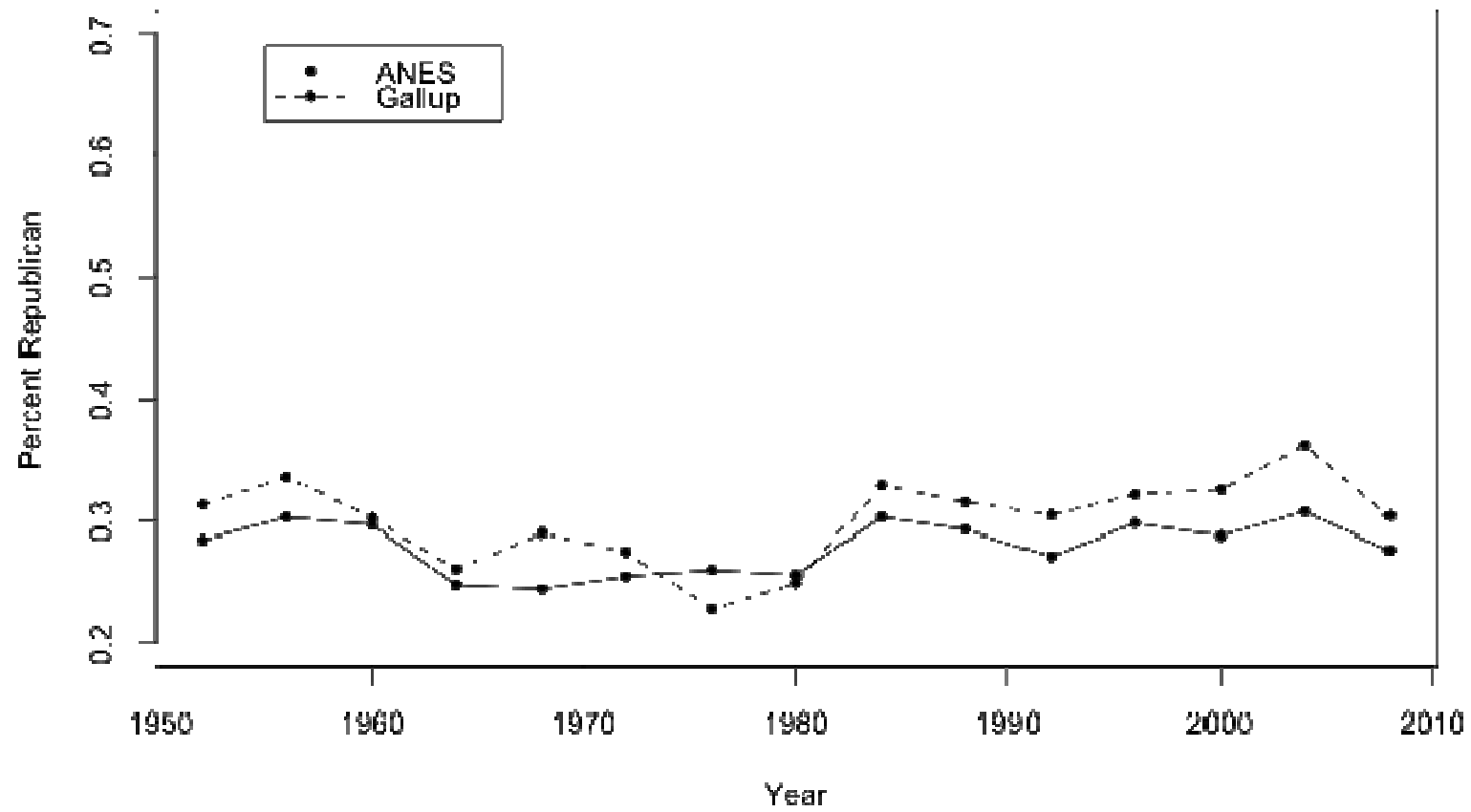
**A:
Democrats**



B: Independents



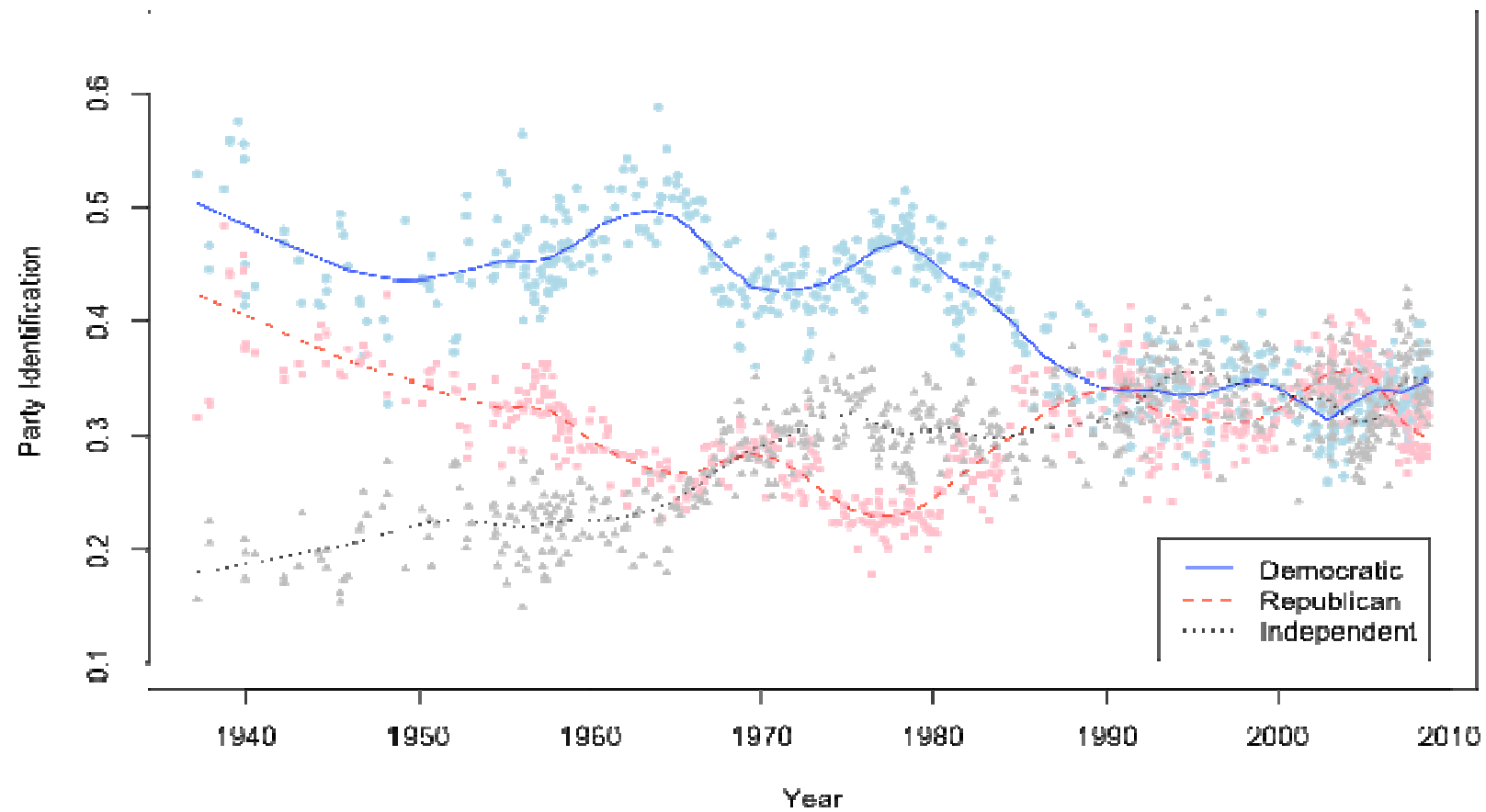
C: Republicans



in House election results. We include comments on whether House seats lead or follow changes in party identification. The next section of the paper utilizes statistical analysis to test hypotheses concerning: change in party identification and electoral results; the impact of voters shifting to Independent on electoral outcomes; and the role of national versus local factors in determining party identification and electoral outcomes.

Over the 1937 to 2010 period, Figure 2 shows that the Democrats have gone from a majority party with over 50 percent identification to a party with roughly a 33 percent plurality (Miller, 1987, among others; Meffert et al, 2001). These changes were not very dramatic until the 1980s when the Democrats fell from the mid 40s to about 35 percent in 1988 and, with some variation, they have remained the party of choice for about one third of the electorate. The elections from 1936 to 1980 reflected Democratic dominance in identification, winning seven of eleven presidential elections and controlling the House of Representatives and the Senate in twenty one of twenty three elections. The shift away from Democrats, beginning in the 1980s, had important electoral consequences. Republicans since 1980, not Democrats, have won five of eight presidential elections. More importantly, in the sixteen Congresses from 1980 to the present, four had mixed party control of Congress, and five times each, the Congress was controlled by either the Democrats or the Republicans. In the 1937 to 1980 period, the probability that the Democratic Party controlled all three branches

Figure 2: National Party Identification: 1937—2008*



*All other regional party identification figures use the same format

of government was above .9. In the post-1980 period, that same probability was .125 --- a dramatic difference.

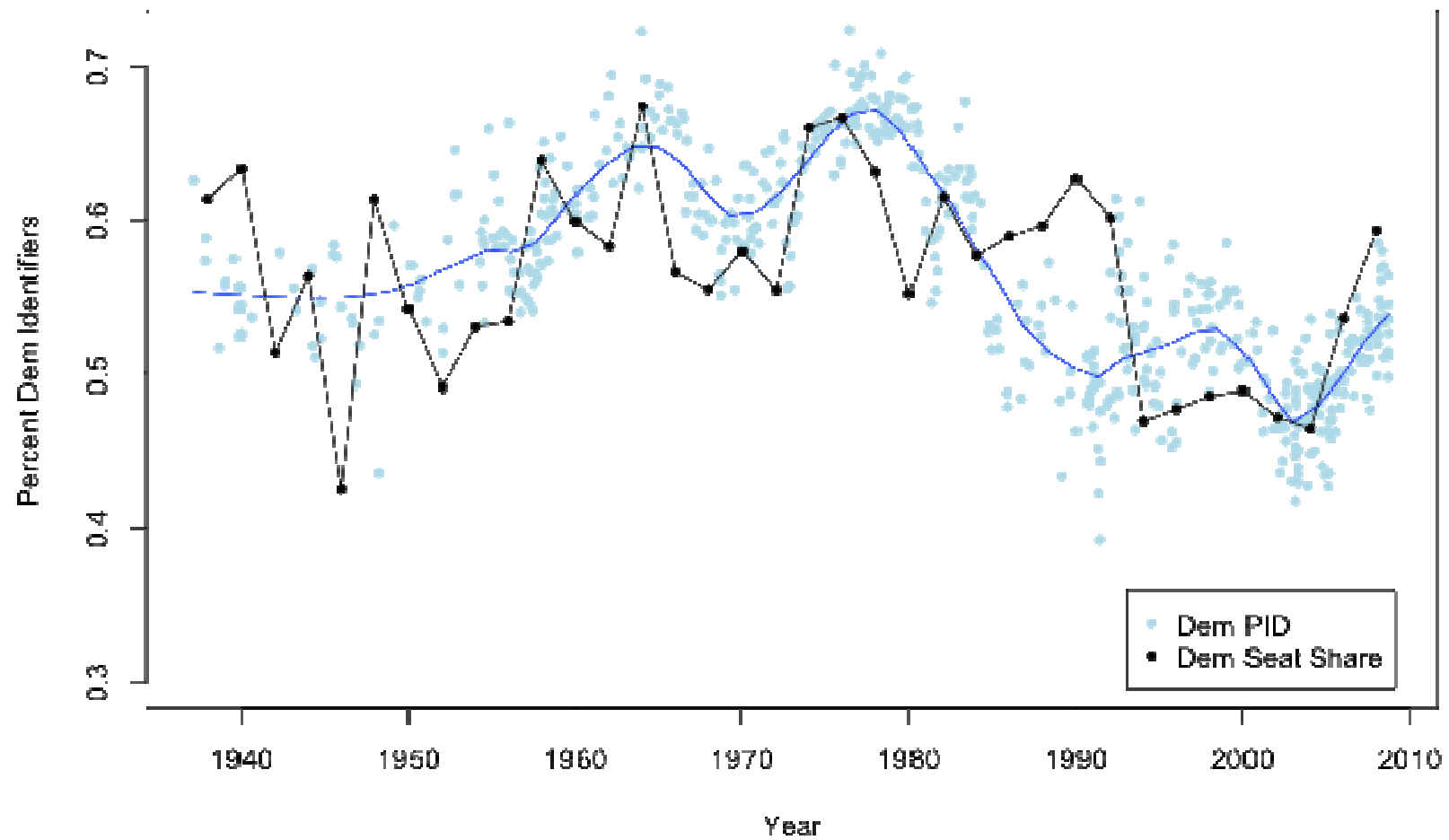
The Republican Party over this time period has, like the Democrats, lost members over the period, but, with their resurgence in the 1980s, their overall identifiers approximate the Democratic identifiers. At no point, however, do they become the plurality party, only briefly in the late 1980s to early 1990s do they draw even with the Democrats. When the time series begins, Republicans are clearly a minority party, down about ten points to the dominant party. Over the 1950s, in spite of Eisenhower's popularity, Republicans as a percentage of the electorate dropped slightly more rapidly than did Democratic identifiers. The 1960s, particularly 1964, were not good years for Republicans. Democratic identifiers rose to almost 50 percent at their high, while Republicans fell below thirty percent and stayed there until the late 1970s and the rise of Ronald Reagan. The electoral results over the data set show this. From 1937 to 1980, the probability that Republicans would control government was less than .05, with only the 83rd Congress fitting the bill. In the post-1980 period, the probability of Republican control is .1875, a fourfold jump over the .043 of the previous 43 years.

While neither party has been able to sustain its late New Deal numbers, the number of Independents has steadily grown over this time series. They grew from about 16 percent in the late New Deal (1937-39) to over 30 percent in the mid 1970s, to over one third in the post-Reagan era. Indeed, in some polls the Independents are already the plurality choice. What these numbers mean depends in part upon what

it means to be Independent, and here question wording matters, as a rich literature in survey research shows. In a later section of the paper, we return to this question, but for our present purposes, it is enough to say that there has been a significant rise in the numbers of Independents and that this rise has implications for the party system.

Figure 3 shows that party identification at the beginning of the period is Democratic and so, too, are a majority of House seats, with Republicans winning the majority only twice, from 1937 to 1994. Democrats remained dominant in House elections, even though their numbers shrank and Independents and Republicans increased. In the mid 1980s, party strength is about equal, yet from 1982 to 1992, Democratic candidates have far higher electoral rates than their percent of party identification

Figure 3: Democratic Party Identification and National Seat Share: 1937—2008



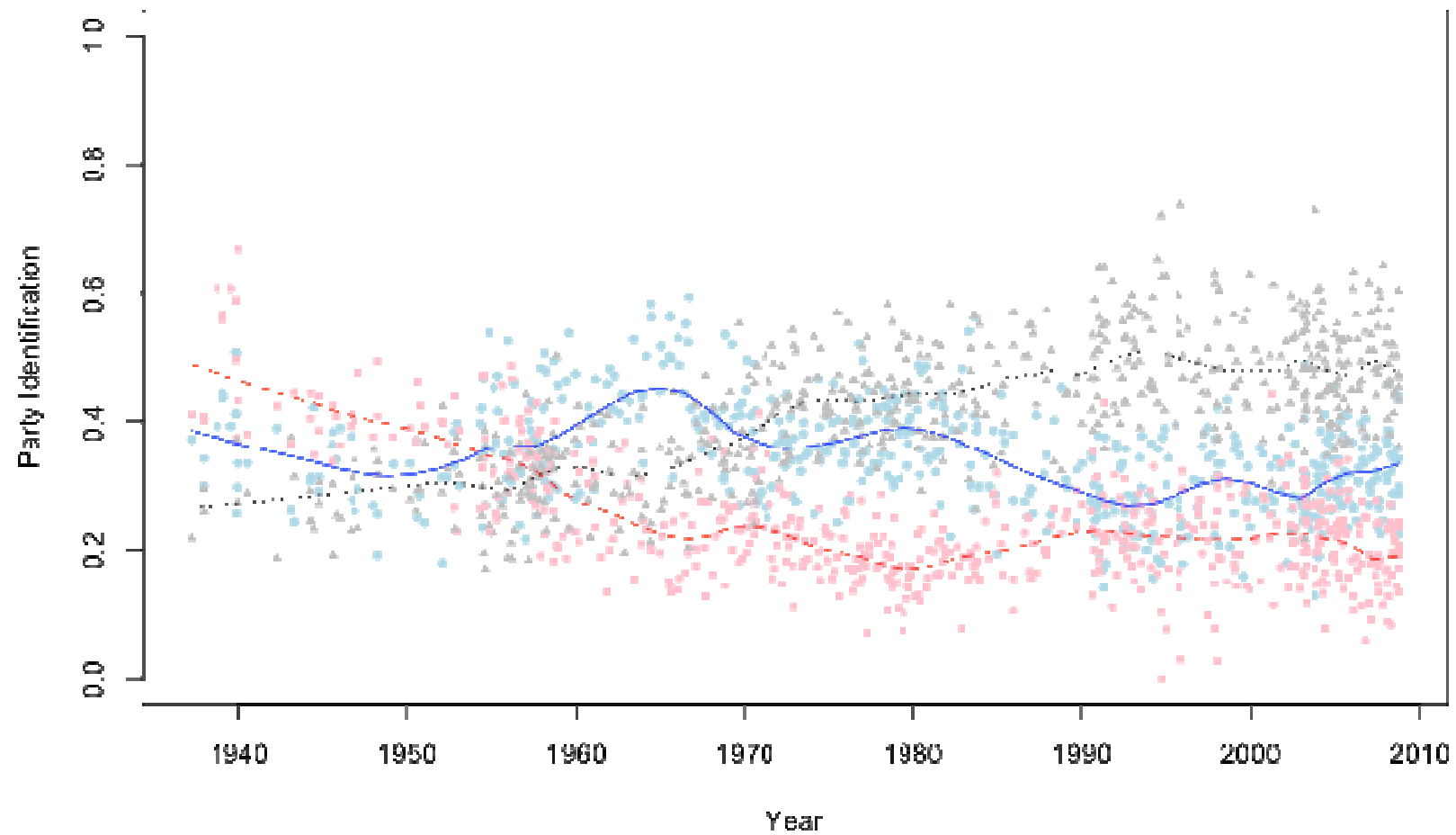
would warrant.² The 1994 election is the first where Republicans win a majority, and from 1994 to 2006, Republicans have more seats than their party numbers warrant. This distortion is clearly because the number of Independents has grown and is often a plurality. Given that Independent identifiers have to elect Republican or Democratic representatives, the distortions shown in Figure 2 have to occur. In sum, for the first 30 or so years of polling data, Democrats had around 50 percent saying they identified while 30 percent plus were Republican. In 1968, the number of Independents rose to about 30 percent and, with the exception of the early Reagan years, stayed there until the recent period, where they are a plurality and electoral results followed shifts in party identification.

Regional Change

We begin the regional analysis of secular realignment in the region Key focused on in his two seminal election papers, New England. The New England states were, in the mid to late New Deal era, a bastion of Republican strength (figure 4). Over the twenty some years from 1937 to 1958, Republicans held an advantage among identifiers and, on average, held about a two to one advantage in House seats. Even though Republicans were dominant during this period, their numbers were falling as Democratic identifiers increased. In the late 50s, Democratic identifiers exceeded Republicans, and in the following 50 years have continued to be more numerous than Republicans. During the 1960s to mid 1980s, Democrats held

² Here incumbency and the personal vote help account for Democrats strength in elections. Alford and Brady, 1988; Gelman and King, 1990; For an analysis of why the delay, see Han and Brady, 2003.

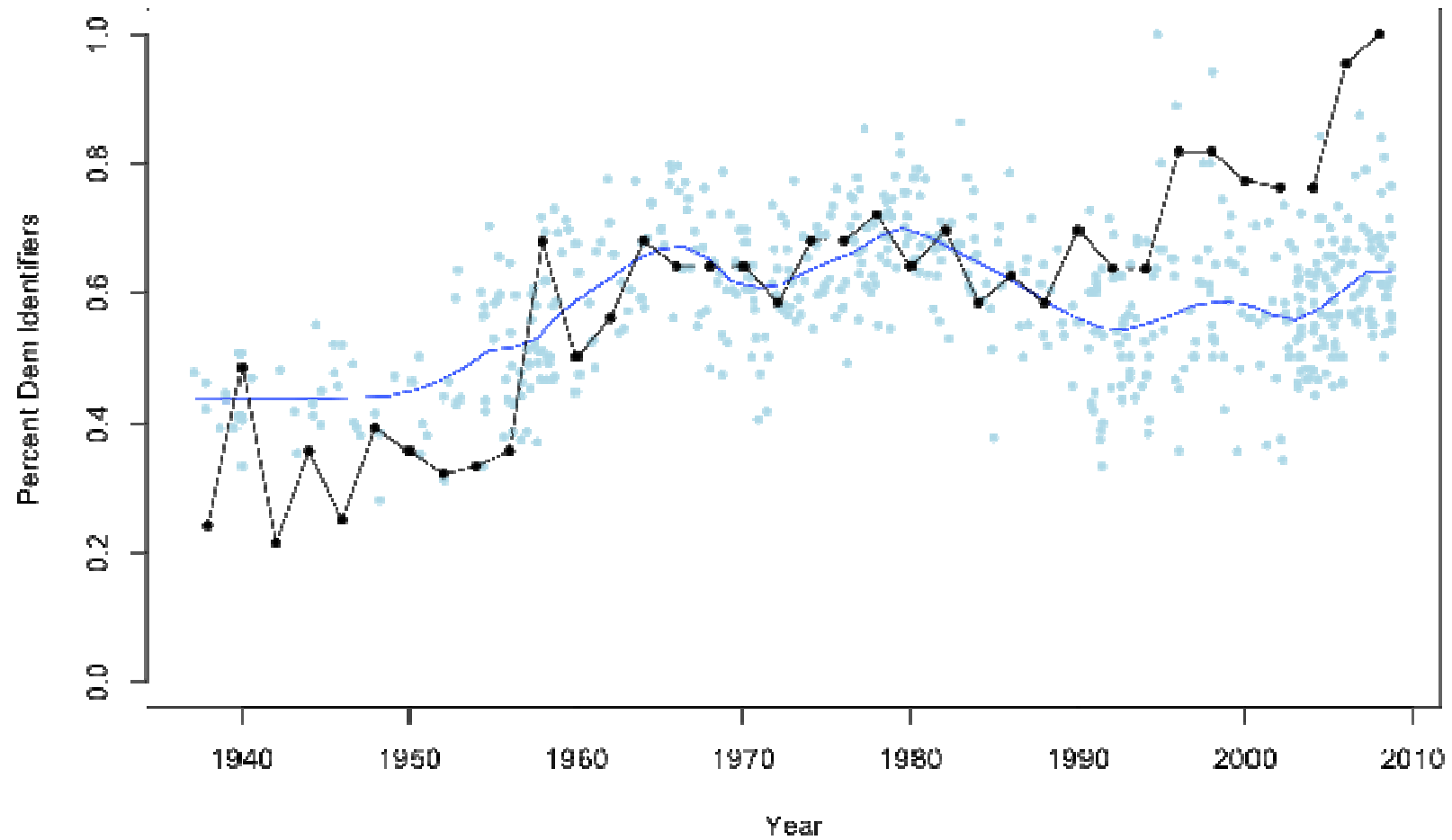
Figure 4: Party Identification in New England (CT, RI, MA, VT, NH, ME): 1937—2008



huge leads over Republicans, but by the end of the Reagan presidency, the margin has declined somewhat. House seats followed this pattern closely (figure 5). In 1958, Democrats had a majority of seats and, while they were even in the 1960 elections, they recaptured the majority during the Goldwater candidacy and held about a two to one advantage over Republicans. In the late 1990s until the present, Democrats held, on average, over 80 percent of the House seats in this region. In the pre-1964 period, Democrats won 40 percent of the time in presidential elections (6 states x 7 elections = 42, with Democrats winning 17 of 42 such elections) while in the post 1964 period, Democrats won 63 percent of such contests. Moreover, in the five elections from 1992 through 2008, only New Hampshire in 2000 voted Republican for President, making New England a bastion of Democratic strength.

There has been a rise in Independents, beginning in the 1960s and maintaining until the present time where there has been a resurgence. Given the increase in Democratic representatives and the region's recent, almost pure, record of support for Democratic presidential candidates, what does the rise of strength of Independents mean? Here the question of Independents leaning Democrat or Republican matters.

Figure 5: Democratic Party Identification and National Seat Share in New England (CT, RI, MA, VT, NH, ME): 1937—2008



Party identification in the region begins to shift Democratic in the late 1950s but not until the 1958 election do Democrats win a majority of House seats. The 1960 election saw the Republicans draw even in House seats but not in party identifiers and since that time Democratic identifiers have gone below 50 percent only once and quickly recovered to their better than 2 to 1 advantage. In this region there was a party identification switch in the 1950s, culminating in the 1958 election and, since that time, they have been the dominant party. The House electoral results seem to follow shifts in party identification, not lead them.

Mid-Atlantic

In the mid-Atlantic states (New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware) the pattern of party identification over time shows Democrats and Republicans relatively even over the first twenty-some years of the series. The 1964 election generated a sizeable advantage to Democrats, which they have maintained except for a brief period in the late 1980s, until the present day (Figure 6). The Democratic bulge falls in the late 1960s but then increases until the 1980s when it falls again only to rebound slightly in the post-2005 period. Republicans mirror this pattern. Independents increase in this region also, beginning in the late 1960s with a relatively slow increase until, in the late 1990s, they surpass Republicans as the second choice among those responding to the Gallup question. In the period before 1964, Republicans, on average, held about 55 percent of the House seats (Figure 7). In the 1964 and post period, Democrats have held a majority of House seats,

Figure 6: Party Identification in the Mid-Atlantic States (NY, NJ, PA, DE): 1937—2008

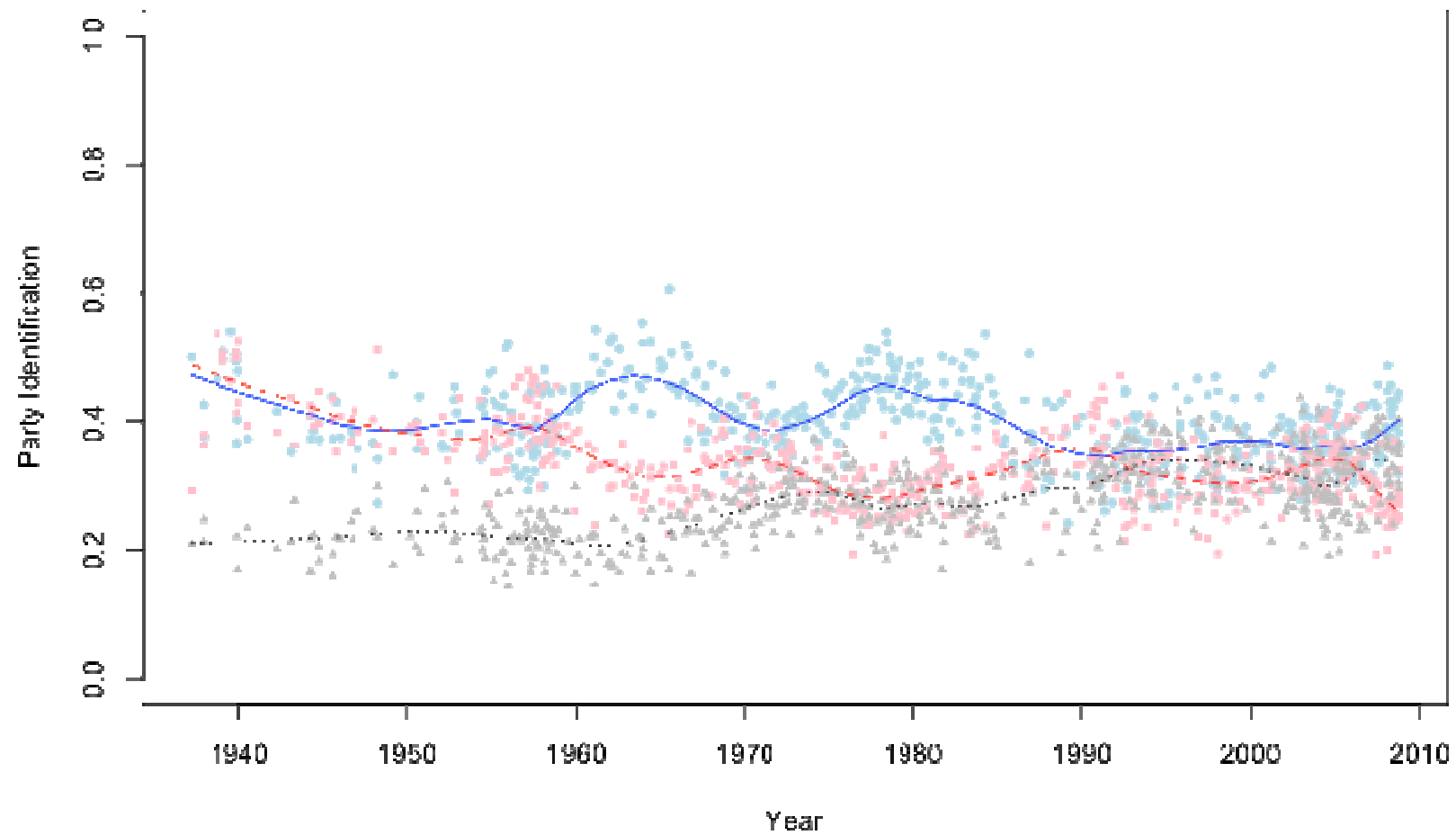
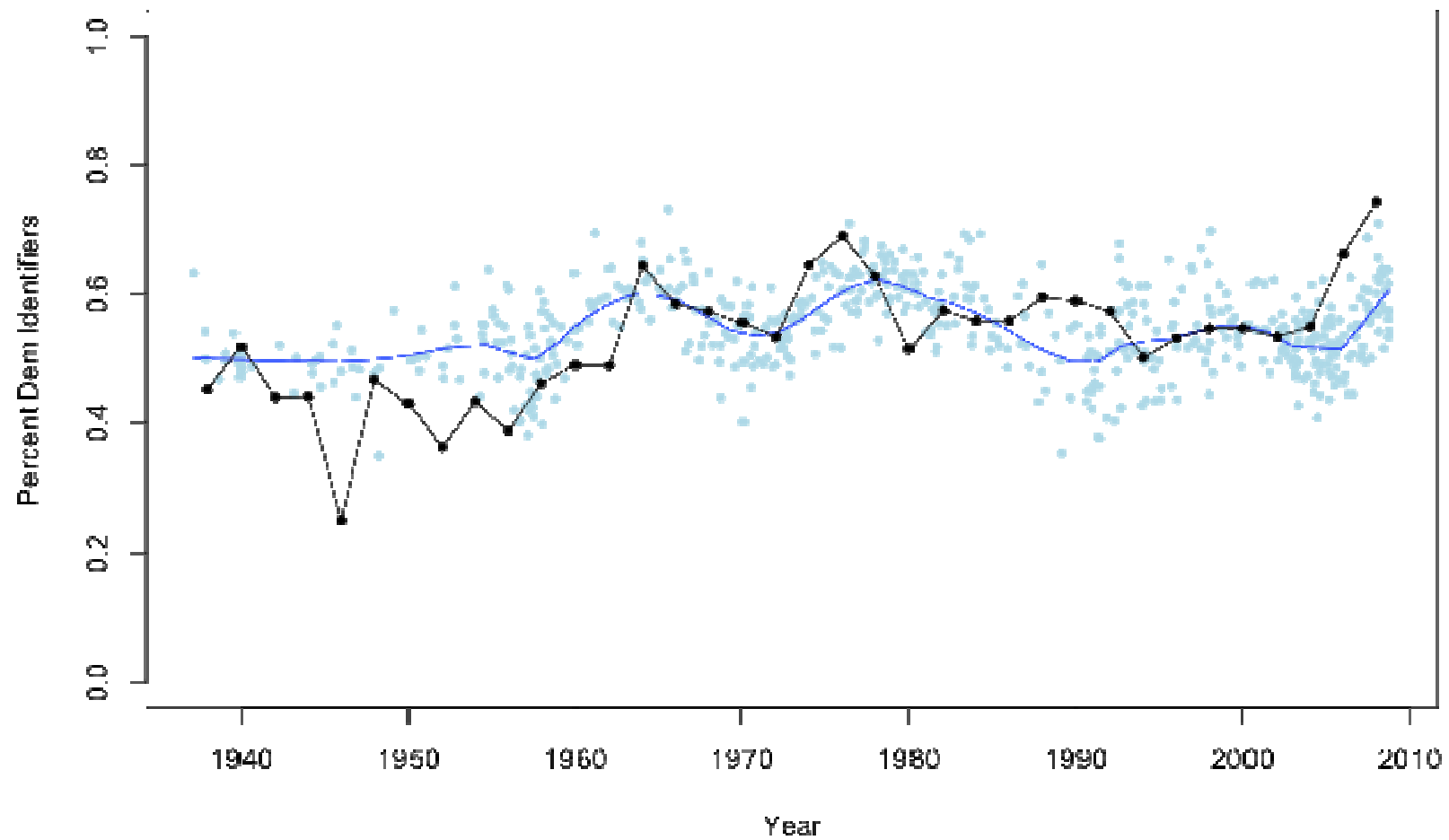


Figure 7: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Mid-Atlantic States (NY, NJ, PA, DE): 1937—2008



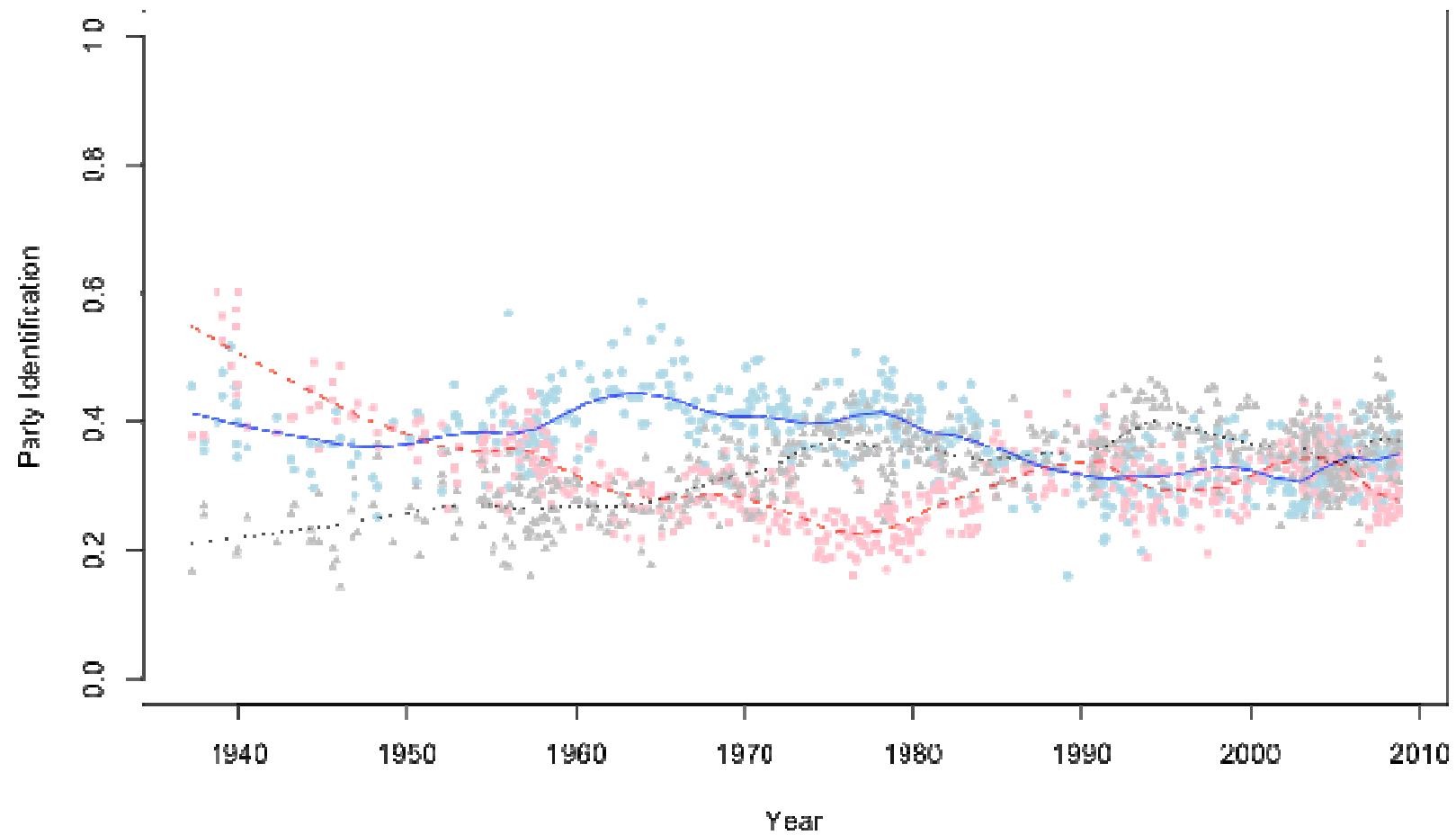
sometimes holding two to one majorities over Republicans. In regards to Presidential elections, Democrats won 16 of 28 possible presidential elections for a 57 percent margin. In the post period they won 30 of 48 such contests for a 63 percent margin. In the last five presidential elections, Democratic candidates have won all 25 state contests. In short, the mid-Atlantic states have gone from fairly competitive to fairly Democratic.

The major switch in identification occurs in the late 1950s, such that by 1960-62 around 60 percent identify as Democrats. House seats trailed the shift in party identifiers through the 1962 elections where Republicans still held a majority of House seats as they had every year since 1940. The 1964 election gave Democrats almost 65 percent of the seats. The decline in Democratic strength beginning in 1980 was accompanied by a drop in House seats from about two to one over the 1974-1978 period to roughly 55 percent until the recent period, where the old higher ratios prevail.

Midwest

In the Midwestern states east of the Mississippi river, Figure 8 shows that Republicans held a slight lead over Democrats in the late 1930s, and throughout the forties the parties are competitive, with Republicans having a slight advantage. In

Figure 8: Party Identification in the Mid-West (OH, MI, IN, IL, WI, MN): 1937—2008



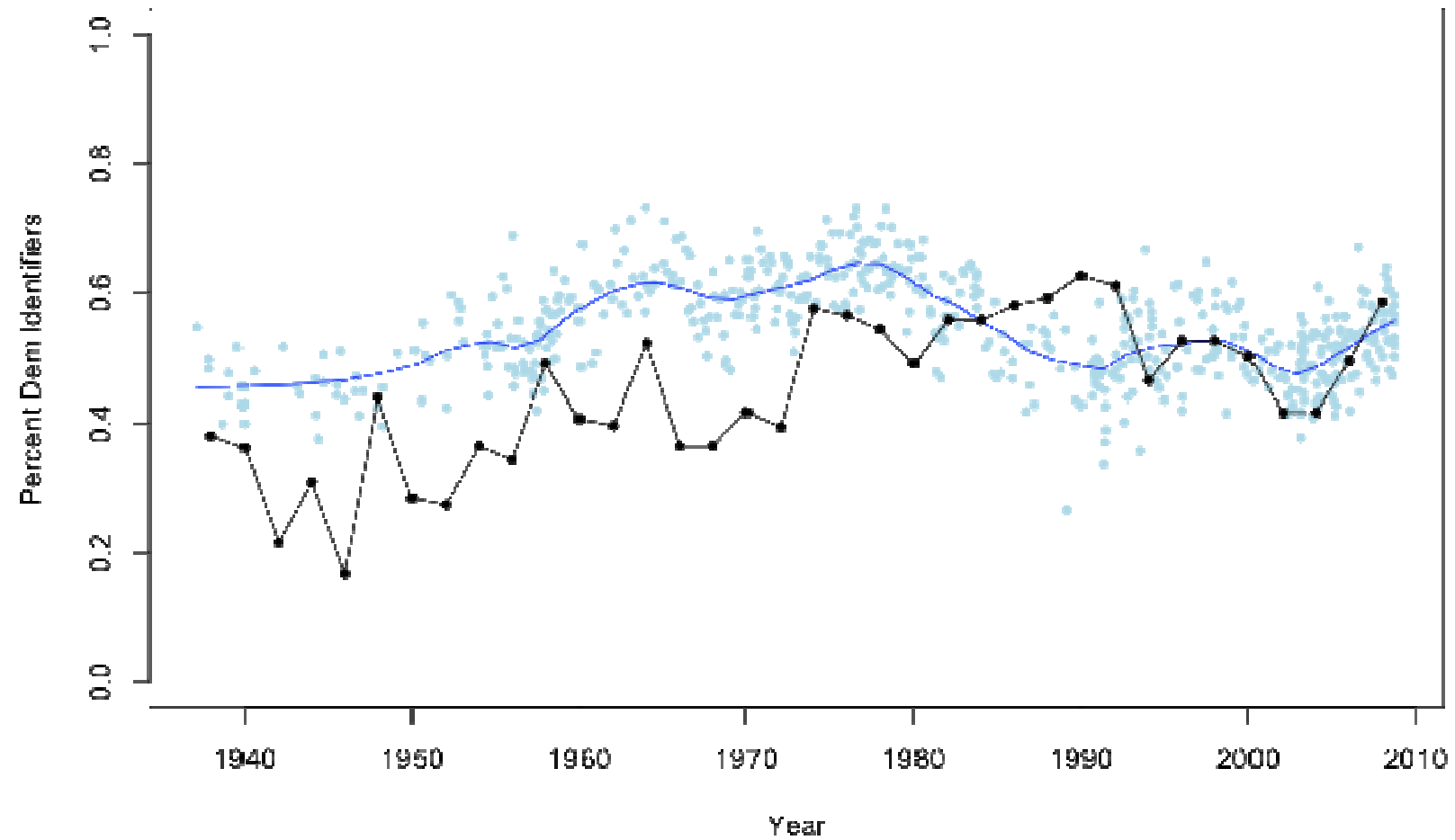
the mid 1950s, Democrats increase their identifiers while Republicans lose some of theirs. In the 1960s, as was the case in many regions, Democrats increase their identifiers at the expense of Republicans who lose significant numbers. The Democrats maintain their lead until the 1980s and Ronald Reagan, at which point the Democratic and Republican numbers vary slightly, with one party then the other having a plurality. Interestingly, Independents remain at roughly the same number until the late 1960s when their numbers rise rapidly until, by the late 1980s, Independents are the plurality.

Presidential voting prior to 1964 reveals a predilection for Republican candidates with the exception of 1940 and 1948, where a majority of these states voted Democratic. In all other election years, 1944, 1952, 1956 and 1960, Republican candidates won majorities in these states, and in 1952 and 1956, Eisenhower carried all five states. In 1964, LBJ won all five states; however, Democratic presidential strength in the region went south after the 1968 Chicago Democratic convention. Nixon's 1968 victory was followed by Republican wins in the region through the 1988 election. Elections after 1988 have yielded consistent Democratic victories in each of the subsequent five elections, and in 2008 Obama won all five states. Thus, presidential election results follow the pattern of this region being competitive but characterized by a shift from Republican to Democrat.

House seats from 1938 to 1964 are controlled by Republicans with Democrats being underrepresented, given the number of their identifiers (Figure 9). With the 1964 election, Democrats hold the majority of seats for the first time and from that time until the present, they won a majority of seats in 17 of 24 elections. House seats followed party identification and while the Midwest has shifted from slightly Republican to slightly Democratic, it remains a competitive battleground region where both parties compete and can point to electoral successes.

Party identification shifts in the 1950s as Republican members fall and Democrats remain the same until by the early 1960s, Democrats have a lead over Republicans. The 1964 election drives Democratic numbers up and Republicans down and this pattern persists until the 1980s when Democratic identifiers decline and Republicans and Independents increase. House electoral rates follow rather than lead party identification shifts. Democrats are even with Republicans by the late 1950s and by 1964 have a clear advantage, yet even in the major shift to Democrats in 1958 Republicans have a majority of seats. Not until 1964, at least a decade behind the start of the switch in identification, do Democrats get a majority of House seats. During the Reagan era, Republicans regain parity in identification yet do not achieve majority electoral status until 1994. Again in regard to House elections, party switches in the electorate precede representation switches in elections.

Figure 9: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Mid-West (OH, MI, IN, IL, WI, MN): 1937—2008



Plains States

In the plains states (IA, KS, NEB, N. Dakota, S. Dakota) Republicans begin the period as the dominant party but by the mid 1960s are slightly less numerous than Democratic identifiers (Figure 10). The 1968 election and its aftermath return Republicans to plurality status. The Nixon presidency and its attendant ills makes the Democrats the plurality party until the mid-Reagan era when Republicans again become the plurality party. The mix of Democrat to Republican is affected by the continuing rise of voters claiming independence from party affiliations. The number of Independents begins to rise in the 1950s and continues through the 1990s, thereafter falling briefly, to rise again to become larger than either Republicans or Democrats.

The pattern of House elections following shifts in party identification holds in this region also, as shown in Figure 11. Democratic gains in the late 1950s and early 1960s give rise to increasing Democratic successes in House elections. The rise in Democratic House seats is steady until the disastrous 1994 House elections where Democrats fall back to less than 15 percent of House seats. The 2006 elections reversed this trend and for the first time since 1964 Democrats were at parity with Republicans in re members of the House of Representatives and 2010 tilted the results to the Republicans.

Figure 10: Party Identification in the Plains States (IA, ND, SD, NE, KS): 1937—2008

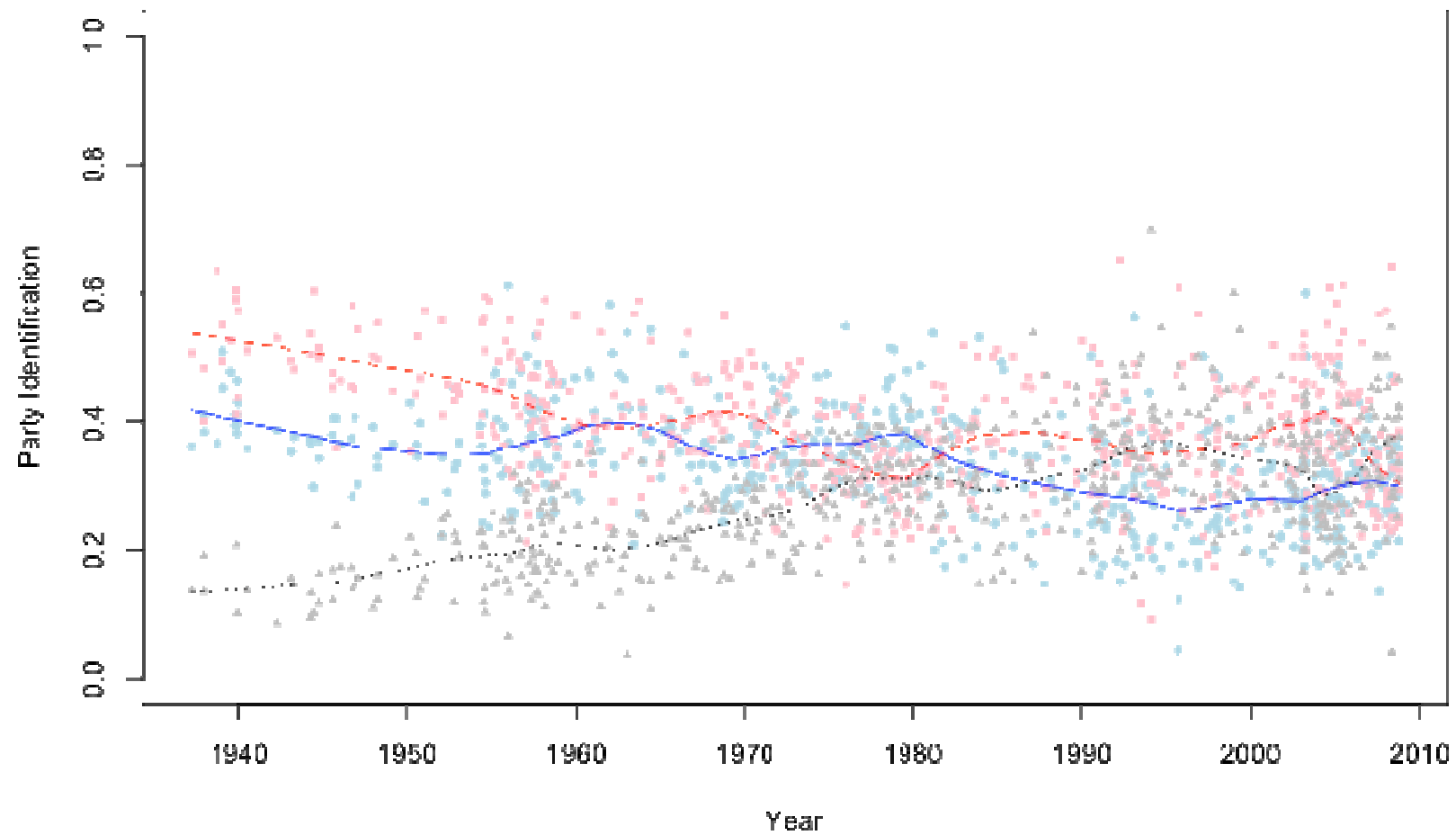
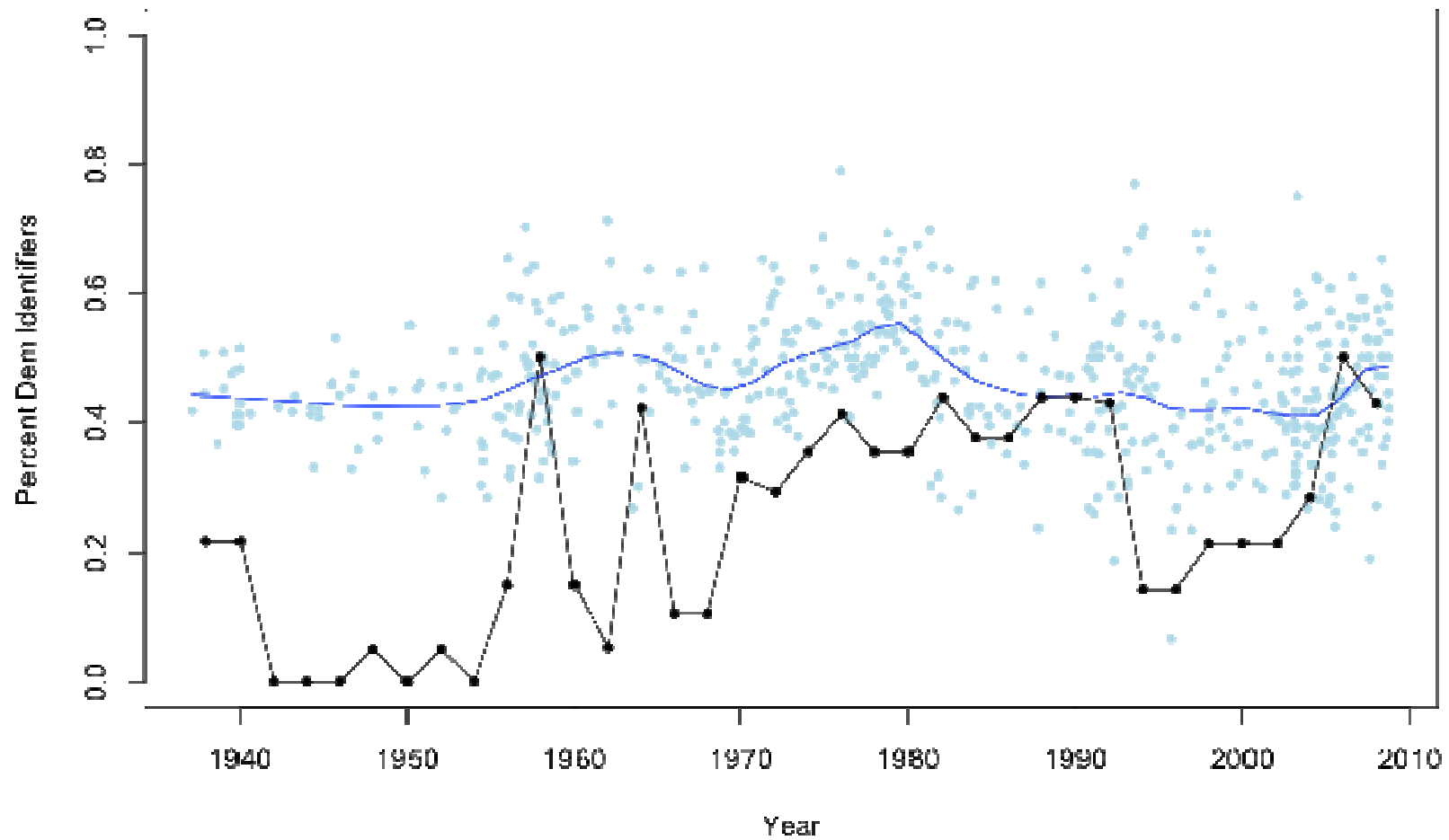


Figure 11: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Plains States (IA, ND, SD, NE, KS): 1937—2008



The plains states were solidly Republican in the late New Deal era, with every state from 1940 to 1964 voting Republican, with the exception of Iowa voting for Truman in 1948. In 1964, Goldwater lost all five plains states; however, in 1968 they returned to the Republican column and, with the exception of Iowa, have remained Republican through the 2008 presidential elections. Iowa, beginning in 1988, went Democratic at the presidential level and, with the exception of 2004, remains on the Democratic side of the presidential ledger through the Obama election.

Southern Region

Surely no other region has changed as much as the South over the 1937 to 2010 period and numerous studies have focused on the South (Stanley, 1988; Black, 2004; Black and Black, 2003). In 1937-38, slightly over 84 percent of Southerners identified themselves as Democrats and roughly that level persisted until the 1950s when the number fell below 80 percent and continued to fall through the 1960s until the 1970s, when identification with the Democratic party moved between about 2/3rds to 70 percent. The Reagan era continued to eat away at Democratic numbers, though as late as 1992, Democrats still claimed 57% of the electorate. However, the 1990s ended the era of Democratic majorities in the South. After the 1994 election, Democrats were at parity with Republican identifiers and by 2000 they were a minority party (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Party Identification in the South (LA, AR, MS, AL, FL, GA, TN, SC, NC, VA):
1937—2008**

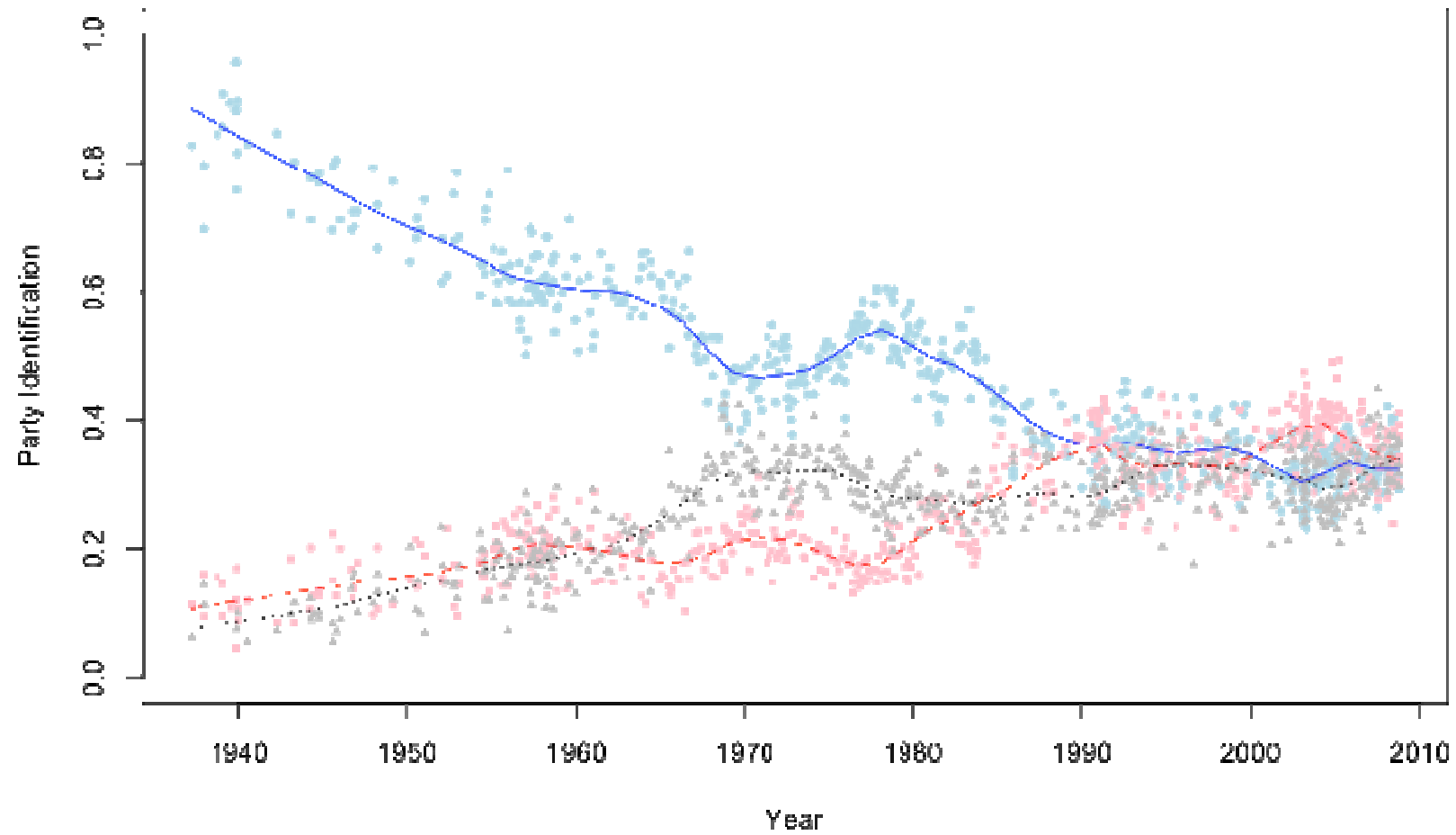
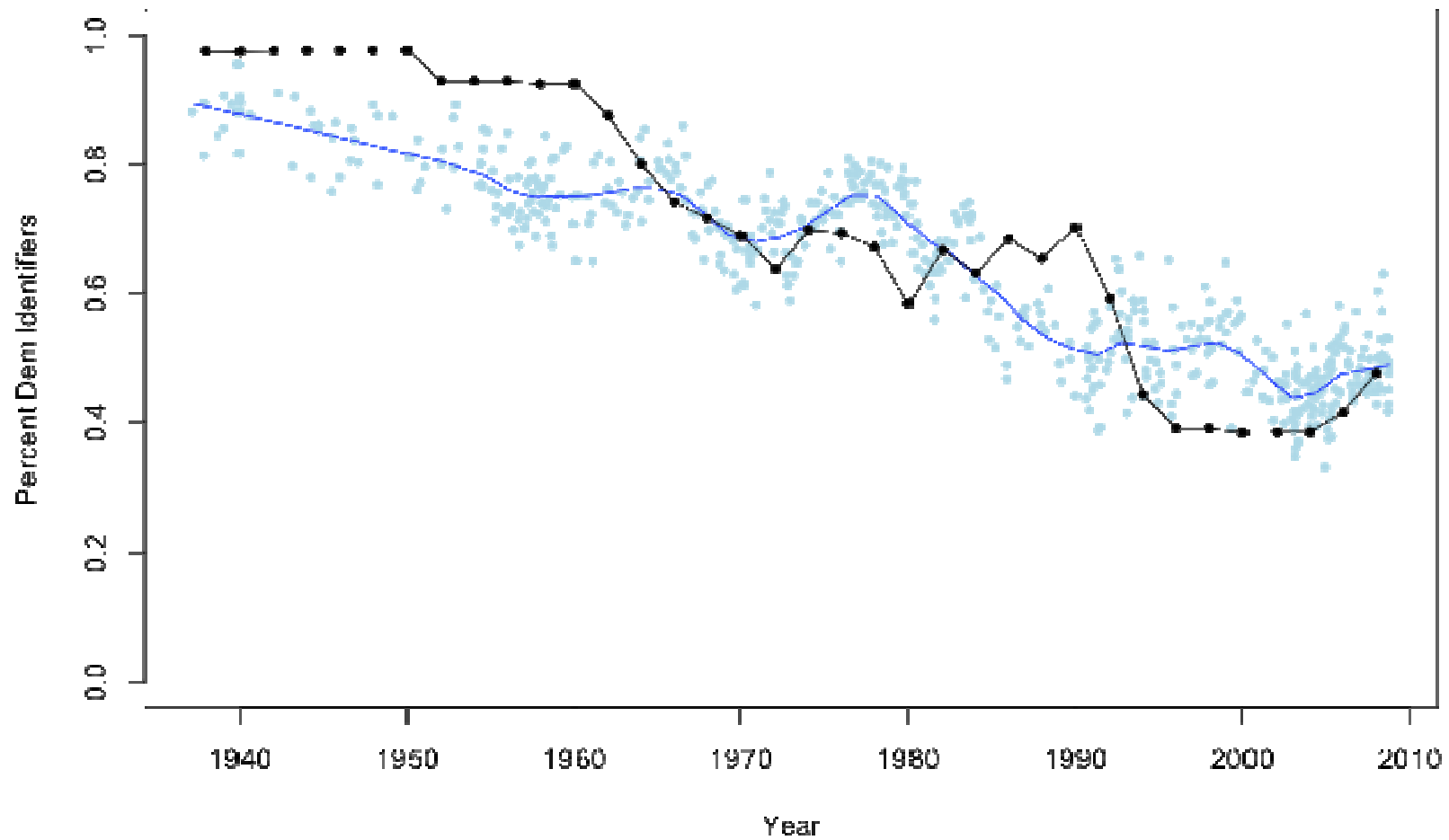


Figure 13: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the South (LA, AR, MS, AL, FL, GA, TN, SC, NC, VA): 1937—2008



House electoral results followed party identification shifts rather than leading them (Figure 13). Until the 1962 election, well over 90% of Southern House members were Democrats and even in the Barry Goldwater election of 1964, 80% of House seats were Democratic, and as late as 1978, 2/3rds of House seats were still Democratic. In the 1980s through 1992, Democrats did no worse than 58% (1980) and in 1990 commandeered 70% of House seats. In 1994, Republicans captured a majority of House seats and continue to hold the majority through 2010.

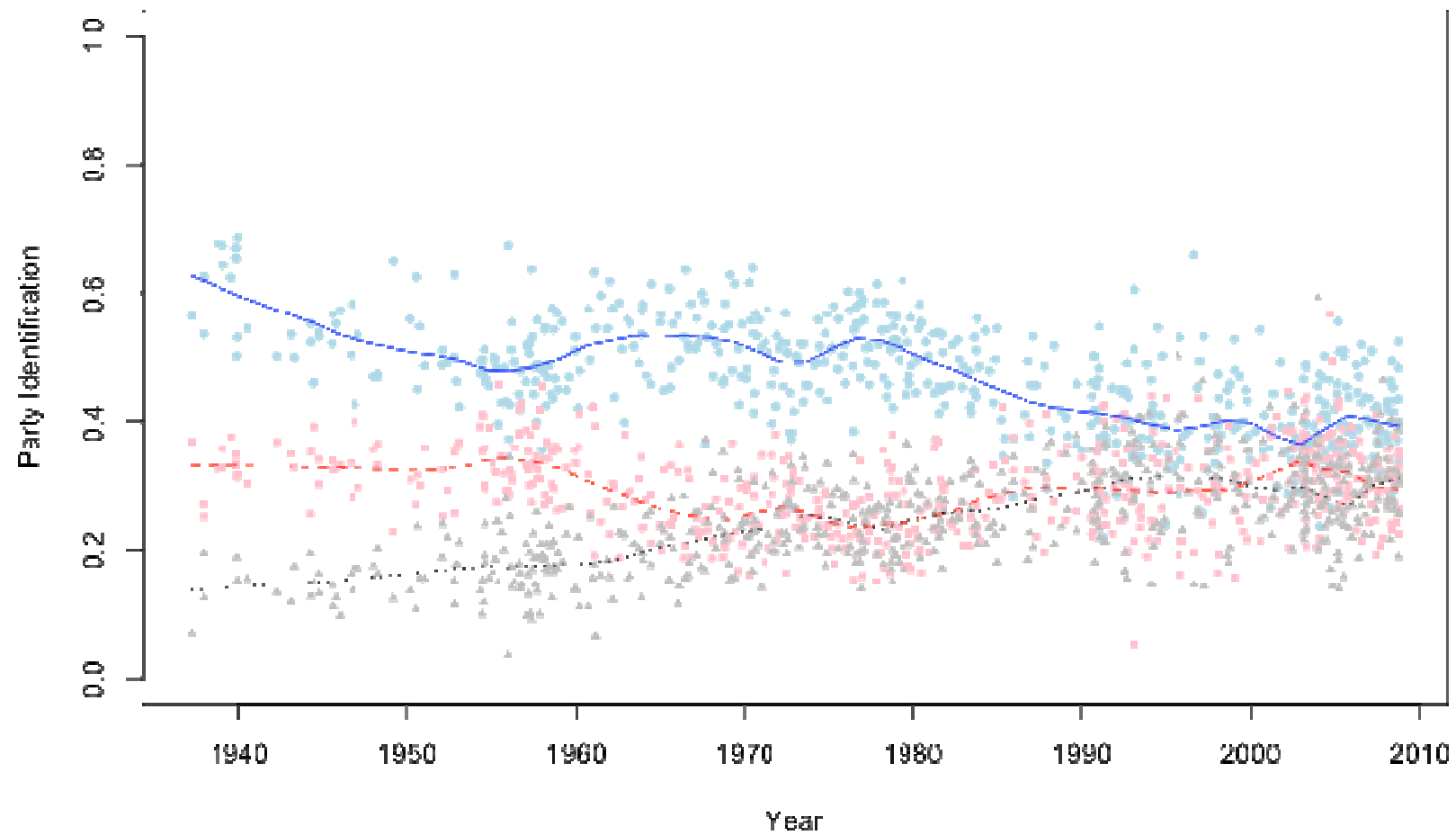
Presidential voting for Republicans in the South preceded party identification shifts. In 1936, 1940 and 1944, all Southern states voted Democratic. In the 1948 presidential race where Strom Thurmond ran on the Dixiecrat ticket, no state went Republican, although Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina went for Thurmond. The Republican breakthrough to electoral college votes occurred in 1952 when Eisenhower won Florida, Texas, Virginia and Tennessee, and in 1956 he won the same states, adding Louisiana to the Southern mix. Nixon held three Southern states in 1960 (VA, FLA, TENN). The LBJ years, including 1968, were tumultuous in the South with Democrats carrying just five of twenty state elections. In 1972, Nixon carried all ten states, but in 1976, the Southerner Jimmy Carter carried nine of ten states. The Reagan-Bush years were highly Republican with the only Democratic win being Georgia in 1980. Even the Southern candidate Clinton could only claim eight states in two elections. Since Clinton, Democrats have won only three states, all in 2008 by narrow margins. In short, by 1952, even though most Southerners still identified as Democratic, the region was already leaning Republican at the presidential level, and since 1980, Democratic presidential candidates have carried

less than 15% of Southern states. The shift to majority House status came in 1994, delayed by incumbency and the personal vote (Han and Brady, 2011).

Border

The Border states (Figure 14) – Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri and W. Virginia – began the period solidly Democratic with about 2/3rds identifying as Democrats. In the 1940s and 1950s, these states remained solidly Democratic with identification ranging from .54 to .65 percent. As in other regions, the 1964 election boosted Democratic identifiers to over 2/3rds of residents; however, unlike other regions, these states remain strongly Democratic, with over 60% identifying through the turbulent late 1960s and 1970s. It is not until Ronald Reagan that the Democrats lose some ground to the Republicans, such that by the mid 1980s Democrats constitute only a bare majority. Republican identifiers mirror these results: a fall off in the 1960s and then a gain in the 1980s. Independents begin a slow increase in the late 1960s and again gain in the 1990s until they reach parity with Republicans post 1994.

Figure 14: Party Identification in the Border States (KY, MD, MO, WV): 1937—2008

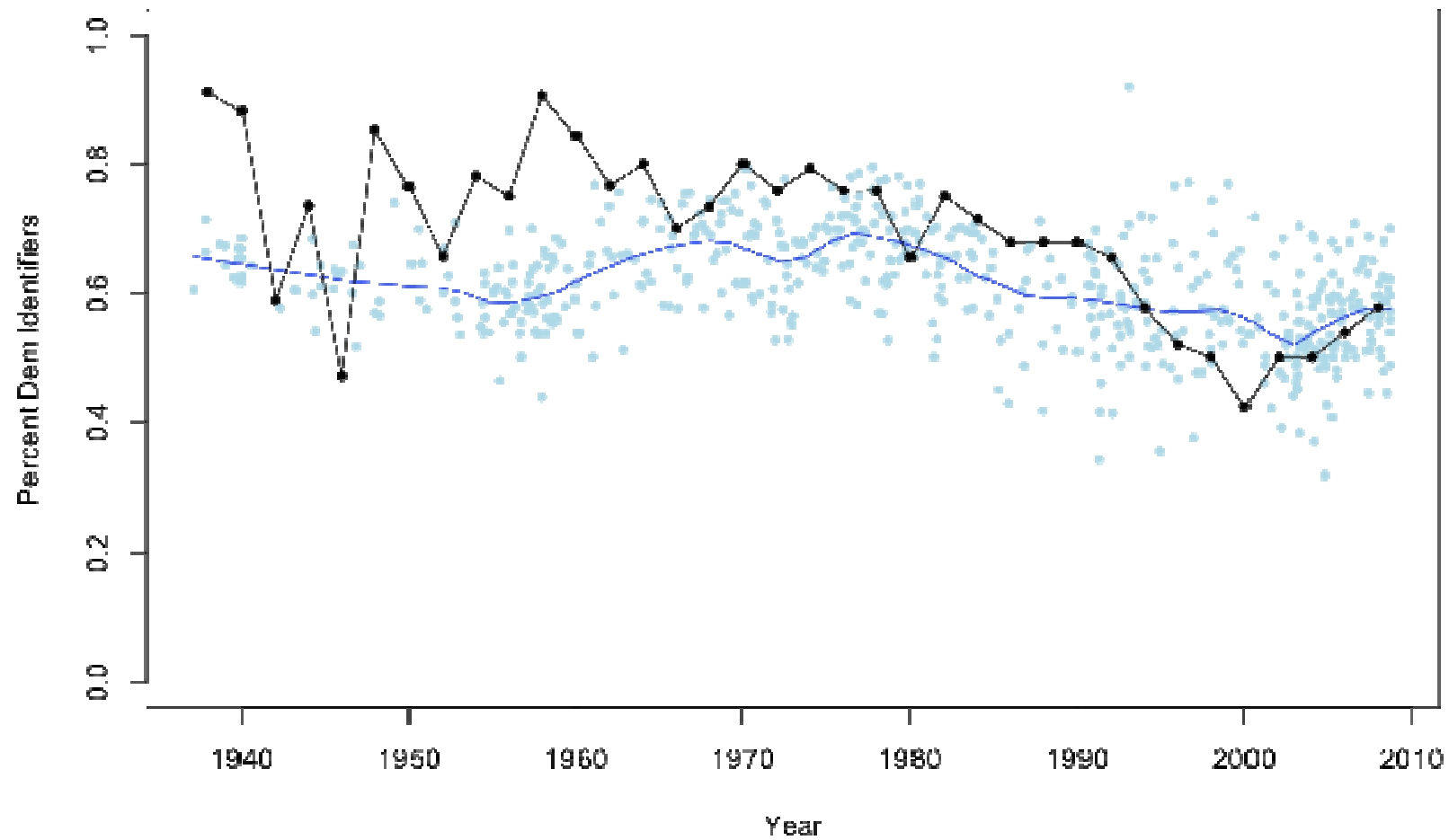


Electoral results in House races are consistent with previous results (Figure 15). From 1938 to 1994, Democrats lose a majority in only the 1946 election and have at least a two to one advantage in all other years. The 1994 elections drop Democrats below 60% of the seats, and from 1996 on the region's House seats are divided about 50/50. Thus, as elsewhere, House seat wins and losses follow shifts in party identification. In contrast, presidential elections varied more than did House elections. In the 1936 to 1960 period, Democrats captured 75% of state results --- 24 of 28 state results, whereas in the 1964 to 1980 period, they fell slightly to over 70%. The 1980 onward period where party identification moves toward Republicans finds Democrats winning only 44% of these state contests. While presidential results follow party identification more closely than in other regions, the presidential Republicanism of the region shows up a decade or more before House results move Republican.

Southwest

The American Southwest (AZ, NM, OK, and TX) show the only shift in identification close to that of the South (Figure 16). Roughly from 1938 through 1978, Democrats enjoy a huge advantage over Republicans. However, there are differences over that time period. Democrats begin to fall post 1964 as do Republicans. Thus, while the margin is maintained, the increase in Independents is the major movement of the era. The 1980s and Ronald Reagan herald the end of the Democratic era and with the 1994 elections, Republicans become the majority, with Independents next,

Figure 15: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Border States (KY, MD, MO, WV): 1937—2008



followed by the Democrats. House electoral results follow this pattern post 1960s. In the 1960s and until the 1980s Democratic seat shares follow party identification scores closely (Figure 17). The Reagan era shows decreased party identification with Democratic incumbents holding on to give them a seats to votes advantage. The 1994 Republican victory yields a Republican seats to votes advantage still held. In sum, the Southwest has moved from a strong Democratic region to a Republican region.

Presidential elections move Republican earlier and in greater strength than House elections. In the four elections from 1936 to 1948, Republicans did not win a single state. Then in 1952 and 1956, Eisenhower won all four. In 1960 and 1964, Democrats take 6 of 8 state elections; however, from 1968 to 1980, only Texas in 1968 and 1976 goes Democratic. Since 1980, Republicans have taken over 80% of state contests, and the dominant electoral college state, Texas, has voted Republican in every election.

Mountain West

The Rocky Mountain states went solidly Democratic in the New Deal era, and when our time series begins in 1937 the regions is still Democratic (Figure 18). Beginning with the Eisenhower era, the region is about equally divided between Democrats

Figure 16: Party Identification in the Southwest (TX, AZ, NM, OK): 1937—2008

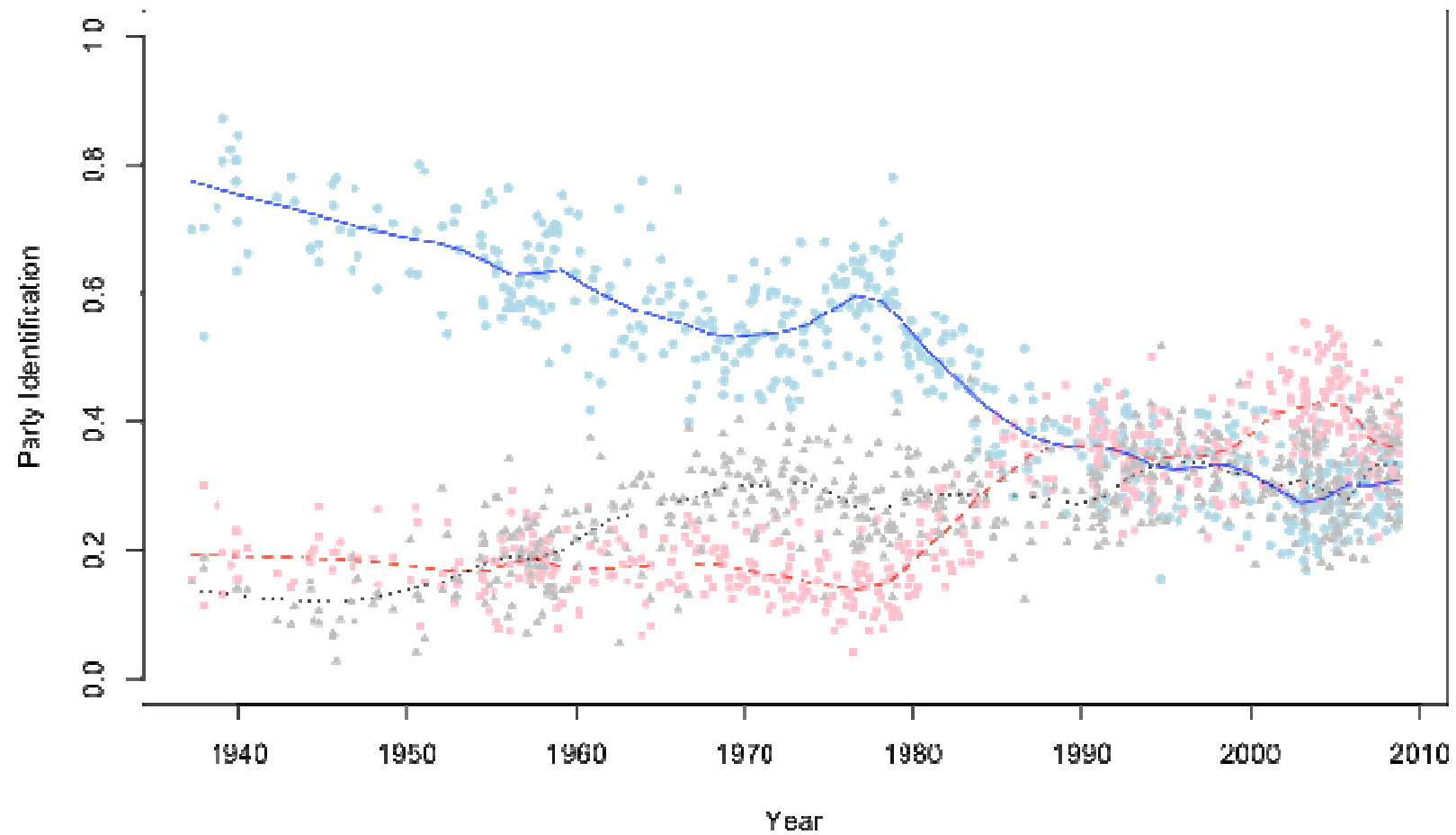
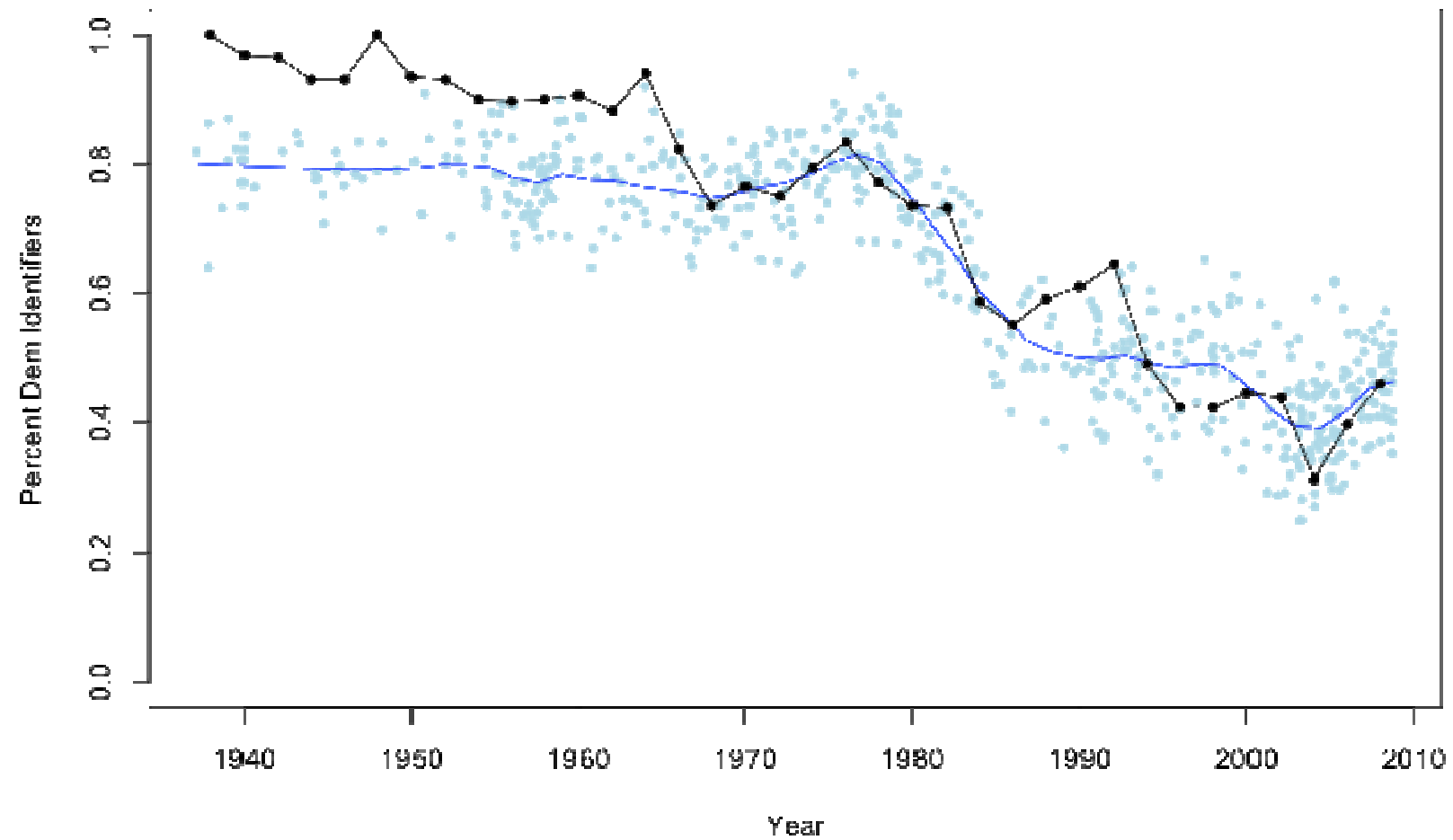


Figure 17: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Southwest (TX, AZ, NM, OK): 1937—2008

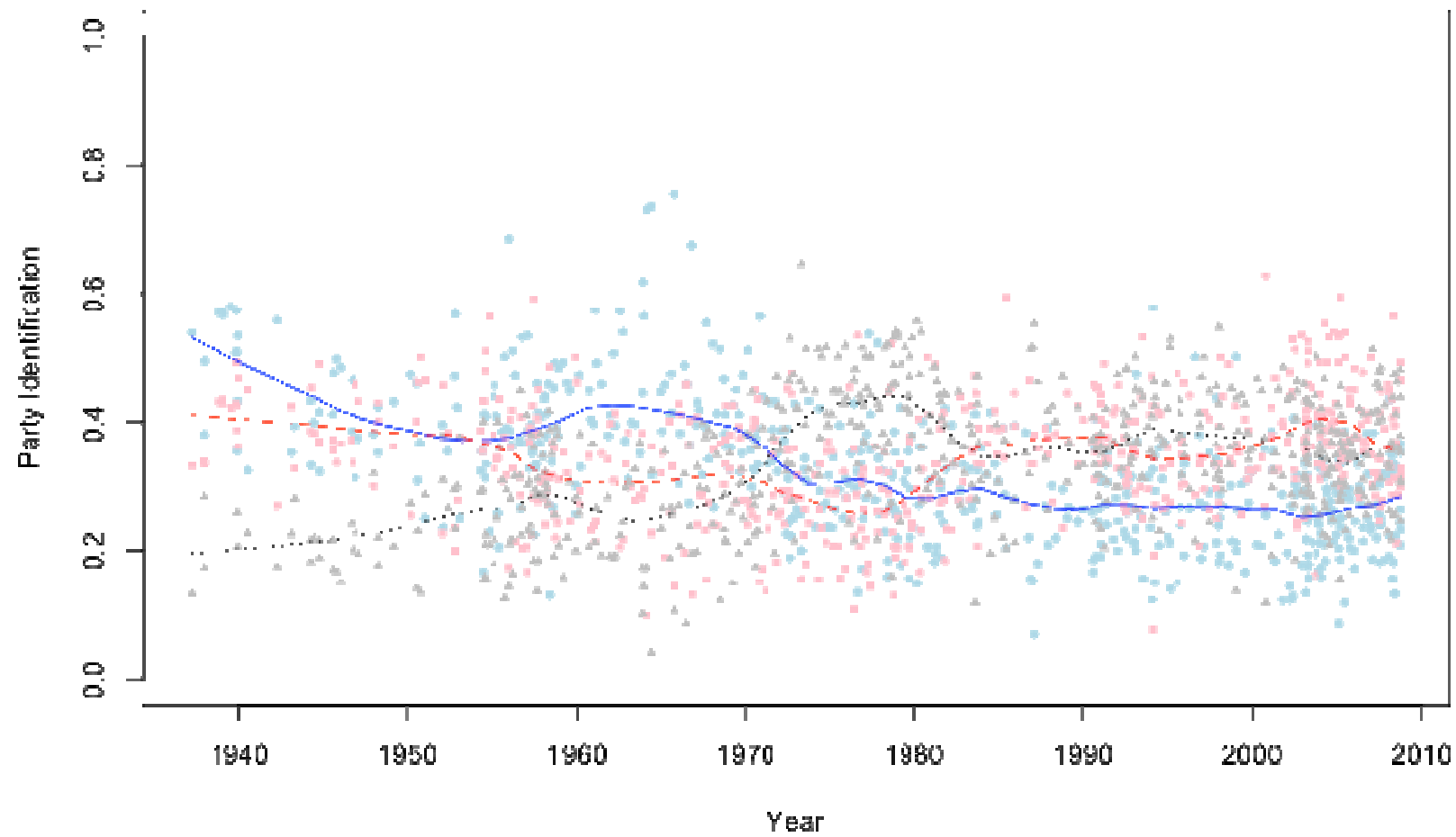


and Republicans: 40% each, with 20% Independent. The Goldwater election generated an increase in Democratic identifiers and a decrease in Republicans. However, by the time of the 1968 election, Democrats were declining and Independents were on the rise such that going into the 1980s they were at 40%, with Democrats having a slight 30 to 35% of the voters, and Republicans last. With Reagan, Republicans become the dominant party, switching with Independents as the plurality over the next 25 to 30 years, with Democrats clearly in last place.

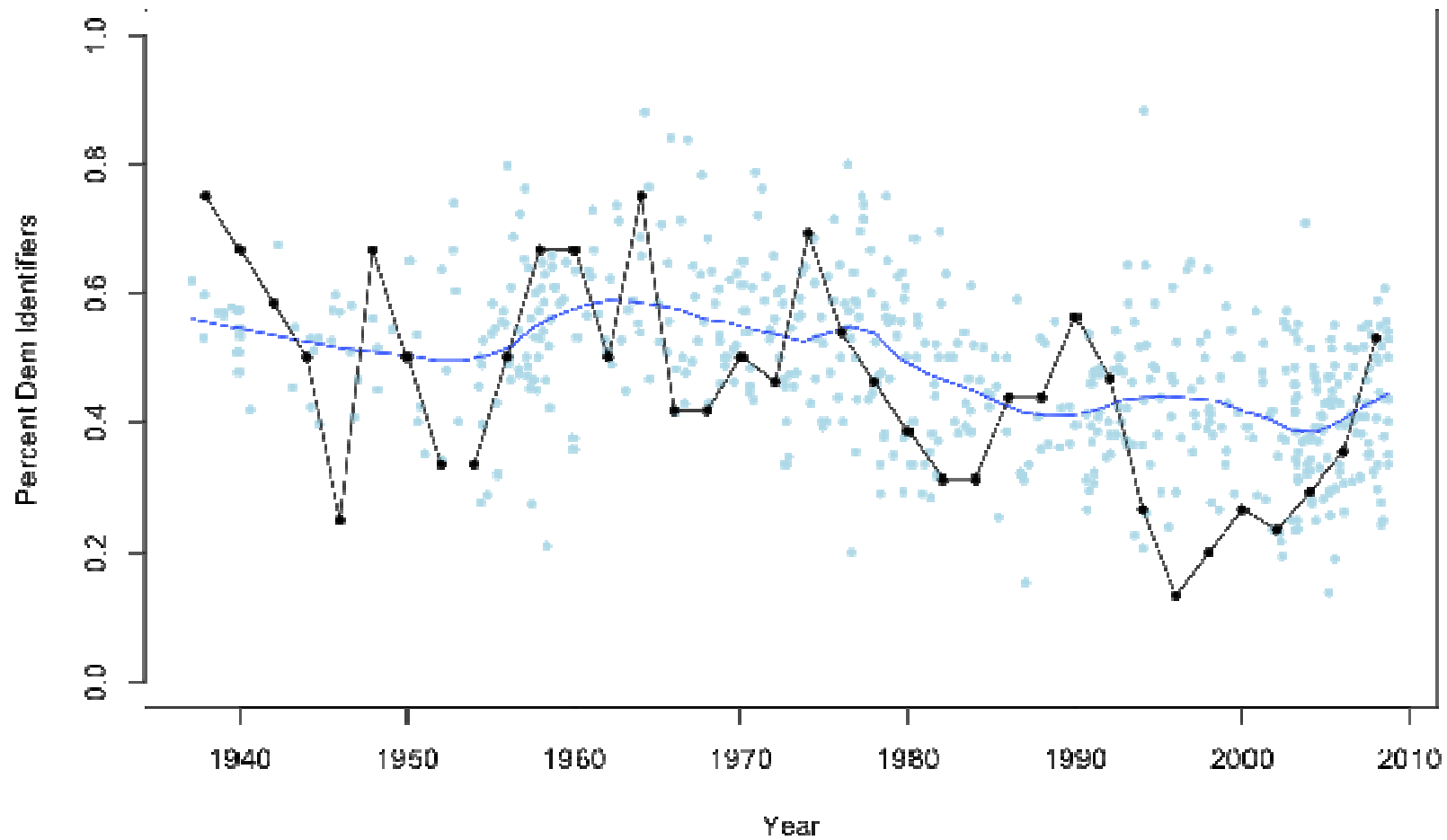
House electoral seats roughly follow the party identification pattern with Democrats having majorities until the 1980s (Figure 19). The region voted Republican in elections like 1946, where national forces favored Republicans but normally returned Democratic majorities in House elections. Then during the Carter presidency Democratic vote shares began to fall and were in a minority until the Clinton era, when they come back to parity. The 1994 election yielded huge gains to Republicans, and not until the 2006 and 2008 elections did Democrats regain parity in House seats. In the post-New Deal, pre-Eisenhower period, of the 24 state elections only three went Republican: Colorado twice and Wyoming once.

Eisenhower won all six states both times he ran, and Nixon won four of six in 1960, while Goldwater lost all in 1964. The six elections over the 1968 to 1990 time period saw every state vote Republican in all six elections. Clinton ran competitively, winning 6 of 12 states in his two slots, while Bush won 11 of 12, and

**Figure 18: Party Identification in the Mountain West States (MT, CO, ID, WY, UT, NV):
1937—2008**



**Figure 19: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Mountain West States
(MT, CO, ID, WY, UT, NV): 1937—
2008**



Obama narrowly carried New Mexico and Colorado in 2008. Roughly, this region has been Republican at the presidential level since 1968, at least a decade before Republicans were the plurality party in identification.

Pacific Coast

Party identification in the Pacific states has been predominantly Democratic over our 60-odd year period (Figure 20). From the late thirties to the 1980s, Democrats were either the majority party, 80% identification, or the plurality party. Then with the Reagan era the two parties reached parity until the early 1990s when Democrats again become the plurality party. This region, known for its independent and sometimes progressive tendencies, has long had many voters identifying themselves as Independent, such that even during the height of the New Deal, 20% or more identified as Independent. That number begins to expand in the late 1960s, post-1964, and continues a gradual rise until the present, where they are second to Democrats and ahead of Republican identifiers.

House elections in this region initially follow party identification (Figure 21).

However, beginning with the 1946 election, Republican House candidates are in the majority until the 1960s when, due to Goldwater, Democrats become the majority party and remain so even during the brief mid to late 1980s resurgence. Roughly

Figure 20: Party Identification in the Pacific States (CA, OR, WA): 1937—2008

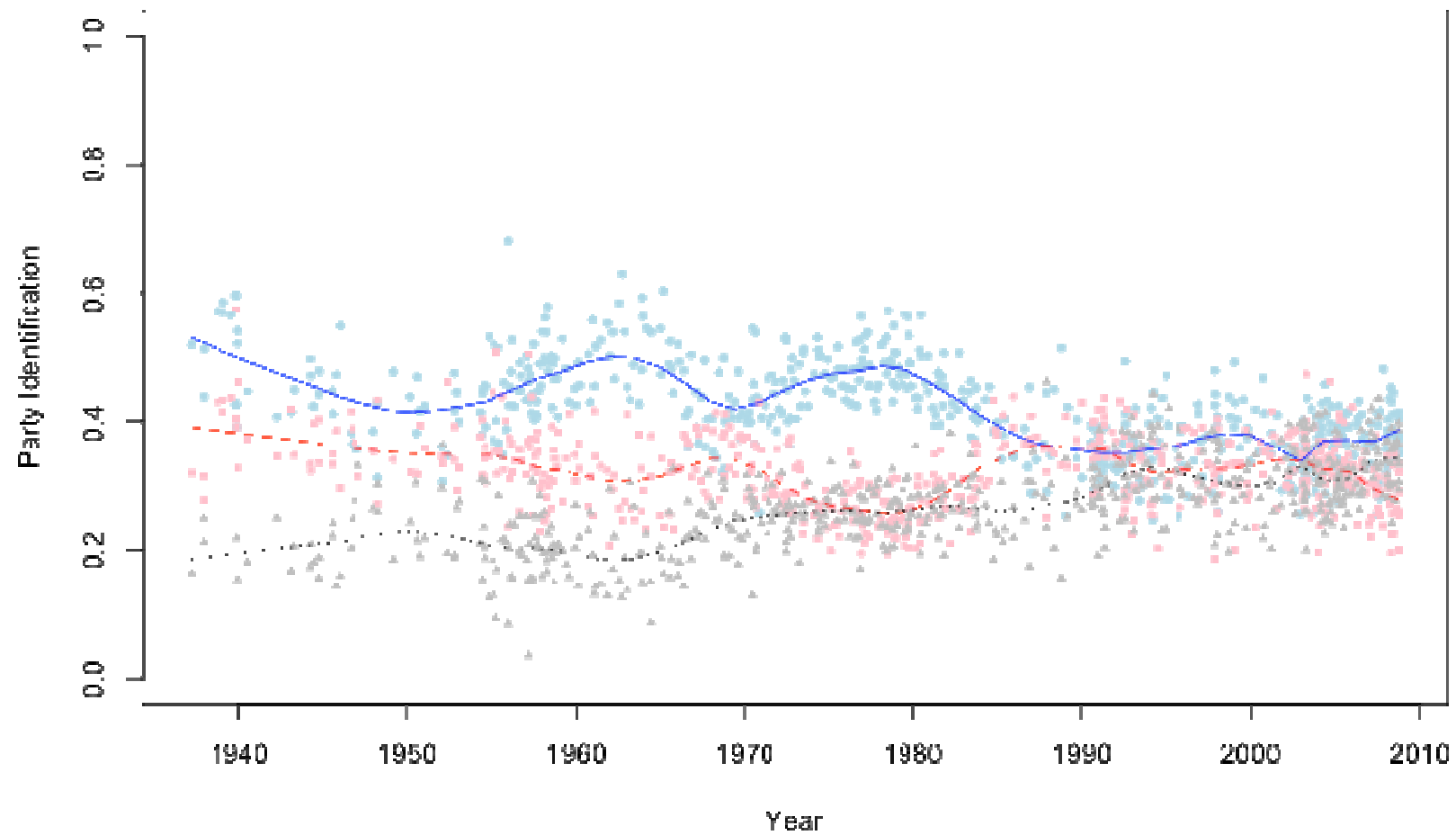
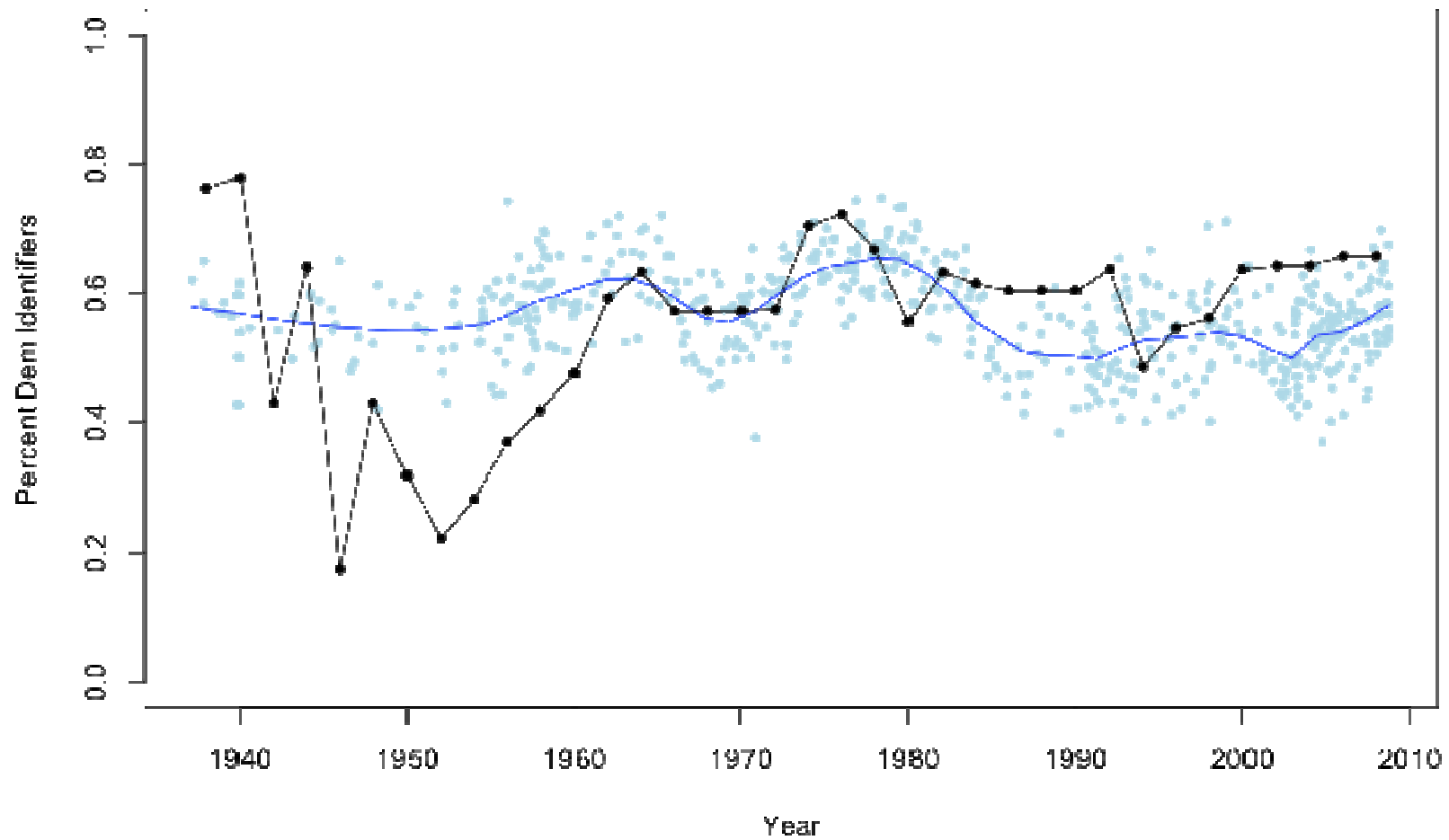


Figure 21: Democratic Party Identification and Seat Share in the Pacific States (CA, OR, WA): 1937—2008



from the mid 1970s onward, Democrats receive more seats than their share of identifiers would warrant. House seats in this region are, with the exception of the 1946 to early 1960s period, primarily Democratic. The 1946 to early sixties period over represents Republicans, given levels of identification, and the 1980s over represents Democrats, given the rough parity in party identification during that era.

The New Deal era made the Democrats the majority party and from 1936 to 1952 at the presidential level only Oregon voted Republican once, for Dewey in 1948. In 1952 and 1956, Eisenhower won all three states, and Nixon held them in 1960, even though throughout this period party identification in the state remained Democratic. The 1964 debacle resulted in all three states voting Democratic, and Humphrey won California and Oregon in 1968. The Nixon reelection brought forward a four election period where Republicans won every state. The 1988 election yielded a Democratic win in California and Republican wins in Oregon and Washington, and ended Republican presidential success. The 1992 election was the first of five straight elections where Democrats captured all the electoral votes in the region. In regard to voting and identification, the Republican victories from 1952 through 1960 are in need of explanation as are Nixon's 1968 California win. These Republican victories came before the shift toward Republicans in the 1980s, thus following the familiar pattern of presidential voting leading shifts in identification as not being correlated.

Summary

In 1937, Democrats were clearly the majority party, with their identifiers outnumbering Republicans and Independents below 20% of the electorate. By the 1950s, in spite of this Democratic advantage in identification, Republican presidential candidates ran well ahead of identification, including Nixon in 1960. The Goldwater campaign caused a rise in Democratic identification and a drop in Republican identification. However, by 1968 there was a dramatic increase in Independents. Nixon won in 1968 and again in 1972, running well ahead of Republican identification. The Watergate era yielded another decrease in Republican identifiers and an increase in Democrats plus a slight rise in Independents. The Reagan years brought an increase in Republican identifiers, a corresponding decrease in Democrats, and a leveling of Independents. Since 1994, the Democrats have generally held a slight lead, sometimes yielding to Independents as a plurality.

House electoral change generally follows identification changes while presidential voting does not reflect identification. From 1937 to the early 1990s, Democratic identifiers were either a majority or a plurality of the electorate and they dominated House elections. In their majority period, where Republican identifiers were always at least 6 or more percentage points behind, Republican presidential candidates nonetheless won 7 of 13 elections. In the House over the same period (1940 through 1988), Democrats controlled the House save for the 1946 and 1952 elections. In the 1984 to 2010 period, where party identification is more equal,

Republicans won 4 of 7 presidential elections and 7 of 14 House elections. Thus, it seems clear that partisanship best predicts House elections and does not do so well in presidential elections.

Regional

The two regions that began the time series as Democratic and ended it as Democratic were the Border and Pacific states. The political parties were essentially at parity in the Mid-Atlantic region in 1937 and end up as Democratic. These three regions show the least change, which is not to say there was no change -- just least relative to others. In all three, the overall Democratic proportion has declined over the entire period after gains in the 1960s and 1970s associated with the decline of the Republicans with Goldwater and Watergate. Moreover, in all three regions Republican fortunes rose in the 1980s only to decline somewhat with Bush post 2004. In two of the three regions, Independents are now in second place, ahead of Republicans. In regard to House seats, changes in party identification distributions have driven congressional election results and with the exception of California in the 1946 to 1958 period, Democrats have dominated House elections. Presidential results don't follow party identification as Republican presidential candidates have done well in both the Border states and, at various times, better than their numbers would indicate in the Pacific states.

Three regions began the time series as Republican and ended as either Democratic or at equal shares. The Midwest and New England states have become Democratic while the Plains states are at political parity in re identification. New England had

Democratic pluralities by 1960 while in the Mid-West by 1960 the parties were even steven. In the Plains states, the 1964 election shifted the party results to the Democrats. In each of the regions the 1964 election gave Democrats a sharp upward bump which they began to lose with the 1968 election. The Republican shift in the 1980s put Republicans at parity in the Mid-West and with a slight advantage in the Plains states. In contrast, Republican gains in the 1980s never made Republicans the majority or plurality party in New England. By 2006, Democrats were on the rise which, combined with a decline in Republican identifiers, made Democrats the majority party in Mid-West and New England states and brought them to parity in the Plains states. In House elections, the Republicans were the majority until 1960 in all three regions. Party identification leads House elections, with New England being the most Democratic, follow by the Mid-West and Plains states. The shift towards Republicans in the 1980s and the 1994 election specifically boosted Republican House seats in all regions, even yielding Republican majorities in the Plains states. Again, the Presidential vote was not well correlated to party identification.

Three regions began the period as Democratic and ended as Republican, and in two of those regions --- the South and Southwest --- they went from heavily Democratic to begin, to solidly Republican. The Rockies region was less Democratic but is today solidly Republican. In all regions, Democrats fall off during the 1930s, 40s and 50s, with fall off less pronounced in the Rocky Mountain states. The Goldwater election hardly caused an upward bump in the Democratic percentages in the South and Southwest whereas, in contrast, the Democrats in the Rocky Mountain states did get

a boost. The 1970s, with Watergate and its aftermath, plus a Southern Democratic nominee in 1976 yielded an upward tick in Democratic fortunes. However, it was not until 1994 that the Republicans become a majority or plurality party and take over one-half of the congressional seats in the Southwest and South. The Republicans outnumbered Democrats in the Rocky Mountain states by the 1980s and achieved an electoral majority success earlier. All of these regions were voting Republican for President long before the Republicans were a plurality. This may well be a result of the fact that in both the South and Southwest the number of Independents rose sharply in the 1960s.

What Does Independent Mean?

The previous section showed a definite secular realignment in American politics over the last forty years, with different regions dramatically shifting their party allegiance. Another pattern emerged: the rising number of respondents answering the first Gallup question by saying they were Independent but, as we know from the literature on party identification, Independents can lean toward one or the other party (Dennis, 1988, 1992; Miller and Wattenberg, 1983; Norrander, 1989).

Moreover, such leaners are often more partisan in their voting behavior than the National Election Studies' weak party identifiers (Keith et al, 1986; Blais et al, 2001, among other scholars). Gallup does not ask the weak identifier question, but in the 1950s they did begin to ask respondents who identified themselves as Independent whether they leaned toward one party or not. Thus, we have a Gallup first question similar to the NES first question and a similar third question determining whether

or not Independents were leaners. In the following section, we use the first question and the respondents' answers to predict vote choice in House elections. House elections are the national election which is most partisan given that, relatively speaking, voters know less about candidates and issues, and incumbency has the greatest effect. In short, it is House elections where we would expect Independents leaning toward a party to more closely follow the party line.

Table 1 is a regression of House vote choices on party identification where the dependent variable (vote choice) takes a value of 1 if the respondent intends to vote Democratic, 0 if the respondent intends to vote Republican. The two independent variables are party, where Democrat equals 1 if respondent identifies as such and 0 otherwise, and Republican takes a value of 1 if the respondent identifies as such and 0 otherwise. The results are pooled across all the surveys, giving us an n of over 280,000.

Table 1: Regression of Vote for a Democratic House Candidate on Individual Party Identification (Probit): 1937—2008

Variable	Estimate	Standard Error	Z-value	Sig
(Intercept)	0.119	0.0055	21.49	***
Democrat	1.526	0.0079	193.04	***
Republican	-1.665	0.0086	-194.12	***

N: 283,502

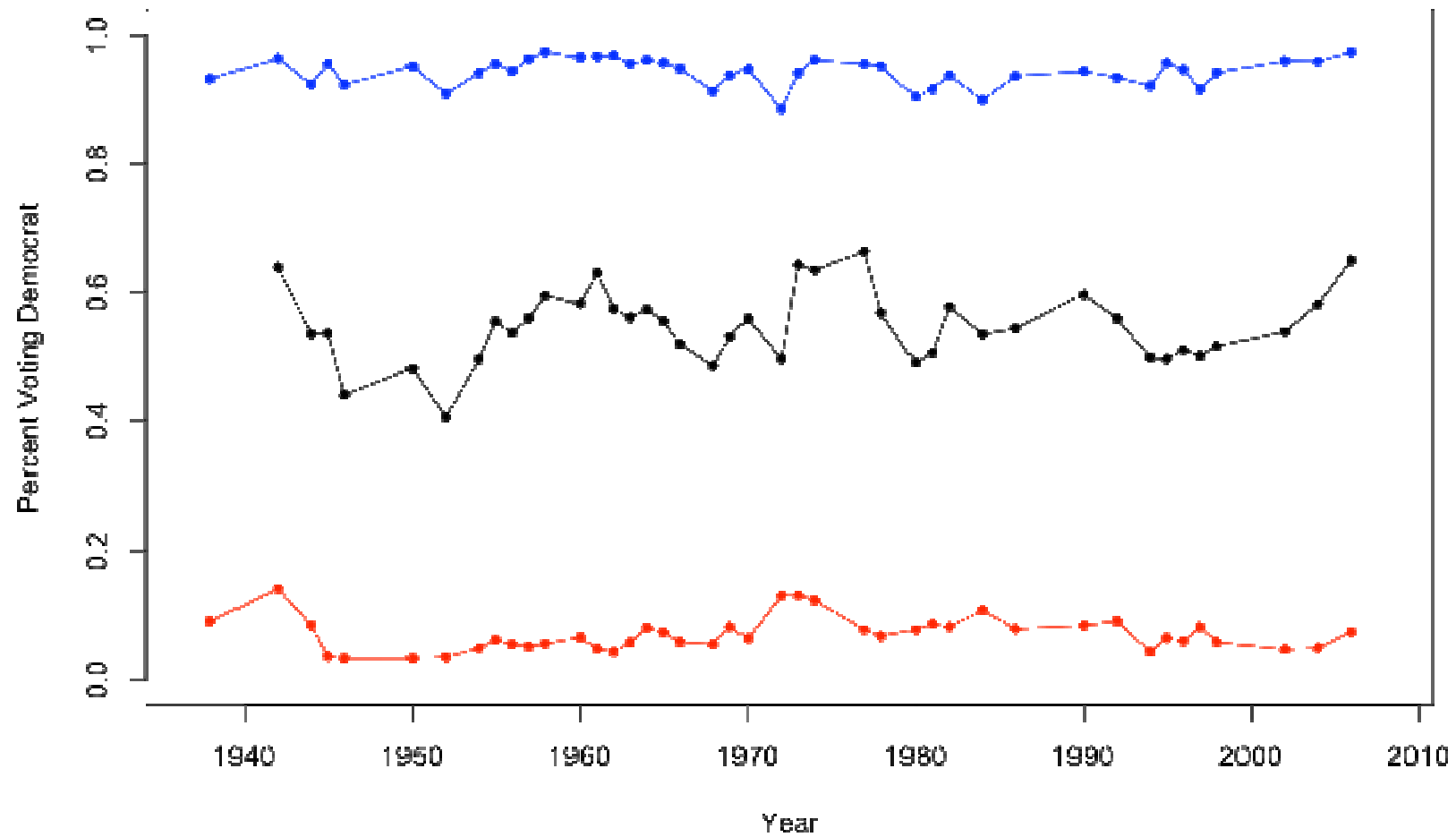
Pseudo R²: 0.56

The table shows what was to be expected for those identifying themselves as a partisan, namely that it predicts voting behavior. The tests are significant at the .001 level, and the pseudo R squared is 0.56. The intercept is the score for how Independents vote in House elections, and the results show them leaning slightly toward Democrats across all pooled elections, which helps explain how Democrats have been the majority party in the House for slightly over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 1936-2011 time period. The regression estimates that on average, a randomly selected Independent would have a 54.7 percent chance of voting Democratic, a randomly selected Democrat would have a 95 percent chance of voting Democratic, and a randomly selected Republican would have a 6.1 percent chance of voting Democratic.

The question of shifts over time is not answered by a pooled regression; thus, Figure 22 shows the pattern for Democrat, Republican and Independent voting by House election by election. The data show that Independents vary voting by party over time. In the post-New Deal, they vote Democratic until the Eisenhower years and then they are mildly Democratic until the Nixon Watergate scandals, when they vote strongly Democratic. During the Reagan era, Republican's House candidates do better, with Democrats doing better going into the 1994 election, where Republicans gain votes, with Democrats picking up in 2004 through 2008.

How much of these results can be accounted for by ascertaining which way Independents lean as opposed to the number of pure Independents? Table 2 integrates leaners into the above analysis. Since the leaning question is not asked until the late 1940s, the number in the analysis declines but is still over 60,000. The results show that Republicans are more likely to vote Republican in House elections than are respondents leaning Republican. Democrats and Democratic leaners follow the same pattern. Compared to the prior table, straight or pure Independents vote differently --- on average slightly less Democratic than when Independents include leaners. All variables in the equation are significant, and the pseudo R squared is

Figure 22: Percent of Party Identifiers Voting for the Democratic House Candidate (Blue: Democrats, Black: Independents, Red: Republicans): 1950—2004



0.62. The regression estimates that a randomly selected Independent would have a 54.8 percent chance of voting Democratic. A randomly selected Democrat would have a 94.5 percent probability of voting Democratic, while an Independent who leaned Democratic would have an 87.4 percent probability of voting Democratic. A randomly selected Republican would have a 5.5 percent chance of voting Democratic, while an Independent who leaned Republican would have a 17.8 percent chance of voting Democratic.

Table 2: Regression of Vote for a Democratic House Candidate on Individual Party Identification with Leaners (Probit): 1950—2004

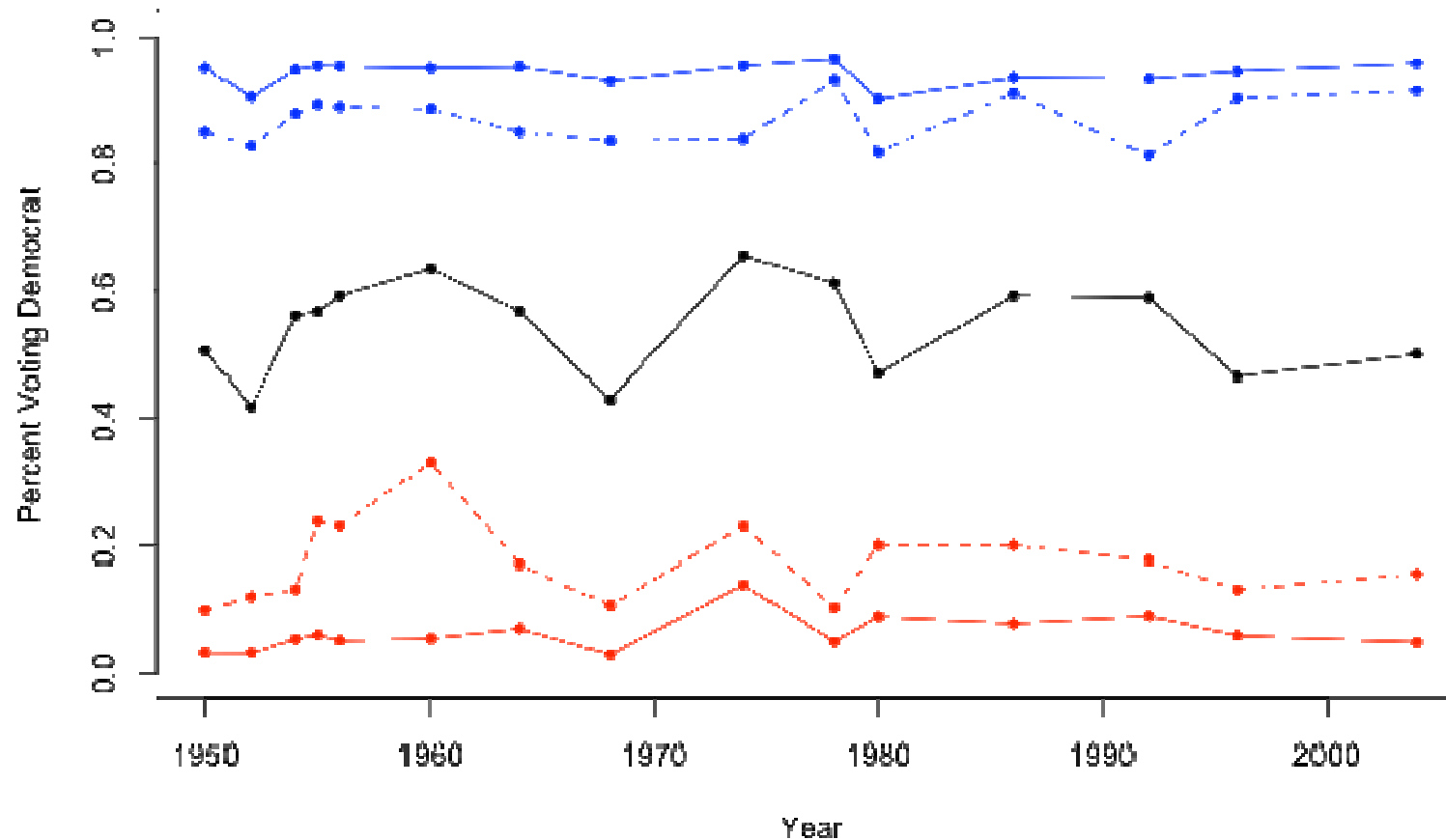
Variable	Estimate	Standard Error	Z-value	Sig
(Intercept)	0.122	0.0268	4.56	***
Democrat	1.478	0.0293	50.47	***
Lean Democrat	1.023	0.0350	29.24	***
Lean Republican	-1.045	0.0337	-31.02	***
Republican	-1.717	0.0301	-57.01	***

N: 64,627

Pseudo R²: 0.617

The overtime variance in leaners and Independents behavior is also a matter of interest, and Figure 23 duplicates the previous figure, including leaners. Leaning Democrats are close to Democrats but less likely to vote party in House elections,

Figure 23: Percent of Party Identifiers Voting for the Democratic House Candidate, with Leaners (Blue: Democrats, Dashed Blue: Lean Democrats, Black: Independents, Dashed Red: Lean Republicans, Red: Republicans): 1950—2004

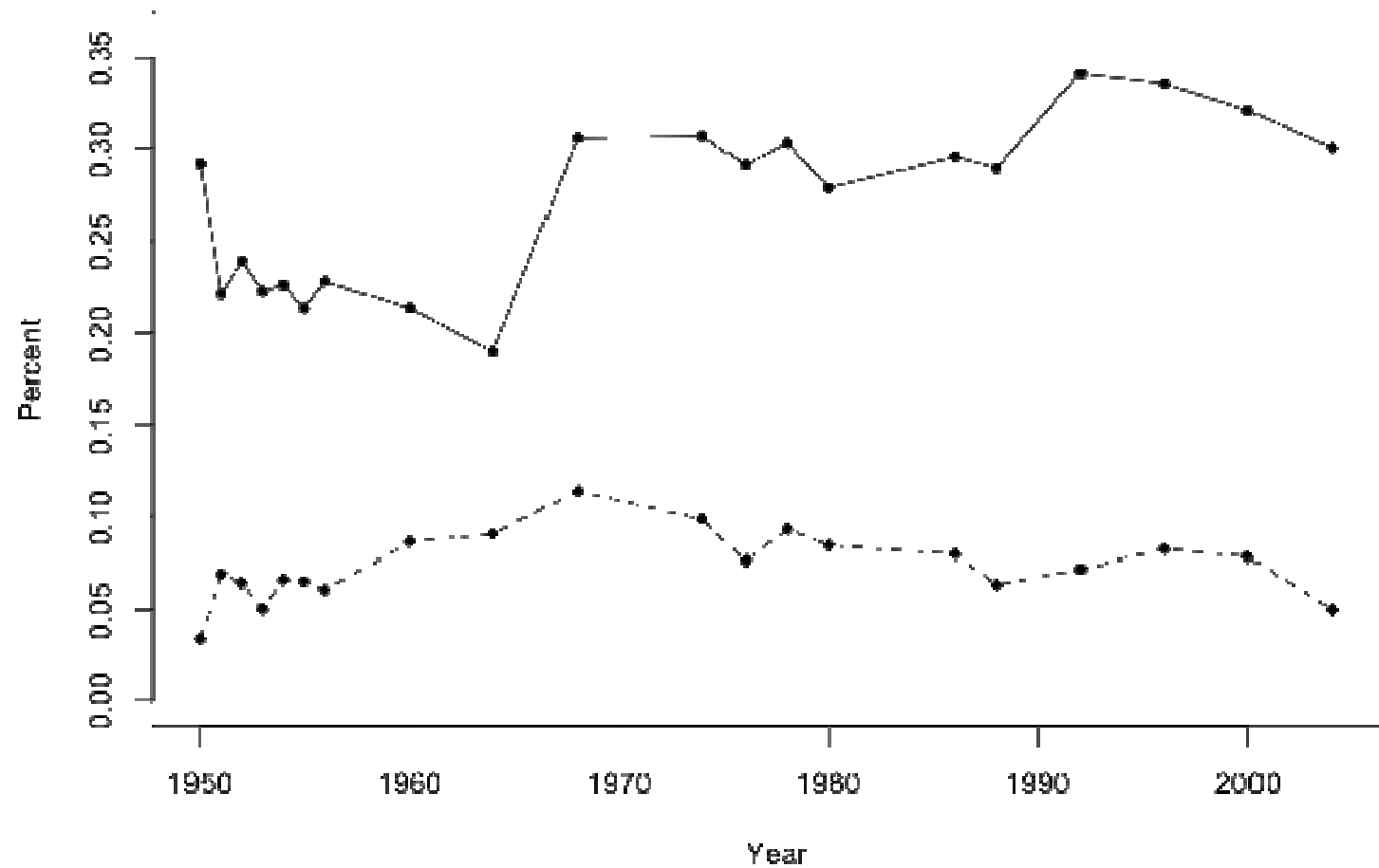


and from the Reagan era through Bush I were even less likely to vote Democratic in House elections than straight Democrats. The pattern for Republicans is somewhat more varied. In the 1958 through 1965 period, leaning Republicans often voted Democratic. However, beginning in 1968, the pattern becomes clearer in that leaners roughly follow partisans but are always more likely to fall away and vote for the other party.

Pure Independents are most likely to swing between parties. In 1952 they went Republican, but from then on until 1966-68 they voted Democratic. The Watergate scandal drove Independents to vote Democratic, which lasted until Reagan where they split their votes about equally. In 1994, they voted Republican and have stayed slightly Republican through 2008.

This preliminary analysis tells us that Independents may be crucial in determining House electoral results. Those leaning toward one party are partisan but more likely to vote against their party's House candidate. As the number of Independents rises, irrespective of the mix of leaners to pure party respondents, the possibility of voting for the other party's candidate rises, since both party's leaners vacate the ticket more frequently than do partisans, and pure Independents switch parties more than any other respondents. How many Independents are leaners and how many pure Independents is thus a relevant question and Figure 24 shows that the Gallup series containing questions regarding leaners shows a high number during the Eisenhower years, falling to about 20 percent during the 1960s and rising rapidly

Figure 24: Percent of Independents and True Independents: 1950—2004



in the late 1960s. True Independents --- those refusing to state that they leaned either way --- were less than 10 percent until the 1960s when they increased to over 10 percent but then begin a slow fall off back to roughly 5 to 7 percent. Thus, the real growth in Independents is driven by leaners. Future analysis will concentrate on what switches from party to leaning party means for both party choice and electoral choice. However, for the moment the analysis shifts to whether the overtime series of one shot surveys can tell us anything about electoral choice.

Electoral Change and Party Identification

Over the 1937 time period, there have been secular shifts in party identification and since the 1980s, shifts in congressional voting. The question asked now is does change in the distribution of party identification signal change in electoral results? We began by regressing percent intending to vote Democratic on percent identifying as Democratic (Question 1 only) and then duplicated that effort for Republicans. The results were as expected. The percent identifying as Democrat or Republican is a good predictor of vote intention --- in both cases significant at .001 with about half the vote explained by just one variable. While this result is not surprising, it does tell us why Republicans did not win control of the House until the mid 1990s. Party identification was predominantly Democratic until the Reagan era when Republicans gained supporters. However, the incumbency effect kept at risk Democrats in office until the 1994 election (Han and Brady, 2003). Since 1994, seven of nine House elections have gone Republican.

Does change in the distribution of identification predict change in House elections?

Change can be conceived in a number of ways; our view is that change in party identification can best be viewed as retrospective. Voters are evaluating the President's party and, over time, change their views of a party based on its performance. Any survey is just a snapshot of the party distribution which would include both identifiers and those moving away from the President's party as well as those who have switched. Normally, people do not switch parties in one fell swoop; rather, they move, for example, from strong affiliation to weaker (lean toward their party) affiliation. Given this, the change in Independents would also be included in the changes in party distribution. In the analysis that follows, we use the sum of change in the president's party identification plus change in Independents to measure change. Net seat change in House elections is regressed on the change variable described above. We include a dummy for midterm elections. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3: Net Seat Swing on Change in Percent Identifying with President's**Party of Independents (from prior year): 1950 – 2008**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-value	Sig
(Intercept)	7.268	4.709	1.543	
Change in Ind and Pres	2.978	1.473	2.022	*
Pty ID				
Midterm Election	-26.078	6.503	-4.01	***

N: 30

R²: 0.446

The results show that changes away from the President's party (including Independents) is significantly related to change in House elections. The coefficient is 2.98 with a standard error of 1.47 yielding a T significant at .053. In short, a one percent loss in party identification and/or an increase in Independents yields a 3 seat loss in House elections.

Discussion

The Democratic party lost its dominant position in American politics in the 1980s and has not regained its prior status. The post 1980s period is characterized by a division of roughly 1/3 Democrat, 1/3 Republican and 1/3 Independent. While the number of respondents saying they are Independent is at a high, most still lean toward a party. Leaners, however, are less likely to vote for candidates of their party, and this volatility affects American elections. Thus, while we have shown the shape and general characteristics of secular realignment from 1937 until 2010, much remains to be done. Careful analyses of overtime changes in voting for both President and Congress and the interaction between such votes will tell us a great deal about how secular realignment occurs overtime. It is also important to map political ideology on partisan identification since we believe that post 1980 the parties have sorted at the elite level into a conservative and a liberal party (Fiorina, 2010; Levendusky, 2011). The sorting at the elite level may have caused the less ideological, more centrist and pragmatic electorate to turn away from the parties toward Independent status. To say more at this point would be speculation. Thus, we conclude that the results obtained up to this point are quite promising.

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