

PART III

Cyclical Behavior and Ideological Change in American Politics

Too often political analysis gets bogged down in minutiae, particularly the many extensive electoral studies which grow more methodologically complex by the day. This state of affairs serves a valuable function in enhancing rigor, but it nevertheless remains healthy to step back at times for the examination of overarching trends. Such broad assessments within the electoral politics literature have mainly been conducted through the study of “realignments,” or supposed sea changes in American politics that recur in regular intervals. But such studies have suffered from the opposite problem as the traditional literature – namely, that they have proven themselves to be largely speculative, non-rigorous, and therefore wrong.

The first attempt at uncovering cyclical patterns in American politics was undertaken by renowned historian Henry Adams (1918). Adams postulated a “pendulum” model with a period of twelve years, in which American politics alternated between periods of diffuse and centralized power. As evidence, Adams noted the largely diffuse government from 1776 to 1788, during the Second Continental Congress and Articles of Confederation (Wood 151); the largely centralized government from 1788 to 1800, during Federalist and Hamiltonian dominance; and a return to diffuse government upon the rise of Jeffersonian Republicanism (Adams and Harbert 246). After 1812, however, this explanation of events broke down (Johnson 257-266).

Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. (1949) made the next such serious attempt, redefining the “diffuse” and “centralized” cycles respectively into “liberal” periods of collective action to improve the political, economic, and social status quo, and countervailing “conservative” periods of the defense of the status quo. Schlesinger, Sr. generally agreed with Adams’s three cycles and

continued them as follows: a conservative cycle from 1812-1829, a liberal cycle from 1829-1841, a conservative cycle from 1841-1861, a liberal cycle from 1861-1869, a conservative cycle from 1869-1901, a liberal cycle from 1901-1919, a conservative cycle from 1919-1931, and a liberal cycle from 1931 to 1947, the year of authorship. On the basis of a calculated mean cyclical length of 16.55 years, this model foresaw a conservative cycle from 1947-1962, a liberal cycle from 1962-1978, and a conservative cycle from 1978-1993, a projection that upon casual inspection seems to have been fairly accurate.

Yet for the electoral cycles literature, from there the road was all downhill. A flurry of studies (Key 1955; Schattschneider 1956; Burnham 1967; Sundquist 1973) attempted to demonstrate the existence of so-called “critical elections” or “realignment” periods which would confirm the existence of these cycles by delineating their transitions.¹ Representative of these studies is Burnham (1970, 136), who argued that political tension rises throughout each cycle, culminating in “flash points” involving an abrupt change in political ideology. These efforts themselves perhaps culminated in the work of historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1986), who proposed a regime of alternating cycles of the “public purpose” (read: liberal) and the “private interest” (conservative) due to cumulative public disappointment with the status quo and similar factors, including a prediction of liberal dominance for the sixteen years commencing in 1992 (Schlesinger, Jr. 1992).

¹ Additional work in this area includes Key (1959), Burnham (1965; 1970; 1981; 1986; 1991), Flanigan and Zingale (1974), Clubb et al. (1980), Petrocik (1981), Gans (1985), Holt (1985), Brady (1988), Shafer (1991), Mayhew (1994), Nardulli (1995), Lawrence (1997), Schantz (1998), Bartels (1998), Stonecash et al. (2002), Rosenof (2003), Alexander (2004).

The fact that these and other predictions did not appear to be borne out by events led to a widespread disillusionment with the realignment literature in the 1990s. David Mayhew (2000; 2002) provided the death blow by effectively debunking eleven of its more egregious claims. The current electoral politics literature is overwhelmingly dominated by rigorous methodological studies, and rightly so.

But there is no reason to abandon cyclical study in its entirety, so long as sufficient care is taken to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. This paper attempts to provide such an analysis by delineating the underlying assumptions of cyclical behavior, synthesizing these assumptions into a quantitative model, and examining the historical record to provide evidence for the model. Only then does it make wild predictions (including the 2004 Republican election victory, if that counts for anything).²

Theory

Assumptions of the characteristics of relevant cyclical behavior are as follows.

1. *Existence.* There is long-term cyclical behavior in American politics, and by extension the politics of all two-party democratic industrialized states. This implies that there are intermittent periods of time, or “cycles,” during which a particular political ideology is dominant, and only moderate members of the opposition party may assume power. A

² For the curious, this model was formulated in July 2004 and submitted for publication the following October. Based upon its findings, your humble author put his money where his mouth is and netted over \$3000 betting upon online election futures, for which he is entirely too pleased with himself.

crucial distinction separates the absolute value of ideological dominance from the *derivative* or change towards that ideology – for example, although the year 1933 saw perhaps the greatest shift towards liberalism, the country was more liberal in absolute terms a few years or even a few decades later, once the changes had taken effect.

2. *Duration.* These cycles are not necessarily regular in frequency. There is no shortage of exogenous short-term fluctuations which affect the duration of each cycle at the margins. Also, there are brief yet fuzzy transitions between cycles that are difficult to categorize – the year 1932, for example. Attempting to boil everything down into immutable 36- or n -year cycles is chimerical, as demonstrated by Mayhew. In fact, one would not intuitively expect the frequencies to be constant, but rather to diminish with each successive cycle, for as political institutions mature they also stabilize.
3. *Intensity.* These cycles are not necessarily regular in amplitude. The amplitude diminishes with time, with each succeeding cycle less intense than its precursor. Reasons for this phenomenon include the gradual maturation of political institutions towards a steady state, as well as the fact that social scientific advances and past experimentation lead a political system to gradually approach an “optimal” bundle of public policies.

Modeling this system is straightforward. We may construct a differential equation in which the more a particular ideology dominates, the greater are the countervailing pressures towards the opposing ideology.³ Letting the political ideology function be represented by $F(t)$,

³ As noted above, this observation is well-documented by Burnham (1970) and Schlesinger Jr. (1987), as well as numerous other contemporaneous studies. The underlying reasons may

with positive values arbitrarily denoting a “liberal” ideology and negative values representing conservatism,⁴ we therefore realize that:

$$F(t) \propto -\frac{dF(t)}{dt} \quad (1)$$

such that political ideology is inversely proportional to its rate of change. Less intuitive is the likewise negative relationship between $F(t)$ and its second derivative. While $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ represents the change in political ideology, $\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2}$ denotes the change in $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$. One would expect a dominant ideology to attract not only a backlash, but a growing backlash.

$$F(t) \propto -\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2} \quad (2)$$

Combining equations (1) and (2) results in a homogenous second-order differential equation.

$$\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2} + c_1 \frac{dF(t)}{dt} + c_2 F(t) = 0 \quad (3)$$

where c_1 and c_2 are coefficients that account for the proportionality of the relationships of (1) and (2). The resemblance to a harmonic oscillator is striking.⁵ Our prior observation that

include executive overreach or complacency, growing public disillusionment at the ideology’s inevitable failures, and an implicit recognition by the electorate that regular ideological change is vital to the maintenance of a healthy democracy.

⁴ The author fervently hopes that this designation will not expose him to indignant accusations of bias. One definition of political ideology is “those explicit systems of general beliefs that give large bodies of people a common identity and purpose, a common program of action” (Higham 1974, 10).

both the oscillator's frequency and amplitude diminish with time allows us to declare it of the underdamped variety, implying that $\frac{c_1}{2} < \sqrt{c_2}$ and leading to a solution of the form:

$$F(t) = e^{-at} \sin(bt^\lambda) \quad (4)$$

where $a > 0$ and $\lambda > 1$ to ensure that both frequency and amplitude monotonically decrease. Determining the values of these constants will require a thorough examination of the evidence.

⁵ In a physical system, c_1 could represent the oscillator's drag coefficient and c_2 the square of its natural frequency. Any constant c_3 as the coefficient of the $\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2}$ term could be readily eliminated by multiplying each term by that coefficient's reciprocal. There is no driving function on the right-hand side of the equation since the influence of exogenous fluctuations (or, if one prefers, the hand of God) cannot be systematically quantified.

Evidence

Disregarding the early years of the republic, there were probably two electoral cycles prior to the modern era – a more “diffuse” or “liberal” cycle from 1801 to 1860, and a more “centralized” or “conservative” cycle from 1861 to 1931. Given the absence of mass politics during these cycles, as well as the inherent unwieldiness of comparing more than two objectives simultaneously, the emphasis will remain on the widely acknowledged liberal cycle from approximately 1932 to 1980, and the conservative cycle since that time.⁶

During these cycles, every executive government⁷ has been either a practitioner of the dominant school of thought or a member of the moderate opposition. To elaborate, each cycle has been characterized by an initial outburst of the dominant ideology (in liberalism’s case, 1933-1941; in conservatism’s case, 1981-1989), a successor also belonging to the dominant

⁶ Two immediate potential flaws come to mind. Contrary to our earlier assumptions, frequency did not diminish from the first to the second cycle – pre-1932 data will not be accounted for due to its marginal relevance. Furthermore, Mayhew considers the 1980 elections to only “[p]ossibly” or “arguably” qualify as significant (2000, 465), a view shared by Schlesinger, Jr. (1992), who viewed them as a mere hallmark of short-lived conservative reaction. Here we part ways. Prior to 1980 “default” public policies were liberal, while now they are conservative. That a “certifiable realignment has occurred since 1932” (Mayhew 2000, 457) is established in depth later on.

⁷ To avoid confusion, the term “government” in this and related contexts refers to an extended period of time during which modes of executive governance remain fairly constant. The Nixon and Ford administrations, for example, would jointly be considered a single government. Both terms are used interchangeably.

ideology but more moderate by nature (in liberalism's case, 1945-1952; in conservatism's case, 1989-1993), a successor belonging to the moderate opposition⁸ (in liberalism's case, 1953-1961; in conservatism's case, 1993-2001; and a successor belonging to the dominant ideology (in liberalism's case, 1961-1969; in conservatism's case, 2001-2009). "Ideological governments" have sought to actively alter the preferences of the electorate (i.e., $\frac{dF(t)}{dt} > 0$ during the liberal cycle and $\frac{dF(t)}{dt} < 0$ during the conservative cycle); while "moderate governments", whether of the dominant or opposition party, have attempted very little such change (i.e., $\frac{dF(t)}{dt} \approx 0$).

In other branches of government, the legislature has remained solidly in the hands of the dominant ideology throughout the bulk of each cycle, acting as a natural impetus towards ideological change. Due to the lag in judicial retirements, the courts remain in the clutches of the previous cycle's ideology during the initial portion of each cycle (Gates 1992), hindering ideological change (for example, by striking down large sections of the New Deal and the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act); yet gradually succumb via new appointments to the dominant ideology, such that by the time of the second ideological government they contribute to that era's drive towards change (i.e., the Warren and Rehnquist courts).

The historical record supports this qualitative framework.

First ideological government

⁸ A moderate opposition does not seek to overturn the fundamental reforms undertaken by its ideological predecessor, and indeed implicitly confirms those reforms by declining to act against them.

The first leader of any ideological movement will naturally be its strongest. Preceded by a long stretch of weak governance and economic malaise deriving from the inevitable overreach and failings of the preceding cycle, the electorates of 1932 and 1980 were most willing to countenance radical change. That change manifests itself through bold new initiatives seeking to entrench the newly-dominant ideology into public policy (Kennedy 245; Woodworth and Land 77-80).

Since no economic downturn can last forever, these leaders take the credit for the inevitable recovery. These improvements in the economy seem to indicate that the bold new policy initiatives – whether they be increasing social spending, in the case of liberalism (Kennedy 152); or cutting taxes, in the case of conservatism (Griffith and Baker 454-456) – are working, lending additional support to the administration that translates into a mandate for continued change. Once it becomes difficult to make much further progress on the home front (as ideas get tapped out and the opposition adapts⁹), change can carry over into the realm of foreign affairs. While the previous malaise had almost necessitated a relatively low international profile, the revival enables America to assert itself more forcefully on the world stage (Kennedy 466; Griffith and Baker 499-502), including finally mustering the strength to confront long-festered problems of anti-democratic movements abroad. While costly, the invigorated political situation ensures that these initiatives, as with their domestic counterparts, will prove successful (Kennedy 798-851, 919-926; Gaddis 514-518).

⁹ In the misguided hope that the ideological change is only a fad, the opposition leaders cling to their old ways far longer than is in their best interests, ensuring that they are locked out of power by wide margins.

The ultimate effect of this administration on the country is to both strengthen it and to shift the terms of its public discourse decidedly in favor of its favored political ideology (Johnson 763-767). While opponents resent its success in the latter regard, so do they also respect it in the former. The administration becomes in a sense legendary, an impression that only grows with the passage of time. Its $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ value is extreme. The value of $F(t)$ during this period is smaller, for the ideological changes require time to take effect.

Moderate ideological government

Such a powerful government could hardly be immediately followed by its now-crippled opposition. Rather, it turns over the reins of power to a successor administration of the same party, bequeathing to it good economic times, a strong executive branch, and a record of success. The cycle's second administration is then placed in the distinctly unenviable position of having to extend a record it cannot possibly live up to.

Since most substantive novel ideas for domestic initiatives were already enacted under its predecessor, the administration has a tendency to adopt style over substance in that respect,¹⁰ and more importantly to concentrate its attention on foreign affairs by finding a long-term national role in the newly transformed international system (Griffith and Baker 86-87, 512-513).

Undermining its efforts is economic recession, the short-term price of the major stimulatory

¹⁰ President Truman, for example, levied a charge that the opposition's agenda "sticks a knife into the back of the poor" (Truman 1948) along with other fiery rhetoric during his campaign, while President George H.W. Bush took symbolic stands against "un-American" practices such as flag burning, although the two leaders' agendas while in office were more moderate than these positions would suggest.

actions of the past (Woodworth and Land 24-27). In essence, this government has to play clean-up after its predecessor, a challenge that, given middling public support, proves too daunting to accomplish alone. Accordingly, the administration must moderate its ideological agenda in hopes of attracting greater support from the electorate and the opposition (Wolfe 16-25; Griffith and Baker 457-458; Woodworth and Land 87-90). The opposition, having learned through the repeated defeats of its unreconstructed wing at the hands of the new guard that its traditional agenda is a relic of the past, has meanwhile likewise moved to the center. As a result, partisan acrimony decreases to a relative minimum and the administration's bid succeeds – but at the cost of implicitly legitimizing the opposition.

Thus, after a long stretch of dominance by one party, the electorate is more than willing to turn to the other as soon as it has become a credible alternative. The cycle's second administration meets with an early demise,¹¹ having failed to effect much ideological change in either direction. The quantity $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ is still nonzero, however, out of the previous government's momentum – so paradoxically, $F(t)$ itself continues to move in the direction of the dominant ideology.

First moderate opposition government

The cycle's third government, although of the opposing party to the dominant ideology, has already demonstrated its lack of hostility towards it, for otherwise it could never have assumed power in the first place. As such, it makes no serious attempt to dismantle the first administration's achievements, nor could it succeed if it did (Woodworth and Land 30-32, 109-

¹¹ The Truman administration was effectively prevented from re-election in 1952 due to low public approval (Schlesinger, Jr. 1971). Both it and its counterpart, however, gained greater respect from the opposing party in hindsight.

113).¹² Since it certainly is not of the mind to extend upon those achievements, and indeed “tend[s] to be suspicious of ideology in general” (Miles 2001, 13), as with its predecessor this government will not preside over a significant change in political ideology and in essence is simply marking time.

Ah, but a pleasant time. The initial negative economic fallout from the first government’s reforms, which cost the second government its job, has now come to an end, paving the way for a prolonged period of economic growth. With foreign affairs also under control thanks to the solid managerial efforts of its predecessor, the third government can put its figurative feet up and take credit for the booming economy (Johnson 826-838).¹³ With the legislature solidly in opposition hands, there is little it could do anyway, even if it wanted to. It does sign off on some of the opposition’s better ideas (for example, the 1957 civil rights and 1996 welfare reform acts) while checking any further impulses to move in a more ideological direction (Griffith and Baker 461). Due to the administration’s moderate orientation, personal

¹² The Eisenhower administration did not try; any “grass-roots rebellion against liberalism” during the 1950s merely halted ideological change, not reverse its direction (Sugrue 1995, 552).

The Bill Clinton administration did make an initial attempt through “compromise after compromise with the ‘Old’ wing of the party in Congress” (Miles 2001, 15), but could not succeed, with the same net result. This difference arises from the earlier observation that the conservative cycle was less extreme than its liberal predecessor, for the simple reason that it had a predecessor which retained a proportion of its influence.

¹³ To be fair, they do contribute to the prosperity through sound economic policies – respectively, high interest rates to limit inflationary pressures from postwar growth, and spending restraint to avoid excessive fiscal stimulus.

popularity, and accompanying strong economy, it is favorably viewed as more in touch with the common citizen than the stiffly ideological opposition, and handily re-elected. Nevertheless, on a certain level this administration's lack of accomplishment and purpose haunt it, and the image of the cycle's third government improves little in hindsight. $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ is very small, but still in the direction of the dominant ideology since no mechanism has yet arisen to counteract the first government's lingering momentum.

Second ideological government

After nearly a decade of opposition rule, and over a decade of moderate governance, the electorate grows weary of a persistent lack of inspiration and seeks strong leadership once more. Although the prosperous status quo is quite tempting – and the ideological candidacy must run a moderate campaign to avoid giving the unwanted impression of radical change¹⁴ – in the end the dominant ideology is narrowly returned to office.

At first, the fourth government's mission of ideological change seems to get off to a rocky start. The fickle economic cycle, so cooperative during the prior government, briefly lapses into recession, and the ensuing shaky public support blocks much progress after the first year despite a friendly Congress. As with the second government, a weak economy forces this administration to attempt to compensate via an invigorated foreign policy, a compensation that at

¹⁴ The victorious 1960 and 2000 campaigns were among the most moderate in memory. The Democratic platform pledged to “unshackle American enterprise and to free American labor, industrial leadership, and capital, to create an abundance that will outstrip any other system” (Schlesinger Jr. 1971, 2938), while the Republican convention was “tightly controlled... in an effort to win the votes of young people, moderates, and women” (Kerbel 2002, 196).

least initially proves successful, and to moderate its policies. Rhetoric and imagery aside, these initial periods are in fact counter-ideological – witness the 1963 tax cut and a 25% rise in government outlays from fiscal years 2001 to 2004 (Council of Economic Advisers 2004, 377).

Economic recovery arrives in time for a resounding re-election victory (the opposition, stung by its narrow defeat, has reverted back to its old immoderate ways), providing a new burst of momentum to the government's ideological agenda (Johnson 869-876; Griffith and Baker 224-225). The administration's desire to replicate the success of the first ideological government leads it to replicate many of its policies, both domestic and foreign – however, having already been enacted once, their marginal benefits are lower and their marginal costs higher. Accordingly, while the government's second term is very prosperous,¹⁵ of which the public approves (Woodworth and Land 41-46), that approval is qualified, especially by uncertainty over its foreign agenda.¹⁶

In the end, the cycle's fourth government proves to be its most ideological – $F(t)$ is at its extrema. However, attempts to bolster $F(t)$ came at the cost of a considerable degree of

¹⁵ The 1960s have been referred to as a “golden age” of prosperity (Kindleberger 1992, 16).

Data from 2005 to 2009 is presently unavailable, although the Congressional Budget Office forecasts a solid 3.0% annual growth in real GDP over that time period (CBO 2004). The author believes this projection to be if anything overly pessimistic, compensating for the excessive optimism of the CBO's 2010-2014 forecast.

¹⁶ The government's attempts at emulation of the first ideological government's foreign policies involves a more forceful role in the international system. As with its domestic program, this engenders a degree of backlash. It is not the author's intention to equate the Vietnam and Iraq conflicts.

polarization (Stonecash et al. 2002), engendering a neutralizing backlash that leaves $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ close to zero or even reversed in direction despite the government's intentions. This backlash persists, constituting the mechanism by which $F(t)$ will gradually revert back to its old equilibrium.

Second moderate opposition government

Weary of the stresses brought about by ideological change, the earlier period of laid-back moderate governance begins in the eyes of the public to seem more attractive. Having recovered from its bout with "extremism" (Goldwater 1964), the opposition readopts its moderate face to narrowly assume power (Johnson 887-890).

Since the dominant ideology is near its apex, and by now holds the legislature and judiciary firmly in its clutches, this government is forced to practice moderation in word as well as deed.¹⁷ This concordance with public opinion leads to a solid re-election victory, even though the economy has taken a turn for the worse due to the fiscal irresponsibility of its ideological predecessor. However, an inability to enact any major initiatives aside from those favored by the dominant ideology (Woodworth and Land 57-58), coupled with the faltering economy, leads the government to look to foreign policy for its achievements – its diplomatic skills ensure that damage to the national interest from an inevitably lower international profile is kept to a minimum (Litwak et al. 1986).

Still, as the economy stubbornly refuses to recover, the government's popularity slowly declines, along with the public's faith in the dominant ideology to enact successful social policy.

¹⁷ Behind the scenes is a different matter – the administration acts as counter-ideologically as it can get away with while not jeopardizing the trust of the public and hence its own re-election (Greenberg 2001).

The cycle's fifth government ends with a whimper, having presided for the first time over a backsliding in ideology – $\frac{dF(t)}{dt} < 0$ for the liberal cycle and $\frac{dF(t)}{dt} > 0$ for the conservative cycle.

Third ideological government

Amidst a struggling economy and diminished international influence, there are widespread hopes that a new administration of the dominant ideology will be able to turn things around. But bereft of ideas, it proves impotent to correct the situation. The administration would certainly like to effect further change, and has the legislature and judiciary on its side, but belongs to an ideology that has simply “run out of steam” (Calvert 1988, 131). The administration is instead caught in a downward spiral of low economic performance leading to low popularity, leading to an enfeebled government, leading to poor domestic and foreign policy.

In the face of mounting evidence that it has lost the support of the public, in desperation the administration turns to positions favored by the opposing ideology (Biven 2002, 253), which after decades in the political wilderness has amassed plenty of fresh ideas. But why choose the watered-down version when one can have the real thing? The dominant ideology is decisively ousted in the next election, through a strongly negative $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ value paving the way for a new cycle to begin.

Synthesis

The record thus far is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Summary of ideology function identities, 1932-2009.

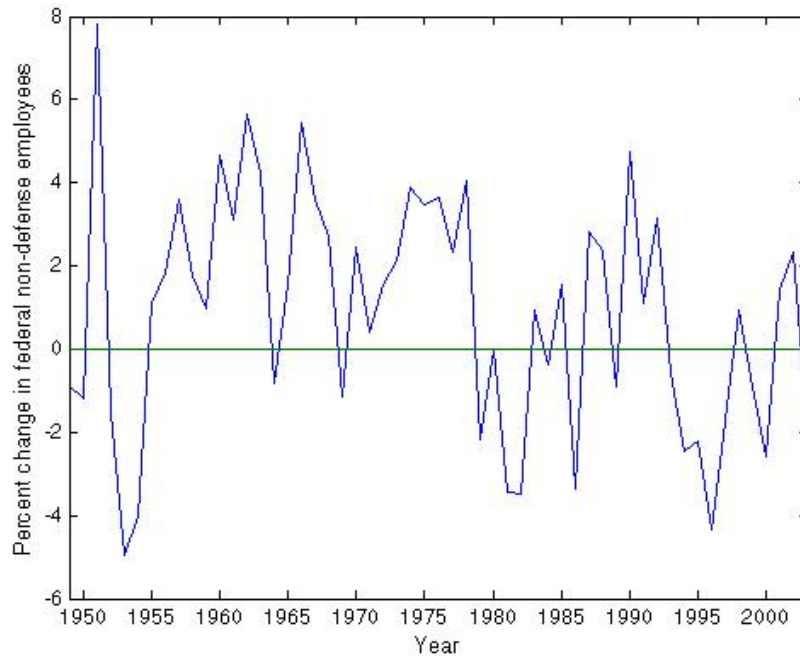
Cycle	Government type	Interval	$F(t)$	$\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$	$\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2}$
Liberal	First ideological	1932-1945	+++	+++++	-

Liberal	Moderate ideological	1945-1953	++++	++	-
Liberal	Moderate opposition	1953-1961	++++	+	-
Liberal	Second ideological	1961-1969	+++++	0	-
Liberal	Second moderate opposition	1969-1977	++++	-	-
Liberal	Third ideological	1977-1980	++	--	-
Conservative	First ideological	1980-1989	--	----	+
Conservative	Moderate ideological	1989-1993	---	-	+
Conservative	Moderate opposition	1993-2001	---	-	+
Conservative	Second ideological	2001-2009	----	0	+

We have seen that both the broad contours and internal mechanisms of each cycle are consistent. Still, these are expansive claims and require quantitative data support. Data on the change in non-defense federal employees, the change in non-defense government spending, and the number of issued executive orders clearly establish the demarcation between the liberal and conservative cycles. Even during periods of opposition rule, these basic structural indicators of governmental involvement in the economy did not noticeably change (Higgs 1987).

The extent of liberal ideological dominance is related to the extent of governmental involvement in the economy, which in turn is related to the size of government, as measured by its personnel. Setting aside military and homeland security employees, whose hiring patterns are particularly sensitive to exogenous events, gives the data shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Annual percentage change in federal non-defense employees.

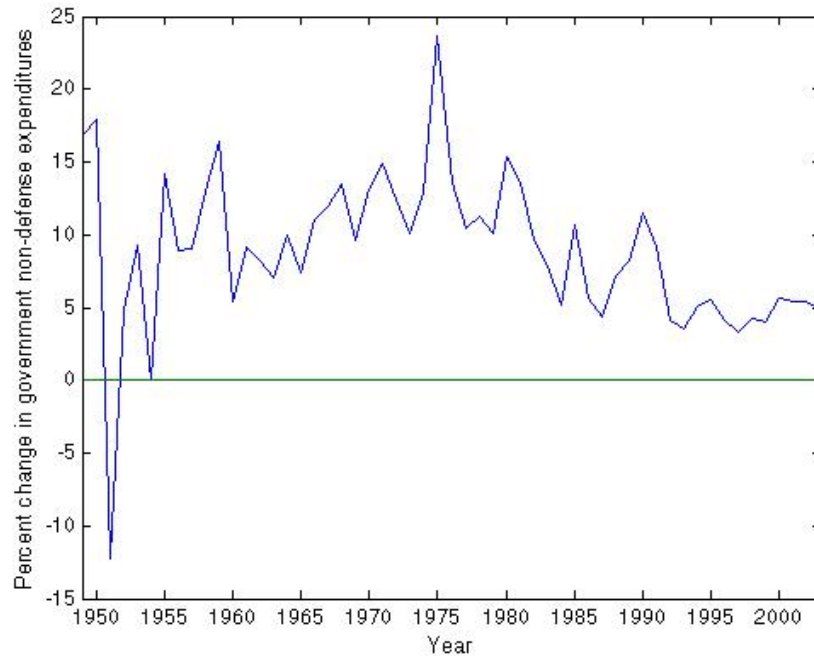


Reliable data is only available since the 1940s (Office of Management and Budget 2004), and even then is initially subjected to large fluctuations attendant to demobilization and the Korean War. Since positive population growth would suggest a positive growth in federal employees as a natural state of affairs, data shall only be considered since that growth rate became consistent in 1955.

Said average growth rate shows a general decline since the late 1950s and a marked drop in the early 1980s. Experimenting with various cutoff years yields a clearest distinction at 1979; before then, the annual growth in federal employees averaged 2.6%, while afterwards it has been -0.4%. This represents a seismic shift in the scope of government – although, in keeping with earlier observations, the later cycle has the smaller magnitude.

The effects of political ideology may also be felt in government spending (Kurian 1998, 82), shown in Figure 2 (OMB 2004). As before, defense-related outlays are excluded.

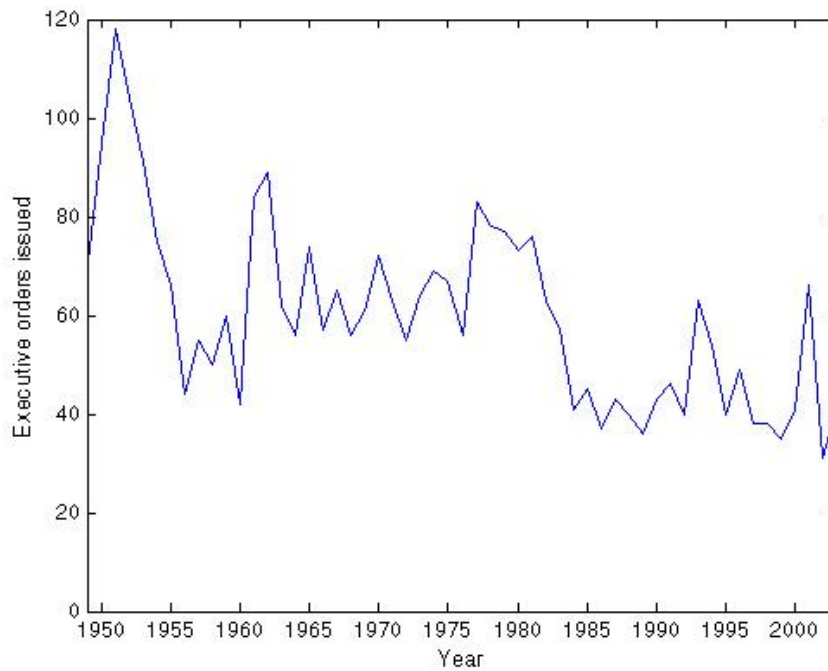
FIGURE 2. Annual percentage change in federal, state, and municipal non-defense expenditures.



Once more a pronounced decline is evident during the early 1980s. Experimenting with various cutoff years gives a clearest distinction at 1982 (the later cutoff year matches intuition – fiscal policy takes longer to change than simply firing people.); from 1955 until that year, the annual growth in government expenditures averaged 11.7%, while since then it has been only 6.1%.

A final measure of political ideology is the number of annual executive orders issued (Figure 3; U.S. National Archives 2004). A liberal ideology, involving a more active role for government, could be expected to attempt management of a wider array of policies than its conservative counterpart.

FIGURE 3. Annual number of executive orders issued.



An early 1980s drop is again evident. To be sure, much of the decline is simply due to the executive order falling into disfavor (Krause and Cohen 2000, 96) – but could not this imply the notion of an active government falling into disfavor? Experimenting with various cutoff years yields a clearest distinction at 1983 (again, the cutoff year matches intuition – the first few years of conservative ideological dominance would see many executive orders designed to roll back prior initiatives, after which the number would fall off); from 1933 to that year, the annual number of executive orders averaged 131, while since then it has been a mere 43. Even excluding the early data by adopting our favored 1955 starting point leaves the liberal cycle’s average at 65, a full 50% higher than its conservative equivalent.

These data have identified dependent variables that demarcate the liberal and conservative cycles, which will prove quite helpful in a moment.

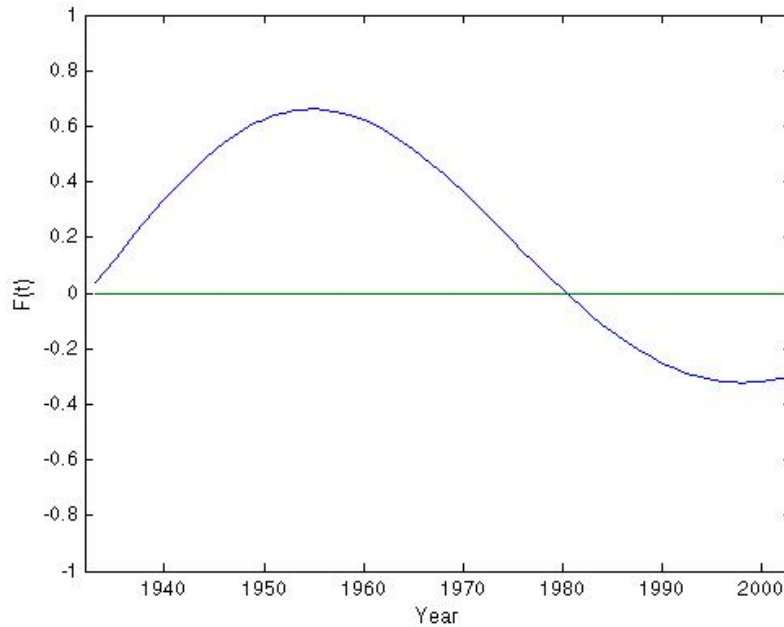
The Theory Revisited

These findings enable us to clarify equations (3) and (4). The completed differential equation can now be solved for $F(t)$, yielding $a \approx -.0168$, $b \approx .0363$, and $\lambda \approx 1.150$.

$$F(t) \approx e^{-.0168t} \sin(.0363t^{1.15}) \quad (5)$$

where t represents the number of years since 1932. Graphing $F(t)$ yields Figure 4.

FIGURE 4. The ideology function, 1932-2003.



The graph of Figure 4 corresponds with intuition. Liberal ideology steadily increases throughout the New Deal period, then increases at a slower rate as the changes become entrenched. $F(t)$ attains a relative maximum about halfway through the cycle – then, the second ideological government attempts to push it even higher, provoking a public backlash that begins to diminish $F(t)$. By the late 1970s, ideological stagnation has forced the dominant mode of governance into moderation, which in turn gives rise to a new cycle that continues the decline of $F(t)$ into negative territory. The downward trend is steepest during this cycle’s first ideological government, and continues until the late 1990s as the reforms are solidified, reaching a relative

minimum for $F(t)$. A second ideological government then seeks to resume the decline, upon which we arrive at the present.

Clearly Figure 4 is far from perfect. $F(t)$ did not monotonically decrease throughout the entire period 1960-1990, for example; the year 1964 surely saw a sizeable increase. Accounting for such discontinuities, however, would render this relation so specific as to eliminate its ability to encompass the overarching trends.

Also of note are the change in ideology $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$, and the rate of said change $\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2}$.

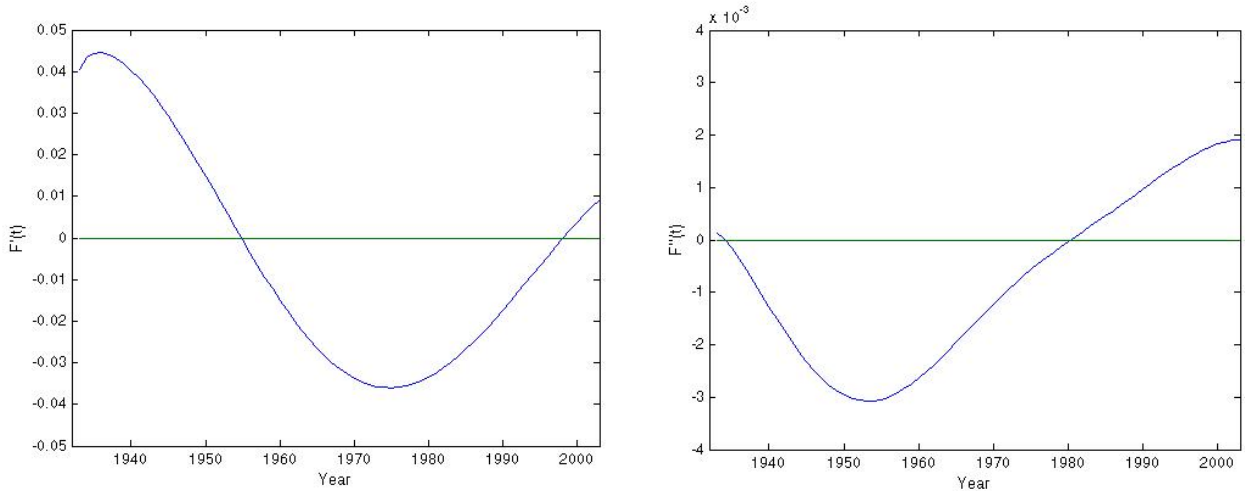
Differentiating equation (5) gives:

$$\frac{dF(t)}{dt} \approx e^{-.0168t} [.0417t^{.15} \cos(.0363t^{1.15}) - .0168 \sin(.0363t^{1.15})] \quad (6)$$

$$\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2} \approx t^{-.85} e^{-.0168t} [(.0063 - .0014t) \cos(.0363t^{1.15}) + (.0003t^{.85} - .0017t^{1.15}) \sin(.0363t^{1.15})] \quad (7)$$

These relations are expressed graphically in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5. The derivative and second derivative of the ideology function, 1932-2003.



No surprises here; the graph of the first derivative matches Figure 1 while the second derivative is akin to $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$, signifying the underlying systematic resistance to any ideological movement.

The results of Figures 1 through 5 are summarized below. The continuous functions $F(t)$, $\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2}$, and $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ have been transformed into discrete functions at $t = \{23,24,25,\dots,72\}$, or the relevant years 1955-2003.

TABLE 2. The ideology function and representative dependent variables.

Year	$F(t)$	$\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$	$\frac{d^2F(t)}{dt^2}$	Employees	Spending	Executive orders
1955	0.6609	-0.00552918	-0.0030416	1.085271318	14.14392	66
1956	0.65883	-0.00357782	-0.002994875	1.840490798	8.913043	44
1957	0.65376	-0.006543153	-0.002929756	3.614457831	8.982036	55
1958	0.64577	-0.009433495	-0.00284784	1.744186047	13.00366	50
1959	0.63492	-0.01223402	-0.002750874	1	16.36953	60
1960	0.62133	-0.014930567	-0.002640722	4.667609618	5.431755	42
1961	0.6051	-0.017509712	-0.002519315	3.108108108	9.114927	84
1962	0.58636	-0.019958833	-0.00238862	5.635648755	8.232446	89
1963	0.56523	-0.022266175	-0.002250588	4.218362283	7.04698	62
1964	0.54187	-0.024420913	-0.002107125	-8.333333333	9.926855	56
1965	0.51644	-0.026413197	-0.00196005	1.56062425	7.414449	74
1966	0.48911	-0.028234213	-0.001811062	5.437352246	11.06195	57
1967	0.46004	-0.029876215	-0.001661712	3.587443946	11.95219	65
1968	0.42942	-0.031332571	-0.001513379	2.705627706	13.45196	56
1969	0.39743	-0.032597788	-0.001367248	-1.159114858	9.598494	61
1970	0.36428	-0.033667535	-0.001224295	2.452025586	13.10819	72
1971	0.33016	-0.034538661	-0.001085285	0.416233091	14.87854	63
1972	0.29527	-0.035209203	-0.00095076	1.554404145	12.42291	55
1973	0.25981	-0.03567839	-0.00082105	2.142857143	10.03135	64
1974	0.22398	-0.035946632	-0.000696279	3.896103896	12.85613	69
1975	0.18799	-0.036015511	-0.000576378	3.461538462	23.63522	67
1976	0.15202	-0.035887757	-0.000461108	3.624535316	13.57836	56
1977	0.11628	-0.035567227	-0.00035008	2.331838565	10.44944	83
1978	0.08095	-0.035058863	-0.000242786	4.031551271	11.21058	78
1979	0.04622	-0.034368657	-0.000138627	-2.190395956	10.11709	77
1980	0.01227	-0.033503599	-0.0000369444	0	15.38462	73
1981	-0.0207	-0.032471628	-0.0000629421	-3.445305771	13.54932	76
1982	-0.0526	-0.031281572	0.000161705	-3.479036574	9.59929	63
1983	-0.0832	-0.029943081	0.000259974	0.924214418	7.844498	57
1984	-0.1125	-0.028466562	0.000358304	-0.366300366	5.203304	41
1985	-0.1401	-0.026863106	0.000457148	1.5625	10.64654	45
1986	-0.1662	-0.025144407	0.000556828	-3.34841629	5.612903	37
1987	-0.1904	-0.023322688	0.00065752	2.808988764	4.372109	43
1988	-0.2128	-0.021410612	0.000759228	2.367941712	7.190635	40

1989	-0.2332	-.019421205	0.000861781	-0.889679715	8.174727	36
1990	-0.2516	-.017367761	0.000964822	4.757630162	11.4364	43
1991	-0.2679	-.015263762	0.001067807	1.113967438	9.19503	46
1992	-0.2821	-.013122789	0.001170017	3.13559322	4.100741	40
1993	-0.2941	-0.01095843	0.001270558	-0.575184881	3.49519	63
1994	-0.304	-.008784199	0.001368391	-2.479338843	5.021726	54
1995	-0.3117	-.006613451	0.001462343	-2.203389831	5.53577	40
1996	-0.3172	-.004459296	0.001551137	-4.332755633	4.079202	49
1997	-0.3206	-.002334518	0.001633425	-1.721014493	3.328088	38
1998	-0.3219	-.000251504	0.001707818	0.921658986	4.226847	38
1999	-0.3212	0.00177784	0.001772919	-0.913242009	4.028866	35
2000	-0.3184	0.00374215	0.001827368	-2.580645161	5.62625	41
2001	-0.3137	0.005630673	0.00186987	1.419110691	5.370885	66
2002	-0.3072	0.007433328	0.001899236	2.332089552	5.357143	31
2003	-0.2989	0.009140763	0.001914419	-1.731996354	4.83069	41

The Theory Explained

Thus far we have examined the scope of ideological change and modeled its behavior. What, though, constitutes the explanation for this behavior? Kelley (1976, 558) cautions that “[t]here is, of course, much intermixture and overlapping between the two parties” involved in a rivalry, perhaps rendering any interpretation hopeless. Gerring (1998, 256-275) makes an attempt nonetheless, categorizing potential explanations into four competing groups: classical, which portrays politics as “a battle between the rabble-rousers and the better sort”; social-class, which posits a struggle between “business enterprise” and “agrarian principles”; ethnocultural, which contends that political factions form along the lines of ethnic or religious groups; and realignment, with which we are already familiar.

With the realignment interpretation discredited, and the three alternatives unsatisfactory due to their vagueness, we shall attempt a novel explanation. A distinction between two rival ideological interest groups that alternate in power will be taken as a given, whether those interests be liberal versus conservative (the case in question), corporate versus agrarian, public versus private, left-handed versus right-handed, or whatever the preference of the reader. As the mechanism for implementing each interest group’s ideological agenda, the government may be

viewed as supplying a greater quantity of goods associated with the group dominant at the moment. Since public demand for these goods changes less rapidly (individuals generally maintain their ideological preferences and generational change is a slow process, whereas a new government can be elected almost instantaneously), surpluses or shortages will often arise during which the system is in disequilibrium (Fisher 1999, 25-50), providing the necessary impetus for ideological change.

Supply

This abstraction may be quantified by regressing $F(t)$ on the three dependent variables of Table 2. The resulting equation will serve as a supply curve, in which the dependent variables represent the quantity of supply (in this case, the change in federal employees, change in spending, and number of executive orders together approximate the extent of governmental involvement in supplying goods related to a liberal ideology) and $F(t)$ the “price” of supplying those goods (in this case, a higher value of $F(t)$ represents a higher price, since increasing the scale of government cannot help but lead to less oversight and more waste per unit of taxes received). Since “quantity” is of course an arbitrary figure, there is little need to perform complex statistical analysis; a simple second-degree polynomial regression should suffice.

$$F(t) = \beta_1 + \beta_2 Q_s + \beta_3 Q_s^2 + \varepsilon \quad (8)$$

where quantity of supply Q_s constitutes an equal weighting of the three dependent variables, with the number of executive orders multiplied by one-tenth to maintain roughly equal magnitudes. 1975 is an outlier and therefore excluded. Resolving the coefficients, the final equation is then:

$$F(t) = -.6308 + .2574Q_s - .0128Q_s^2 + \varepsilon \quad (9)$$

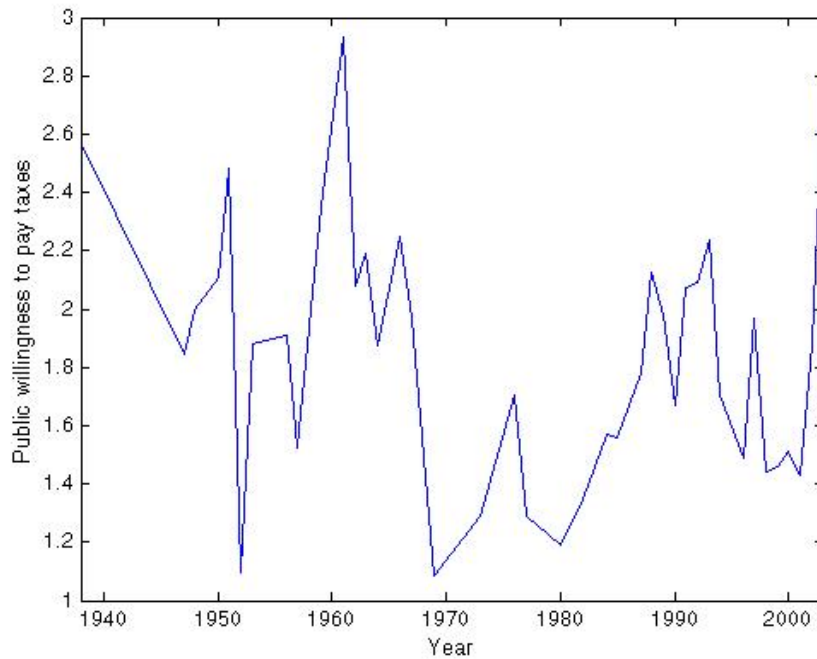
The curve naturally has a positive slope, for the supply of goods associated with high values of $F(t)$ is directly proportional to $F(t)$ itself. The regression's high error mainly derives from the clustering of data points into two distinct groups, one for each cycle. Ordinarily the clusters would be isolated into separate regressions, but in this case such a measure would inappropriately limit equation (9) to only one of the cycles and thus fail to explain the transition periods which concern us. Accordingly, the weaker yet more useful equation will be used.

Demand

Completing this microeconomic model will require a demand curve. The demand for the goods in question may be measured through public opinion, in particular public attitudes concerning the desired scope of government. This is a vague subject, and consequently lacks many detailed studies. Many surveys have indeed been conducted, however, on public opinion towards taxation. A greater public willingness to pay taxes would presumably translate into a greater desire for government services, and hence a greater quantity of demand for goods associated with high values of $F(t)$. As noted above, such attitudes are partially dependent on the "price" of supplying those goods – if taxes are squandered or otherwise allocated inefficiently, as is the case for larger governments, we would expect a lower quantity of demand (King and Stivers 1998, 16).

Figure 6 expresses the public willingness to pay taxes, as measured (Bowman 2004, 5-6) by the proportion of respondents who characterized their tax burden as "about right" divided by the proportion regarding it as "too high," multiplied by three to maintain a similar magnitude to Q_s . (Responses of "too low" are negligible.)

FIGURE 6. Public willingness to pay taxes.



Public willingness to pay taxes exhibits a marked decline throughout the second half of the liberal cycle, and then an uptick upon the start of the conservative cycle, in line with expectations deriving from the price $F(t)$. Some of this change is surely due to the straightforward reductions in taxes during the early 1980s – but since no such rise in demand is evident following the comparable 1963 tax cut, we may safely assume that much of the change derives from price fluctuations. In other words, a negative feedback cycle exists in which greater demand (willingness to pay taxes) leads to a greater supply (provision of government services), which increases the price (government profligacy lowering the effectiveness of tax revenues), thus serving to lower demand.

Quantifying this model necessitates the construction of a demand curve to accompany the supply curve of equation (9). The public willingness to pay taxes appears to be most strongly correlated with $\int F(t)$, or the cumulative effect of a particular cycle, due to ideological stagnation leading to a less efficient government and collective public fatigue. $\int F(t)$ is very

difficult to compute, but the same effect may be achieved by differentiating both sides of the relation; then, $F(t)$ is negatively correlated with the *change* in public willingness to pay taxes, henceforth regarded as the quantity of demand. A similar regression will be performed on this variable.

$$F(t) = \beta_1 + \beta_2 Q_d + \beta_3 Q_d^2 + \varepsilon \quad (10)$$

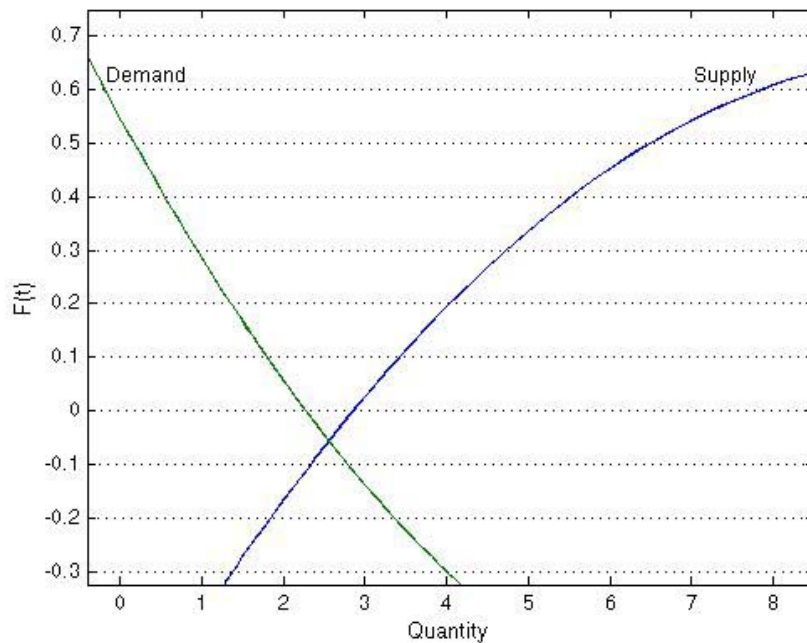
where Q_d represents the quantity of demand and $F(t)$ the price. 1949, 1952, and 1957 are outliers and therefore excluded. Resolving the coefficients gives the final equation:

$$F(t) = .5495 - .2792Q_d + .0167Q_d^2 + \varepsilon \quad (11)$$

Once more the regression proves weak due to the clustering of data points into two groups based upon each cycle, and once more little can be done while preserving the equation's usefulness. As expected, the slope is negative, so we now have a complete system (Figure 7).

$$-.6308 + .2574Q_s - .0128Q_s^2 \approx e^{-.0168t} \sin(.0363t^{1.15}) \approx .5495 - .2792Q_d + .0167Q_d^2 + \varepsilon \quad (12)$$

FIGURE 7. The ideological supply and demand curves.

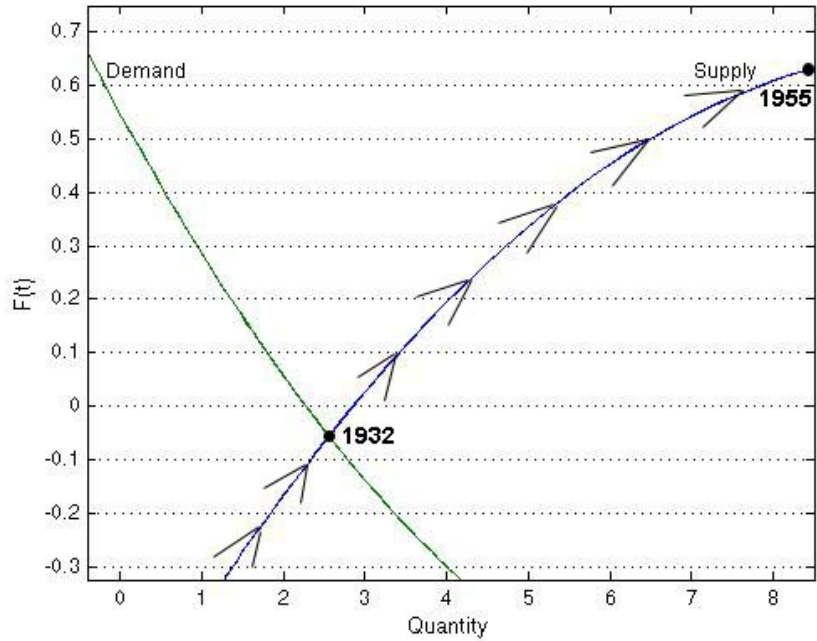


The intersection of the supply and demand curves should be located at $F(t) = 0$, signifying equilibrium; this discrepancy may be attributed to the error terms of equations (8) through (12).

Disequilibrium

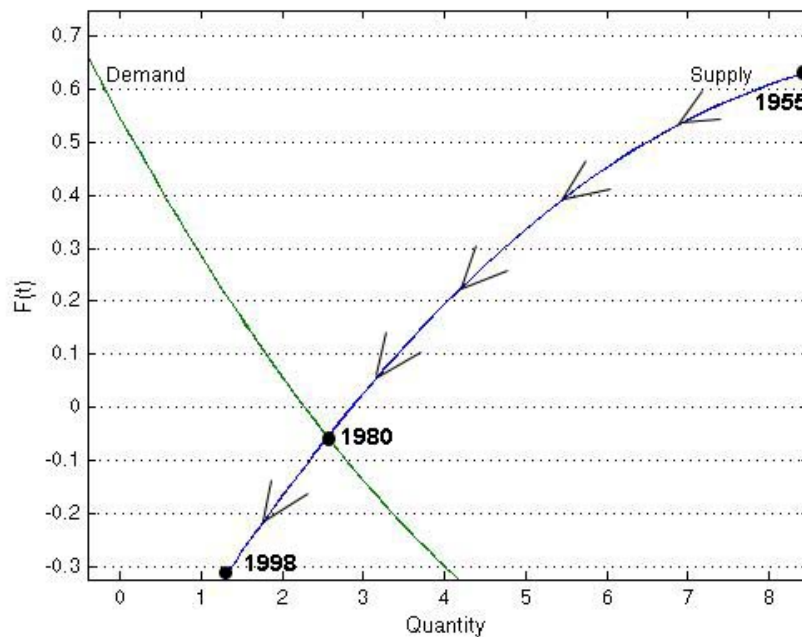
The validity of this system may be verified by examining the historical record. In 1932, $F(t) \approx 0$ so $Q_s \approx Q_d$, an apparent equilibrium – yet as we saw earlier, a rising tide of liberalism led $\frac{dF(t)}{dt} > 0$. This placed upward pressure on the price $F(t)$ (Table 2), also increasing Q_s and decreasing Q_d . Since markets clear on their supply curves, $Q_s - Q_d$ units of excess supply were created. By the late 1950s, $F(t) \approx 0.66$, $Q_s \approx 9$, and $Q_d \approx 0$, a surplus of about nine units (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8. The path of market clearance, 1932-1955.



Since quantity of supply exceeded quantity of demand, the price $F(t)$ fell. As mentioned earlier, much of the mechanism of this reversal stemmed from the backlash engendered by the second ideological government's misguided attempt to push $F(t)$ still higher. By 1980, $F(t) \approx 0$ so $Q_s \approx Q_d$, and equilibrium had seemingly been restored – yet the momentum of a negative $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ value continued to lower the price, leading to an “overshoot” and a shortfall of $Q_d - Q_s$ units. By the late 1990s, $F(t) \approx -0.32$, $Q_s \approx 1.28$, and $Q_d \approx 4.15$, reaching a shortfall of about three units (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. The path of market clearance, 1955-1998.

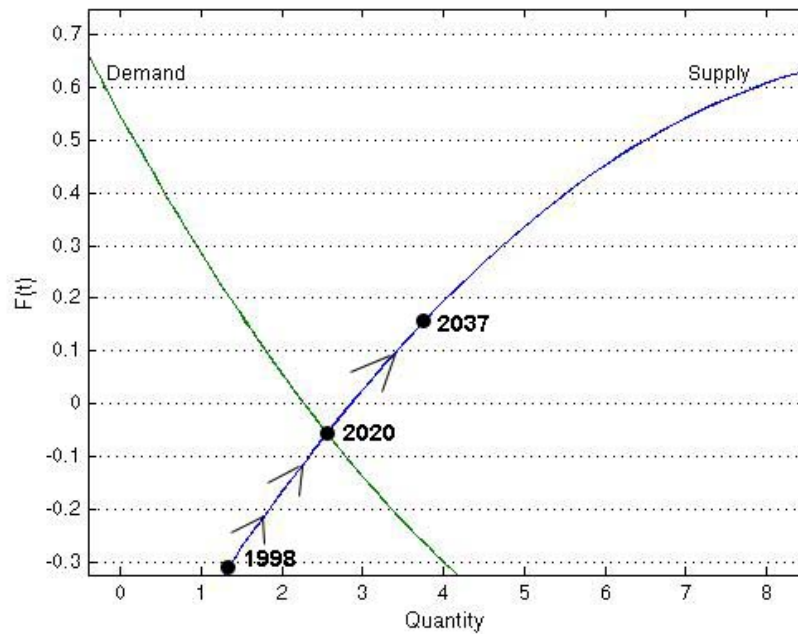


Projections

At this juncture, we have modeled ideological change from 1932 to the present and constructed an economic explanation. The obvious next step is to use these findings to make projections of future ideological change.

We may expect the shortfall of Figure 14 to be remedied through a rising price $F(t)$, confirmed by equation (5). That equation projects $F(t)$ returning to zero in 2020, when $Q_s \approx Q_d$ (Figure 10). The mechanisms for this shift – involving a rise in Q_s of about one unit and a fall in Q_d of about two units – deserve a detailed interpretation. We will pick up where we left off, at the second ideological government.

FIGURE 10. The projected path of market clearance, 1998-2037.



Second ideological government

This government provides much of the mechanism for the rise in $F(t)$. Its attempt to decrease $F(t)$ still further has largely failed and given rise to a backlash. The ensuing low

quantity of supply relative to demand cannot help but to drive up the price, or $F(t)$. Accordingly, while $F(t)$ is solidly in negative territory, $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ is positive and still growing (Table 2).

In practical terms, the next four years may represent the final era of unrestrained conservatism. Their considerable prosperity will translate into high administration popularity notwithstanding foreign policy concerns, as evidenced by the 2004 election results, and assisting its ideological goals of tax and entitlement reform to provide a domestic counterpoint for the foreign policy emphasis of the first term. However, these short-term gains will have come at the long-term cost of sowing the seeds for positive ideological change later on.

Second moderate opposition government

This change may appear to assume the form of the second moderate opposition government, narrowly elected in 2008.¹⁸ On second thought, perhaps not: strong conservative control of Congress and the judiciary will force this government to adopt more moderate policies than it had planned during its campaign. But first impressions were correct after all: as seen in Figure 10, this administration does preside over a marked rise in $F(t)$, despite its moderation and slowly waning popularity attendant to the economic slump of the 2010s. Through judicial

¹⁸ As many view politics through the lens of individuals, the personality most likely to assume such a role seems to be Hillary Clinton, wife of former President Bill Clinton and current senator from New York. Since her successful 2000 election Mrs. Clinton has taken care to align herself with selected moderate causes and organizations, particularly the New Democrat Network (Edsall 2002, 12). Her gender should not be a concern, probably serving to gain more female votes than lose male (and female) votes.

appointments and selective vetoes, if not initiatives, it also provides much of the mechanism for the positive ideological change.

Despite the government's general competency, a faltering economy will complicate its 2012 re-election bid. As with its counterpart during the liberal cycle, it may attempt to compensate by adopting highly stimulatory monetary and fiscal policies (Johnson 887-890), including tax cuts or rebates. It may also launch new diplomatic initiatives to compensate for domestic weaknesses through foreign policy success, perhaps reaching out to Europe or China to assume more of the burden in combating terrorism, as did its counterpart during the liberal cycle with the Cold War. The government will accordingly coast to re-election, but at the price of a rocky second term. Rising interest rates due to the pre-election stimulus will deal the economy a blow from which the government's popularity cannot recover.

Third ideological government

By 2016, then, the electorate will incline towards change. After the apparently rocky tenure of an opposition government, it returns to the known quantity of forthrightly ideological leadership. Yet lacking any clear ideas of how to remedy the national decline, this government will fare no better than its predecessor. The weak economy will continue, concomitantly weakening national influence over global events, and leading the administration to suffer through a series of foreign policy reversals.¹⁹ With $F(t)$ the one indicator that seems to be on the rise, the

¹⁹ China, in particular, will gain power relative to the U.S. throughout the 2010s, comprising the source of many of these setbacks. Its rapidly aging demographics during the 2020s due in part to a low mean fertility rate of 1.5 over the 1995-2010 period (Ogawa 1989, 27) would reverse this

government in its final years will panic and turn to moderation. Measures born of desperation rarely bear fruit, however, and the fate of its counterpart during the liberal cycle indicates that this government is no exception.

A new cycle

The shortfall of Figure 10 is therefore remedied by 2020. Projections beyond that year, however, are a delicate business – while the termination of the current cycle is evident, the nature of its successor is anything but. Perhaps the best place to begin is through a continuation of Figures 4 and 5.

FIGURE 11. The ideology function, 2004-2100.

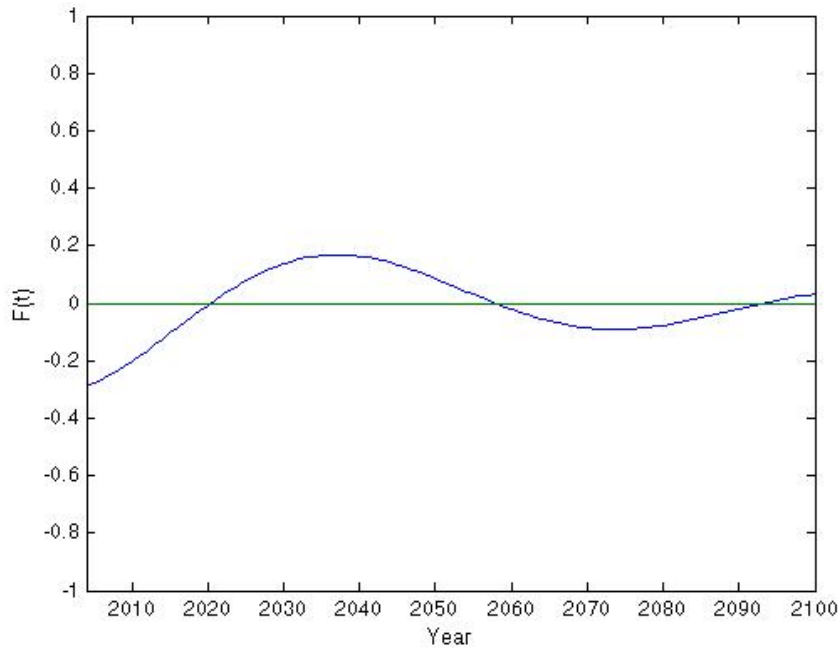
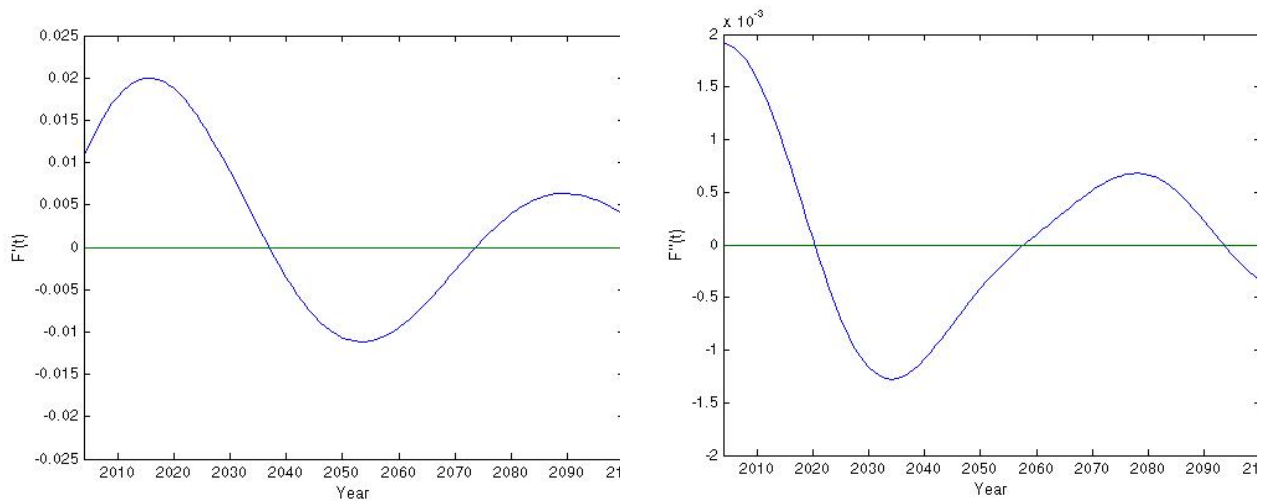


FIGURE 12. The derivative and second derivative of the ideology function, 2004-2100.

trend, consistent with a projected American revival during that time period as the result of a new ideological cycle.

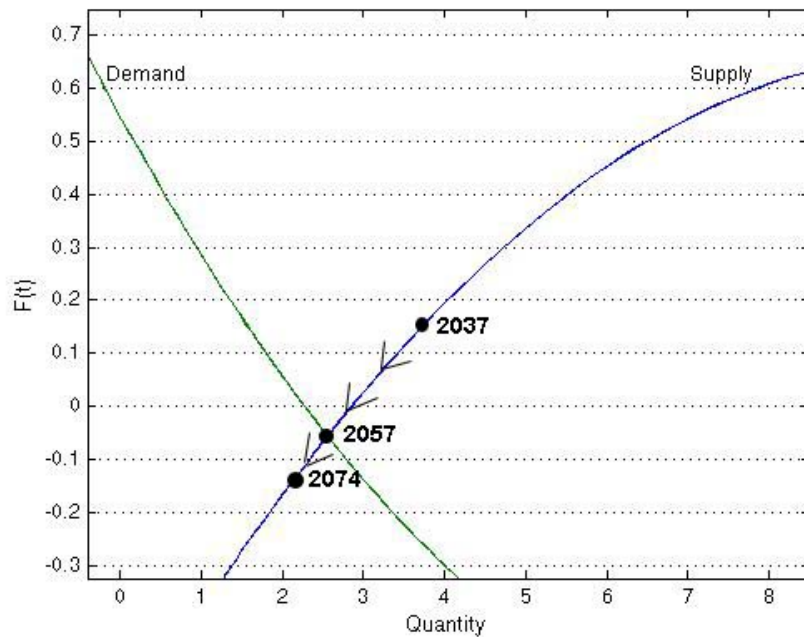


The increase in $F(t)$ over the interval 2005-2020 is expected and already explained.

Figures 11 and 12 also indicate a continuation of the increase until 2037, presumably the apex of the next ideological cycle. While the precise form of this cycle is unclear, the evidence accumulated thus far can establish its general contours.

An increase in $F(t)$ parallels the 1932 scenario of a generally liberal cycle, only with a lower magnitude. This stands to reason, for an aging population and the residual effects of the conservative cycle would severely constrain any attempt by a 2020s ideological government to increase spending. In order to maintain a rising ratio of Q_s relative to Q_d , then, the quantity of demand would have to fall significantly, due to the lower efficiency resulting from higher taxes to support a larger government. The late 2030s show projected values of $F(t) \approx 0.17$, $Q_s \approx 3.8$, and $Q_d \approx 1.5$, for a surplus of about two units (Figure 10). If past cases are any indication, after a moderate interlude a second ideological government will attempt to push $F(t)$ higher, creating a backlash that in fact contributes to a steady decline in $F(t)$. The 2050s would see ideological stagnation and moderate governance, such that by the end of that decade $F(t)$ will have fallen to zero and $Q_s \approx Q_d$ (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13. The projected path of market clearance, 2037-2074.

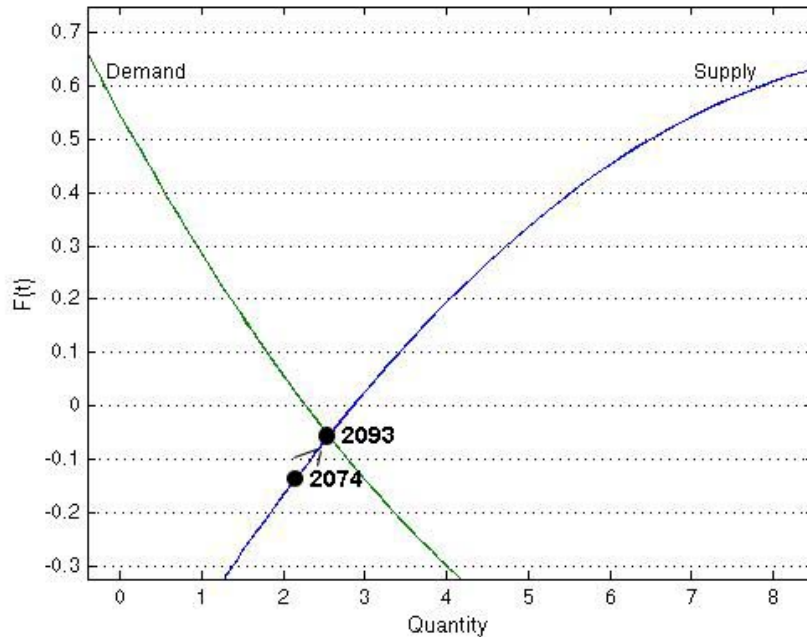


The last cycle

Out of momentum $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ is still negative (Figure 12), so $F(t)$ declines into negative territory and a new cycle begins. Much as the liberal cycle was characterized by spending increases, and the conservative cycle by tax cuts, so will this cycle be characterized by spending cuts. The ideological government that assumes power in the late 2060s would probably be generally libertarian in orientation, committed to mitigating the fiscal excesses of prior cycles while retaining a socially benign image. Q_s will accordingly fall, while Q_d rises somewhat to account for a greater public willingness to pay taxes in the face of streamlined governance. By the mid 2070s $F(t) \approx -0.09$, $Q_s \approx 2.4$, and $Q_d \approx 2.7$: while the shortfall is at its greatest – about a third of a unit – it is small indeed when compared to that of previous cycles (Figure 13). The ensuing backlash will be minor, for the system is nearly at equilibrium already.

Nevertheless, the shortfall cannot help but place upward pressure on $F(t)$, confirmed by Figure 11 and illustrated in Figure 14.

FIGURE 14. The projected path of market clearance, 2074-2093.



Stability?

By the 2090s $F(t)$ will have risen once more to equilibrium level. Ordinarily one would now predict the commencement of another cycle, for $\frac{dF(t)}{dt}$ remains positive (Figure 12).

However, the ideology function's magnitude is so slight as to suggest the absence of any additional cycles, and hence of any further significant ideological change. While in theory oscillations linger forever, in practice they eventually come to an end, and the 2090s seem a natural stopping point.

Such ideological stability is not inconsistent with the maintenance of a democratic system of governance. While social science would presumably have advanced to the point that an optimal set of public policies is generally known, the two parties could still stake opposing

claims as to the optimal means of implementation. Despite “the great age and durability of the party system and the ideologies to which it gives expression” (Kelley 1976, 558), only the former may remain, and even then within the context of “an increasingly postparty era in which, while the parties continue to perform certain functions in the political world, their reach, importance, and acceptance have sunk to levels unknown for almost two centuries” (Silbey 2002, 2). While perhaps detrimental to the party system, and certainly so for the employment prospects of future observers of politics, this stability would constitute a positive development insofar as it avoids the disruptions inherent in ideological change. Similar stability within the economic and international systems would signal a true end to history.

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