

# Why are some of us red and others blue?

Lane Kenworthy

Fall 2011

# *Outline*

---

Puzzle #1: poor red states and rich blue states

Puzzle #2: working-class whites' defection from the Democrats

**Puzzle #1:  
poor red states and  
rich blue states**

## *Red states and blue states*

---

Red = Republican

Blue = Democratic

## *Red states and blue states*

---

Since the mid-1990s, a large number of states have been reliably red or blue in presidential elections

Red: south, Indiana, plains and mountain states, Alaska

Blue: northeast, Illinois-Michigan-Wisconsin-Minnesota,  
west coast, Hawaii

## *Red states and blue states*

---

The map on the following slide shows results of the 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections

Dark blue: Democratic all 4

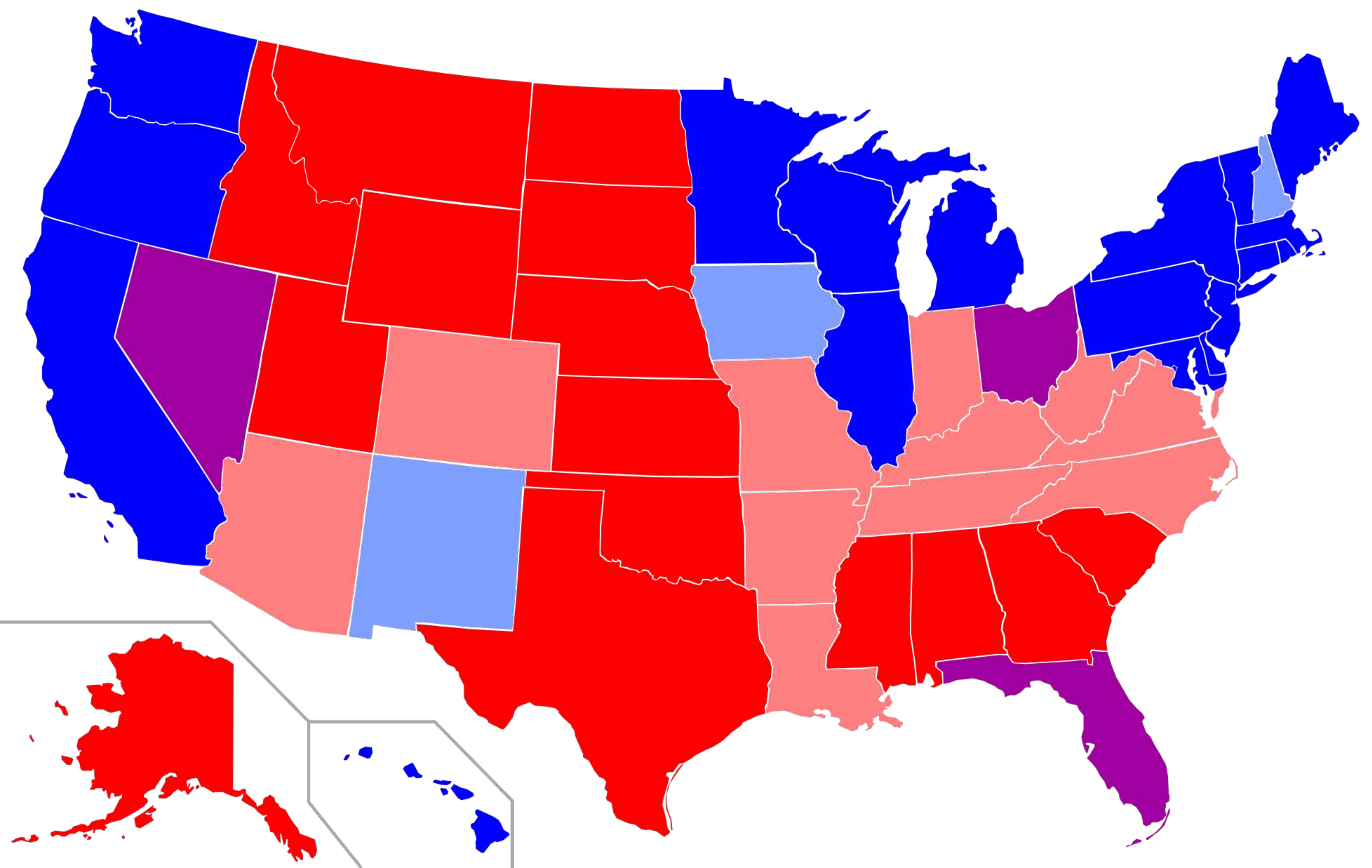
Light blue: Democratic 3 of 4

Purple: 2 and 2

Light red: Republican 3 of 4

Dark red: Republican all 4

Data source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Red\\_state,\\_blue\\_state.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Red_state,_blue_state.svg)



## *The puzzle*

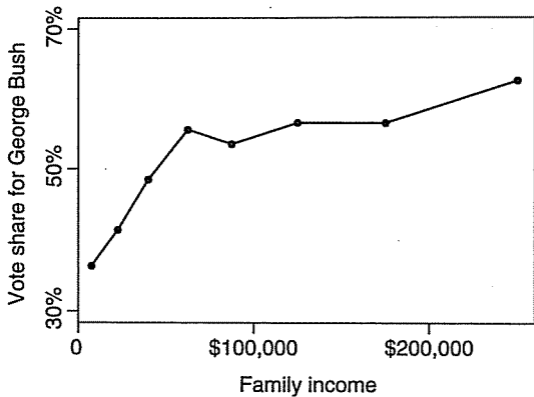
---

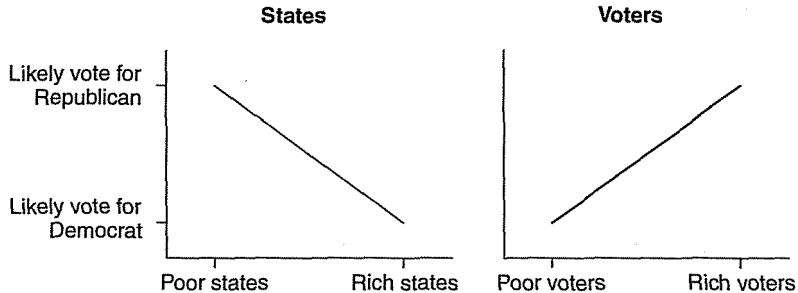
Blue states are, on average, much richer (GSP per capita) than red states

How can that be, given that richer people tend to vote red (Republican) while poorer people tend to vote blue (Democratic)?



Bush vote in 2004 by income





**Figure 1.1:** The red–blue paradox: Rich *states* vote for the Democrats, but rich *people* vote Republican.

## *The end of class voting?*

---

One frequently-suggested possibility

Poor voters in red states now vote based on their views on social and cultural issues ("God, guns, and gays") rather than on their economic interests

Their views on these issues tend to be traditional, so they vote Republican

RONALD INGLEHART

**MODERNIZATION and  
POSTMODERNIZATION**

CULTURAL, ECONOMIC,  
AND POLITICAL CHANGE  
IN 43 SOCIETIES

---

BEN J. WATTENBERG

---

VALUES  
MATTER  
MOST

---

*How Republicans or Democrats or  
a Third Party Can Win and Renew  
the American Way of Life*

---



THE FREE PRESS

New York London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS?

"The year's most prescient political book."

—Frank Rich, *The New York Times*



**HOW CONSERVATIVES WON  
THE HEART OF AMERICA**

**THOMAS FRANK**

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

"This book is a must-read for Democrats who want to win." —James Carville

THE  
NEGLECTED  
VOTER



---

---

WHITE MEN  
AND THE  
DEMOCRATIC  
DILEMMA

---

---

DAVID PAUL KUHN

## *The end of class voting?*

---

It turns out that the influence of income on voting has indeed weakened

But it's mainly higher-income voters who now betray their (presumed) economic interests

Many upper-income voters — especially professionals — now vote based on their views on social-cultural issues

In blue states their views on these issues tend to be progressive, so they vote Democratic

In red states their views tend to be traditional, perhaps because they're more likely to be religious



**red state**

**blue state**



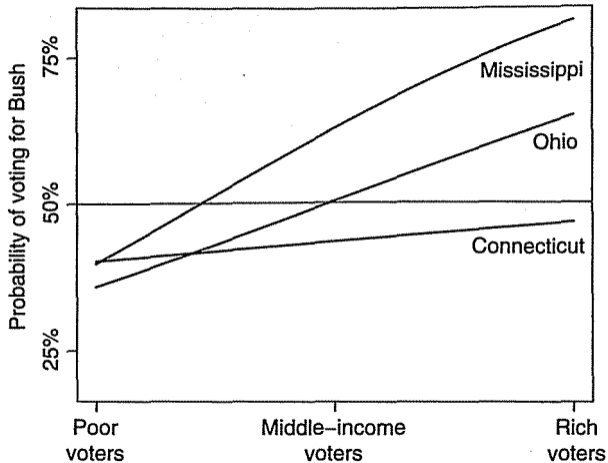
**rich state**

**poor state**



**Why Americans Vote the Way They Do**

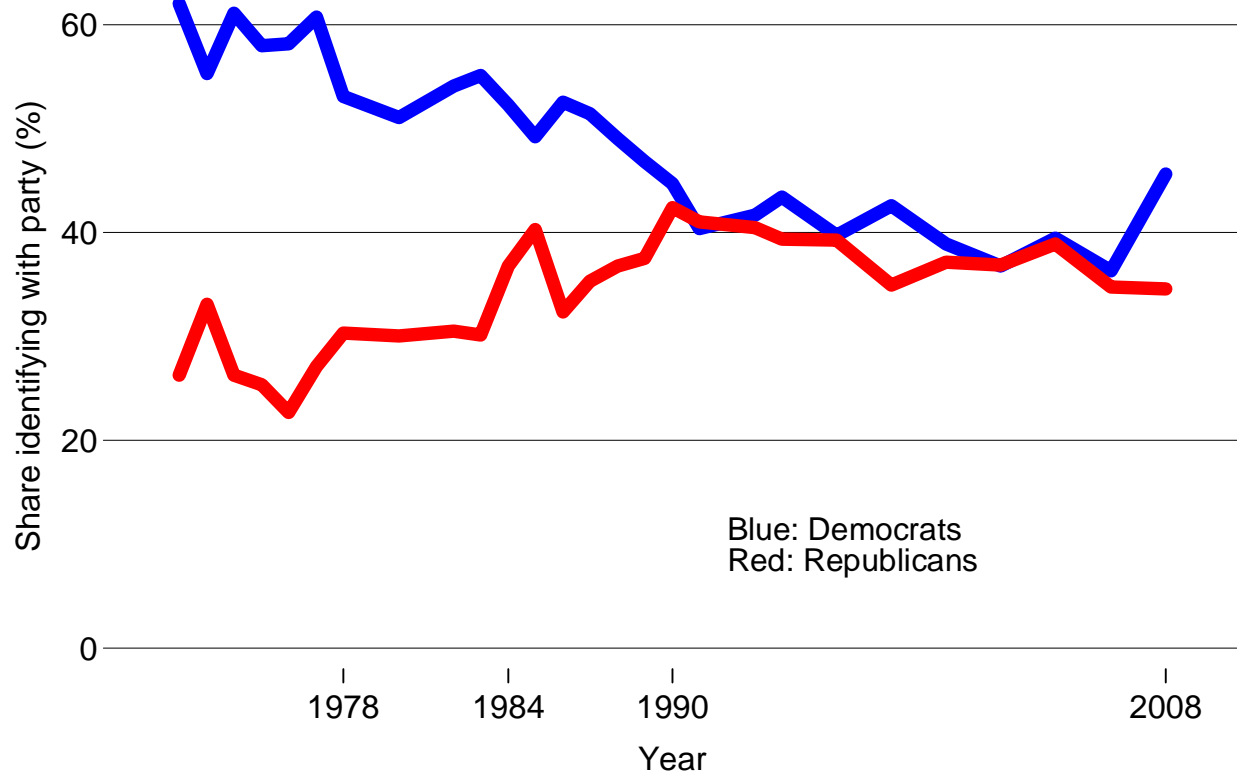
**Andrew Gelman**



**Puzzle #2:  
working-class whites'  
defection**

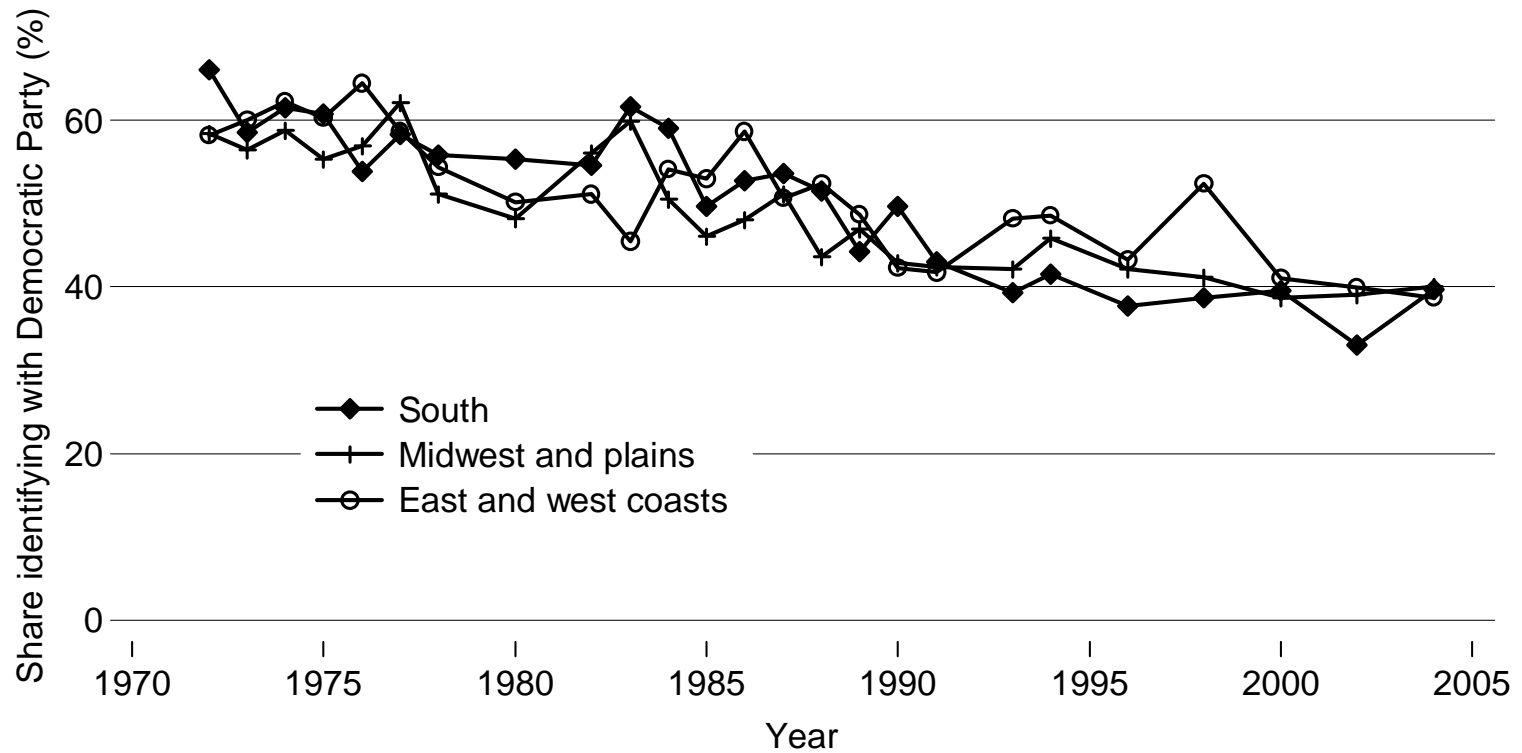
# *Working-class whites' defection*

---



Whites who self-identify as working class or lower class. Source: Lane Kenworthy, Sondra Barringer, Daniel Duerr, and Garrett Schneider, "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," using GSS data.

# *Working-class whites: not only in the south*



Whites who self-identify as working class or lower class. Source: Lane Kenworthy, Sondra Barringer, Daniel Duerr, and Garrett Schneider, "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," using GSS data.

## *Conventional hypotheses*

---

1. Working-class whites veered right
2. The Democratic party lurched left
3. Social and cultural issues came to the fore



# NIXONLAND

THE RISE OF A PRESIDENT  
AND THE FRACTURING OF AMERICA

**RICK PERLSTEIN**

NATIONAL BESTSELLER

"Easily the best book on the politics of race in recent years."  
—Andrew Hacker, author of the bestselling *Two Nations*

The Impact  
of Race,  
Rights, and  
Taxes on  
American  
Politics

---

# Chain Reaction

---

THOMAS BYRNE EDSALL  
with MARY D. EDSALL  
With a New Afterword

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

# WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH KANSAS?

"The year's most prescient political book."

—Frank Rich, *The New York Times*



**HOW CONSERVATIVES WON  
THE HEART OF AMERICA**

**THOMAS FRANK**

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD

## *A better explanation*

---

The 1973-1983 economic crisis

## *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---

It was the 1930s revisited, with the parties reversed

The Democrats were in charge during an economic meltdown

Beginning around 1978, Ronald Reagan and other Republicans offered a simple and seemingly plausible story that blamed Democratic policies and suggested a clear alternative: smaller government

The Republicans won the presidency and the Senate in 1980, and within three years the crisis had ended

## *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---

As a result, some working-class whites no longer believed the Democrats best serve their economic interests

# *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---

## Elements of the crisis

1973-75 recession

Sharp slowdown in growth of earnings and household incomes

High unemployment

High inflation (epitomized by rising gas prices)

High interest rates

1981-83 recession

Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers

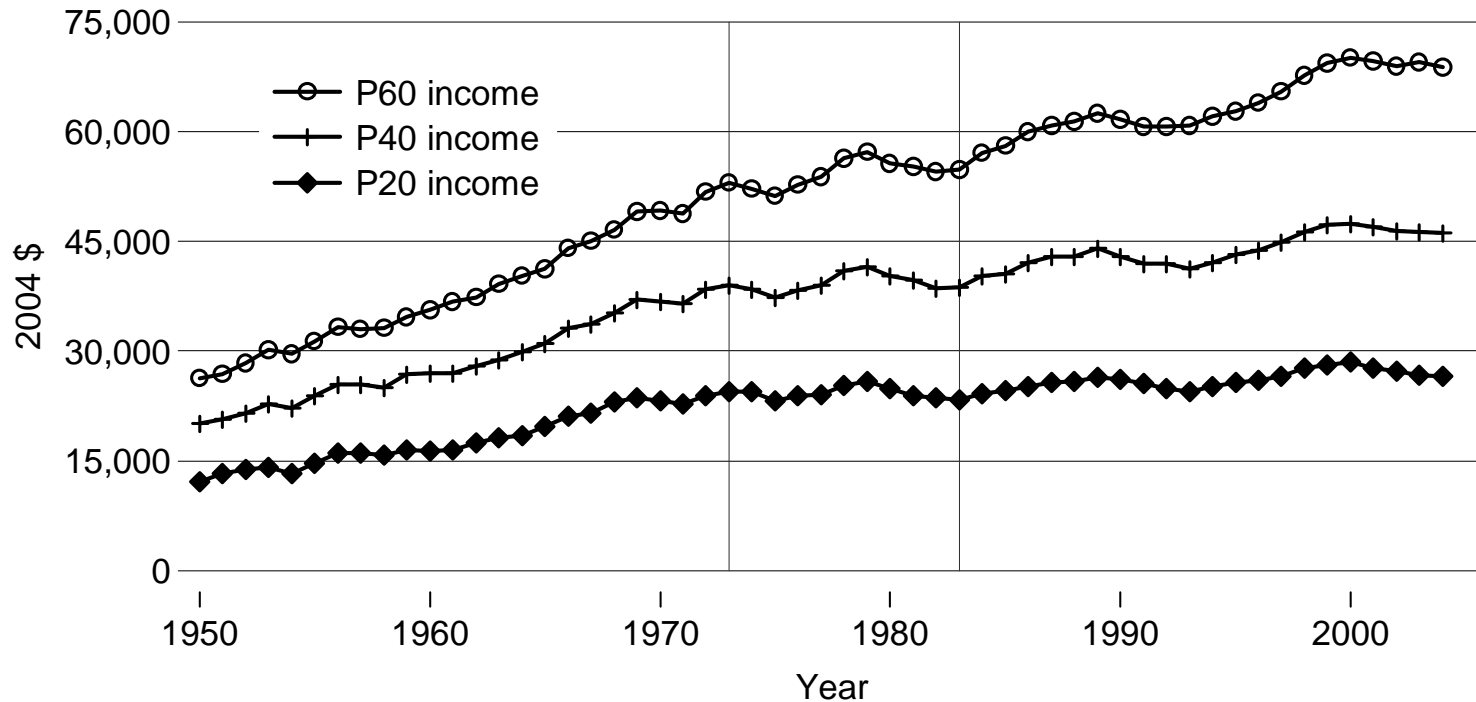
# Why the White Working Class Still Matters

---



AMERICA'S  
FORGOTTEN  
MAJORITY

# The 1973-83 economic crisis



Inflation-adjusted family income at the 20th, 40th, and 60th percentile of the income distribution. Posttransfer-pretax income.  
Source: Lane Kenworthy, Sondra Barringer, Daniel Duerr, and Garrett Schneider, "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," using Census Bureau data.

# The 1973-83 economic crisis

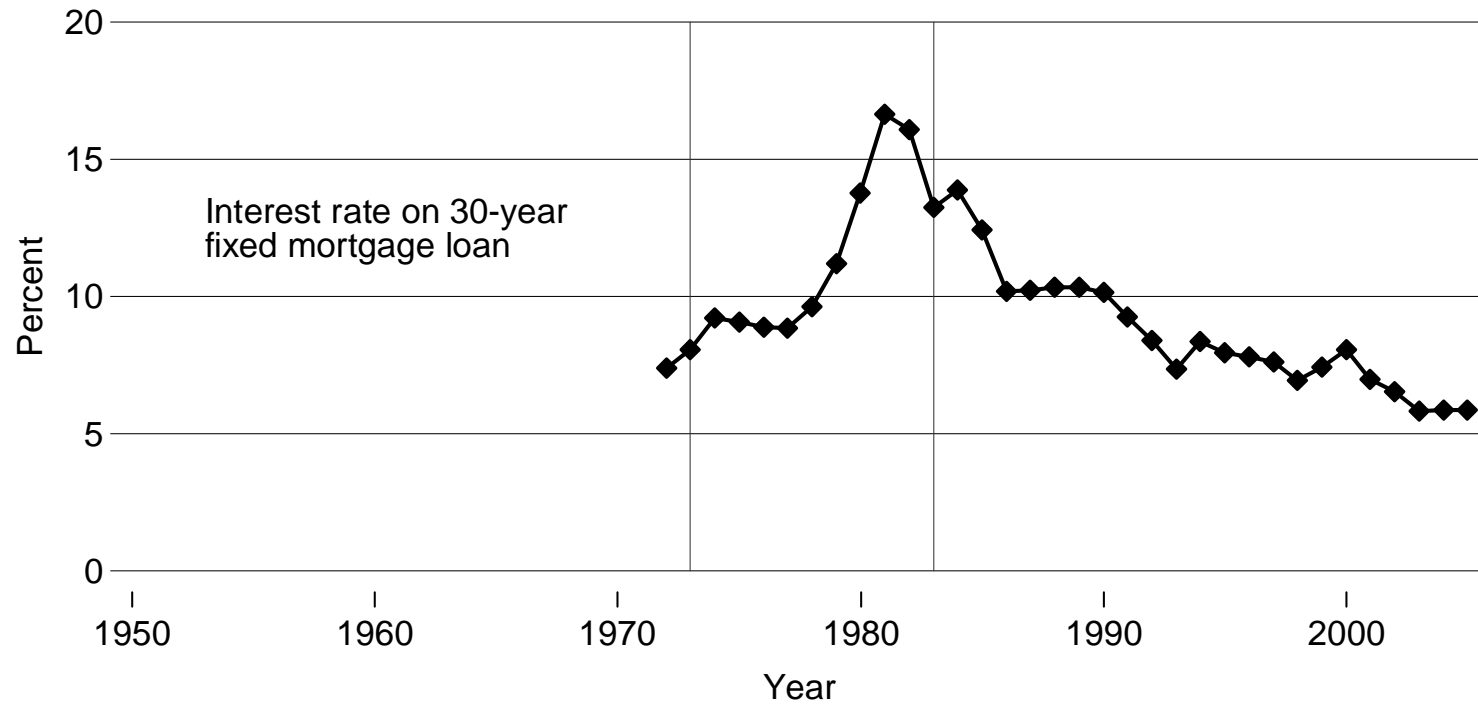
---



Source: Lane Kenworthy, Sondra Barringer, Daniel Duerr, and Garrett Schneider, "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," using Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

## *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---



Source: Lane Kenworthy, Sondra Barringer, Daniel Duerr, and Garrett Schneider, "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," using Federal Reserve data.

## *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---

It wasn't just the economy; there was a broader context of dissatisfaction

Rising crime

Growing disorder and decay in public spaces (parks, schools, city streets)

Concern about national security (Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iran)

Opposition to busing and affirmative action

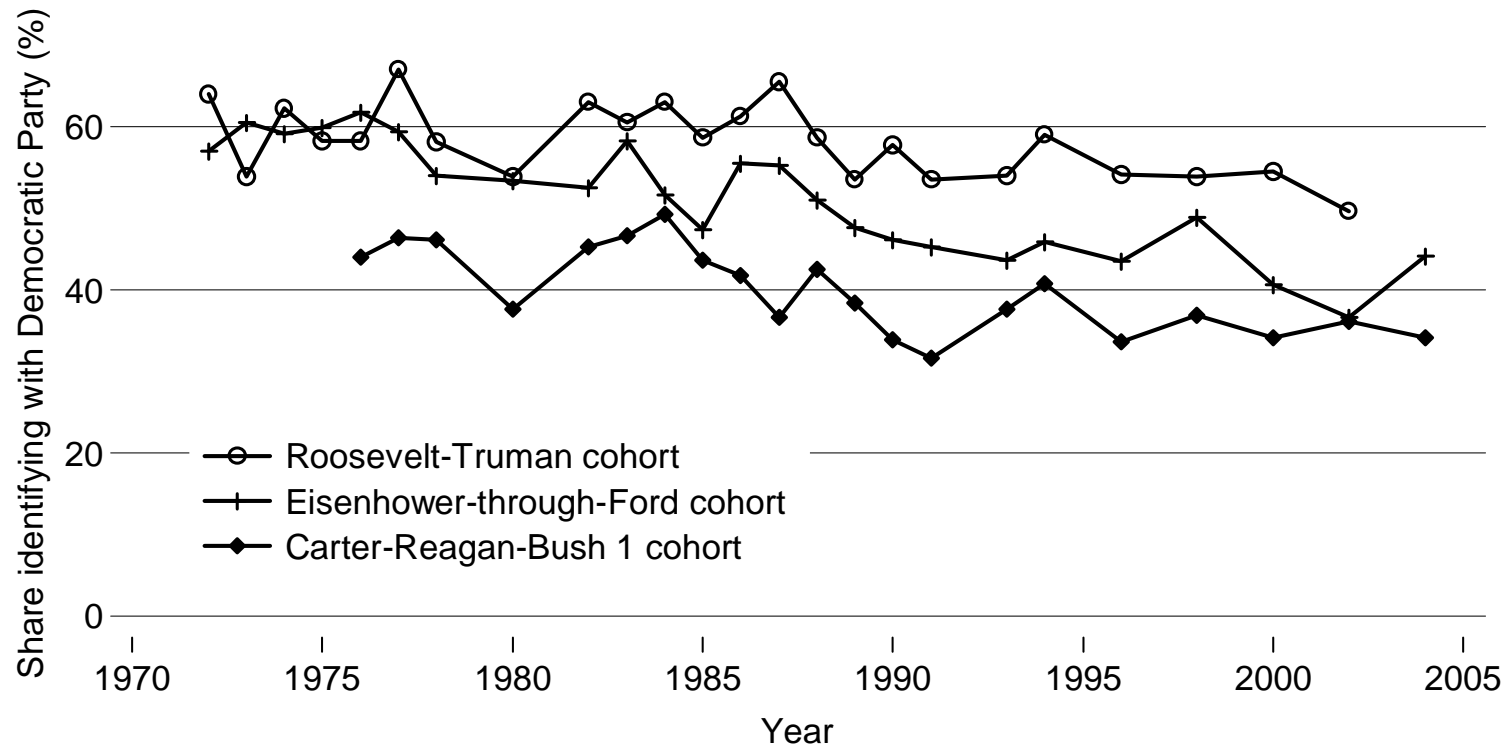
## *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---

But the party identification data suggest that the late 1970s was when working-class whites began to defect, and the economic crisis was the defining feature of this period

The *cohort* trend in party identification is revealing

## The 1973-83 economic crisis



Whites who self-identify as working class or lower class. Cohort membership is defined by the year in which a person turned 20 years old. Source: Lane Kenworthy, Sondra Barringer, Daniel Duerr, and Garrett Schneider, "The Democrats and Working-Class Whites," using GSS data.

## *The 1973-83 economic crisis*

---

Why didn't working-class whites go back to the Democrats when the economy was sour under Bush I, strong under Clinton, and sour under Bush II?

Crises have a different impact than normal business-cycle swings

The cohort shift

Growing importance of social and cultural issues beginning in the 1990s

# Summary

# *Summary*

---

## Puzzle #1

In the past four presidential elections, Republican presidential candidates have consistently won one group of states while Democratic candidates have won another group

The conventional view is that this is because low-income Americans in blue states continue to vote their economic interests (Democratic) while low-income Americans in red states now vote their social-cultural preferences (Republican)

In fact, it's mainly because high-income professionals now vote based on social-cultural preferences

## *Summary*

---

### Puzzle #2

In the late 1970s, working-class whites began to defect from the party that's (seemingly) more closely aligned with their economic interest: the Democrats

The chief cause of that defection appears to have been the 1973-1983 economic crisis