

Generational Change in Affective Polarization and Partisanship  
An Age-Period-Cohort Accounting

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## Introduction

The partisan characteristics of the American electorate have been changing in recent decades. During the mid-1960s, Democratic identifiers firmly outnumbered Republican identifiers, but that edge had largely disappeared by the end of the Reagan years, ushering in a period of partisan balance and volatility in the party holding the presidency and majorities in Congress (Abramowitz 2013, Carmines and Stimson 1989, Osborne, Sears, and Valentino 2011). Over the past thirty years, Americans have become increasingly likely to hold a party identification that is in alignment with their issue positions, social identities, and ideological affiliation (Fiorina 2017, Levendusky 2009, Mason 2015, 2016), and to cast votes in accordance with their party identification (Abramowitz and Webster 2018, Bafumi and Shapiro 2009, Bartels 2000, Hetherington 2001). Since the mid-1970s, Democrats and Republicans have been expressing increasing levels of hostility toward the other party and its members (Abramowitz and Webster 2016, Iyengar and Westwood 2015, Iyengar et al. 2019). Even so, recent decades have brought steady growth in the percentage of the electorate eschewing a partisan identity until pressed, claiming the identity of Independent instead (Jones 2019, Klar and Krupnikov 2016, Pew Research Center 2019).

Despite the great deal of research on these developments, surprisingly little attention has been given to whether they have been fueled by generational replacement. Exceptions include research on the Southern realignment (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989, Osborne, Sears, and Valentino 2011), Stoker and Jennings (2008) on partisan sorting, Ghitza and Gelman (2014) on presidential voting, and Twenge et al. (2016) on trends in party identification and ideology. I have found no research using a generational lens to study how Democrats and Republicans feel about their own or the other party.<sup>1</sup>

If generational replacement is changing the U.S. partisan landscape, young people entering the electorate have partisan characteristics that differ substantially from those who are exiting via mortality. Perhaps the newcomers are more Republican or Independent than those they are replacing, more sorted in terms of their partisan and issue attitudes, more partisan in their voting behavior, and more hostile to those from the other party. A second possibility is that socio-political forces are prompting Americans of all stripes to shift their behavior—to switch parties or eschew the parties (at least publically) by claiming an Independent affiliation, to bring their partisan and issue attitudes into alignment, to cast a straight-ticket instead of a split-ticket vote, and to increasingly dislike the other party and its members. A third possibility draws attention to the shifting sociodemographic composition of the electorate. Over the past half-century America has gotten older, less white, more populated by immigrants, more educated, less likely to be unionized, and more. If these or other sociodemographic characteristics influence partisan attitudes and behavior, then the trends we have been witnessing could be driven by how America's sociodemographic composition has been changing.

My objective in this paper is to sort through these various explanations for macro-political change on just three of the dimensions described above: (1) *affective polarization*: “the tendency of people identifying as Republicans or Democrats to view opposing partisans negatively and copartisans positively” (Iyengar and Westwood 2014, 691); (2) *party balance*: the erosion of Democratic dominance in the distribution of party identifiers, both inside and outside of the South; and (3) *Independent identification*: the growing percentage of Americans who claim an Independent identification (even if most of those admit to leaning toward one party or the other).

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<sup>1</sup> The question of generational replacement was central to work carried out decades ago on the erosion of party loyalties during the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Abramson 1975, Knoke and Hout 1976, Wattenberg 1981).

The approach I use is an Age-Period-Cohort (APC) model applied to data from the face-to-face component of the American National Election Studies (ANES) from 1964-2016.<sup>2</sup> APC models are designed to work with repeated cross-sectional data and to identify age, period, and cohort effects, i.e. influences tied to aging processes, macro-level causes (political, technological, cultural) varying over time, and membership in a group defined by year(s) of birth—i.e., a cohort or generation.<sup>3</sup> APC models easily accommodate the analysis of additional sociodemographic influences beyond age.

APC models have their adherents, but have also been met with skepticism and even derision (e.g., Glenn 1976, Markus 1985) and can become statistically very complex (e.g., Fosse and Winship 2019). The skepticism arises because APC models try to disentangle causes that are thoroughly entangled, and are only able to do so only by making statistical assumptions that may not be warranted. The entanglement comes from the fact that age is indexed by years since birth, period is indexed by year, and cohort is indexed by year of birth, such that  $\text{Period} - \text{Cohort} = \text{Age}$ . At any given point in time, age and cohort are indistinguishable; differences in age correspond exactly to differences in birth cohort. For any given cohort, period and age are indistinguishable; as time passes, the cohort is aging. And if you try to follow a given age group across time, for example, by looking at 18 year olds in each successive ANES survey, cohort and period are indistinguishable; the cohort of the 18<sup>th</sup> year olds is changing along with time.

The derision comes from the fact that even if the APC model yields believable results about how outcomes vary with age, period, and cohort, that may not be much of an accomplishment. As Markus (1985, 720) put it, “the APC model is primarily an accounting equation rather than an explanatory one.” The point is well-taken. As discussed further below, the APC modeling I undertake in this paper is a thoroughly inductive and descriptive enterprise, not a theory-driven or hypothesis-testing one. Its objective is to show whether and how outcomes vary with age, whether groups defined by when they were born are politically distinctive, and the extent to which outcomes are changing over time in ways that cannot be explained by over-time shifts in the composition of the population—taking all of these under consideration simultaneously. Of course, theory can provide expectations about why aging might matter, why generational distinctiveness might arise, or what might be driving individuals throughout the population to change their behavior over time, yielding period effects. But an APC analysis will not provide evidence as to the mechanisms.

Still, even inductive, descriptive APC modeling does serve explanatory goals. One reason is that the aging effects and generational differences it uncovers should set the agenda for new research hoping to explain them. For example, my analysis will show a clear association between age and the likelihood of identifying as Republican. What about aging is producing this association (or, indeed, is it really about aging at all)? It will also show that younger cohorts (Millennials and Gen-Xers) are less likely to claim an Independent identification (and more likely to claim a partisan identification) than would be expected on the basis of their age and sociodemographics. Is this because young people today find one or the other of the parties to be a better ideological or social fit than did young people from earlier generations?

Related, only by attempting to disentangle age and generation can we even find the patterns that we next need to try to explain. In two of the cases I consider here, age and generation appear to operate at cross-purposes. With age comes a greater likelihood of affiliating with the Republican party, but without an APC analysis this would be masked in the South by the fact that older generations were less likely to abandon the Democrats than were the younger ones. The likelihood of claiming a party identification

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<sup>2</sup> I start in 1964 because the feeling thermometer measures used in the affective polarization analyses are only available in 1964 and afterward, and I wanted to keep the time frame across the three sets of outcomes constant.

<sup>3</sup> See Stoker (2014) on why some distinguish “cohort” from “generation” and on different meanings of “generation”.

grows robustly with age, but the most recent entrants into the electorate are distinctive in their higher rates of party affiliation. Each of these findings would be missed if not accounting for the other.

Finally, an APC analysis is designed to identify how age and generation are influencing individuals in order to improve our understanding and future expectations regarding macro-political change. It turns out, for example, that there are almost no generational differences in affective polarization (or none of great consequence). Compare that reality to a hypothetical alternative, where each succeeding cohort is entering the electorate with greater affinity to their own party and greater hostility toward the other. Attributes of the society and polity are driving the trends we see in affective polarization without especially influencing the young and without being fueled by their growing presence as population replacement marches on. The trend is not doomed to get worse by the loss of kinder and gentler members of the older generations.

In what follows I begin by elaborating on the concept of a political generation, why we expect distinct generations to arise, and how the APC approach I use differs from hypothesis-driven research on generational differences. I follow with a brief discussion of aging and why we might expect it to have consequences for affective polarization and partisanship. I then elaborate on the APC framework and the approach I take to disentangle age, period, and cohort effects. In the results section that follows, I consider affective polarization, party balance, and Independent identification in turn. For each, I first show data on the trends from 1964-2016 before presenting results on aging, generation, and period effects. The last section highlights key findings, implications, and limitations.

## **Political Generations**

A generation is a group defined by the intersection of age and history, with its members defined as having been of a certain age (or within a certain age range) during a specified year or range of years. The concept was famously elaborated by Karl Mannheim in a 1926 essay (1952 [1926]), which inspired volumes of interest by social scientists and emerged as key to theory and empirical work in the field of political socialization (see Stoker 2014 and references therein for an overview).

The political socialization perspective holds that political orientations are most likely to form in late adolescence and early adulthood, the most “impressionable years” (IYs) of the life cycle. This is when people are first motivated to define themselves politically and when they are most vulnerable to influence from what is going on in their lives and in the polity (see Stoker and Bass 2011 for a review). Because of this, the political views of a given generation will bear an historical imprint, which will continue to distinguish them from other generations as they age. Those, for example, who are going through their IYs during the Trump presidency would be expected to hold Trump-related political views now and in the future that are different from the views of those who went through their IYs earlier or later. That is not to say that orientations formed during the IYs are unchangeable. Indeed, initial tendencies are expected to strengthen with age due to motivated reasoning and behavioral reinforcement, while events and experiences taking place later in life always have the potential to induce change. Nevertheless, the generation’s distinctiveness from others is expected to persist.

Some research on political generations is hypothesis driven, based on explicit ideas about when and why distinct generations form. Gibson and Caldeira (1992), for example, argue that African Americans who were going through their IYs when Earl Warren presided over the U.S. Supreme Court developed more favorable attitudes toward the Court than those who were younger or older during that time. Another example comes from Firestone and Chen (1995), who argue that women who came of age before passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment were throughout their lives less likely to vote than were those who came of age later. A third example comes from my collaboration with M. Kent Jennings (Stoker and Jennings 2008), which compares voters who entered the electorate before vs. after the parties staked out different positions

on social issues. Voters entering afterwards are much more likely to express a party identification that aligns with their views on social issues.

As with these examples, hypothesis-driven research on political generations begins by identifying historical periods that differ in features thought to shape the political orientations of young, impressionable citizens (in the examples, respectively: during vs. before or after the Warren Court, before vs. after passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, and before vs. after the parties divided on social issues). This then guides the demarcation of generations (those going through their IYs during vs. before or after the Warren Court era, before vs. after the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, and before vs. after the opening of a party divide on social issues). The first two examples also focus their generational arguments on specific subgroups—African Americans and women, respectively. This recognizes that young people may differ in the extent to which they are shaped by the historical moment or react to that moment in divergent ways.<sup>4</sup>

Other work on political generations proceeds inductively, without identifying a specific shift in the society or polity that might be prompting the formation of a new political generation, but still recognizing that sociopolitical changes may be leading the younger cohorts of today to be politically quite different from those of the past. The APC approach I take in this paper falls into this category. This kind of work often divides American history loosely into different eras, identifying as generation members those who came into adulthood during those eras. Thus, for example, the extensive work on generational differences carried out by the Pew Research Organization distinguishes six generations: *Greatest*—born before 1928 and coming into adulthood in the interwar period or during WWII; *Silent*—born between 1928 and 1945 and experiencing their IYs in the quiet period before the storm of the 1960s; *Baby Boomers*—born between 1946 and 1964 and coming into adulthood during or soon after the turmoil over civil rights and Vietnam; *Gen X*—born between 1965 and 1980, experiencing the Reagan and Clinton presidencies as young adults; *Millennials*—born between 1981 and 1996 and entering adulthood at the turn of the century, and *Generation Z*—born in 1997 or later and coming of age during Obama’s second term or Trump’s reign (Dimock 2019, Pew Research Center 2015). Typically, this work seeks to compare the generations across a broad array of attitudinal and behavioral measures, though not necessarily with an APC model (e.g., Levine 2007, Putnam 1995, Zukin et al. 2006).

### **The Political Consequences of Aging**

The reasons we expect aging to have political consequences fall into two categories, those that are directly linked to the passage of time and those that are tied to the roles and transitions that accompany aging. The latter are sometimes called life-cycle or life-stage effects instead of aging effects. Ideas in the former category include the growth of experience and understanding that comes with repeated exposure to elections and political news, the sheer length of time one has held onto a social identity, and the effects of repeatedly acting in one fashion or another, as in voting over and over for candidates from a given party. These kinds of ideas give rise to the expectation that political knowledge will deepen with age and that political opinions and identities will strengthen, which have been confirmed by any number of political socialization studies. The growing strength of party identification with age, famously demonstrated by Converse (1976) but shown repeatedly in other research, including APC analyses (Knoke and Haut 1976, Twenge et al. 2016), is a pertinent example. Because of this, we would expect to see affective polarization strengthen with age too, with feelings toward the inparty growing more positive and feelings toward the outparty more negative.

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<sup>4</sup> Mannheim discussed this issue at length in his 1926 essay, calling such subgroups “generation units.”

The second category of arguments about why aging has political consequences focuses on how experiences, relationships, incentives, values, and preferences shift as one moves into and through the life stages of adulthood, including college, careers, marriage, parenthood, retirement, and more. These ideas have been elaborated in the literature on political socialization in adulthood (Sapiro 1994, Sigel 1989, Watts 1999); Munger (2019) offers an interesting “political gerontology” take. Research on whether aging prompts conservatism or Republican affiliation is usually of this ilk, where the argument is that aging leads to increases in stature, wealth, property, and sometimes also marriage and children, prompting shifts in values and interests that make conservatism and the Republican party more attractive. Existing evidence on the question is mixed (Peterson, Smith, and Hibbing 2020, Twenge et al. 2016).

### **The Age-Period-Cohort (APC) Framework**

As noted earlier, the APC framework attributes macro-level trends to three causes: aging effects, period effects, and cohort replacement effects. Most APC analysts add a fourth, as do I: socio-demographic change. In elaborating on these, it will help to have an example in mind; I will refer to over-time changes in voter turnout rates.

The idea that macro-political trends can be attributed to aging effects has a two-part logic: (1) aging brings about a change in the outcome for reasons having to do with the acquisition of experience or life stage transitions, and (2) as time passes, the age composition of the electorate is shifting. Thus, if (since) the likelihood of a citizen voting tends to rise with age and the U.S. population has been growing older in the aggregate in recent decades, the aging effect would result in higher overall voter turnout rate, *ceteris paribus*.

Period effects are changes wrought by causes that vary only over time and that have broad effects on the citizenry—in the simplest formulation, effects that operate on all regardless of age or generation. Were the United States to make the November election date a holiday, for example, that would be likely to make it easier for all citizens to vote, prompting an increase in voter turnout rates relative to past elections. The closeness of the presidential election can also inspire voter turnout, so elections that are close should have higher turnout than elections that are not, *ceteris paribus*. Period effects can also be specified as subgroup-specific, as in a change of the Minnesota registration law that affects Minnesotans but not others.

The cohort replacement argument follows a two-part logic similar to that for aging: (1) unique generations exist, and (2) as time passes, the generational composition of the electorate is shifting. Through natural mortality, older citizens are dying and being replaced by younger ones entering the electorate. This engine of population replacement turns into generational replacement when older and younger citizens represent different political generations. Thus, if the older Americans dying out were part of a highly civically engaged Greatest generation and their replacements are Gen-Xers or Millennials who show less inclination to vote, the overall voter turnout rate will decline (on this, see Dalton 2008).

Finally, and likewise, over-time shifts in outcomes can be driven by shifts in the socio-demographic composition of the population on dimensions apart from age or generation, e.g., in the rate of union membership or educational attainment. If (since) people are more likely to vote if they are union members or highly educated, then voter turnout rates should rise or fall as the rate of union membership or educational attainment rises or falls.

#### *Using the APC Framework with ANES Data, 1964-2016*

The APC framework is typically applied to the analysis of repeated cross-sectional data. As discussed earlier, the first and most fundamental problem in doing so is that the effects of age, period, and cohort

cannot be simultaneously estimated. If we take cohort to be defined by year of birth, period to be defined by year, and age to be defined by the number of years alive, then once you know any two of these the third is given:  $\text{Year} - \text{Year of Birth} = \text{Age}$ .

The ANES presidential surveys are carried out every four years, so tracking cohorts and age groups over time requires that we use four-year categories, as shown in Table 1. The column identifies the year of the ANES study. The row identifies the cohort, with the label indicating the first of the four birth years for the cohort. Thus, the cohort labeled “1879” includes individuals born in 1879-1882, the cohort labeled “1995” includes individuals born in 1995-1998, and so on.<sup>5</sup> The intersection of the row and column implicitly identifies the age group of someone from that cohort interviewed in that year. To help in seeing this, I have highlighted the group aged 18-21—those newly entering the electorate—in bold italics. Thus, there were 26 respondents in the 18-21 age range in the 1964 study (born 1943-1946), 34 in the 1968 study (born 1947-1950), and 204 in the 1972 study (born 1951-1954)—a big jump since by 1972 the voting age had been lowered to 18 and the ANES sampling frame shifted accordingly. As is evident, the same indeterminacy arises. The four-year age range of any respondent can be perfectly predicted by knowing the year of the study and the four-year range of the birth cohort.

A great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to means of solving this problem so that the effects of age, period, and cohort (and socio-demographics) on outcomes can be simultaneously estimated and their implications for macro-political change parsed. Good overviews can be found in Fosse and Winship’s (2019) essay in the *Annual Review of Sociology* and in the contributions to the 2014 special issue of *Electoral Studies*, edited and introduced by Neundorff and Niemi (2014). In this paper, I took two steps to “solve” the indeterminacy problem.

First, I make use of an approach that Elias Dinas and I developed, which is described and illustrated in Dinas and Stoker (2014). This approach estimates the APC model on two subgroups within each birth cohort. So long as one is willing to assume that one of the three effects—age, cohort, or period—is the same across the groups, the model is estimable.<sup>6</sup> For two of the three cases I focus on in this paper, an analysis distinguishing subgroups is essential. When studying affective polarization, I consider the feelings of Democrats and Republicans—specifically, their feeling thermometer ratings of the inparty (scored 0-100), the outparty (scored 0-100), and the difference between the inparty and outparty (scored -100 to +100). When studying shifts in party identification, I consider the party identification of Southerners and non-Southerners—specifically whether they identify as a Democrat (coded 1) or a Republican (coded 0). Both analyses include as partisans those who say they lean toward the party after first claiming an Independent identification, based on the preponderance of evidence suggesting that leaners are partisans too (Keith et al. 1992, Klar and Krupnikov 2016, Petrocik 2009). The expectation of different patterns and dynamics of change across these groups is strong based on previous research into the topics.

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<sup>5</sup> The exception to this scheme concerns the oldest age group, which is labeled “86-89” but adds the few respondents aged 90+. So, for example, the oldest cohort in the 2016 study is labeled 1927, which would imply individuals born between 1927-1930 and aged 86-89, but in fact includes a few older people who, properly, would belong in the 1923 or even 1919 cohort. Putting them there, however, leads to problems due to the fact that their numbers are so few. The alternative to this would have been to drop everyone in any study who was 90 years or older.

<sup>6</sup> Our 2014 article develops a causal argument about generation effects, which considers one of the groups to be “treated” by the historical context (e.g., women, in the 19th amendment case) and one to be untreated (men). In order to obtain an estimate of the treatment effect, all one needs to do is to estimate cohort effects separately for the treated and untreated groups, holding the effects of either period or age to be the same. Although here I am not assuming that one group is treated and the other is not, I use this solution as the logic holds.

In the analysis of each outcome, I hold the effects of age—but not period or generation—constant across the subgroups. This specification is based on a mix of theory and evidence. Regarding affective polarization, the well-known finding that partisanship strengthens with age means we would expect feelings toward the inparty to become more positive with age and feelings toward the outparty to become more negative. But there is no obvious reason to expect these age-related effects to differ between Democrats and Republicans. Regarding party balance, there is some research suggesting that people become more conservative or Republican with age, as noted earlier, but no reason to expect that the effect of aging would vary depending on region of residence. Nevertheless, I also tested alternative specifications, holding period, generation, and age effects constant across the groups in turn. In both cases, the results supported the specification holding age constant (instead of period or generation) in that it yielded the best fit, though the differences across specifications were not large.

The second step I took was to distinguish five generations instead of the 31 birth cohort groupings listed in the rows of Table 1. In a coding that is similar but not identical to the Pew breakdowns, I distinguish those born before 1927 as the Greatest Generation (the first thirteen cohorts in Table 1, highlighted in yellow); those born between 1927 and 1946 as the Silent Generation (next five cohorts, highlighted in blue); those born between 1947 and 1962 as Baby Boomers (next four cohorts, highlighted in purple); those born between 1963 and 1982 as Gen X (next five cohorts, highlighted in gray); and those born between 1983 and 1998 as Millennials (final four cohorts, highlighted in green).<sup>7</sup> Taking this step was important for several reasons. First, for the third outcome I consider—identification as an Independent—the model I specify does not distinguish subgroups.<sup>8</sup> Collapsing cohort categories into 5 generations is what makes the simultaneous estimation of age, period, and cohort effects possible. Second, distinguishing 5 generations instead of 31 cohorts also improves estimation in the analysis of affective polarization and party balance. Using all 31 cohorts results in data sparseness and the likelihood of overfitting, problems reduced by grouping the cohorts as I do. Third, focusing on 5 generations greatly simplifies the presentation of results regarding generational change and makes them comparable across the set of outcomes I analyze. The major drawback of simplifying in this matter is that the collapsing might mask significant intra-generation variation, e.g., between early and late Baby Boomers. As described below, however, I use a lowess smoothing technique that displays this intra-generation variation when it is substantial.

These steps lead to an APC model of affective polarization in which each outcome variable—inparty thermometer, outparty thermometer, and inparty-outparty thermometer—is regressed on (a) a dummy variable for party identification (PID) (1=Democrat, 0=Republican), (b) dummy variables for 13 of the 14 years, (c) dummy variables for 4 of the 5 generations, (d) dummy variables for 17 of the 18 age categories, (e) interactions between PID and year dummies, and (f) interactions between PID and generation dummies. In the analysis of party balance, the specification is the same, with the substitution of a dummy for residence in the South or non-South instead of PID, using the census region classification for South. In the analysis of Independent identification, which does not distinguish subgroups, the specification includes the year dummies, age dummies, and generation dummies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> When analyzing the ANES, it is important to work with multiples of four when defining age groups and cohorts since the studies occur every four years. This constrained my definition of generations, leading my cutoff points to differ by a year or two from those employed by Pew. In addition, Pew would call those born in 1997 or 1998 Generation Z, but this group is too small to be distinguished (n=18 in 2016).

<sup>8</sup> I explored distinguishing subgroups defined by race/ethnicity, but the non-white sample sizes tend to be small, which yields unstable estimates, and patterns I did see were quite similar between the different groups.

<sup>9</sup> All analyses used OLS, applying the weight variable appropriate for the face-to-face sample. Logit analyses of the PID and Independent outcomes, which are dichotomous, yield very similar results. Results are displayed in the form of figures calculated using the regression results. The regression results are given in the Appendix.



Of course, the U.S. has experienced substantial changes to its sociodemographic make-up over the past half-century, which are also capable of shaping macro-political changes. To isolate the effects of age, period, and cohort, these too must be taken into account. Each analysis controlled for education (dummy variables for some college and college degree), union membership (dummy variable for union member in household), race/ethnicity (dummy variables for black and Hispanic or other non-white), nativity (whether one or more parents was born outside of the U.S.), gender (dummy variable for female), and marital status (dummy variable for married or living with a partner).

Figure 1 shows the trends on these measures from 1964-2016; entries are weighted means. Education rates have of course been climbing while union membership has been declining. The share of the electorate identified as Hispanic or other non-white has grown substantially, while the percentage of those with a parent born outside of the U.S. first declined between 1964 and 1980 and then stabilized, though with volatility. The percentage of women in the sample has stayed relatively stable over time, though trended downward slightly from around 55% in the earlier studies to around 52% more recently. Finally, the prevalence of married respondents declined sharply between 1964 and 1988 (from 76% to 56%) before rebounding to a lesser extent in recent years (to 64% in 2016). Also worth noting is that Obama's first election (2008) is an outlier in terms of the composition of the ANES sample, with a noticeable uptick in the percentage of respondents who were black, unmarried, and whose parents had been born in the U.S.

The age and cohort composition of the electorate was also changing between 1964 and 2016. Figure 2 shows the average age of the ANES sample at each year, broken down by party, while Figure 3 shows the changing generational composition of the electorate across the time frame. On average, the electorate grew younger from 1968 (47 years old) to 1984 (45), before growing older with an average approaching 48 years by 2016. The nearly 2 point drop between 1968 and 1972 was fueled by the extension of suffrage to those aged 18, 19, and 20. In terms of generational replacement, the Greatest generation dominated in the early years of the time series but had disappeared by 2016. The Baby Boomers held the plurality from 1984 through 2000, before being eclipsed by the Gen-Xers. By 2016, almost 60% of the electorate came from the youngest two generations.

The final step in an APC analysis is to display the results while adjusting, as appropriate, for the effects of shifts in socio-demographic, age, and generational composition. In what follows, I begin by introducing the trends evident in the ANES data over time and (as relevant) subgroup. There is no modeling here; these are just weighted means. I then show the estimated effects of age, which provides context for what comes next: a display of generational differences over time, both before and after adjusting for the effects of age and sociodemographic composition. I finish by comparing the unadjusted over-time trends to the period effects, i.e., the trends evident after removing confounds from the shifting sociodemographic, age, and generational composition of the electorate.

## **Results**

### *Affective Polarization*

#### Trends

Figure 4 displays the trends in affective polarization from 1964 to 2016, with the top panel showing how Democratic and Republican identifiers rated their own party on ANES's 0-100 feeling thermometer scale ("Inparty Ratings"), the middle panel showing how partisans rated the other party ("Outparty Ratings"),

and the bottom panel show the difference, i.e., the relative favoritism partisans showed to their own party (“Inparty minus Outparty Ratings”).<sup>10</sup> Entries are weighted means.

Previous research has emphasized the steady and steep decline in evaluations of the outparty since their peak in the early 1970s, trends that are evident in Figure 4 and very similar for Democratic and Republican identifiers. It is important to remember, though, that outparty ratings had been more negative before that peak, as is also evident in the figure. Feelings toward the outparty were neutral in 1964 and rose to being mildly positive by 1972 before beginning their steady descent over the ensuing decades, ending at a rating near 30, about 25 points below the 1972 high.

Inparty ratings also show a decline across the period, but one that is milder, varies somewhat across the parties, and manifests more waxing and waning turns. The peak inparty rating for both Democrats and Republicans was in 1964, at about 85 and 80 points, respectively. By 2016, favoritism had dropped by between 15 and 20 points for both parties, with Democrats continuing to show more favorable attitudes toward their party than do Republicans. Yet, the decline between the 1964 and 1976 elections was itself 15 points for both groups, so the trend across the post-1976 period is best described as flat though fluctuating, which contrasts markedly with the steady decline in outparty ratings.

Indeed, the partisans were becoming more negative toward their own parties at the same time (1964 to 1972 or 1976) as they were becoming more positive toward the other party. Thus, if we analyze a difference measure of the relative favorability of the inparty, a pronounced curvilinear trend appears (bottom panel Figure 1). Democrats and Republicans went from a high point of ingroup favoritism in 1964—undergirded by favorable views of their own party and neutral views of the other—to a low in 1972 or 1976, followed by rather steady gains subsequently. By the end of the series, Democrats had regained the relative favorability gap of 35 points shown in 1964, and Republicans had nearly matched that, exceeding the gap shown in 1964 (25 points). However, these 30-35 point gaps now combine less positive inparty attitudes (around 65 rather than 85) and more negative outparty attitudes (around 30 rather than 50).

### Aging

Figure 5 displays the estimated effects of aging on inparty ratings, outparty ratings, and the difference between the two. Recall that age was represented in the statistical model through a series of dummy variables, imposing no constraint on the functional form of the relationship between age and any outcome variable. Recall also that the effects of age were constrained to be the same for Democrats and Republicans.

The striking finding in Figure 5 is the contrast between inparty and outparty ratings. As expected, inparty ratings tend to grow more positive with age, and nearly linearly so, with the oldest partisans expressing feelings that are about 10 points more favorable toward their party than those expressed by the youngest. Unexpectedly, there is no aging effect on outparty ratings. As such, the age-related growth in the relative measure (bottom panel of Figure 5) is entirely driven by the fact that warmth toward one’s own party tends to increase with age.

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<sup>10</sup> Scores 97 and above are coded “97” in the original data file but I recoded these 97 scores to 100. Between 1964 and 1980 ANES respondents were asked to rate “Democrats” and “Republicans” but afterward they were asked to rate “the Democratic party” and “the Republican party.” Both wordings were carried in 1980 and 1982, in split ballot experiments. Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) analyze the effects of this wording variation, finding that the wording change did not affect inparty ratings but the new wording lowered evaluations of the outparty by about 6 points (see their Table 1).

## Generational Differences

Figures 6-8 show results on generational differences for each outcome variable in turn (inparty ratings, outparty ratings, inparty-outparty ratings), first for Republicans (6a, 7a, 8a) and then for Democrats (6b, 7b, 8b). There are two charts for each outcome and group. The top panel displays the mean position of each generation in each election, after a smoothing algorithm is applied (more on that below). Differences across generations at any one point in time could be due to differences in age or sociodemographic composition, as these are not held constant. The bottom panel holds age and the other sociodemographic variables constant, to their within-party sample means, revealing the estimated generation effects.<sup>11</sup>

In producing these charts I used a lowess smoothing procedure, which serves two purposes. First, it will reveal any significant variation in outcomes across the cohorts that the generation classification groups together. In the top panels of Figures 6-8, and in the comparable graphs to come, this variation is represented by multiple instances of the same generational symbol in any given election. Of course, this variation is variation across age as well as cohort, since for any generation in a given year, variation in the one (age) is variation in the other (cohort). Second, the lowess procedure yields a smoothed representation of the over-time trends seen in Figure 4. This is helpful since it makes it easier to see the generational differences, which are the focus of these charts.<sup>12</sup>

With few but interesting exceptions, the overall pattern is one of minimal generation effects. Take inparty ratings first (Figure 6). The generations differ in the unadjusted results, with inparty ratings highest among the earliest generation in any given year. For example, in 1968 Republicans and Democrats in the Greatest generation rated their party about 15 points higher than did the Boomers then entering the electorate for the first time (about 80 vs. 65 among Republicans, 83 vs. 68 among Democrats). But these differences can be explained by the effects of aging or differences in sociodemographic composition. After holding age and sociodemographics constant, only one set of generational differences remains. Republican identifiers in three generations we can spot when they first entered the electorate—Baby Boomers, Gen-X, and Millennials—each emerge as distinctive. By about 5 points on the 0-100 rating scale, Republican Boomers in 1968 expressed more negative feelings toward their own party than did members of the other generations. This greater negativity is also evident among Democratic identifying Boomers. By contrast, Republican identifying Gen-Xers and Millennials expressed relatively more positive inparty feelings when first entering the electorate, which was during the second-term elections of Ronald Reagan (1984) and George W. Bush (2004), respectively. Although modest, these differences are consistent with the core idea underlying generation effects, that young people entering the electorate will be especially influenced by the Zeitgeist of the time.

With outparty ratings (Figure 7), the generations are largely indistinguishable, both before and after accounting for age and sociodemographic differences. The plummeting outparty ratings are not being

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<sup>11</sup> Different counterfactuals could be of interest, for example, what if the composition in 2016 looked just like it did in 1972? I hold composition to the within-group mean (unweighted) for simplicity.

<sup>12</sup> For the unadjusted results: Separately by generation, I smoothed the over-time trend in  $\hat{Y}$  that was predicted from the regression, which closely tracks the actual mean of  $Y$  over time and generation. Differences in  $\hat{Y}$  values among generation members at any given point in time will exist due to variation in age/cohort and sociodemographics, and the lowess fitted values will represent that if it is significant. For the adjusted results I did the same, but in this case the  $\hat{Y}$  holds age and other sociodemographic variables to their sample means (within PID or region, as appropriate). This means that lowess is fitting a set of points that vary across time and generation but not within a given generation at any point in time—essentially just smoothing the generation-specific trend in the adjusted  $\hat{Y}$ . In doing so, lowess will also yield multiple fitted values for any given generation in any given year, as seen in the charts, though usually these vary by a trivial amount. I specified a bandwidth of .8; smaller bandwidths put more inflection points in the trends on occasion, but did not change the picture regarding generation effects.

fueled by population replacement. In fact, the only major exception to the conclusion of no generation effects concerns Republican-identifying Millennials, and suggests that their entrance into the electorate is actually mitigating the overall level of outparty hostility. In 2004, 2008, 2012, and 2016, Republican Millennials showed warmer feelings for the Democratic party than would be expected based on their age or sociodemographic make-up, by about 6 points on the 0-100 scale.<sup>13</sup>

Results for the feeling thermometer differential (Figure 8) show how these patterns balance out when both inparty and outparty ratings are considered together. The main story once again is of minimal generation effects. The exceptions are again Baby Boomers in both parties who showed less inparty favoritism in 1968, and Republican Millennials whose favoritism toward their party is low relative to what would be expected of those similar to them in age and demographics. Democratic Millennials also show less inparty favoritism, but only in 2016.

### Period Effects

In light of the minimal generation effects seen in Figures 6-8, the unadjusted vs. adjusted trends shown in Figure 9 come as no surprise. There are scarcely any differences wrought by adjusting for over-time differences in the composition of the electorate. In other words, the downward trends in partisans' views of their own and, especially, the other party cannot be attributed to generational replacement, the aging of the population, or shifts in its demographic composition. They are true period effects in this sense.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, there are other changes taking place in the composition of the electorate that must be taken into account in understanding these trends. For example, distrust in government, which has generally declined from 1964 to 2016 (Citrin and Stoker 2018), is a robust predictor of inparty and outparty ratings, with the distrustful expressing more negative feelings toward both their inparty and outparty (not shown). The percentage of Americans considering themselves strong partisan identifiers first waned and then waxed over the time frame, and stronger partisans express warmer feelings toward their own party and cooler feelings toward the other (not shown). These kinds of compositional shifts and effects should be thought of as helping to explain the period effects rather than as explaining them away. The socio-political factors driving the growth of distrust and the strength of party attachments are indirectly contributing to the trends in affective polarization.

### *Party Balance*

#### Trends

Figure 10 shows how the partisan balance in the electorate shifted from a solid Democratic majority in 1964 to near parity by 2016. The measure here is the percentage of those identifying with a party who identify as a Democrat, including leaners. Pure independents are, thus, excluded; they number about 10% of the electorate, a figure that fluctuates only 1-2 percentage points from election to election and shows no

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<sup>13</sup> This 6 point difference is statistically significant among Republicans at  $p=.012$ , as the regression results provided in the Appendix show. The coefficient is about half that size among Democrats and not statistically significant. The only other generational difference concerns Republicans from the Silent and Boomer generations, who expressed slightly more negative feelings toward the Democrats than did those from the Greatest generation, by 3 points in each case. Although small, each difference is statistically significant at  $p<.01$ .

<sup>14</sup> The results in Figure 7 control separately for the composition of the two parties, but the results differ minimally when holding the two parties' composition constant (not shown). Democrats and Republicans show an almost identical drop in warmth toward the other party, while Democrats feel warmer toward their own party than Republicans do to theirs.

over-time trend. The figure breaks down the results by Census region, distinguishing Southern states from others.<sup>15</sup>

What jumps out from the figure is the well-known pattern of Southern realignment—the steady decline in Democratic identifiers in the South, which in the ANES data dropped from nearly 80% in 1964 to 50% in 2016. The pattern outside the South shows much more election-to-election fluctuation, though a 10-point decline for the Democratic party as well, from a percentage in the low 60s in 1964 to a percentage in the low 50s by 2016. The vast regional variation evident in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had largely disappeared by the 1990s as the Republicans grew slowly and surely in the South and made modest inroads elsewhere. Interestingly, a regional gap popped up again during in 2008, this time with Southerners about 10 points more Republican than others. That regional gap diminished but did not disappear in 2012 and 2016.

### Aging

The APC model uncovers a sizeable aging effect on the likelihood of identifying as a Democrat rather than as a Republican, with the probability dropping almost linearly and by 15-20 points across the full age range (Figure 11). All else held constant, the probability of a young person choosing a Democratic identity over a Republican one is about .65. This probability declines steadily to between .45 and .50 among the oldest age groups. This strong aging effect is surprising in light of the mixed evidence in support of the aging-brings-conservatism hypothesis, discussed earlier. But this effect is easily masked, as we will see, because the generation effects work in the opposite direction.

### Generational Differences

Figures 12a and 12b present the results on generation effects, for Non-Southerners and Southerners, respectively. One big takeaway is that generation effects are minimal outside the South and pronounced in the South, which of course comes as no surprise. The Southern realignment was clearly fueled by the greater draw of the Republican party to each succeeding generation. A second big takeaway is that the generational effects in the South are suppressed in the analysis that fails to adjust for the effects of age and sociodemographics (compare top panel of Figure 10b to bottom panel). Aging may lead to greater affinity with the Republican party, as the results in Figure 9 suggest. But Southerners from the older generations were still much more likely to identify as a Democrat than were those from the younger generations, with about a 15 point gap distinguishing the Greatest generation from the Gen-Xers. Within each group, there is a modest downward trend, so we know that period forces are also operating (and we will see that clearly in the next figure).

Interestingly, Millennials have not extended the pattern. They look no more Republican than the Gen-Xers. On the basis of population replacement alone, however, we would still expect the South to trend further in the Republican direction since the more Democratic Boomer and Silent generations still comprise about 40% of the electorate and their numbers will dwindle over time.

Although generation plays little role outside the South, there is one notable finding. As seen earlier, Gen-Xers and, especially, Millennials, who identified with the Republican party were generationally distinctive in the level of warmth they expressed toward the party when they entered the electorate (in 1984 and 2004, respectively). What figure 12a adds to this is that both groups were also generationally

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<sup>15</sup> South: AL, AR, DE, D.C., FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV.

distinctive in their proclivity to identify with the Republican party in the first place.<sup>16</sup> Both tendencies underscore the importance of the contemporary political context to the partisan tendencies of young people entering the electorate.

### Period Effects

Because of the substantial generation effects and the dynamics of population replacement, the period effects on party balance are lessened when the analysis holds generational composition, as well as age and sociodemographic composition, constant (Figure 13). The unadjusted difference between 1964 and 2016 in the percentage of Southerners identifying as Democrat (vs. Republican) is about 20 points, but that difference is halved after taking into account population change.

Notice also that the period effects outside the South are slightly stronger after adjusting for composition, with a clearer trend in the Democratic direction after 1984. The minimal generational differences operating outside the South do not account for this, in that Millennials and possibly even Gen-Xers are more Republican in PID than would be expected on the basis of their age and other sociodemographic characteristics. Instead, this is due to other compositional shifts, where the biggest shift advantaging the Democrats has been the growth of the Latinx fraction of the electorate. In the ANES data, the percentage of those whose race/ethnicity is identified as “Hispanic or other non-white, non-black” more than doubled from 1984 to 2016 (from 9% to 20%).

### *Identifying as an Independent*

#### Trends

Figure 14 tracks the growing percentage of American citizens identifying as Independent to the first or “root” question the ANES asks about party identification. On average across the 1964-2016 period, two thirds of these are “leaners” who admit in follow-up questions that they lean toward one or another of the parties. Since there is no over-time growth in the percentage of “pure” or non-leaning Independents, the trends in Figure 14 reflect the growth of Independent leaners. The largest jump occurred between 1964 and 1976, when the percentage of Independents went from just over 20% to just over 35%. This, of course, was noticed by political scientists, prompting a surge of research into the causes of the trend and the differences between those who identify as Independent but lean toward one of the parties from both weak partisan identifiers and pure independents (e.g., Abramson 1974, Keith et al. 1992, Knoke and Haut 1974, Wattenberg 1981). For about 20 years after 1976 the percentage identifying as Independent flattened out, only to begin growing again after the mid-1990s—albeit slowly and modestly, increasing another 5% by 2016. Nowadays, 40% identify as Independent with about 75% of those admitting to a partisan leaning.

#### Aging

One likely consequence of aging is that the probability of identifying as an Independent declines. The expectations of finding such an association are strong based on theory and past evidence, and the results are as expected. Holding all else constant, the APC model estimates that the probability of calling oneself

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<sup>16</sup> The gap between Millennials and the Greatest generation is statistically significant at  $p < .01$  but that for Gen-Xers is not, with a t-statistic of 1.51. The reason why is evident in the figure, where the gap between the Gen-Xers and the others diminishes after they entered the electorate in 1984 even if it never quite disappears, while the Millennials remain more distinctive across the four elections in which they appear. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2004) also report evidence of unusually high rates of affiliation with the Republican party among Gen-Xers entering the electorate during the Reagan years.

an Independent drops by more than half when comparing the youngest age group to the oldest, from nearly .55 to about .20 (Figure 15).

### Generation Effects

What is more novel in these results are the important generational shifts taking place, which work in the opposite direction (Figure 16). The unadjusted results show large differences by generation which trend differently across time. Controlling for age and sociodemographic composition sharpens the picture, showing that the Baby Boomers have been slightly less drawn to the Independent label than have members of the Silent and Greatest generation, at least since the 1980s. More clearly, Gen-Xers are even less likely to identify as Independent and have consistently been so since entering the electorate in 1984. Millennials have extended the pattern, being even less drawn to the Independent label than Gen-Xers. Compared to the Greatest generation, Gen-Xers are 6 points less likely to identify as Independent, on average, and Millennials are 11 points less likely. Thus, even though an Independent identification is more common among the young than the old, the two youngest generations are more partisan than would be expected given their age and other sociodemographic attributes.

### Period Effects

One implication is that the period forces fueling the growth in the percentage of people identifying as Independent are even stronger than is evident by looking at the simple trend line, as shown in Figure 17. As before, the figure shows the unadjusted (but smoothed) trend as well as the trend under an assumption of no shifts in the composition of the population. Comparing the end-points, the over-time growth in percentage of Independents is estimated to have been about 10 points higher had the electorate's composition not also been shifting across this period. The differences between the two estimates after 1992 are driven by the increasing prevalence of Gen-X and, later, the Millennials in the electorate, as well as the rise in educational attainment, as those with some college education or a college degree are less likely to claim the Independent identity.

### **Discussion**

One clear conclusion from this analysis is that generational differences are not driving the trends in affective polarization, nor are shifts in the population's age or other sociodemographic characteristics. New entrants to the electorate do stand out to a modest extent, expressing partisan attitudes that reflect the status of the political parties at the time. Baby Boomers in the late 1960s showed more ambivalence toward the party they identified with (or leaned toward), while Republican Gen-Xers (in the mid-1980s) and Millennials (in the mid-2000s) expressed more enthusiasm towards their party. Among Republicans, Millennials are distinctive in terms of their feelings toward the other party, but in a way that cuts against the idea that generational replacement is fueling the trend in outparty hostility. They are about 6 points more favorable to the Democrats than would be expected on the basis of their age and sociodemographics.

Gen-Xers and Millennials also stand out when it comes to the choice of a party identification. Among those residing outside of the South, both generations were especially drawn to the Republican rather than Democratic party, not surprising in that most went through their IYs during the Reagan and Bush Jr. presidential terms, respectively. Within the South, generational differences are pronounced, with each succeeding generation more likely to consider themselves Republican rather than Democrat until we reach the Millennials, who look just like Gen-Xers in their party choices. As emphasized in the literature on the Southern realignment, generational replacement was a key driver of the shifts in party balance that took us from a period of Democratic dominance, still in place in the early 1960s, to a period of near parity decades later.

A pattern of successive generational differences also characterizes the choice to identify as an Independent. Although a strong period effect has been operating since the late 1960s to make the Independent identity more appealing, newer entrants to the electorate are less drawn to the Independent identity than were those entering earlier. Gen-Xers begin the pattern, being about 6 points less likely than the most senior generation to call themselves Independents rather than Democrat or Republican, *ceteris paribus*, and the Millennials extend it, with the gap growing to 11 points.

The APC analysis has also shown several ways in which aging and partisanship relate to one another. Evaluations of one's own party tend to become more favorable with age, though evaluations of the other party do not grow more unfavorable. This was unexpected, since strength of party identity itself grows with age—shown here in the finding that a Democratic or Republican identification rather than an Independent identification is more likely to be expressed as one ages—and stronger partisans typically express both more favorable inparty views and more unfavorable outparty ones. Yet the finding is also consistent with social identity theory and evidence, which holds that group attachment prompts ingroup favoritism—the tendency to hold the ingroup in higher esteem than the outgroup—but not (or not necessarily) outgroup antagonism (Tajfel and Turner 2004).

The analysis also found a robust association between age and the tendency to identify as a Republican rather than Democrat. This finding is notable in light of the mixed findings from previous research on the topic, though matches the finding of Twenge et al. (2016), who analyze non-ANES data, as well as those of Knoke and Haut (1974), who analyze data from ANES from the 1950s through 1972. It suggests that the aging of the American population has played a role in shifting the fortunes of the Democratic and Republican parties.

The undeniable virtue of an APC analysis is that it links ideas about how individuals develop and change their political orientations to ideas about how the polity writ large changes over time. With findings such as those just reviewed, it can help us understand the macro-political implications of micro-level influences. Yet the vices of the APC approach are worth reiterating. Although I have spoken of the “effects” of age, period, and generation, these findings are descriptive not causal. Believable evidence of cause and effect can only come from hypothesis-testing research using designs strong in internal validity. Since age, period, and generation are not capable of being manipulated experimentally, what is needed are quasi-experimental approaches such as those employing instrumental variables, regression discontinuity, or the analysis of a difference in differences.

Neither are the APC results explanatory in the sense that they provide evidence as to why generations are distinctive, why aging matters if it indeed does, or what period forces are operating to drive individuals to change their attitudes and affiliations over time. The APC framework could be extended to move in a more explanatory direction. For example, we could see whether the age, period, or generation effects on the probability of identifying as an Independent diminish or disappear with the inclusion of additional explanatory factors, like trust in government, degree of party-ideology sorting, or enthusiasm for the current president. Clear finding from such an analysis would surely advance our understanding of the micro- and macro-political dynamics, but would still leave us without the ability to reach causal inferences because of the inductive quality of the APC framework.

What is more, the descriptive findings themselves could prove to be fragile. The approach I have taken to untangling age, period, and cohort effects has the advantage of simplicity and transparency of assumptions (Dinas and Stoker 2014), but analysts employing different solutions and statistical methods might find different patterns of results. Even smaller changes to the analysis—e.g., the inclusion of different or more socio-demographic controls or allowing the effects of sociodemographic variables to vary across subgroups or time—could influence the results. Working with a different dataset—e.g., the



General Social Survey instead of the ANES—could matter. This means there is more APC work to do. As always, our confidence in any finding will grow if it is demonstrated repeatedly despite differences in the data, methods, and decisions made by the analyst. In addition, further sub-setting the data by analyzing, say, whites and non-whites or men and women separately, could reshape how we understand the overall patterns of partisan change.

Understanding the micro-level dynamics of macro-political change is a daunting yet important objective. APC analysis has a part to play in this research agenda but it will take sustained research from scholars working with a multiplicity of designs and sources of data to make real progress.

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Table 1  
Face-to-Face Sample Frequencies by Cohort, Year, and (Implicitly) Age  
ANES Presidential Election Studies (1964-2016)

	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016
1875	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1879	13	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1883	26	17	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1887	46	26	23	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1891	55	40	56	32	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1895	69	66	73	47	21	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1899	88	83	107	82	28	35	24	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1903	85	93	110	94	50	48	27	18	0	0	0	0	0	0
1907	106	83	150	118	72	83	56	53	27	0	0	0	0	0
1911	135	109	165	144	77	89	60	73	37	23	0	0	0	0
1915	121	109	155	124	83	102	75	84	37	35	11	0	0	0
1919	125	134	162	133	106	129	102	102	64	44	20	35	0	0
1923	147	134	201	149	90	95	94	122	86	57	23	35	22	0
1927	126	137	181	125	96	112	111	119	78	66	44	68	24	23
1931	126	126	184	119	71	106	88	108	87	66	38	58	34	24
1935	139	100	167	133	88	109	111	98	78	86	51	74	37	33
1939	125	134	190	157	111	131	96	143	96	99	91	107	69	51
1943	26	118	273	182	128	162	128	163	94	132	71	128	77	50
1947	0	34	267	247	151	229	200	179	125	131	97	139	126	92
1951	0	0	204	186	164	239	227	191	152	141	97	171	123	63
1955	0	0	0	146	150	202	182	269	163	160	97	192	146	86
1959	0	0	0	0	114	209	208	276	183	172	91	189	171	82
1963	0	0	0	0	0	142	145	221	150	174	93	161	124	86
1967	0	0	0	0	0	0	103	157	107	133	75	161	118	74
1971	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	109	94	107	74	175	152	70
1975	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54	98	89	174	150	61
1979	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	74	89	158	175	94
1983	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	61	133	145	74
1987	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	119	173	75
1991	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	128	72
1995	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	46

*Note:* The column gives the ANES study year. The row identifies the cohort, with the label indicating the first of the four birth years for the cohort (with the exception of the oldest cohort; see text). Thus, for example, the cohort labeled “1995” includes individuals born in 1995-1998, and so on. The distribution on age can be seen by starting with any left-most cell and moving down along the diagonal. To illustrate, 18-21 year olds are highlighted in bold italics.

Figure 1—Sociodemographic Trends

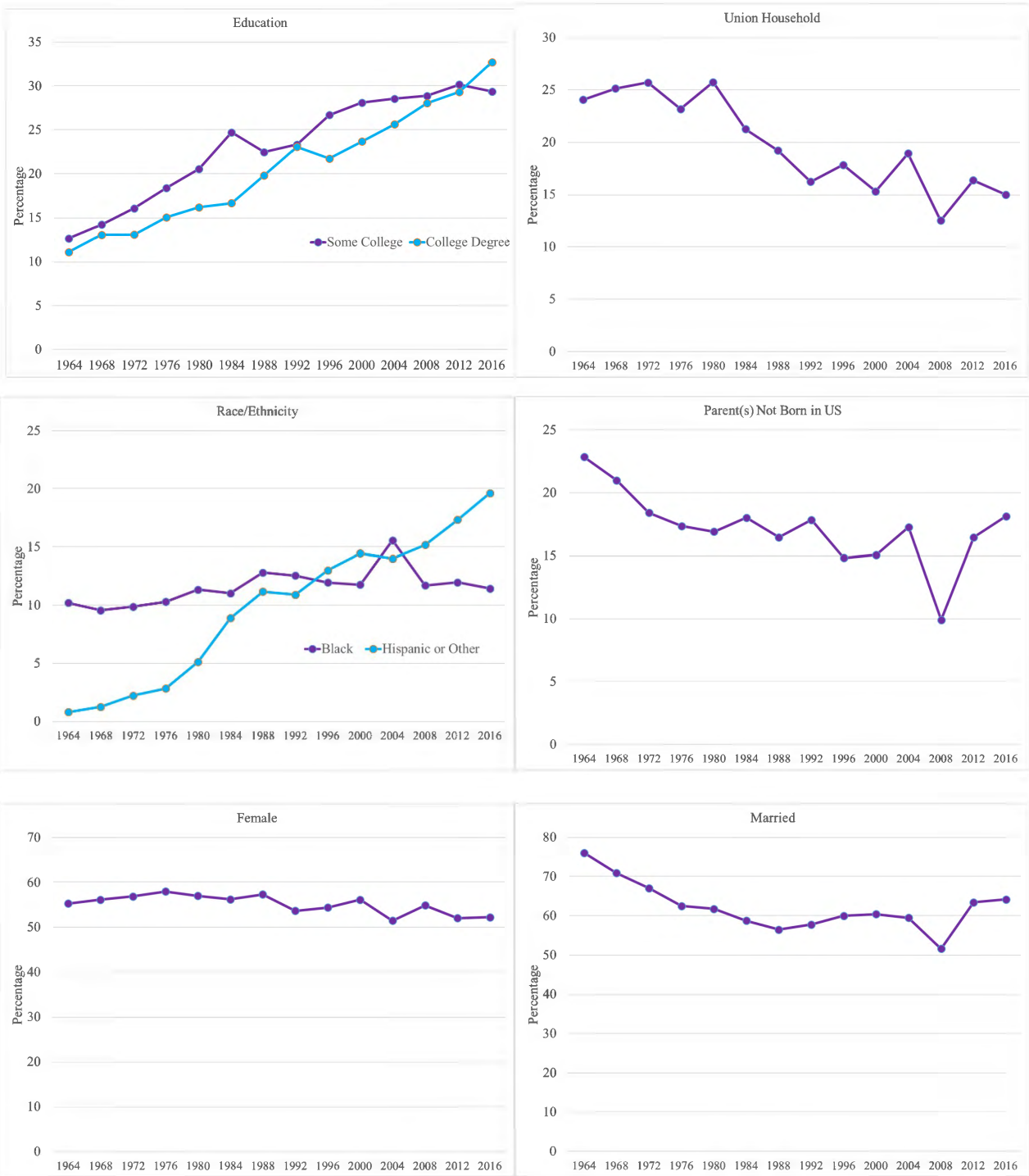


Figure 2—Trends in Age, by Party ID

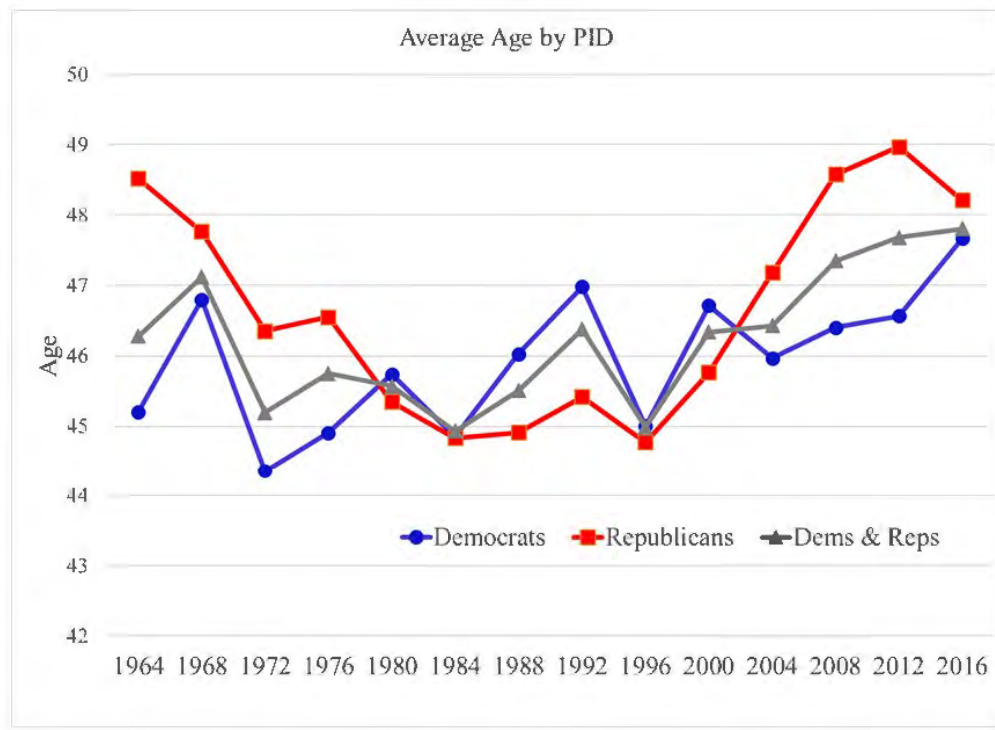


Figure 3—Trends in Generational Composition

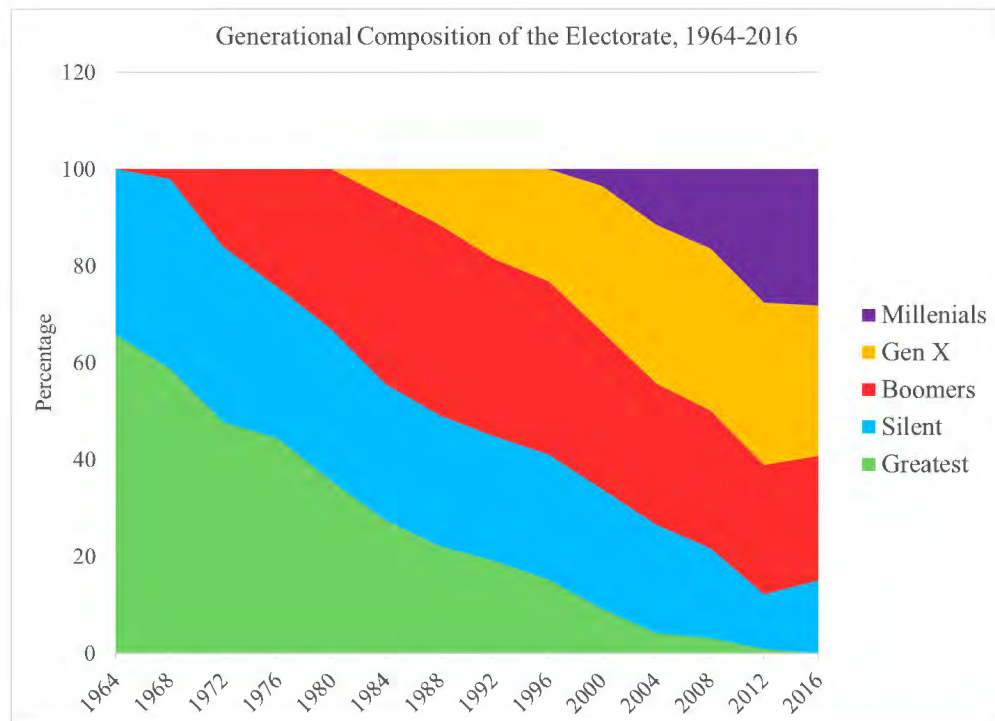




Figure 4—Trends in Affective Polarization by Party ID

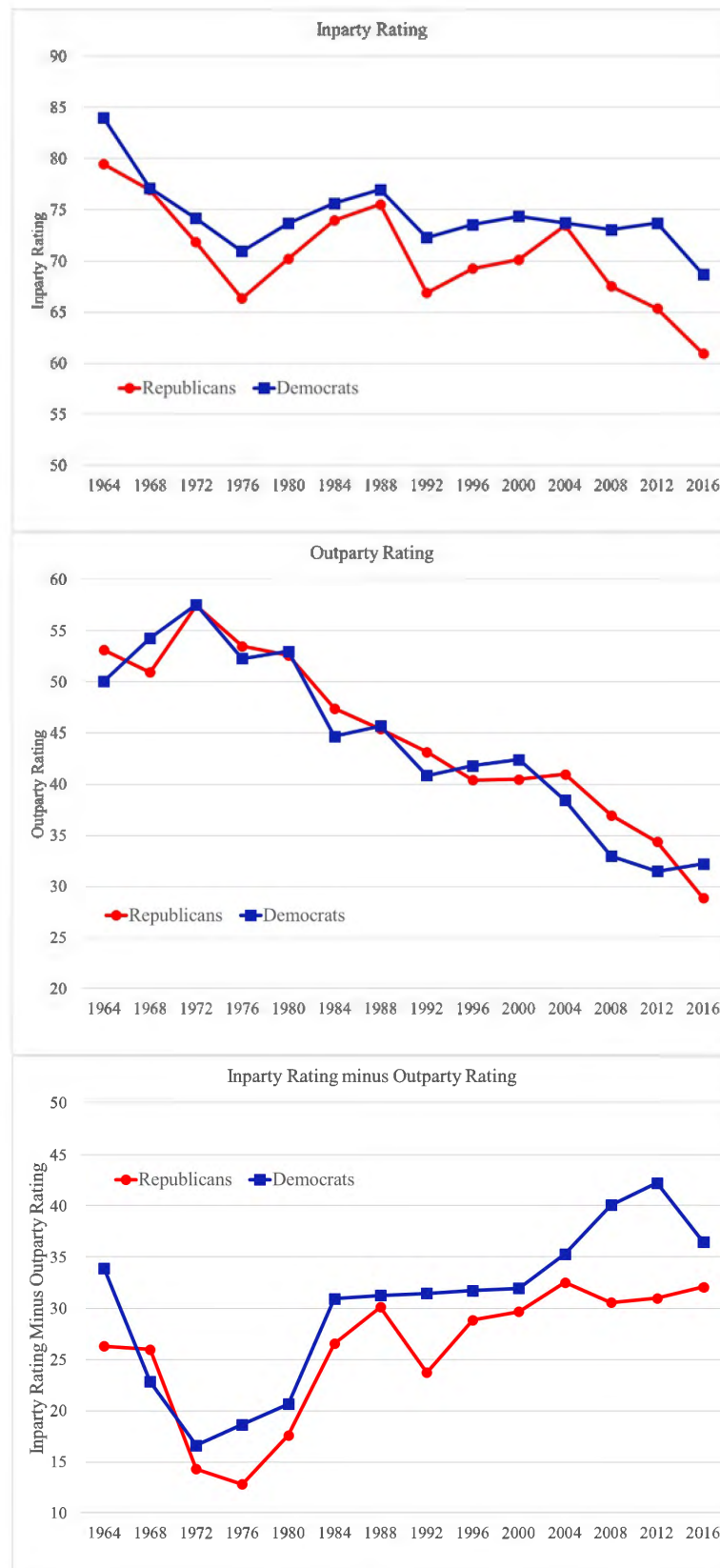


Figure 5—Aging Effects on Affective Polarization

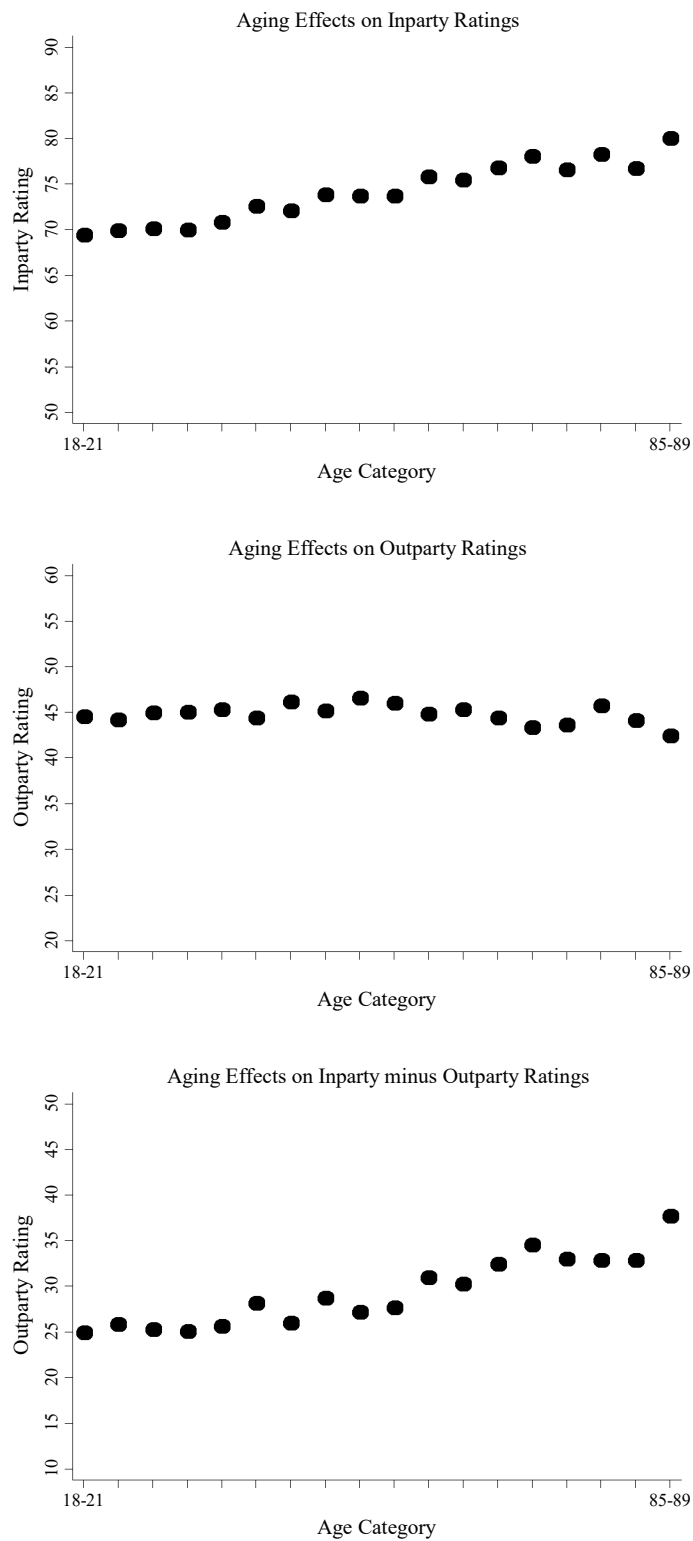


Figure 6a—Inparty Rating by Generation—Republicans  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

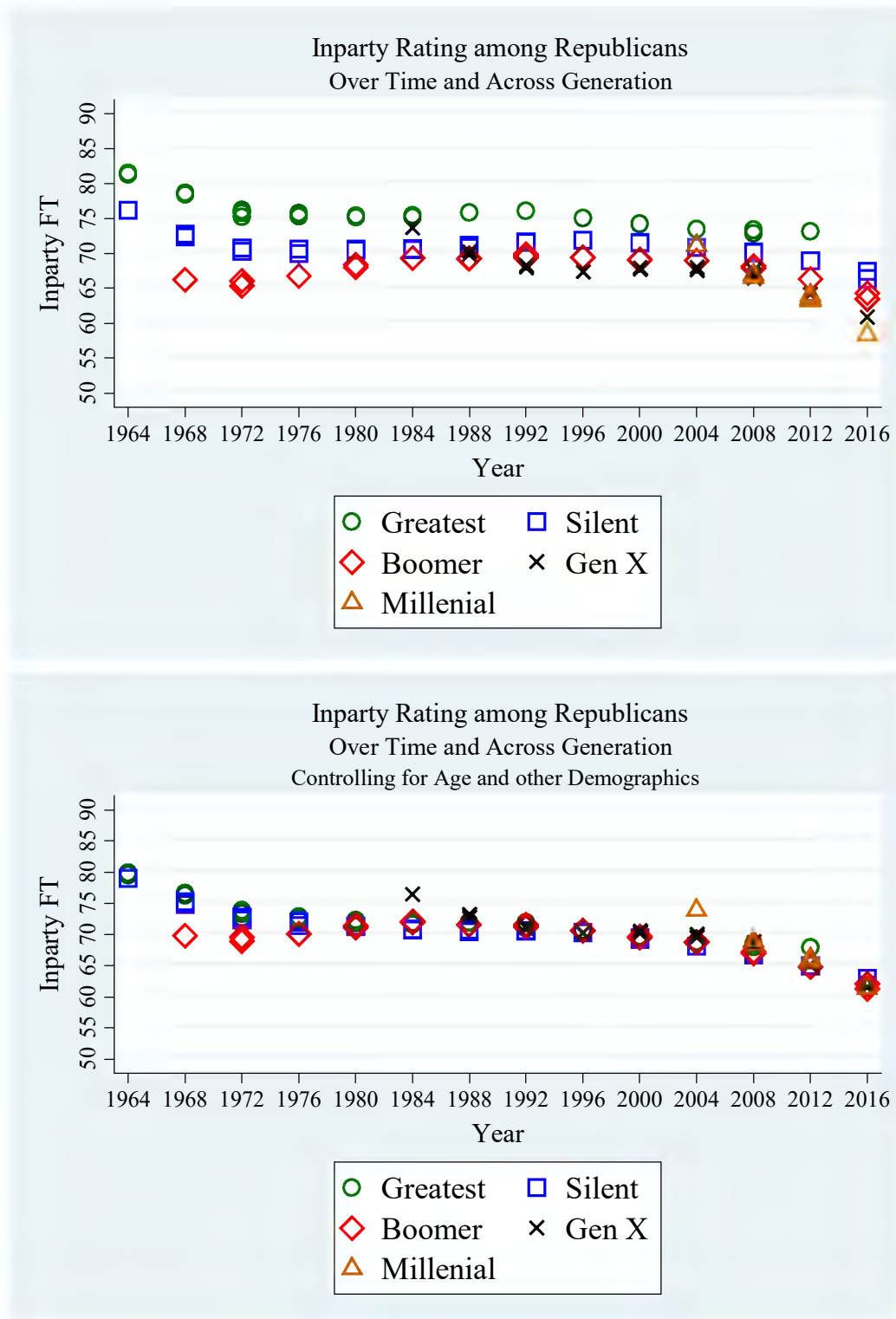


Figure 6b—Inparty Rating by Generation—Democrats  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

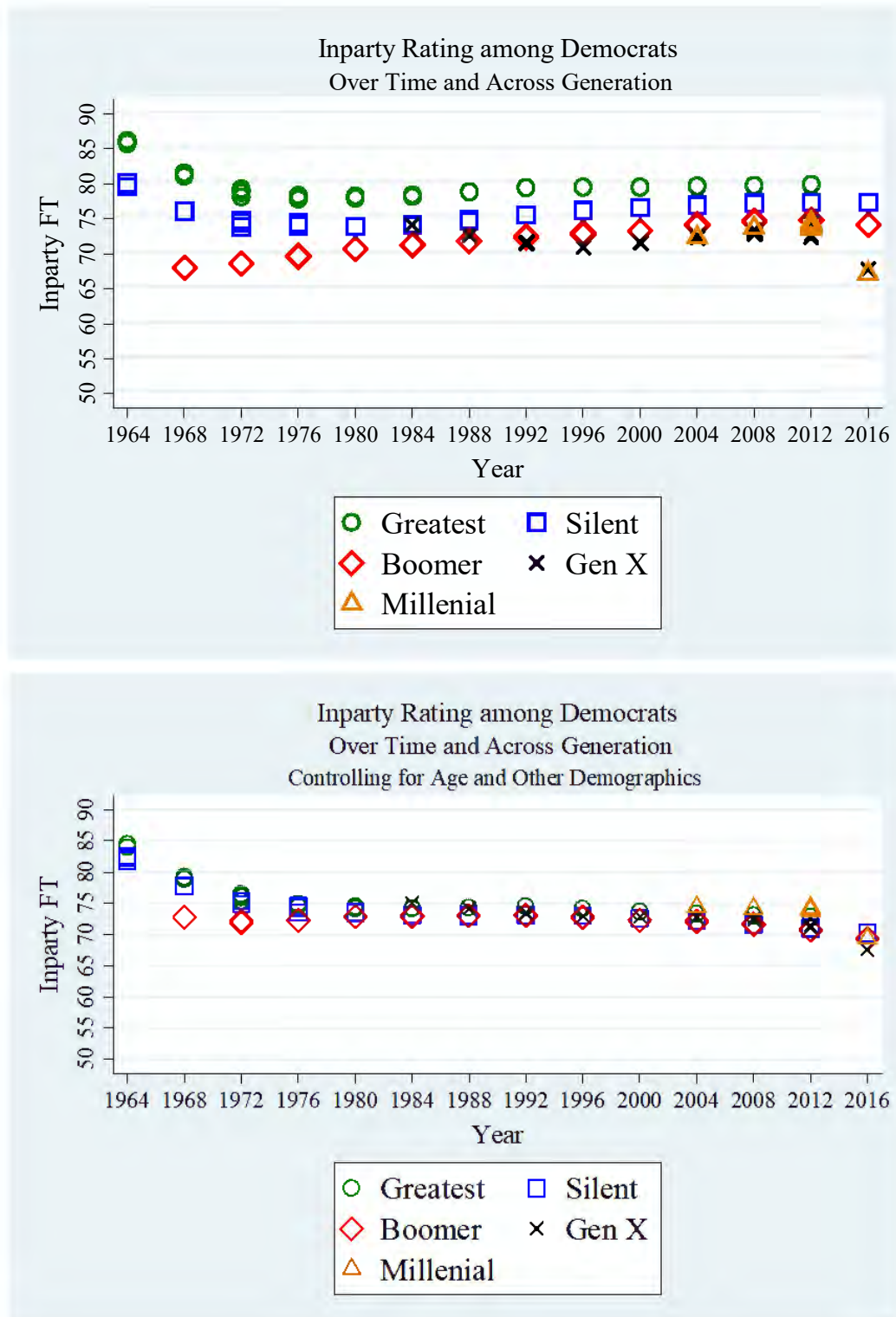


Figure 7a—Outparty Rating by Generation—Republicans  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

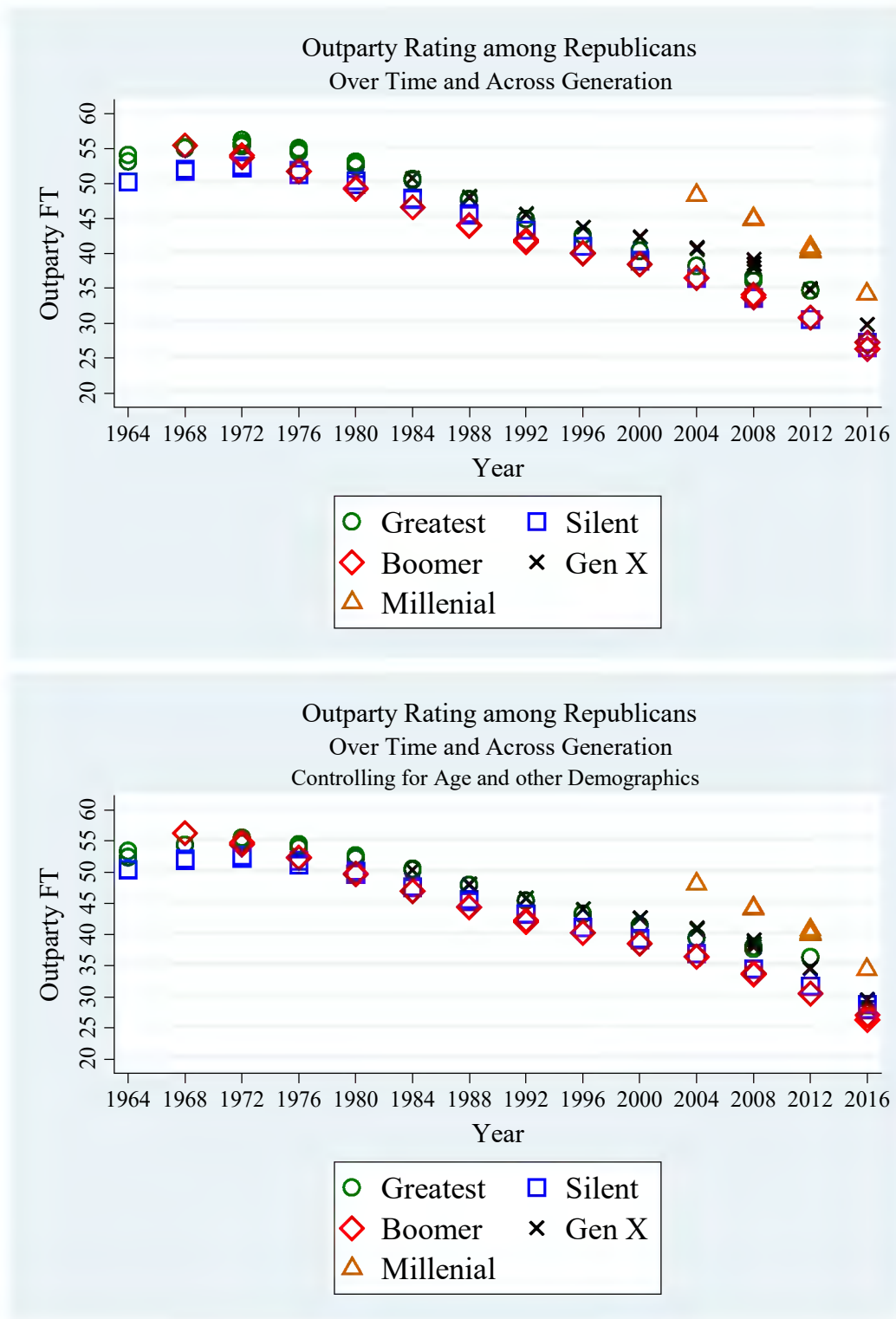


Figure 7b—Outparty Rating by Generation—Democrats  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

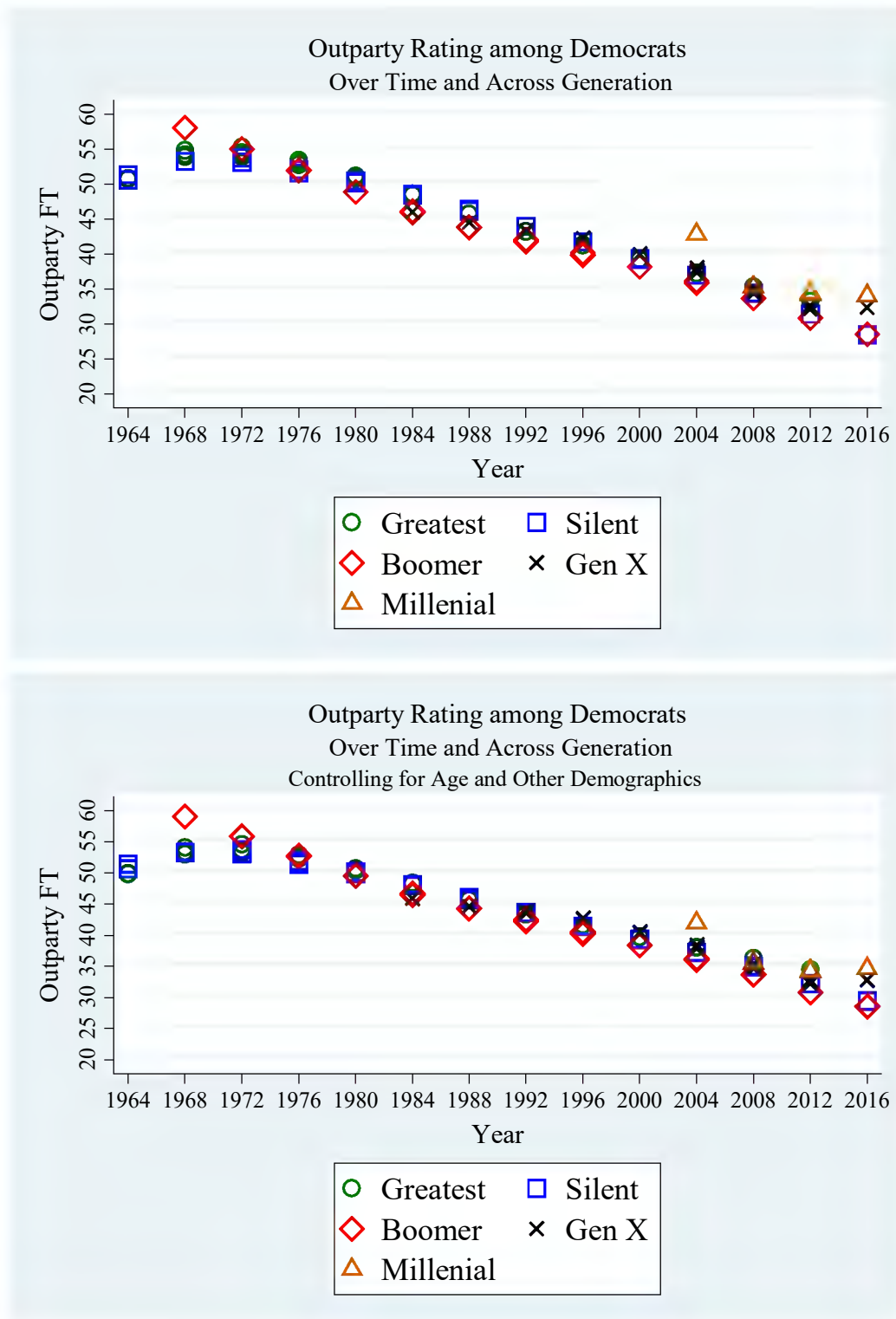


Figure 8a—Inparty minus Outparty Rating by Generation—Republicans  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

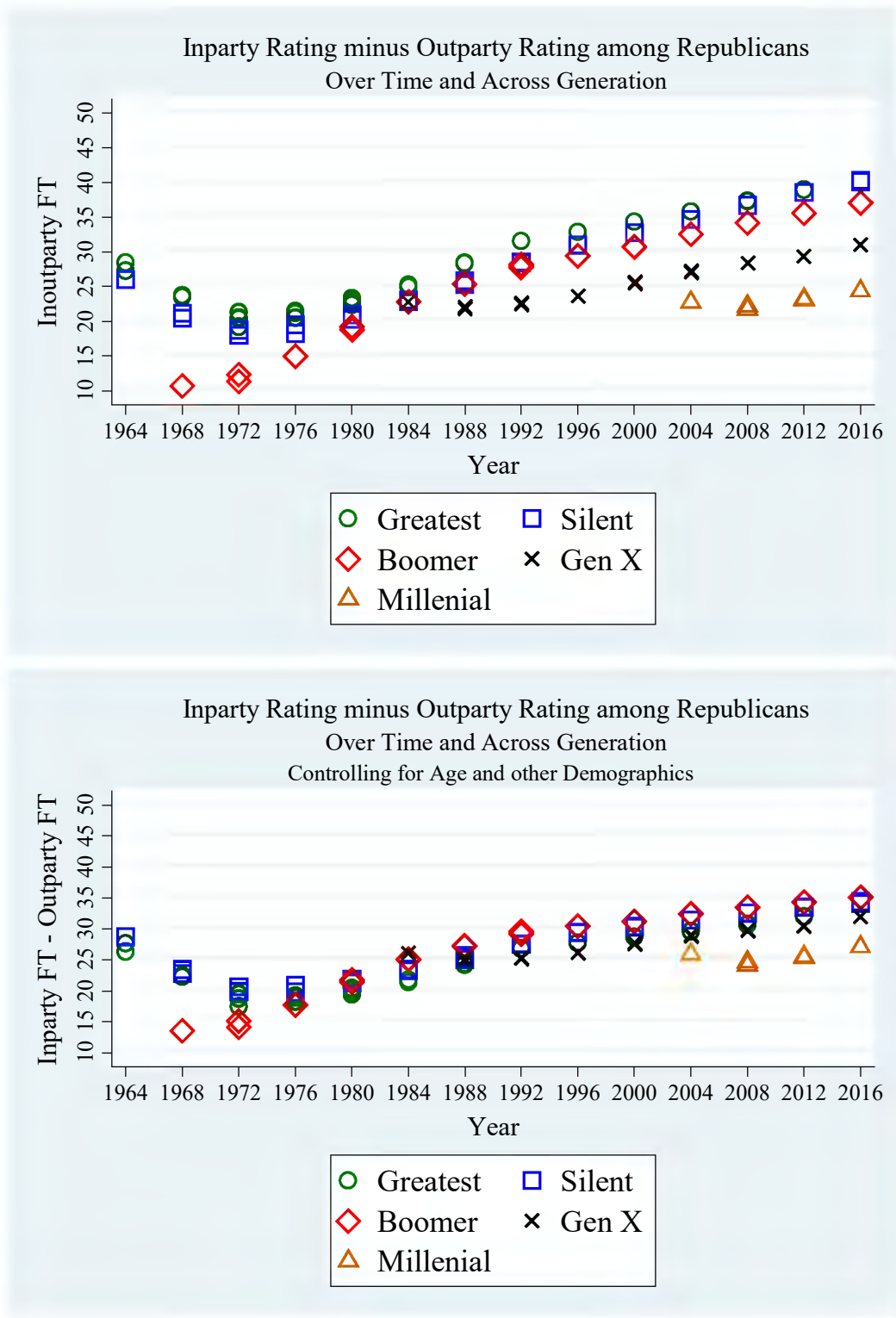


Figure 8b—Inparty minus Outparty Rating by Generation—Democrats  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

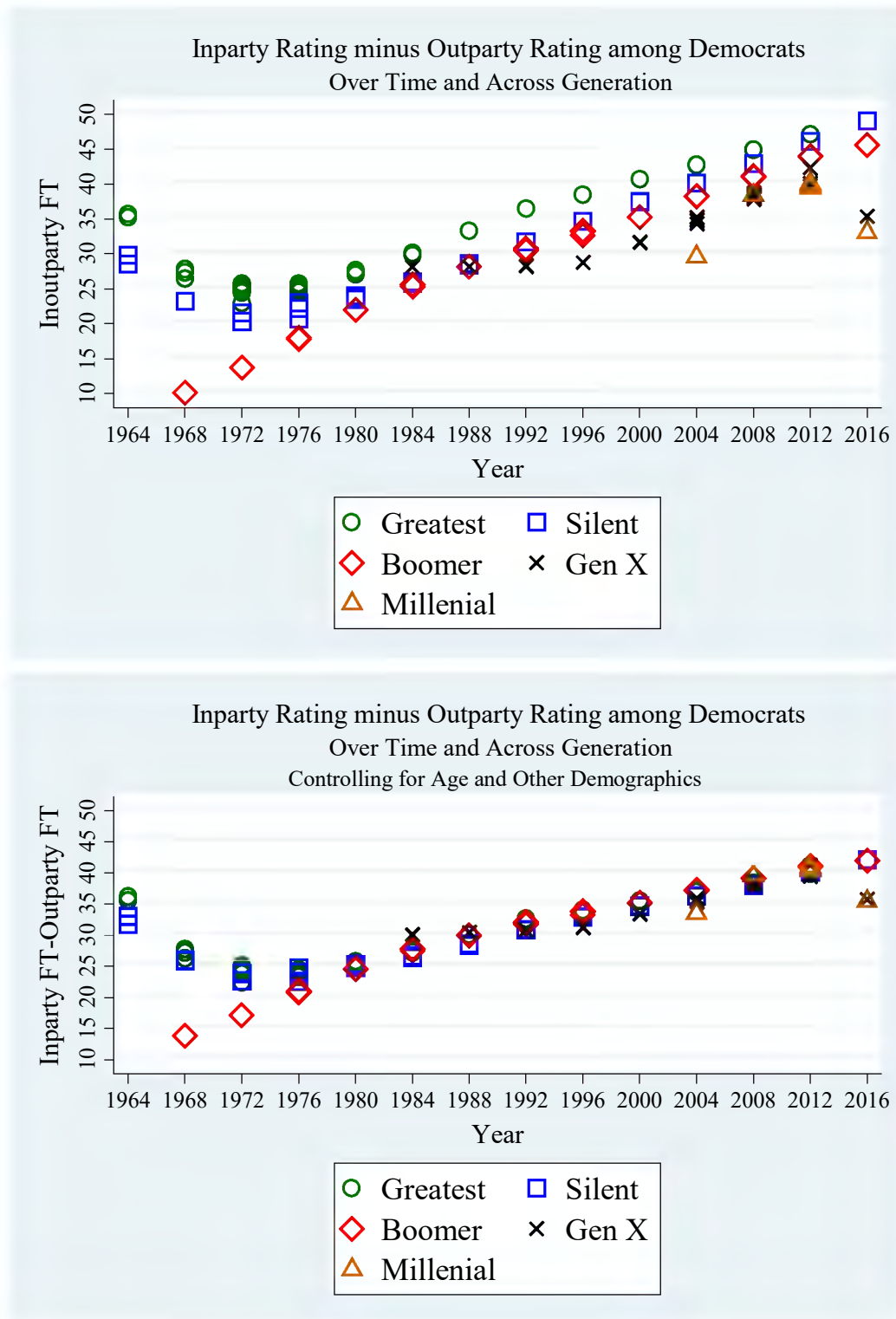




Figure 9—Period Effects on Affective Polarization, by Party

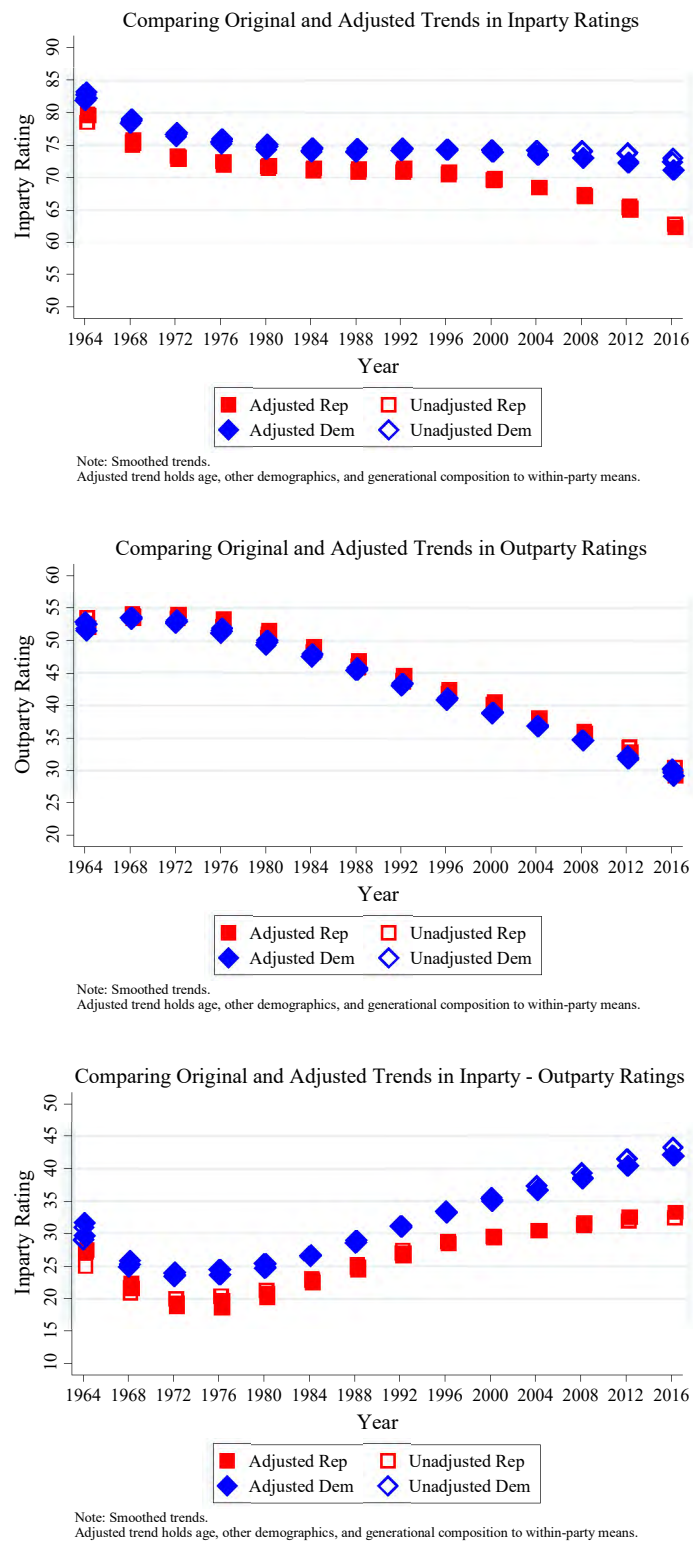


Figure 10—Trends in Party Balance by Region

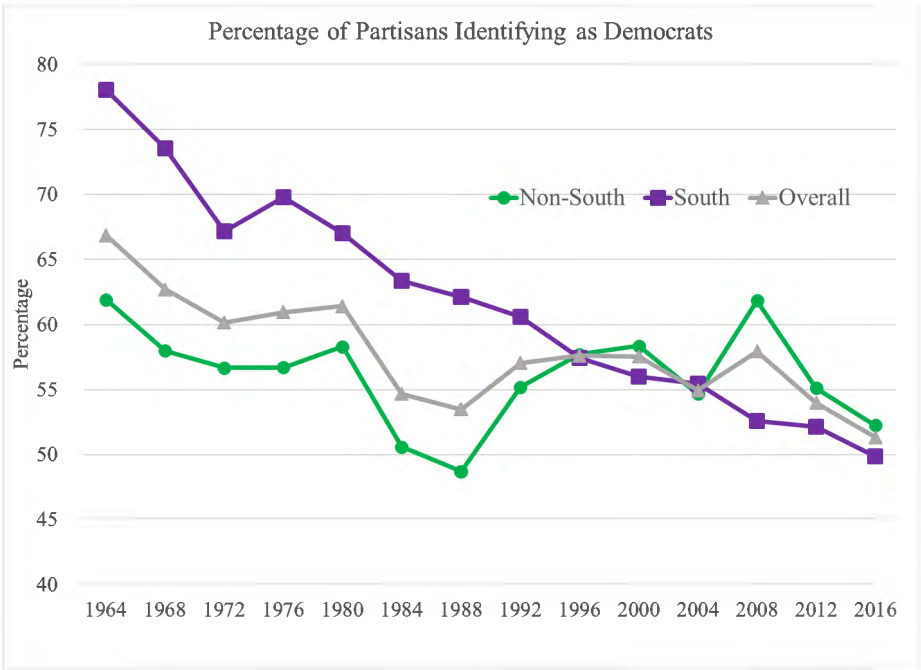


Figure 11—Aging Effects on the Probability of Identifying as Democrat vs. Republican

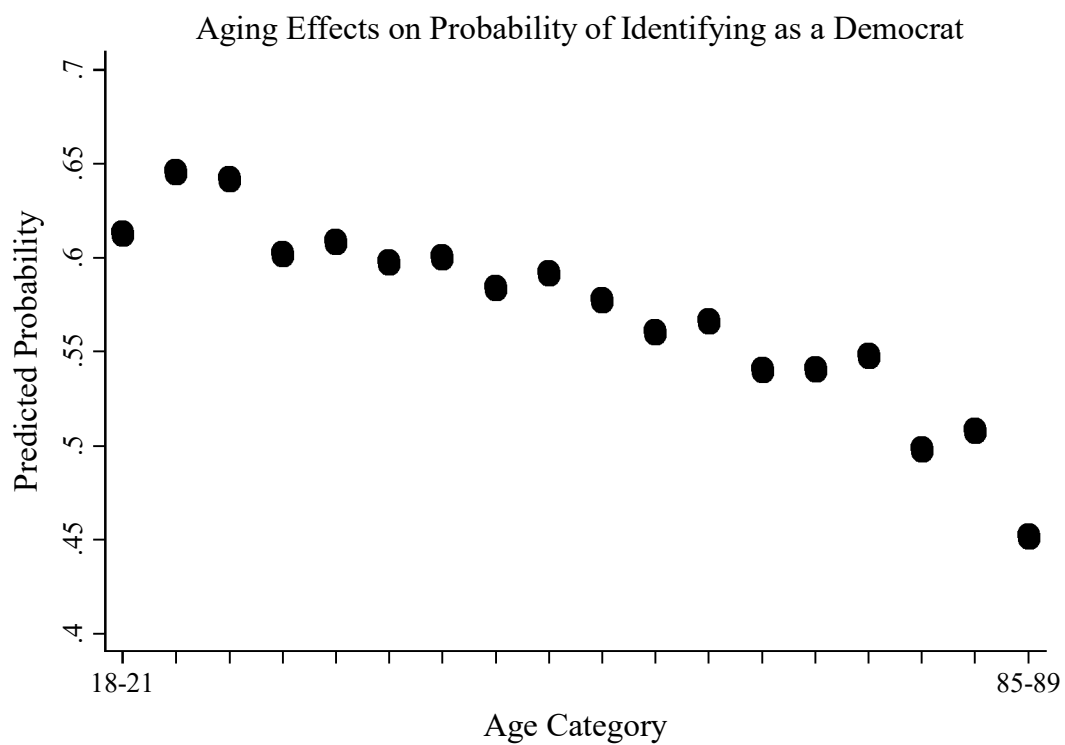


Figure 12a—Probability of Identifying as Democrat by Generation—Non-Southerners  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

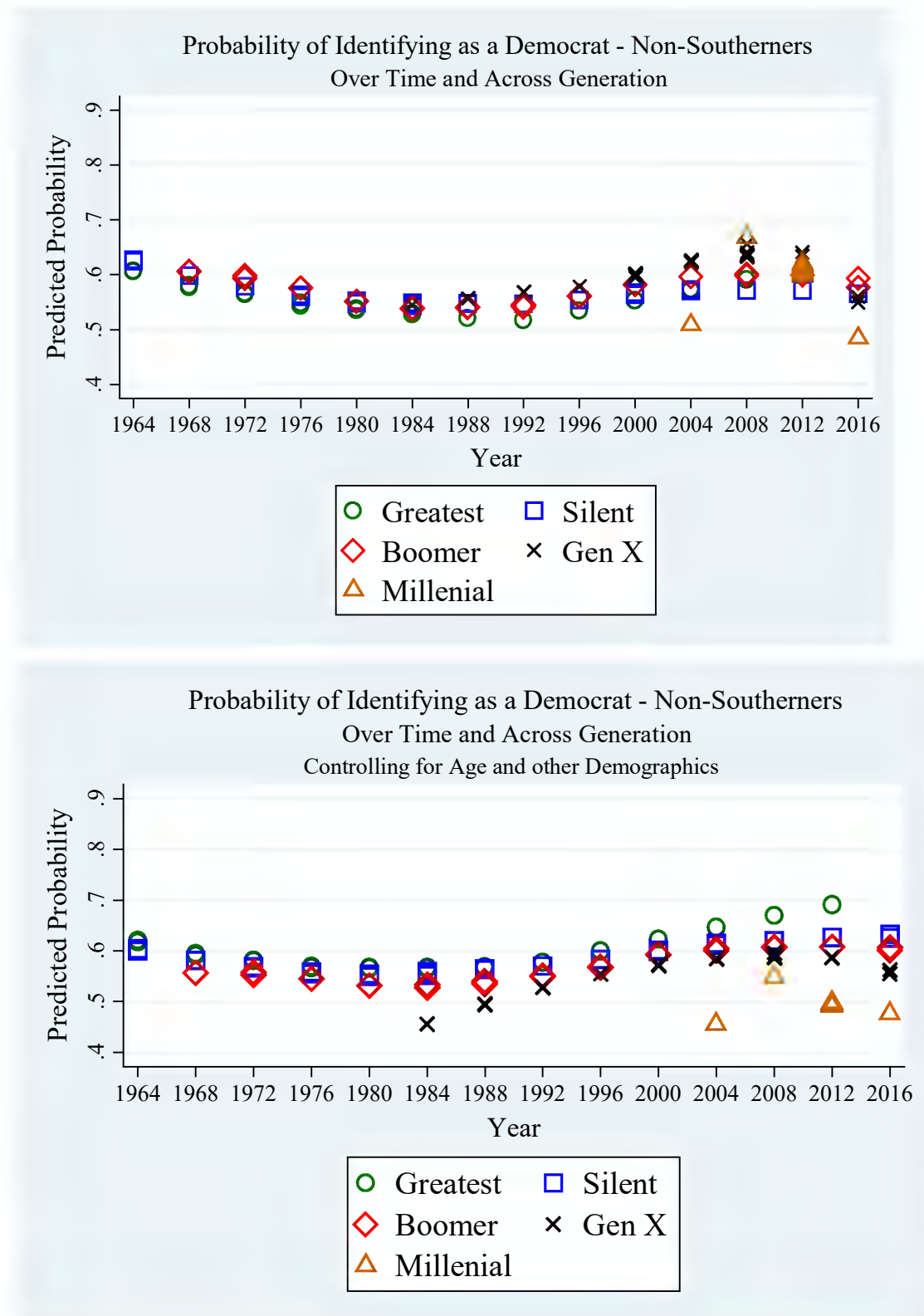


Figure 12b—Probability of Identifying as Democrat by Generation—Southerners  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

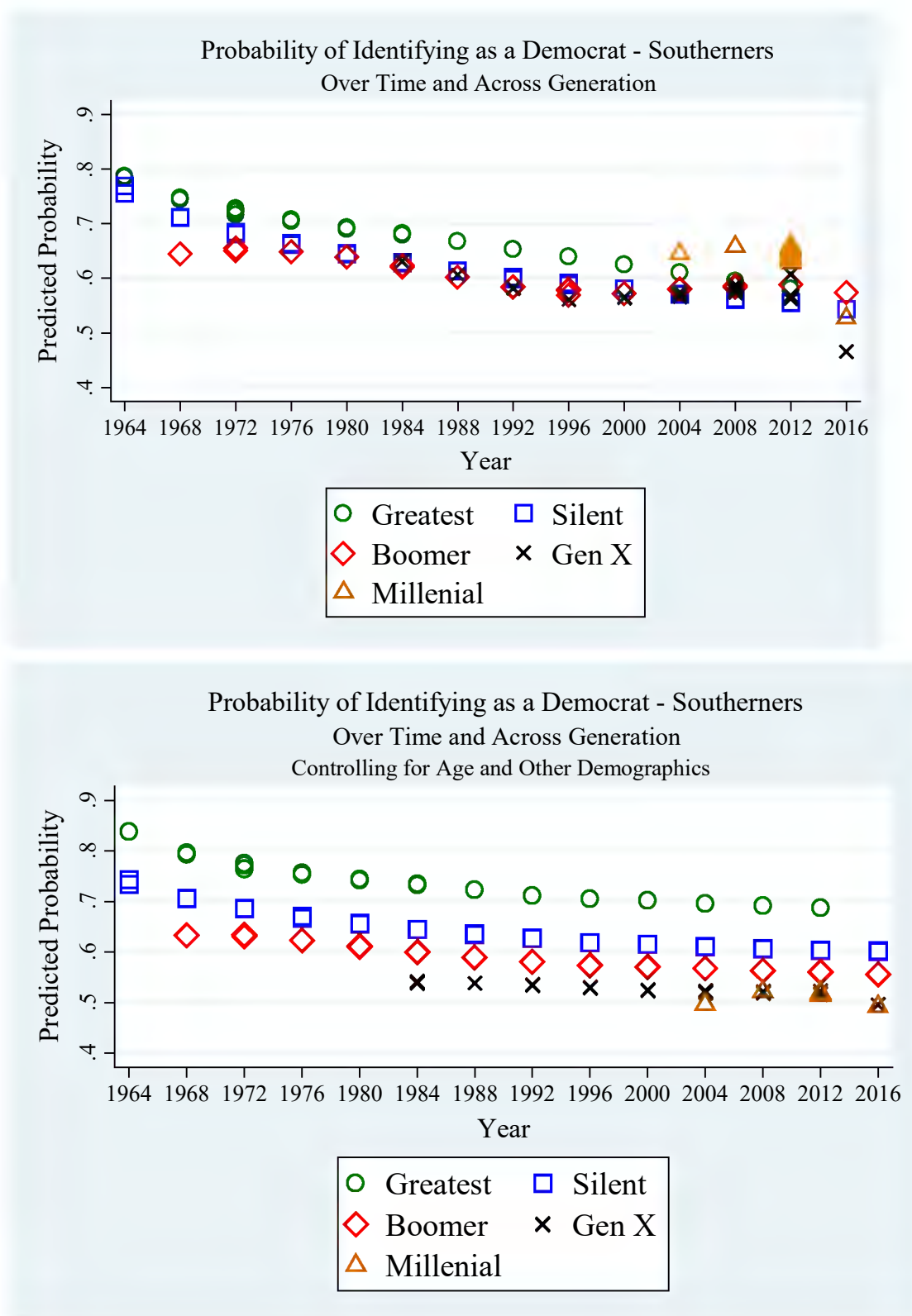


Figure 13—Period Effects on Probability of Identifying as Democrat, by Region

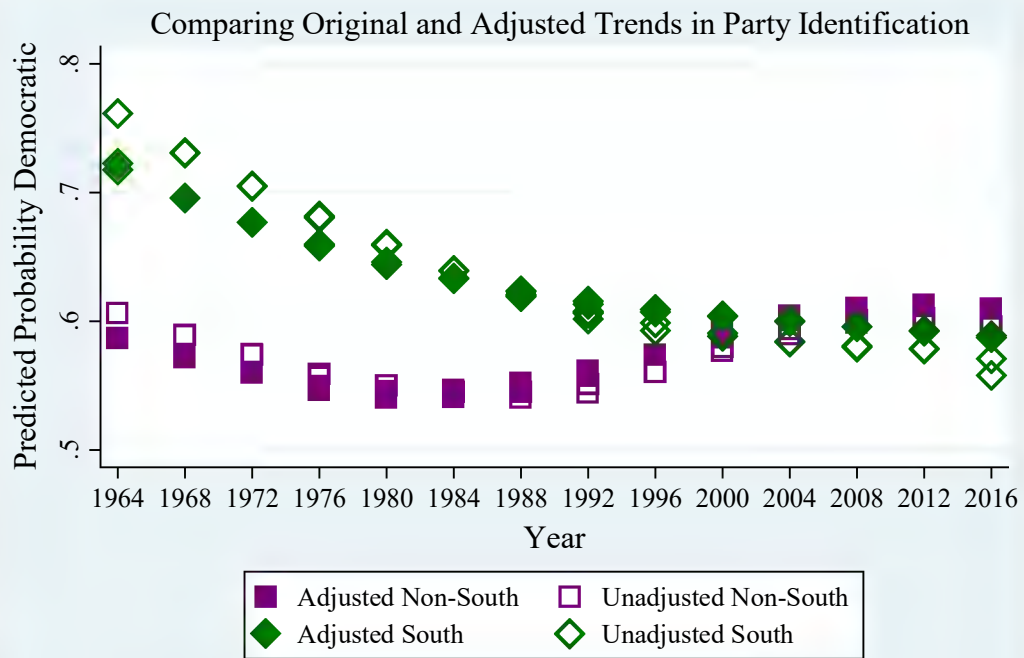


Figure 14—Trends in Independent Identification

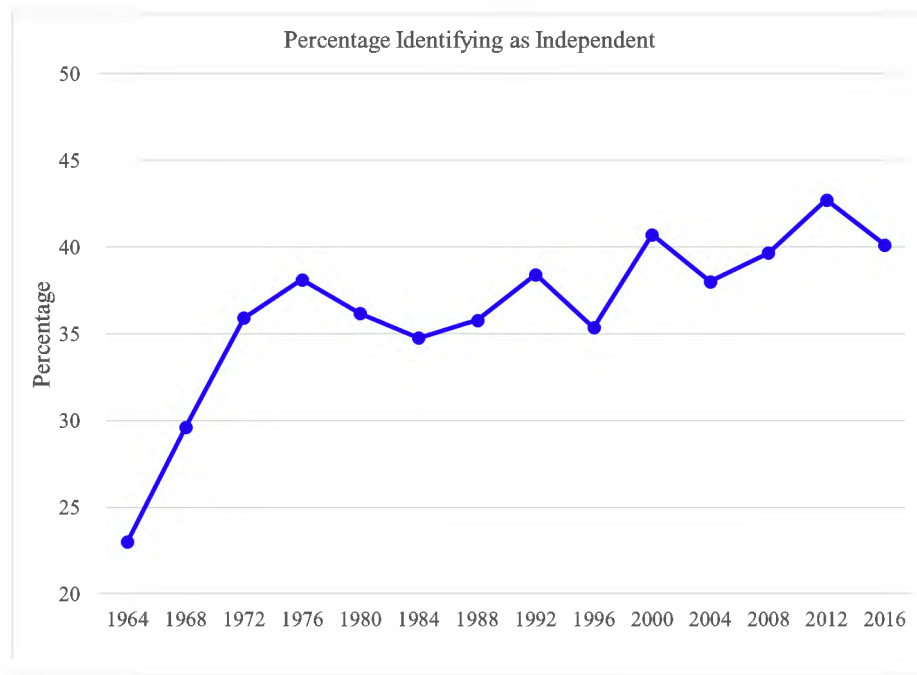


Figure 15—Aging Effects on Probability of Identifying as an Independent

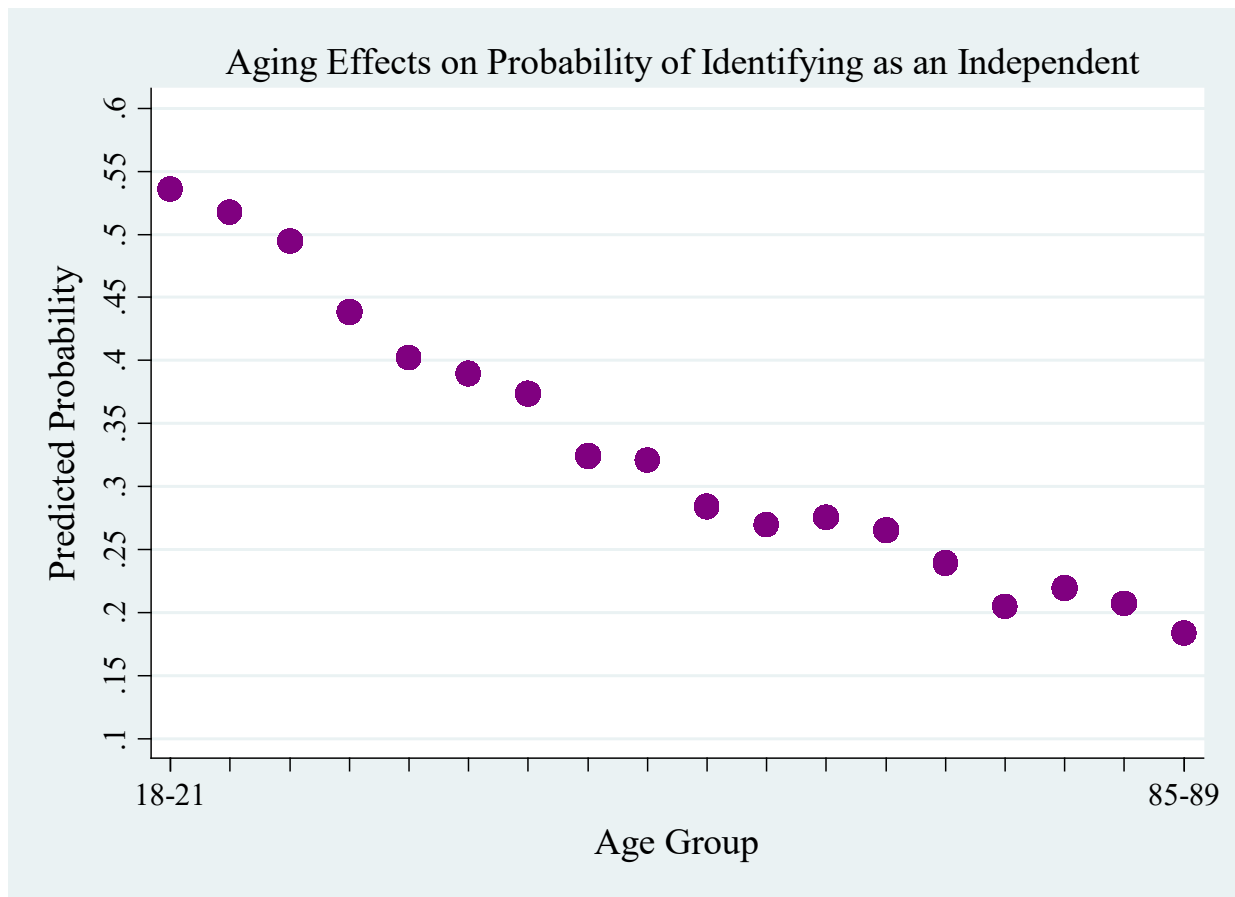




Figure 16—Probability of Identifying as Independent by Generation  
Before and After Adjusting for Effects of Age and Socio-Demographic Composition

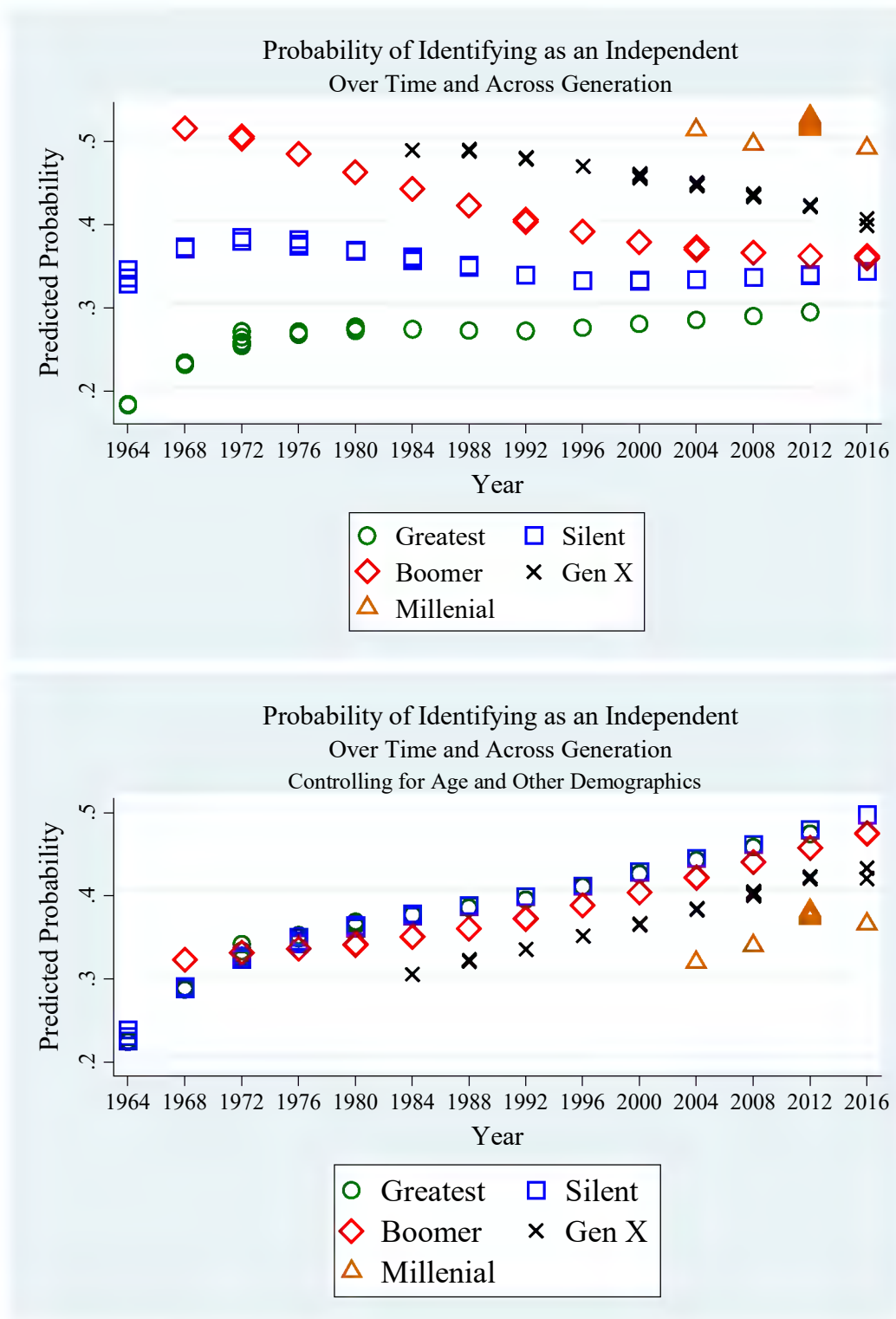
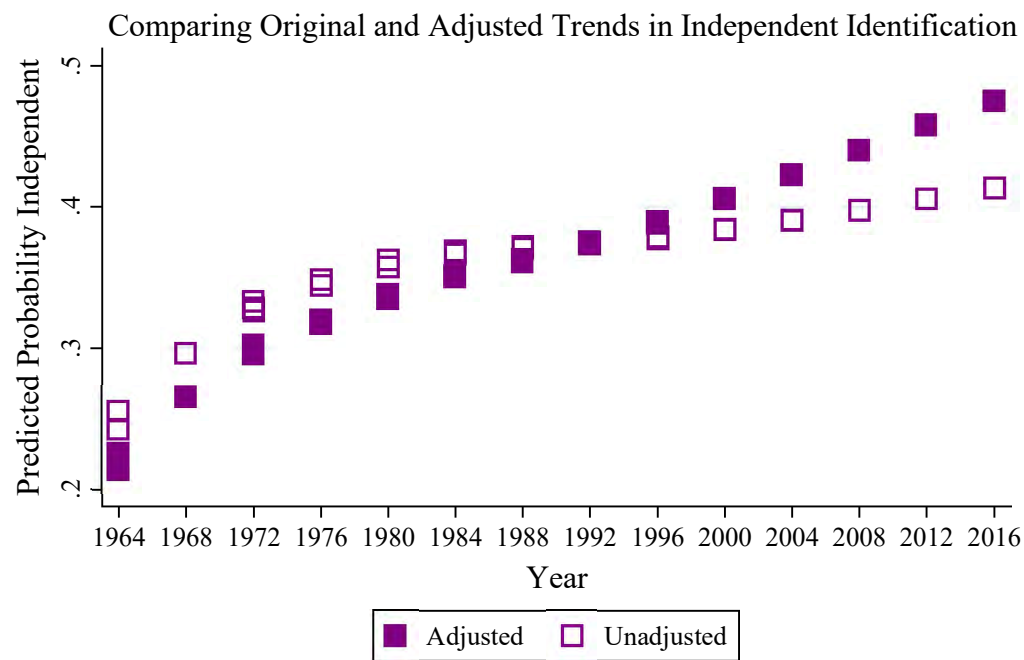


Figure 17—Period Effects on Probability of Identifying as an Independent



Note: Smoothed trends.  
Adjusted trend holds age, other demographics, and generational composition to their sample means.

## Appendix—OLS Regression Results

### *Inparty Rating (0 to 100)*

N=21,247

<u>X:</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>T-statistic</u>	<u>P-value</u>
Democrat	3.88	1.07	3.62	0
1968	-2.08	1.15	-1.81	0.071
1972	-7.06	1.08	-6.53	0
1976	-12.34	1.10	-11.26	0
1980	-8.39	1.18	-7.12	0
1984	-4.54	1.12	-4.06	0
1988	-3.15	1.19	-2.65	0.008
1992	-11.41	1.20	-9.48	0
1996	-9.17	1.29	-7.09	0
2000	-8.76	1.34	-6.54	0
2004	-5.63	1.48	-3.8	0
2008	-11.33	1.45	-7.8	0
2012	-13.41	1.59	-8.42	0
2016	-18.21	1.83	-9.97	0
1968*Democrat	-4.94	1.46	-3.39	0.001
1972*Democrat	-2.44	1.34	-1.82	0.069
1976*Democrat	-0.61	1.36	-0.45	0.655
1980*Democrat	-2.62	1.45	-1.8	0.072
1984*Democrat	-3.57	1.37	-2.61	0.009
1988*Democrat	-4.54	1.43	-3.18	0.001
1992*Democrat	-0.49	1.39	-0.36	0.722
1996*Democrat	-1.10	1.50	-0.73	0.465
2000*Democrat	-1.08	1.56	-0.69	0.488
2004*Democrat	-5.28	1.69	-3.12	0.002
2008*Democrat	0.19	1.60	0.12	0.904
2012*Democrat	2.41	1.73	1.39	0.164
2016*Democrat	2.26	2.11	1.08	0.282
Silent	-1.06	0.73	-1.46	0.145
Baby Boomer	-0.64	0.99	-0.65	0.518
Gen-X	-0.09	1.36	-0.06	0.949
Millennial	0.17	2.10	0.08	0.935
Silent*Democrat	-0.23	0.73	-0.32	0.75
Baby Boomer*Democrat	-0.88	0.79	-1.1	0.269
Gen-X*Democrat	-0.88	1.05	-0.84	0.402
Millennial*Democrat	0.64	1.94	0.33	0.741
22-25	0.48	0.82	0.59	0.557
26-29	0.70	0.83	0.84	0.398
30-33	0.56	0.86	0.66	0.512
34-37	1.40	0.88	1.59	0.112

38-41	3.11	0.93	3.34	0.001
42-45	2.66	0.98	2.71	0.007
46-49	4.44	1.07	4.15	0
50-53	4.30	1.11	3.86	0
54-57	4.24	1.17	3.63	0
58-61	6.38	1.20	5.31	0
62-65	6.03	1.27	4.76	0
66-69	7.36	1.32	5.57	0
70-73	8.61	1.38	6.23	0
74-77	7.17	1.47	4.86	0
78-81	8.80	1.58	5.56	0
82-85	7.28	1.86	3.92	0
86+	10.57	2.03	5.2	0
Parents: Not Born in US	0.14	0.38	0.38	0.706
Black	8.78	0.44	20.13	0
Hispanic/Other	3.95	0.54	7.34	0
Female	2.60	0.27	9.67	0
Married	0.26	0.29	0.87	0.382
Some College	-0.55	0.33	-1.63	0.103
College Degree	-2.43	0.35	-6.97	0
Union HH	0.36	0.34	1.07	0.287
Constant	74.44	1.35	55.2	0

***Outparty Rating (0 to 100)***

N=21,140

<u>X:</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>T-statistic</u>	<u>P-value</u>
Democrat	-3.70	1.36	-2.72	0.007
1968	-1.32	1.42	-0.93	0.351
1972	5.18	1.31	3.97	0
1976	1.93	1.30	1.48	0.138
1980	1.79	1.42	1.26	0.208
1984	-3.90	1.37	-2.86	0.004
1988	-5.87	1.46	-4.03	0
1992	-8.07	1.44	-5.6	0
1996	-11.27	1.63	-6.92	0
2000	-11.27	1.65	-6.84	0
2004	-11.14	1.79	-6.23	0
2008	-15.02	1.78	-8.44	0
2012	-18.45	1.95	-9.48	0
2016	-24.88	2.06	-12.09	0
1968*Democrat	5.80	1.79	3.24	0.001
1972*Democrat	2.77	1.65	1.67	0.094
1976*Democrat	1.04	1.63	0.64	0.523

1980*Democrat	1.91	1.74	1.09	0.274
1984*Democrat	-0.70	1.71	-0.41	0.681
1988*Democrat	2.08	1.78	1.17	0.243
1992*Democrat	-0.50	1.69	-0.3	0.767
1996*Democrat	3.58	1.89	1.9	0.058
2000*Democrat	4.33	1.89	2.29	0.022
2004*Democrat	0.75	2.14	0.35	0.727
2008*Democrat	-1.82	1.93	-0.94	0.346
2012*Democrat	0.29	2.08	0.14	0.89
2016*Democrat	7.21	2.27	3.17	0.002
Silent	-2.58	0.87	-2.98	0.003
Baby Boomer	-3.30	1.20	-2.75	0.006
Gen-X	0.81	1.64	0.49	0.622
Millennial	6.08	2.41	2.52	0.012
Silent*Democrat	2.57	0.87	2.94	0.003
Baby Boomer*Democrat	2.24	0.94	2.37	0.018
Gen-X*Democrat	0.02	1.23	0.02	0.985
Millennial*Democrat	-3.29	2.19	-1.5	0.133
22-25	-0.34	0.91	-0.37	0.709
26-29	0.38	0.89	0.43	0.67
30-33	0.52	0.96	0.54	0.589
34-37	0.76	0.98	0.77	0.44
38-41	-0.10	1.05	-0.1	0.921
42-45	1.62	1.11	1.46	0.145
46-49	0.65	1.24	0.53	0.599
50-53	2.06	1.28	1.61	0.108
54-57	1.46	1.37	1.07	0.283
58-61	0.33	1.43	0.23	0.819
62-65	0.79	1.47	0.54	0.592
66-69	-0.16	1.57	-0.1	0.921
70-73	-1.21	1.68	-0.72	0.47
74-77	-0.93	1.77	-0.52	0.602
78-81	1.23	1.85	0.66	0.507
82-85	-0.44	2.06	-0.21	0.831
86+	-2.13	2.46	-0.86	0.388
Parents: Not Born in US	0.97	0.44	2.2	0.028
Black	-2.88	0.59	-4.85	0
Hispanic/Other	3.28	0.63	5.23	0
Female	1.38	0.32	4.37	0
Married	0.24	0.35	0.68	0.497
Some College	-1.57	0.39	-3.99	0
College Degree	-4.77	0.40	-11.79	0
Union HH	-1.21	0.40	-3.03	0.002
Constant	53.41	1.59	33.55	0

***Inparty Rating minus Outparty Rating (-100 to +100)***

N=21,095

<u>X:</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>T-statistic</u>	<u>P-value</u>
Democrat	7.62	1.86	4.11	0
1968	-0.62	1.91	-0.32	0.747
1972	-12.16	1.77	-6.87	0
1976	-14.12	1.79	-7.9	0
1980	-10.11	1.91	-5.3	0
1984	-0.42	1.90	-0.22	0.824
1988	2.97	2.01	1.48	0.14
1992	-3.17	2.00	-1.59	0.112
1996	2.44	2.30	1.06	0.289
2000	2.76	2.29	1.21	0.228
2004	5.64	2.52	2.24	0.025
2008	3.93	2.47	1.59	0.111
2012	5.21	2.67	1.95	0.051
2016	6.98	2.91	2.39	0.017
1968*Democrat	-10.90	2.39	-4.57	0
1972*Democrat	-5.30	2.20	-2.41	0.016
1976*Democrat	-1.80	2.19	-0.82	0.411
1980*Democrat	-4.63	2.35	-1.97	0.049
1984*Democrat	-3.08	2.36	-1.31	0.191
1988*Democrat	-6.94	2.45	-2.83	0.005
1992*Democrat	-0.24	2.32	-0.1	0.919
1996*Democrat	-4.97	2.65	-1.88	0.06
2000*Democrat	-5.61	2.62	-2.14	0.032
2004*Democrat	-5.99	2.96	-2.03	0.043
2008*Democrat	1.71	2.73	0.63	0.53
2012*Democrat	1.93	2.92	0.66	0.51
2016*Democrat	-5.35	3.35	-1.59	0.111
Silent	1.43	1.17	1.22	0.223
Baby Boomer	2.48	1.64	1.51	0.131
Gen-X	-1.12	2.24	-0.5	0.618
Millennial	-5.99	3.36	-1.78	0.075
Silent*Democrat	-2.69	1.17	-2.29	0.022
Baby Boomer*Democrat	-2.90	1.29	-2.25	0.024
Gen-X*Democrat	-0.72	1.73	-0.41	0.678
Millennial*Democrat	3.97	3.18	1.25	0.212
22-25	0.93	1.31	0.71	0.476
26-29	0.35	1.27	0.27	0.784
30-33	0.14	1.36	0.1	0.92
34-37	0.71	1.38	0.52	0.606

38-41	3.25	1.47	2.21	0.027
42-45	1.03	1.56	0.66	0.51
46-49	3.78	1.70	2.22	0.026
50-53	2.25	1.79	1.26	0.208
54-57	2.72	1.90	1.43	0.152
58-61	6.00	1.96	3.06	0.002
62-65	5.33	2.04	2.62	0.009
66-69	7.51	2.16	3.47	0.001
70-73	9.63	2.28	4.22	0
74-77	8.07	2.40	3.37	0.001
78-81	7.94	2.55	3.11	0.002
82-85	7.90	2.98	2.66	0.008
86+	12.74	3.37	3.78	0
Parents: Not Born in US	-0.85	0.60	-1.42	0.157
Black	11.71	0.78	14.98	0
Hispanic/Other	0.78	0.86	0.91	0.363
Female	1.25	0.44	2.85	0.004
Married	0.05	0.47	0.1	0.924
Some College	0.97	0.54	1.79	0.074
College Degree	2.30	0.56	4.07	0
Union HH	1.59	0.55	2.9	0.004
Constant	20.96	2.23	9.39	0

***Democrat (coded 1) vs. Republican (coded 0)***

N=22,555

<u>X:</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>T-statistic</u>	<u>P-value</u>
South	0.182	0.026	6.99	0
1968	-0.036	0.022	-1.69	0.092
1972	-0.049	0.020	-2.48	0.013
1976	-0.044	0.021	-2.07	0.039
1980	-0.040	0.023	-1.7	0.089
1984	-0.091	0.022	-4.11	0
1988	-0.109	0.024	-4.61	0
1992	-0.029	0.024	-1.23	0.217
1996	-0.003	0.028	-0.11	0.912
2000	0.008	0.029	0.29	0.773
2004	-0.030	0.032	-0.94	0.348
2008	0.061	0.032	1.87	0.061
2012	0.005	0.036	0.15	0.883
2016	-0.010	0.040	-0.24	0.813
1968*South	-0.009	0.036	-0.25	0.806
1972*South	-0.042	0.033	-1.26	0.207
1976*South	-0.024	0.034	-0.7	0.482

1980*South	-0.040	0.037	-1.07	0.287
1984*South	-0.030	0.035	-0.86	0.389
1988*South	-0.021	0.036	-0.59	0.552
1992*South	-0.087	0.035	-2.52	0.012
1996*South	-0.134	0.039	-3.42	0.001
2000*South	-0.146	0.039	-3.76	0
2004*South	-0.131	0.043	-3.06	0.002
2008*South	-0.197	0.040	-4.92	0
2012*South	-0.143	0.045	-3.21	0.001
2016*South	-0.156	0.048	-3.23	0.001
Silent	-0.013	0.016	-0.81	0.418
Baby Boomer	-0.028	0.024	-1.15	0.249
Gen-X	-0.050	0.033	-1.51	0.132
Millennial	-0.137	0.051	-2.7	0.007
Silent*South	-0.075	0.019	-3.93	0
Baby Boomer*South	-0.105	0.021	-4.99	0
Gen-X*South	-0.128	0.027	-4.65	0
Millennial*South	-0.046	0.051	-0.9	0.368
22-25	0.032	0.021	1.52	0.129
26-29	0.029	0.021	1.37	0.17
30-33	-0.011	0.022	-0.49	0.623
34-37	-0.005	0.023	-0.22	0.827
38-41	-0.016	0.024	-0.66	0.512
42-45	-0.013	0.025	-0.5	0.618
46-49	-0.029	0.027	-1.07	0.283
50-53	-0.021	0.028	-0.76	0.449
54-57	-0.036	0.030	-1.2	0.229
58-61	-0.053	0.031	-1.7	0.089
62-65	-0.047	0.032	-1.45	0.146
66-69	-0.073	0.034	-2.16	0.031
70-73	-0.072	0.035	-2.04	0.041
74-77	-0.065	0.037	-1.76	0.078
78-81	-0.115	0.040	-2.88	0.004
82-85	-0.105	0.044	-2.39	0.017
86+	-0.162	0.050	-3.2	0.001
Parents: Not Born in US	0.081	0.010	8.23	0
Black	0.369	0.008	45.66	0
Hispanic/Other	0.144	0.013	11.08	0
Female	0.046	0.007	6.6	0
Married	-0.073	0.007	-9.85	0
Some College	-0.077	0.009	-8.74	0
College Degree	-0.089	0.009	-9.44	0
Union HH	0.139	0.009	15.94	0
Constant	0.607	0.030	20.11	0



***Independent Identification (Independent=1, Partisan=0)***

N=25,269

<u>X:</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>T-statistic</u>	<u>P-value</u>
1968	0.069	0.016	4.39	0
1972	0.128	0.014	8.89	0
1976	0.147	0.016	9.38	0
1980	0.143	0.017	8.31	0
1984	0.133	0.017	7.93	0
1988	0.159	0.018	8.76	0
1992	0.191	0.018	10.31	0
1996	0.152	0.022	7.05	0
2000	0.224	0.023	9.88	0
2004	0.214	0.026	8.33	0
2008	0.234	0.025	9.19	0
2012	0.277	0.028	9.71	0
2016	0.260	0.031	8.28	0
Silent	0.001	0.014	0.07	0.941
Baby Boomer	-0.021	0.021	-1.01	0.311
Gen-X	-0.058	0.029	-1.98	0.048
Millennial	-0.113	0.043	-2.62	0.009
22-25	-0.018	0.020	-0.92	0.359
26-29	-0.041	0.020	-2.04	0.041
30-33	-0.097	0.021	-4.65	0
34-37	-0.134	0.021	-6.27	0
38-41	-0.146	0.023	-6.45	0
42-45	-0.162	0.024	-6.77	0
46-49	-0.212	0.026	-8.25	0
50-53	-0.215	0.026	-8.15	0
54-57	-0.251	0.028	-9.08	0
58-61	-0.266	0.029	-9.24	0
62-65	-0.260	0.030	-8.71	0
66-69	-0.270	0.031	-8.67	0
70-73	-0.296	0.032	-9.13	0
74-77	-0.331	0.034	-9.85	0
78-81	-0.316	0.036	-8.79	0
82-85	-0.329	0.040	-8.23	0
86+	-0.352	0.045	-7.9	0
Parents: Not Born in US	0.025	0.009	2.72	0.007
Black	-0.133	0.010	-13.8	0
Hispanic/Other	-0.017	0.012	-1.35	0.176
Female	-0.063	0.007	-9.53	0
Married	-0.026	0.007	-3.7	0
Some College	-0.023	0.008	-2.72	0.006

College Degree	-0.070	0.009	-7.92	0
Union HH	0.000	0.008	-0.01	0.992
Constant	0.474	0.027	17.56	0

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