

THE IDEOLOGICAL GAP: BEHAVIOR TRENDS OF THE POLITICALLY ACTIVE,
1976-2004

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ABSTRACT

This thesis tracks the relationship between voter positions on ideological issues and voter partisanship in presidential elections from 1976 to 2004 using data from the ANES. Based on Stimson's (1975) work, the electorate was divided into quartiles, representing a continuum of political engagement. On one end are those voters that are not paying attention to politics, that do not organize their beliefs along the abstract liberal-conservative dimension, and that are not highly educated. On the other end are those voters that are paying attention to politics, that organize their beliefs along the liberal-conservative dimension, and that are highly educated. I present evidence demonstrating the most politically engaged twenty-five percent of the population are consistently connecting their partisanship and issue positions at higher rates from 1976 to 2004, representing a trend that does not seem to be stalled by any single election. The least politically engaged twenty-five percent of the electorate are not making any absolute or election specific strides in connecting their partisanship and issue positions. The middle fifty percent of the electorate have fluctuated in connecting their issues positions and their partisanship depending on the election. Only the top twenty-five percent of the electorate have made large strides in organizing their political beliefs since 1976, leaving the rest of the electorate lagging far behind.