

# Is Government Still “the Problem” after 2008?



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# Overview



- “Government is not the solution to our problems, government *is* the problem” – Ronald Reagan (1981)
- Some suggested that the 2008 election signaled a public turn toward government as problem solver
- I show:
  - Attitudes toward big government affect congressional voting
  - Attitudes toward big government are changing
  - Why attitudes are changing

# Measuring Big Government



- “Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel that it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?”

# Government Size and Congressional Voting

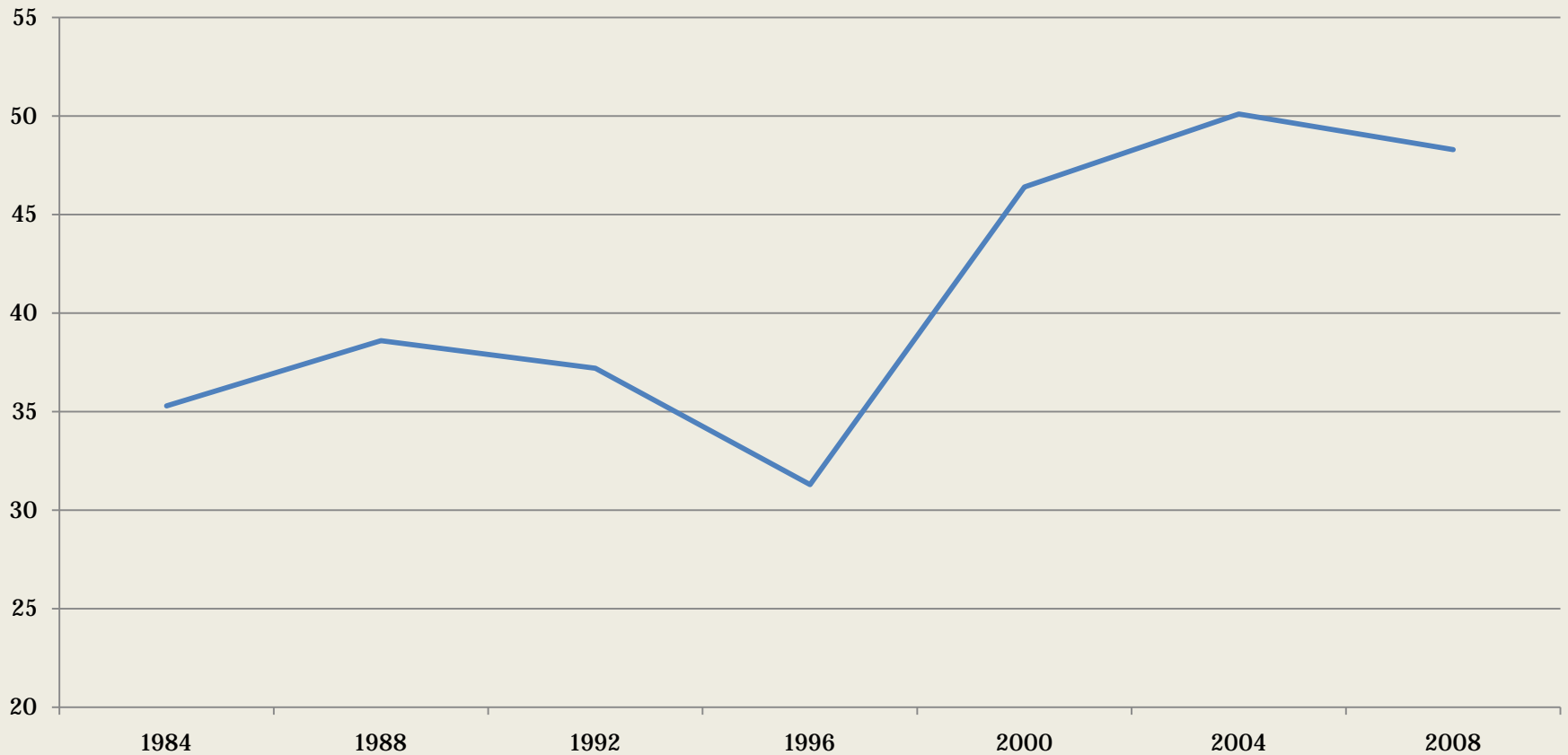


- Controlling for race, ethnicity, gender, education, age, party id, ideology, in midterm elections . . .
- Strong opponents of big government are just 41% likely to support a Democratic Congressional candidate, while strong supporters are 64% likely

# Attitudes about the Size of Government



## **% Supporting Increased Services and Spending**

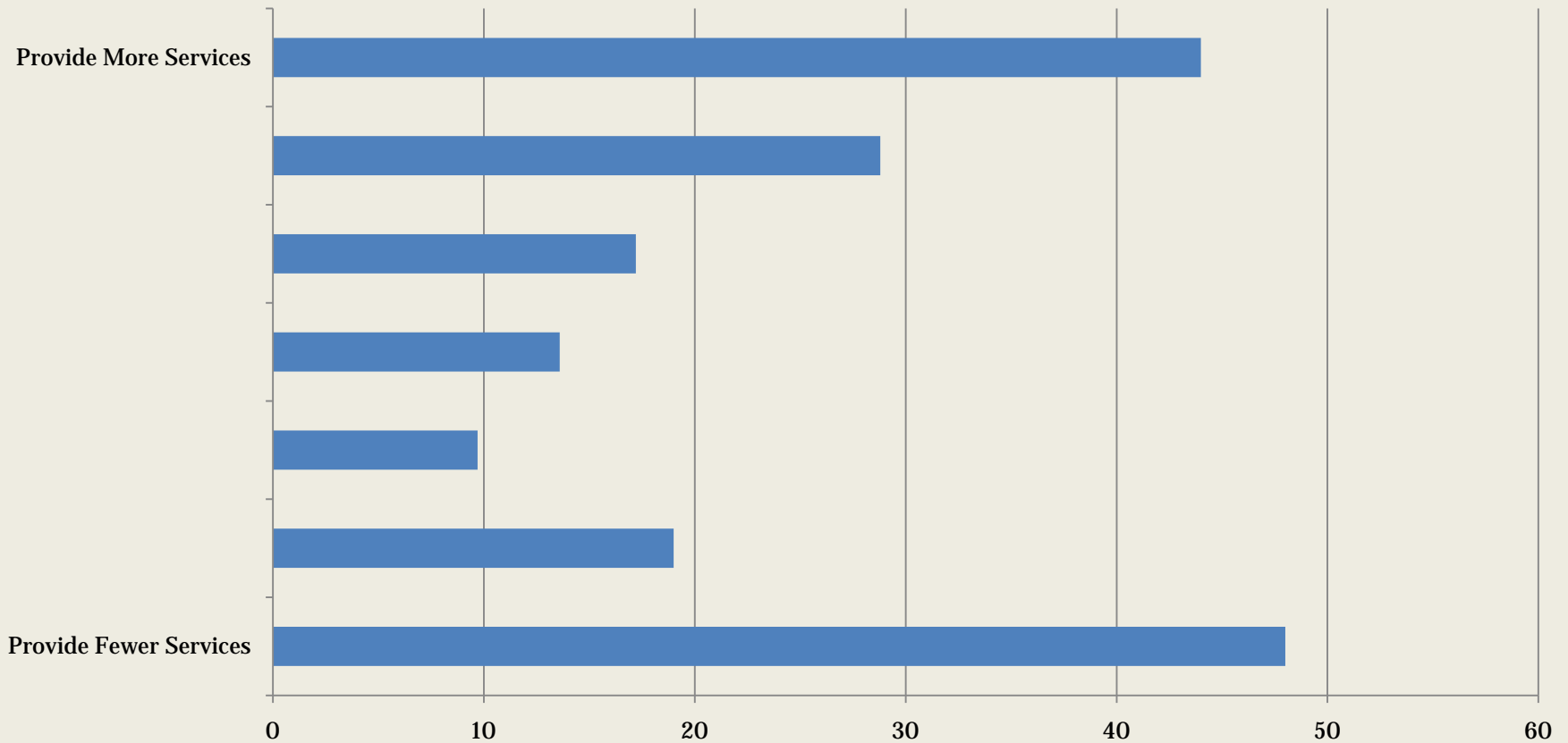


Source: NES

# Intensity



## % Extremely Important (2008)

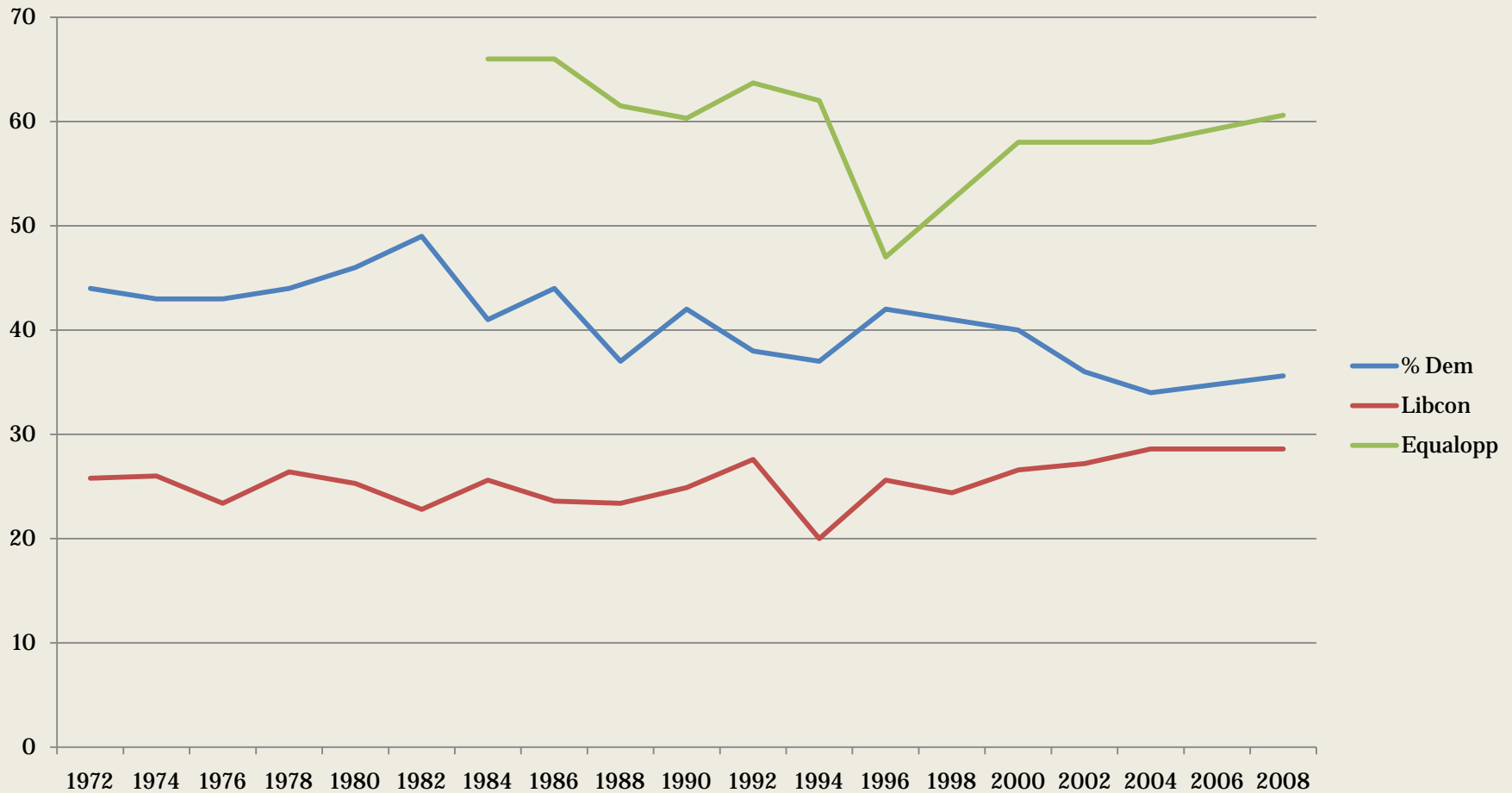


# Explanations for Changing Attitudes



- **Changing Composition**
  - Predictors of support for government spending (Jacoby 1994; Feldman and Steenbergen 2001; Goren 2003)
    - ✦ Orientations (PID, Ideology, Equal Opportunity)
    - ✦ Demographics (Race, Ethnicity, Gender)
- **Changing Effect**
- **Shift**

# Changing Composition



Source: NES

# Shift



## 1984-1996

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs = 8071	
				F( 8, 8062) = 264.67	
Model	4063.64476	8	507.955595	Prob > F = 0.0000	
Residual	15472.8573	8062	1.9192331	R-squared = 0.2080	
				Adj R-squared = 0.2072	
Total	19536.502	8070	2.42088006	Root MSE = 1.3854	

serv_spend	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
partyid	<b>.3297094</b>	.0211895	15.56	0.000	.2881725	.3712464
libcon	.2219828	.0126145	17.60	0.000	.1972551	.2467104
equalopp	.2381048	.016567	14.37	0.000	.2056293	.2705804
black	.5464074	.0546626	10.00	0.000	.4392546	.6535603
latino	.2382582	.0762854	3.12	0.002	.0887192	.3877972
gender	.287587	.0310466	9.26	0.000	.2267277	.3484464
age	-.0080129	.0009436	-8.49	0.000	-.0098626	-.0061632
education	-.1486616	.0177611	-8.37	0.000	-.183478	-.1138453
_cons	2.000647	.1124155	17.80	0.000	1.780284	2.221011

## 2000-2004

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs = 1004	
				F( 8, 995) = 51.75	
Model	734.987013	8	91.8733766	Prob > F = 0.0000	
Residual	1766.4343	995	1.77531086	R-squared = 0.2938	
				Adj R-squared = 0.2881	
Total	2501.42131	1003	2.4939395	Root MSE = 1.3324	

serv_spend	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]	
partyid	<b>.1448771</b>	.066373	2.18	0.029	.01463	.2751241
libcon	.4143624	.0368735	11.24	0.000	.3420036	.4867212
equalopp	.2385749	.0446168	5.35	0.000	.1510211	.3261287
black	.6479509	.1535771	4.22	0.000	.3465787	.9493231
latino	.4134821	.1772259	2.33	0.020	.0657027	.7612615
gender	.3638143	.0851141	4.27	0.000	.1967905	.530838
age	-.0032014	.0026858	-1.19	0.234	-.0084719	.002069
education	-.1453011	.051701	-2.81	0.005	-.2467567	-.0438454
_cons	1.774774	.3091752	5.74	0.000	1.168064	2.381485

# Party Identification and Attitudes Toward Big Government, 2000 and 2004



<b>2000</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Democrat</b>
BG Opponent	44.0	25.9	7.9
Middling	35.5	34.4	22.7
BG Supporter	20.5	39.7	69.4

<b>2004</b>	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Independent</b>	<b>Democrat</b>
BG Opponent	41.2	20.2	9.8
Middling	26.8	30.3	21.4
BG Supporter	32.0	49.6	68.8

# Changing Effect



## 1984-1996

## 2008

Source	SS	df	MS	
				Number of obs = 8071
				F( 8, 8062) = 264.67
Model	4063.64476	8	507.955595	Prob > F = 0.0000
Residual	15472.8573	8062	1.9192331	R-squared = 0.2080
				Adj R-squared = 0.2072
Total	19536.502	8070	2.42088006	Root MSE = 1.3854

serv_spend	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
partyid	<b>.3297094</b>	.0211895	15.56	0.000	.2881725 .3712464
libcon	.2219828	.0126145	17.60	0.000	.1972551 .2467104
equalopp	.2381048	.016567	14.37	0.000	.2056293 .2705804
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latino	<b>.2382582</b>	.0762854	3.12	0.002	.0887192 .3877972
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_cons	2.000647	.1124155	17.80	0.000	1.780284 2.221011

Survey: Linear regression

Number of strata =	1	Number of obs =	797
Number of PSUs =	797	Population size =	.0659
Design df =	796		
F( 8, 789) =	37.28		
Prob > F =	0.0000		
R-squared =	0.3438		

		Linearized					
serv_spend	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]		
partyid	<b>.5433668</b>	.1098765	4.95	0.000	.3276849 .7590486		
libcon	.2789671	.0547687	5.09	0.000	.1714589 .3864753		
equalopp	.3585449	.0606729	5.91	0.000	.239447 .4776427		
black	.5493149	.2304289	2.38	0.017	.0969947 1.001635		
latino	<b>.8123583</b>	.2568545	3.16	0.002	.308166 1.316551		
gender	.2228651	.1472379	1.51	0.131	-.0661553 .5118856		
age	.0002326	.0043926	0.05	0.958	-.0083898 .008855		
education	-.1224989	.0754613	-1.62	0.105	-.2706256 .0256277		
_cons	.7425482	.4515605	1.64	0.100	-.143842 1.628938		

# Summary



- Attitudes about the size of government affect Congressional voting
- Americans' attitudes toward government are changing due more to shifts and changing effects than changing composition
- 2008 does not appear to be a break point
- The future of Congressional elections . . .

# Caveat



- “Americans seem to be recoiling against big government when it threatens to become a reality rather than a campaign promise” – Michael Barone (July 2009)