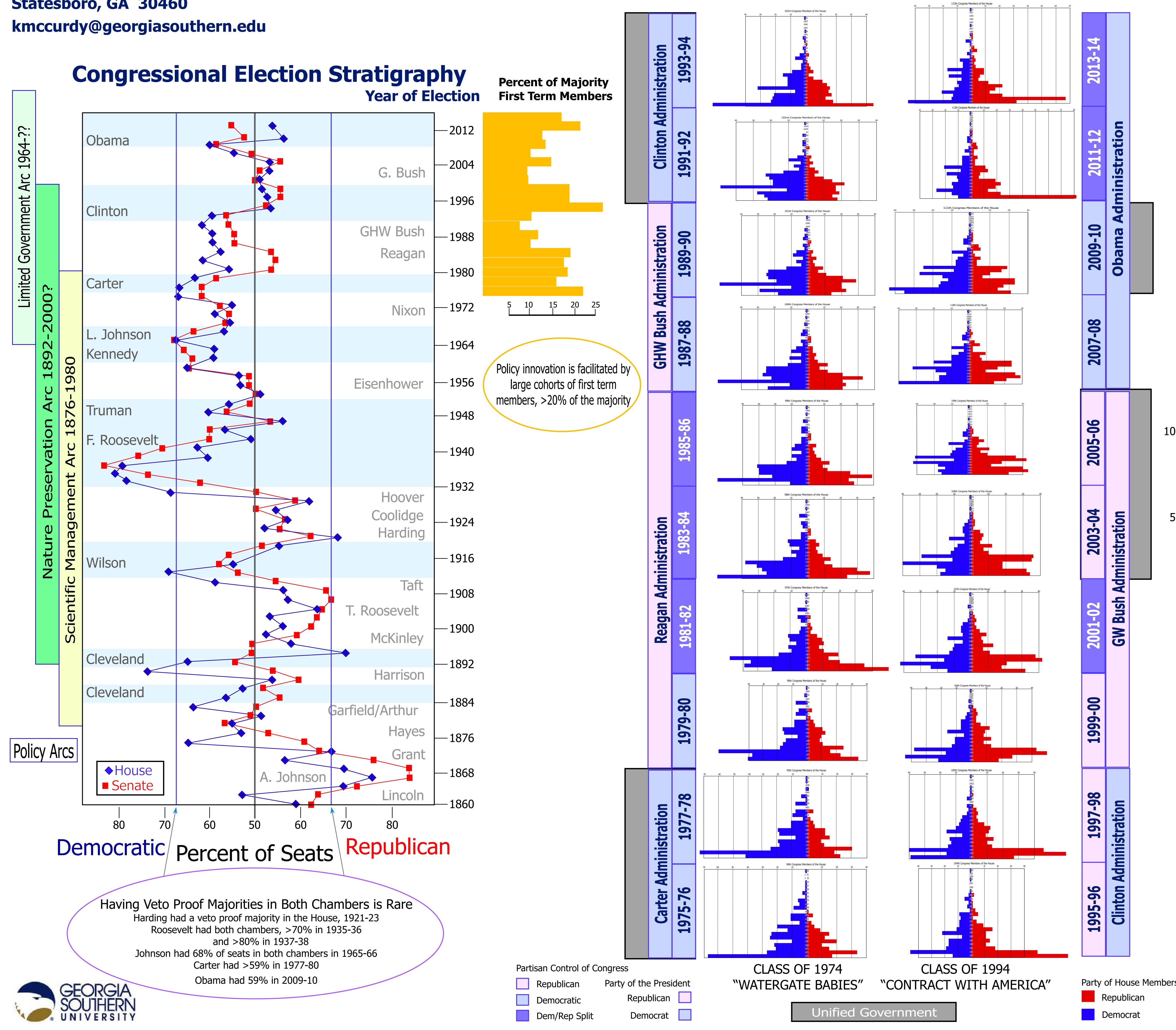
Karen M. McCurdy

Department of Political Science Georgia Southern University Statesboro, GA 30460

Science, the United States Congress and Institutional Arrangements: The Election Classes of 1974 and 1994 Influencing Policy

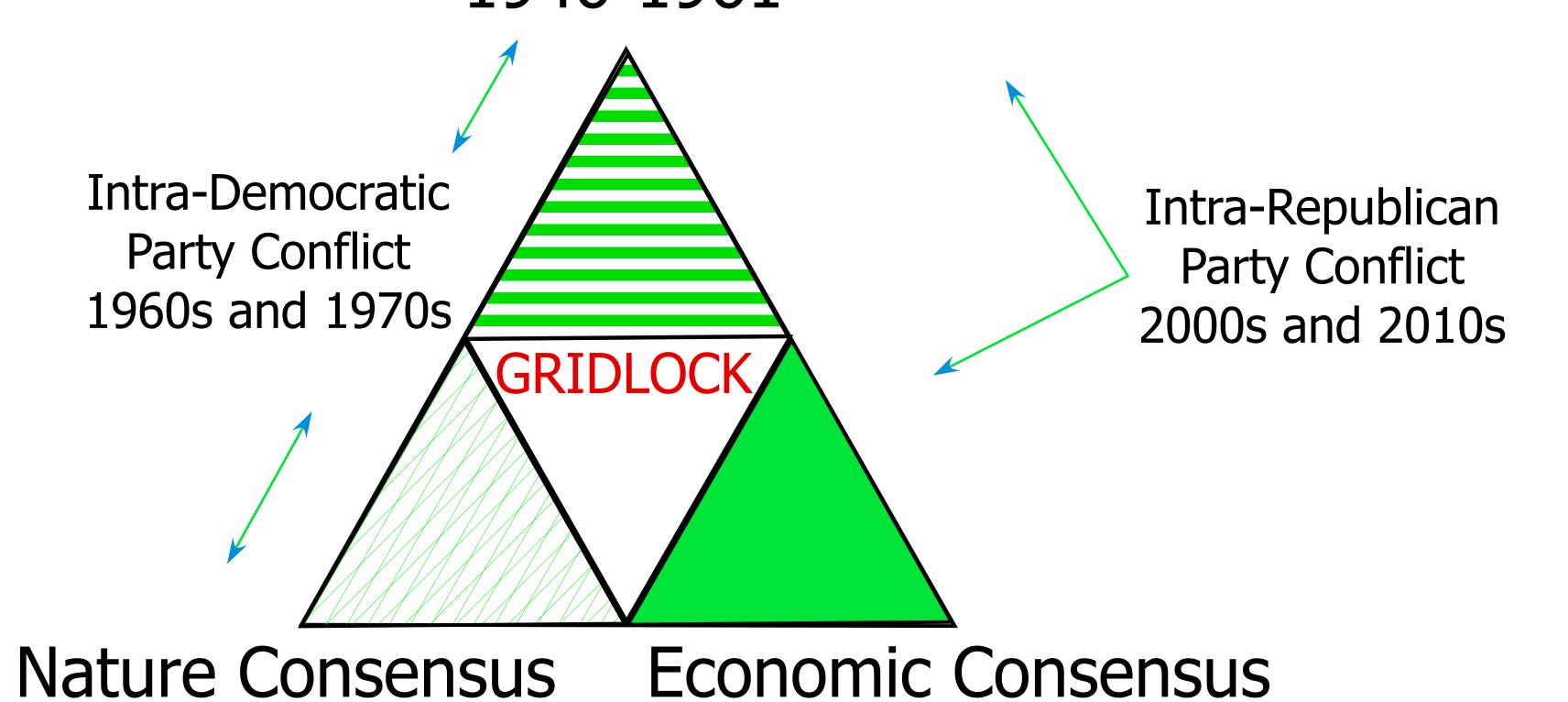


NR-04



Policy Preference Cohorts

Science Consensus 1946-1961

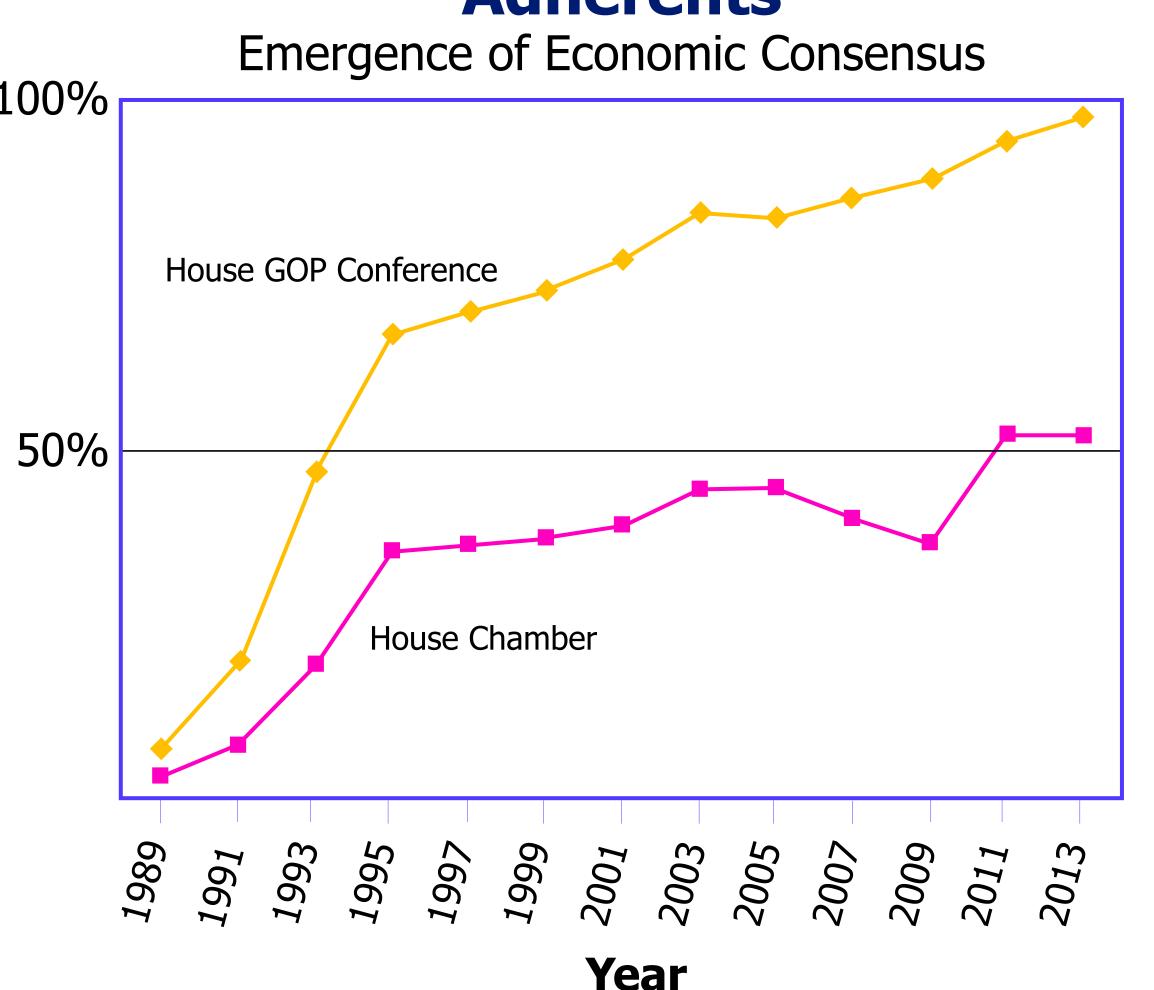


1981-2011

Policy preferences at first election influence policy behavior throughout congressional careers, particularly in committee or party leadership positions

Growth in Taxpayer Pledge Adherents

1960-1981



Emergence of a New Policy Cohort
"No New Taxes"
"Reduce the Size of Government"

Abstract

Members of the United States House of Representatives first elected in the same year have a demographic influence in the seniority system for more than twenty years, particularly at the committee leadership level. Policy outcomes in a wide range of contemporary science and technology topics can be understood comparing the large class of Democrats elected in 1974 (20.9 percent of seats) to the large class of Republicans in the 1994 elections (19.8 percent of seats).

The 1974 class was able to extend policy consensus for twenty years beyond their initial election. With majorities of 56-67 percent over two decades, the class of 1974 reformed Congress to devolve power and produced legislation limiting the power of executive and campaign finance contributions, further reinforcing their influence in policy making. The 1994 class has as yet been unable to sustain unified government beyond two consecutive Congresses (4 years) and the magnitude of their majority in divided government has remained slim (51-56 percent). Alterations they made to congressional procedures have not been maintained due to oscillating majorities, and little legislative innovation has occurred. Instead, the class of 1994 has depended on blocking tactics and high stakes budgetary brinkmanship to further their policy goals of shrinking the size of government.

The policy consensus of scientific management in place from 1876 to 1980, and possibly extended by the class of 1974 through 2000 has been challenged by the class of 1994 which desires a smaller federal government. During the struggle between these co-existing congressional factions, science and technology research and development have been transformed to high stakes election issues instead of low visibility bureaucratic decision-making.

Change in political outlook and approach to public problems does not happen with a single election. The partisan realignments that can easily be identified looking back to the 1788 elections through 1934 are not as clear in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Control of institutional arrangements are much more complex including the entire range of strategies available in constitutionally defined systems of federalism and separated powers. Political strategists no longer see science as beneficial in the tactical moves for control of domestic policy.