Faculty at Home
INSIGHT AND CONVERSATION WITH MIDDLEBURY PROFESSORS
U.S. Politics in a Pandemic

April 22, 2020

Bert Johnson
Political Science Department
Middlebury College
bnjohnson@middlebury.edu
• Government Performance
• Political Consequences
Government Performance

- Federalism
- Centralization and Decentralization
The Parties in Congress Have Moved Apart Since the 1970s
House Members' Ideological Positions
Democrats in blue, Republicans in red.

Source: DWNominate data from Voteview.com.
State Medicaid Expansion Status, March 2020

Map showing the status of Medicaid expansion by state in March 2020, with red for states that have adopted expansion and blue for states that have not adopted.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, kff.org.
Timing of Statewide Closure Orders, March and April 2020
Number of days after March 11 that state instituted order. (Gray=No statewide order.)

Note: Specifics of state orders vary. Source: Ballotpedia.org.
State and Local Annual Revenue Changes, 1952-2019

Percent change in state and local revenues vs. previous budget cycle, adjusted for inflation

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; National Association of State Budget Officers (2018-19 estimates).
Political Consequences

• 2020 Election
• The long run
Public Opinion Rally Effects for Various Presidents

Presidential approval rating tends to rise in a crisis

9/11 Attacks (Bush 2001)
Gulf War (Bush 1991)
Iraq War (Bush 2003)
Bin Laden killed (Obama 2011)
Covid-19 (Trump 2020)

Source: Gallup Polls
Approval has Risen for Trump and Most Governors
But most governors' rally effects exceed Trump's

The Economy and Presidential Election Results

GDP Growth and Incumbent Two-Party Vote Share

Source: Election results; GDP data from Bureau of Economic Analysis.
The April Generic Ballot and House Election Results

Early polls are not as useful as later polls

April 2020 Democratic Party lead=8%

Number of House Seats Won by Democrats in November

Democrats' Lead in April 'Generic Ballot' Poll

Source: Gallup Polls, pollingreport.com, fivethirtyeight.com.
Conclusion

• A ‘critical juncture’ and disruption of old modes?