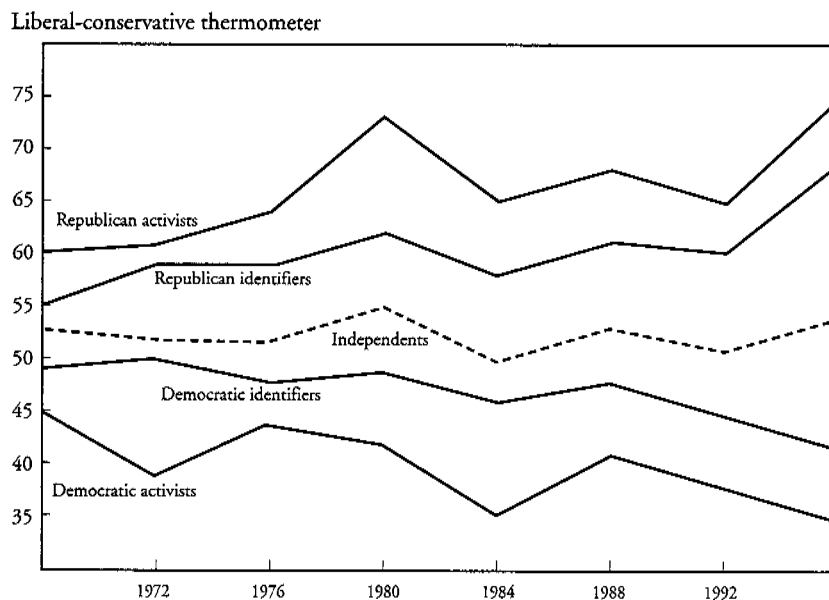


Figure 11-4. *Ideology Thermometer Scores of Party Identifiers and Activists, 1968–96<sup>a</sup>*



Source: American National Election Studies, website: [www.umich.edu/~nes](http://www.umich.edu/~nes).

a. Activists are defined as respondents who engaged in three or more campaign activities. Partisan identifiers do not include leaners. The liberal-conservative thermometer score measures the respondents' relative thermometer ratings of "liberals" and "conservatives."

children's activities, and so forth—can testify to the generality of the phenomenon. One group of activists may propose something outside the mainstream of community sentiment only to be countered by another group's proposal equally far off in another direction. Or opponents may simply exercise their "exit" option and withdraw from the discussion. In most such conflicts my strong suspicion is that a handful of people picked randomly off the street could have offered proposals that would have beaten the formal contenders in majority votes of the community.

What is going on here? The answer is clear enough. Ordinary people are by and large moderate in their views—relatively unconcerned and uninformed about politics most of the time and comfortable with the language of compromise, trade-offs, and exceptions to the rule. Meanwhile, political and governmental processes are polarized, the participants self-righteous and intolerant, their rhetoric emotional and excessive. The