

Long-Term Trends in Modern American Society

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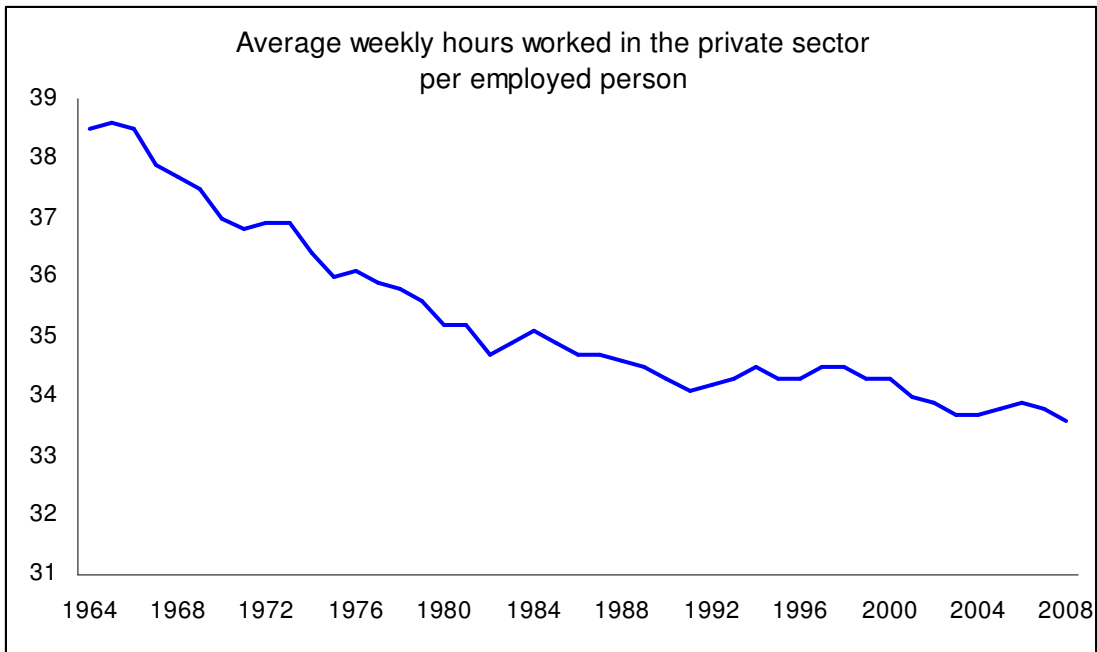
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This short descriptive piece highlights six areas in which the right and the left typically differ: the economy, military spending, other federal government spending, values, crime, and the culture. Time-series data enable to roughly determine the direction taken by American society.

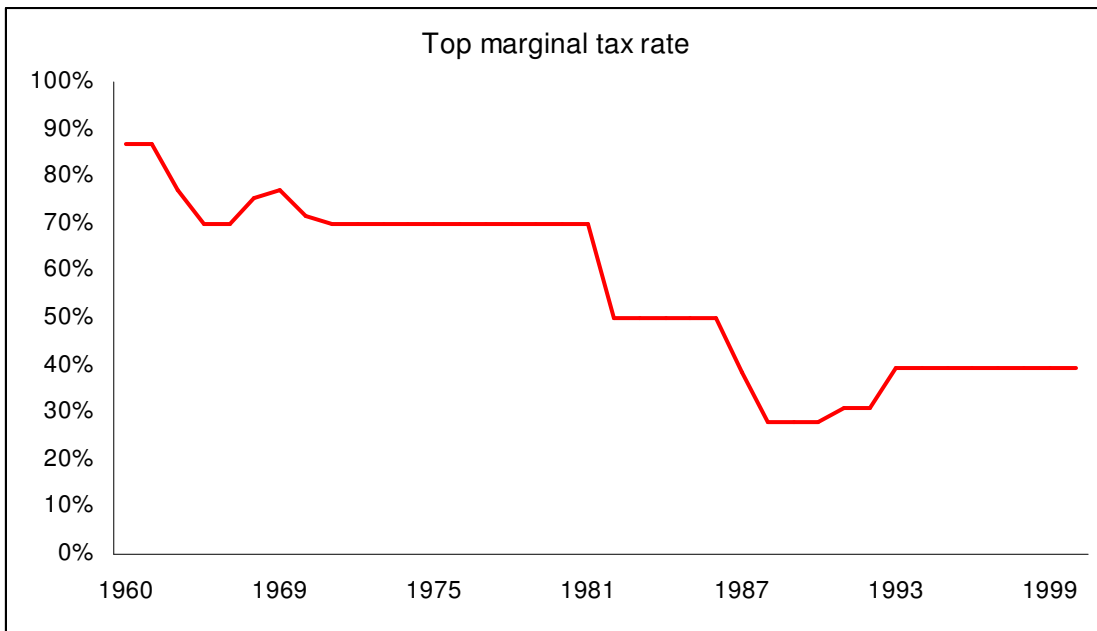
In the past decades, the right has been successful in curbing the rise in crimes and abortions, and in lowering marginal income tax rates. The left has been successful in reducing time spent at work, in decreasing military spending, in increasing non-defense federal government spending, and in imposing a multicultural society. Religious attitudes do not seem to have changed much.

In what follows, the differences between **right** and **left** have purposefully been simplified and exaggerated to be starker. Neither Republicans nor Democrats are so polarized.

The Economy. The right wants individuals to be free to work hard and reap the fruits of their labor. The role of the state is minimal. Incentives to work in productive activities are strong, and purchasing power is high. The left wants individuals to be taken care of by the welfare state and the nanny state, regardless of their contribution (for instance with an unconditional access to healthcare and pensions). The state has a big role to play, notably in redistributing the earnings of successful individuals. Incentives to work in productive activities are weak, more time is dedicated to leisure and to unproductive but pleasurable activities.

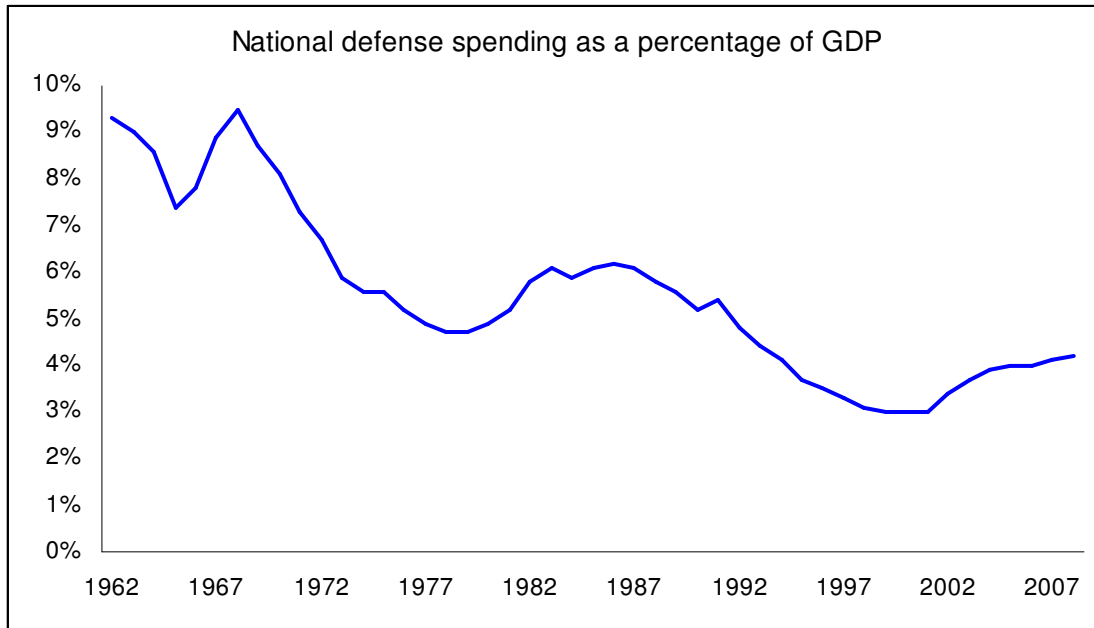


Trend: toward the **left**.



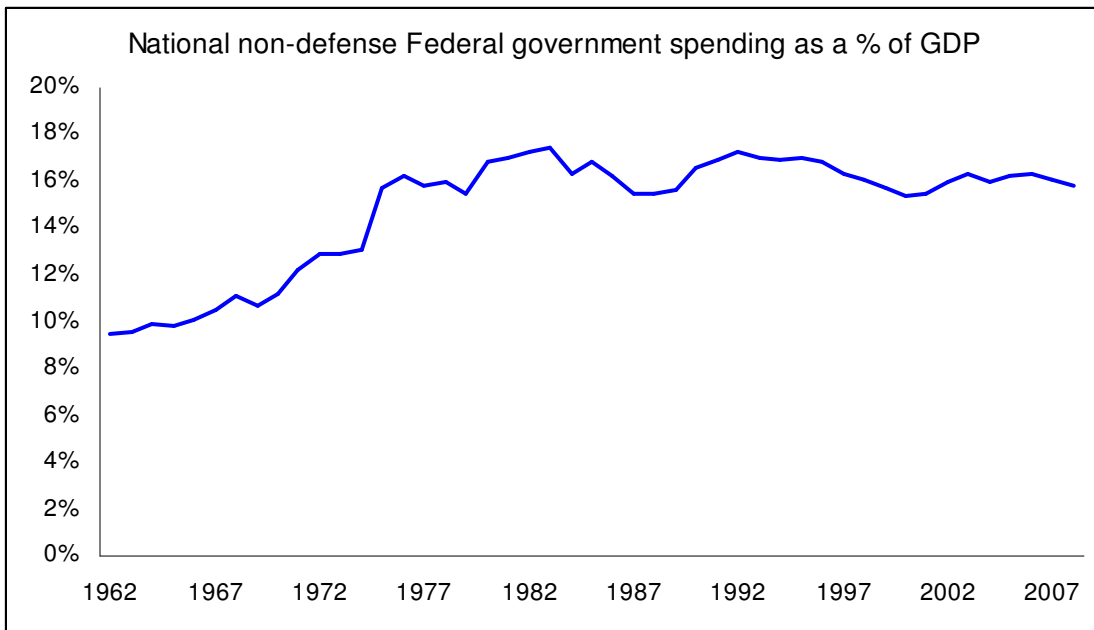
Trend: toward the **right**.

Defense. The right believes in achieving peace and stability through the strength of a benevolent world superpower. The left believes in disarmament and isolationism. The U.S.A. should surrender its status of great power to become a normal and hence largely impotent country.



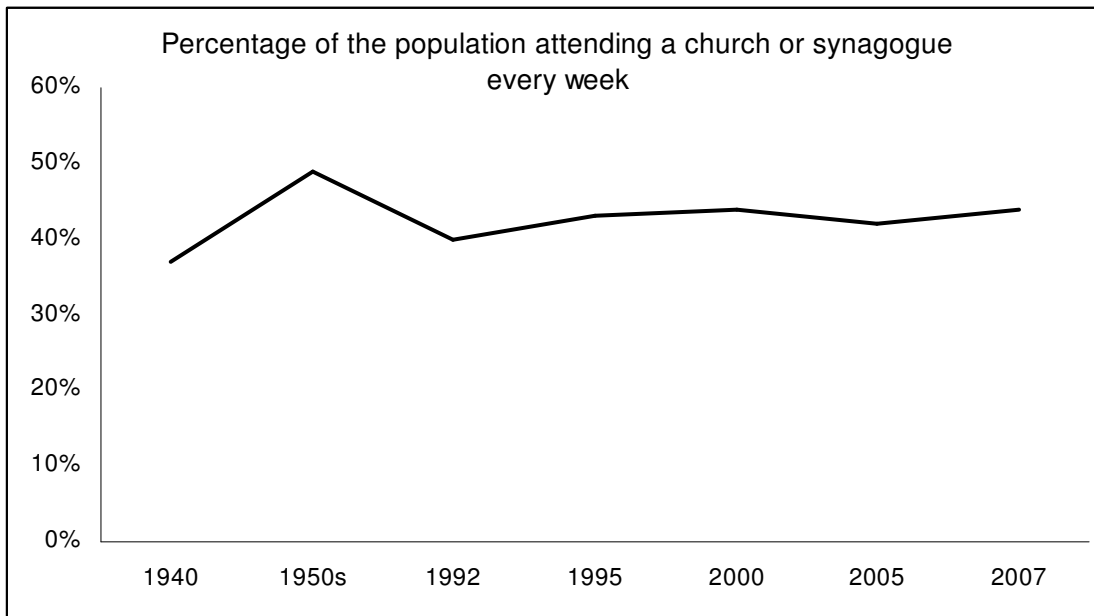
Trend: toward the **left**.

Public policy. For the right, principles and standards should be paramount when designing public policy. Implicit incentives and long-term consequences should be considered; individual freedom, accountability and responsibility should be encouraged. On the contrary, the left aspires to massive top-down social engineering by enlightened bureaucrats and judges. Equality of outcomes is the objective.



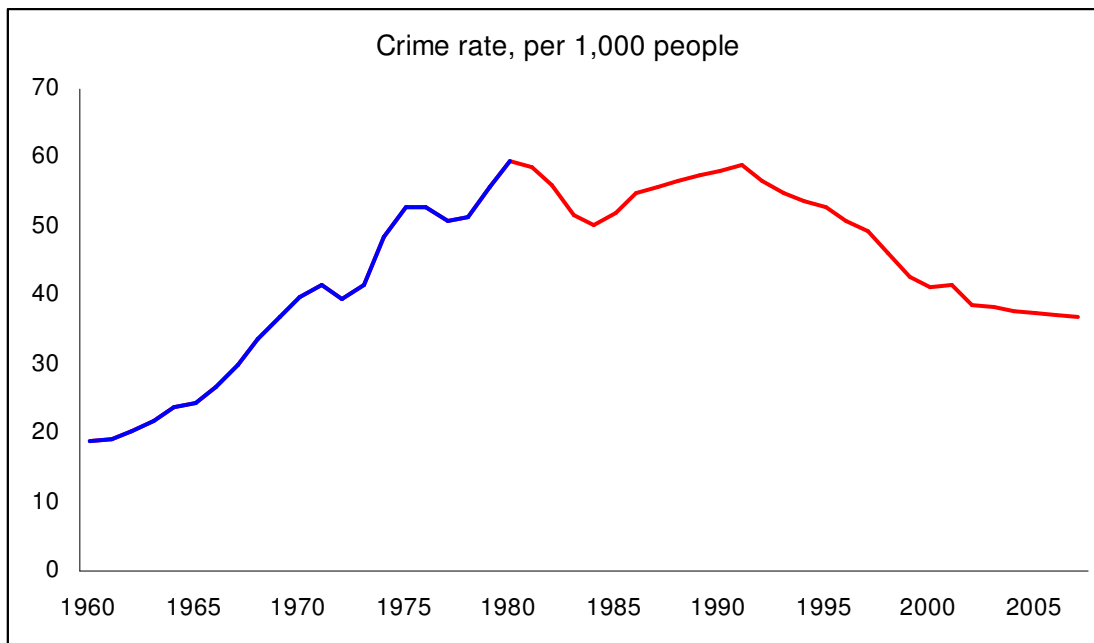
Trend: toward the **left**.

Values. The right believes that traditional values constitute a proven moral compass, and provide essential guidelines to elicit good behavior in a free society. In particular, it believes that Judeo-Christian values (not theologies) are superior and desirable. The left believes that all moral systems are of equal worth, and that individuals should follow their own emotions. Church or synagogue attendance is an imperfect but adequate proxy.



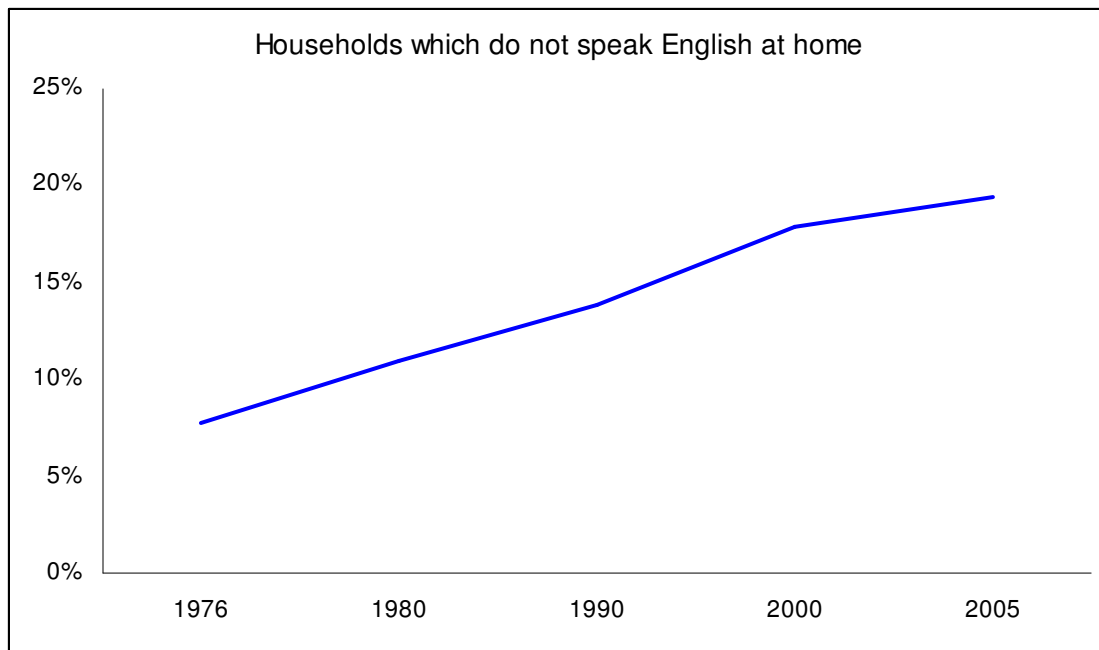
Trend: **stable**.

Law enforcement. The right insists on combating crime. It inflicts harsh punishments on convicted criminals and delinquents. With rightwing policies, criminals either serve long-term sentences in prison, are killed, or deterred (the extreme example is Singapore, which is a very safe city). The left is more focused on reinserting criminals, and usually blames outside forces for deviant behavior. Being lenient and understanding towards criminals tends to result in a higher crime rate.



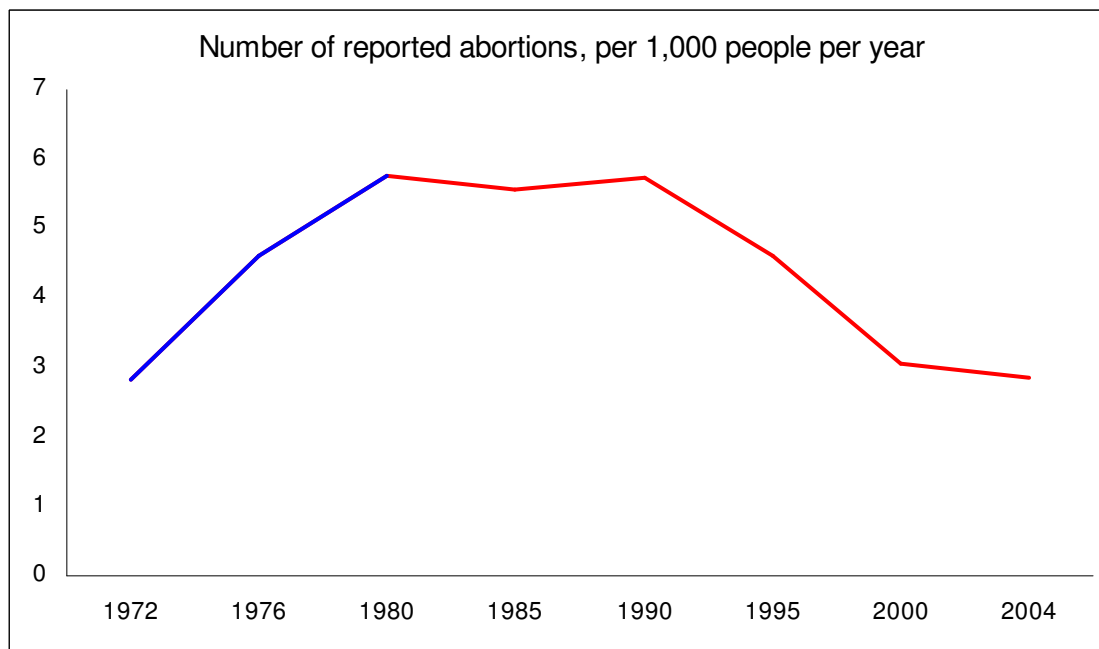
Trend: toward the **left**, then toward the **right**.

The culture. It is very important for the right that the country be united, especially by a common language. The left is much more tolerant of cultural differences, and praises multiculturalism.



Trend: toward the **left**.

For the right, sex should be taken very seriously, but should not be given center-stage in society. It is a private matter, which should ideally be conducted within marriage, and mostly for procreation. On the contrary, the left welcomes the age of sexual liberation. People's sexual preferences are a defining element of their personality. Hence the celebration of alternative lifestyles defined by their sexual components. It is not unreasonable to presume that the more left-leaning society is on these matters, the higher the number of abortions will be.



Trend: toward the **left**, then toward the **right**.

Sources:

The Economy: Bureau of Labor Statistics; and NBER working paper 10273.

Defense: Office of Management and Budget, Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2008.

Public Policy: Office of Management and Budget, Budget of the U.S. Government, Fiscal Year 2008.

Values: Gallup Polls.

Law enforcement: FBI, and The Disaster Center.

The culture: Census Bureau, Statistical Abstracts; Abortion Facts and MMWR Abortion Surveillance Reports.