

Burying the Ghost of DeGaulle: Anti-Americanism and Ideology in France

Introduction

The American preoccupation with the opinions other nations hold of the United States can be traced back to the concern that the founding fathers expressed in the Declaration of Independence for a “decent respect for the opinions of mankind.” Benson (1968). Few nations have invested comparable resources into developing, monitoring, and analyzing their international image. French criticism of the United States seems to cause a particular sting, and the French are frequently stereotyped as inveterate anti-Americans. Although French opinions about the United States are far from being the most negative in the world, or even in Europe, (Pew 2009) the French stand out in their ability to attract American ire. This paper examines the ideological loading of French anti-Americanism among the mass public from 1982 to 2006. It finds both a broad trend in shifting ideology, and short term effects of specific political debates.

Anti-Americanism does have a long pedigree in France. As described by Phillippe Roger, Anti-Americanism is a discourse shared across French political families (Roger 2002). It has, historically been more prevalent at the extremes of the ideological spectrum. During the cold war both left and right indulged in anti-American discourse, albeit with the understanding on the part of the center left and center right that a security arrangement with the United States was indispensable given the potential threat of the Soviet Union. However, the nature of anti-Americanism differs along the ideological spectrum. If leftist anti-Americanism centered on capitalism, and the deficiencies of the American overreliance on the market, the left was divided on the geopolitical position of France during the cold war. NATO membership was generally accepted by Socialists leaders while rejected by the Communists. On the right an old anti capitalist tradition nurtured anti-Americanism while under De Gaulle, the French right spoke of a role for France and Europe as a third actor in the bipolar environment of the cold war.

After the cold war one could expect that the ideological map of French Anti-Americanism would change. Without the Cold War, the division of the left into pro Soviet and pro western camps lost relevance, while on the right Gaullist dreams of grandeur seem to fade in the light of the emergence of the US as the sole hyperpower. Indeed a Gaullist president, Jacques Chirac proposed that France reenter the NATO military command from which DeGaulle had withdrawn in 1962. This proposal was taken up by his conservative successor Sarkozy. Parallel to this shift in French security policy was the rise of French

neo-liberalism. With the US held out as the negative model of neoliberal excess by the Left, neoliberals on the right were able to use the US as a positive model for the efficacy of neoliberal reforms.

In French politics the left-right ideological dimension appears over two centuries ago during the revolution. Though contested, it is by far the most widely used shorthand to describe policy and philosophical orientations of French voters, parties, and candidates. However, the meaning of this ideological dimension has been far from stable. The relationship between specific policies and opinions and the left-right dimension has changed significantly since the left-right division first appeared in the National Assembly vote in 1789 on the royal veto. Indeed, at times there seems to have been a rightward drift of ideas along this left-right continuum. Concepts such as nationalism, centralization, imperialism, and indeed liberal economic policy have drifted from the left end of the ideological scale toward the right, as other ideas such as monarchism have disappeared from the political scene. It would be odd if Anti-Americanism, such a recurring theme in French political discourse, were not related to the left-right ideological scale. Yet we should not expect the strength and nature of this relationship between opinions about the United States and left-right ideology to remain constant over time. This is particularly the case given changes in the image of the United States at the end of the Cold War, and the rise of neo-liberalism on the French right.

Anti-Americanism

The concept 'anti-Americanism' turns out to be a particularly problematic one, with an inherent ambiguity compounded by the frequent use of this term as a polemical tool. As an earlier scholar noted, 'anti-Americanism... proves difficult to define once you start peeling back the layers of meaning'. (Croakatt 2003, 43) Without broad agreement of the meaning of 'Americanism' it is not obvious what anti-Americanism opposes. The task is further complicated by the suffix 'ism', associated with ideologies or prejudices such as fascism, liberalism, or racism, suggests that we are dealing with attitudes that are somehow systematic, structured, or irrational. The works of Crockatt (2003) and Phillipe Roger (2003) both begin with a sketch of "Americanism" which is identified with the nationalist thought of Theodore Roosevelt. Crockatt also finds elements of an American nationalism in such phenomena as the nativist movement and the McCarthy era persecution of 'un-American' activities. However, Roger concludes that 'anti-Americanism' has little to do with these historical traditions. He argues that in France, 'Anti-Americanism' is nothing more than the set of negative clichés about America

held by anti-Americans. (2003, 15) In some discussions, the 'Americanism' which is rejected by anti-Americans becomes rather divorced from the actual United States of America. Some 'anti-Americans' such as Régis Debray offer a critique of a modern consumerist lifestyle, which is only coincidentally related to the United States. (2003, 582) Crockatt likewise states that 'to some extent, anti-Americanism ... is a reaction to modernity' by which he means the broader phenomenon known as 'globalization', 'rather than to America itself'. (2003 57) As an autonomous discourse, French Anti-Americanism can be expected to persist despite short term fluctuations in Franco-American relations. (Roger 2002 p 580)

Other authors see anti-Americanism as a more direct response to the reality or policies of the United States. Among authors who interpret anti-Americanism to mean criticism of the United States itself, a common theme is the unreflective or irrational nature of the criticism. Hollander draws a parallel between racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Americanism, which he describes as 'an unfocused and largely irrational, often visceral, aversion towards the United States, its government, domestic institutions, foreign policies, prevailing values, culture, and people' (1992 334-335). Likewise, commentator Robert Kagan dismisses European criticism of American foreign policy by arguing that the people of Europe are largely anti-American, the result of irrational sentiments and covert anti-Semitism which he identifies as the root of European criticism of Israel. (2003, 31). This rhetorical use of the 'anti-American' label, recently described as 'pathological' by Mendieta (2003), literally knows no bounds. For example, critics of American policy now feel the need to preface their comments with a preemptive rejection of the 'anti-American' label both in the UK and in France (Kilfoyle 2003, Vedrine 2004).

Other scholars have asserted that anti-Americanism is to a significant degree a response to the policies of the United States. Based on interviews of forty Pakistanis, Kizilbash finds that all the major sources of anti-Americanism in Pakistan come from policy disagreements, most notably American support for Israel and U.S. opposition to Pakistan's nuclear program. Smith and Wertman trace the ebb and flow of European anti-Americanism since the end of World War II, suggesting that peaks in anti-American sentiment coincide with particular U.S. policies, such as the development of the hydrogen bomb, and the deployment of intermediate range nuclear forces.

Fabbrini likewise argues that anti-Americanism will persist in Europe because of 'domestic sources of European anti-Americanism, at least as significant as the external ones, and probably more resilient than the latter'. This paper argues that in the case of France, perceptions and evaluations of the United States have responded to both external actions of the US and internal discourse in France.

Trends in French Anti-Americanism

Figure 1 presents the evolution of the image of the United States in the eyes of French public opinion over the last half century. This figure plots the difference between the percentage of French survey respondents with a positive or favorable opinion of the United States and the percentage who hold a negative or unfavorable opinion.

The data for this portrait of evolving French opinion are drawn from a variety of opinion surveys conducted on behalf of a number of sponsors. During the 1950s and early 60s, the US government sponsored frequent opinion surveys to gauge international opinion about the United States. United States government surveys become less frequent, and less accessible, once the agency responsible for the surveys (The United States Information Agency) was reformed in the 1970s, before resuming toward the end of the 1980's. The European Commission included questions about opinions of the United States on a number of Eurobarometer surveys in the 1980's and after 2001. The Pew Charitable trusts also sponsored a series of surveys of opinions about the United States after 2001. Between these survey series, gaps in the data set are filled with occasional surveys done for news outlets or as part of national election studies.

A few patterns in French opinion are particularly salient and suggest that attitudes towards the United States are neither stable nor random, but are systematically influenced by events.

Some patterns in the data are subtle. Gaullist rhetoric notwithstanding, overall opinions of the United States actually improved under the first six years of the Fifth Republic. It is during the latter years of De Gaulle's presidency- 1965-1968, that opinions of the United States degrade. A number of elements come together during this time period including De Gaulle's decision to withdraw from the military structure of NATO, the escalation of the American war in Vietnam, and images of racial violence in the United States. By 1969, opinions about the United States had recovered and for the remainder of the Cold War they oscillate between 20 and 50 percent net positive opinions with high water marks in 1978 (Camp David Accords) and 1989 (Fall of Berlin Wall) and a low point in 1984.

The end of the Cold War marked a dramatic shift in the strategic rationale behind Franco-American cooperation. However, it was not accompanied by a dramatic shift in attitudes towards the United States. After the Cold War, opinions of the United States gradually degrade until 1995. This movement

could be thought of as a response to the weakening importance of the United States as a bulwark against the obsolete Soviet threat. However, opinions improve after 1995, a trend which continues until the end of the presidency of Bill Clinton.

The most dramatic aspect of this graph is the very substantial and abrupt dive in French opinions about the US in 2003. This unprecedented drop in public opinion occurs as the United States invades Iraq and opinion stays at a very low level until the election of Barack Obama as US president in 2008. The first surveys conducted during the Obama administration suggest a return to pre invasion levels of favorable opinion about the United States. Tellingly, the precipitous drop in assessments of the US does not coincide with the election of George W Bush. While French criticism of George W Bush began early in his term with actions such as the rejection of the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto accords, attitudes among the French public dropped only modestly from 2000 to 2002. It was the invasion itself which provoked a rupture in French opinion which lasted for the remainder of the Bush administration.

Changing stereotypes of the United States.

These shifts in the aggregate French opinion about the United States tell only part of the story. The global evaluations of the United States masks substantial changes in the way the French think of the United States. The France-America foundation has carried out a series of surveys asking the French not only whether they have a positive or negative opinion of the United States, but exploring the content of these opinions as well. In one particularly revealing exercise, survey respondents were given a list of 12 words, and asked which words they associated with the United States.¹

In the closing years of the Cold War, the image of the United States was dominated by the contrast between the USA as a leader of the capitalist West, and the USSR as the avatar of the communist East. In the survey conducted in 1988, the words most often associated with the United States were Strength (56%) Dynamism (32%) Wealth (31%) and Freedom (30%). These terms all fit comfortably into a vision of the United States as the patron and protector of the “free world.” As the leading military power in the Atlantic alliance, and the nation which had (eventually) come to the aid of France in two World Wars, strength was a natural attribute to see in the United States. Dynamism and wealth are both natural contrasts to the stagnation and poverty of the command economies of the East, at least by the

¹ The full set of items is la puissance, la violence, les inégalités, la richesse, le racism, l'imperialisme, le dynamisme, la liberté, le relâchement des mœurs, la naïveté, la jeunesse, la générosité.

1980s. And in a time when the Soviet block was characterized by a totalitarian regime, the United States was seen with some accuracy as a champion of liberty.

In the post Cold War era, the image of the United States changes substantially. When this survey was repeated in 1996, the top four terms chosen as typifying the United States were Violent (59%) Strong (57%) Inequality (45%) and Racism (39%). Those terms do not fit at all into the cold war dichotomy of a wealthy free West and a stifled East. Instead, it is negative views of the domestic situation in the US which dominate. External events and internal debates conspired to shift perceptions of the United States. 1992 saw rioting in Los Angeles following the acquittal of police officers accused of beating a black suspect. The four days of looting and arson received substantial coverage in the French media, often with an analysis of causes which emphasized racism as an underlying factor. In 1995 a truck bombing at the federal building on Oklahoma City killed 168 people in a domestic terror attack which had no recent precedent. These images of racism and/or violence helped associate those concepts with the United States. At the same time, French politicians defending social and economic policies in the face of neoliberal economic orthodoxy associated with the United States found criticism of American society to be a useful rhetorical tool.

This particular negative image of the United States persists throughout the 1990's and into the 2000's. In 2005, the top words to describe the US are again Strong (68%) Violent (50%) and Inequality (45%), with Wealth (31%) appearing just before Imperialism (31%) and racism (29%). This characterization, with an emphasis on inequality, fits well with the rhetorical use by the left of the United States as a negative exemplar of the type of neoliberal society France should avoid. On the right, the image of the United States as a neoliberal paragon is also widespread. However, the coexistence of statist and neoliberal currents on the French right changes the implication of this assumption. For French neoliberals, the wealth of the United States is taken as a prime facie evidence in favor of a reduction of the role of the state. Champions of French neoliberalism have found themselves warding off criticisms that their policy prescriptions are too "American" and either must counter that positive aspects of American society, such as wealth creation have been overlooked, or have argued that they plan to implement neoliberalism differently.

Given the shift in the dominant conception of the US from an anti communist hegemon to a model for good and bad consequences of neoliberal economic policy, we could expect the ideological loading of anti-Americanism to shift in the post cold war era.

Anti-Americanism and Left Right Ideology

I will look at this relationship at four points in time covering the period from the end of the presidency of Charles DeGaulle to the beginning of the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

The Gaullist Era

Gaullist has become shorthand for the protection of French national interests and autonomy, often at the price of cooperation with European or American allies. It is important to place the willingness of Charles DeGaulle to criticize the United States in the context of the broader partnership between France and America. Even as DeGaulle withdrew France from the military structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1966, France remained within the Western alliance. Nonetheless, the De Gaulle's emphasis on the power and independence of the French state, and his willingness to criticize American policy, provides an intellectual foundation for anti-Americanism on the French right. One would expect that the relationship between ideology and opinions about the United States should follow a u shaped pattern during the Gaullist era, with the left and right both being significantly more anti-American than the center, albeit for different reasons.

Figure 2.1 uses survey data from the French presidential election of 1969, and plots the mean levels of Anti-Americanism against respondent's left-right ideological self placement. Opinions about the United States are measured using a 100 point "feeling thermometer". The scores have been inverted so that higher values represent higher levels of anti-American sentiment. The figure traces a shallow u shaped curve, with anti-American attitudes most common on the far left, least prevalent in the center, and somewhat higher again on the right.

A regression analysis confirms this weak curvilinear relationship between ideology and opinions about the United States. An OLS regression predicting opinions about the United States using both a linear and a quadratic term for ideology suggests a shallow parabolic shape for this relationship. For this regression analysis, the dependent variable is a respondent's feeling thermometer score towards Americans, while the two independent variables are left-right ideological self placement and a term incorporating the square of the survey respondent's distance from the center of the left-right scale. Both linear and quadratic terms are statistically significant, and overall the regression explains about nine percent of the variance in opinions of the United States. (See the first column of results in Table 1.)

The parameter estimate for left right ideology indicates an overall tendency of the Left to be more anti-American than the right. The significant squared term for ideology confirms that this relationship is non linear, and that anti-Americanism increases at an ever higher rate on the left, while the overall trend to pro Americanism on the right is mitigated, and eventually reverses.

The end of the Cold War

This curvilinear pattern observed in 1969 reappears in the survey data from the 1980's. Typical are the results for 1987 which are presented in figure 2.2. This figure draws on data from the Eurobarometer survey series, and again presents mean levels of anti-Americanism according to survey respondents' self placement on the left-right ideological axis. Anti-American attitudes are much more common on the far left than on the center left, and least common on the center right, before increasing again on the far right. The shallow parabolic shape of this curve reflects the anti-Americanism of the left, and far right. The OLS regression results confirm this shallow curve with significant parameters for both the linear and squared terms for 1982, 1984, and 1987. During this period, ideological placement can account for ten to fifteen percent of the variance in opinions about the United States.

Post Cold War era

Beginning in 1989, the relationship between ideology and opinions about the United States becomes less curvilinear and also much weaker. The period from 1989 to 2009 also marks some of the greatest volatility in opinions about the United States. 1989 marks the end of the cold war, and one of the highest levels of pro American opinion in France since the 1950's. Fourteen years later, in 2003, French opinions about the United States are at their lowest levels ever recorded. Aggregate levels of anti-Americanism seem to swing quite dramatically in response to events, suggesting that opinions have lost much of their ideological mooring. This development is far from unique to opinions about the United States, and reflects a general weakening of the hold of left-right ideology on French political thought.

The fit between ideology and opinions about the United States is weakening already in 1989 as the Berlin Wall comes down. The left is still less positively disposed towards the United States than is the Right, but the curvilinearity of this relationship is no longer statistically significant, and across the ideological spectrum the lowest levels of anti-Americanism are actually observed on the far right in 1989. This linear relationship accounts for only 8.9% of the variation in opinion, lower than at any other period since the end of presidency of Charles DeGaulle.

The end of the cold war brings with it an acceleration of the process of European integration. In 1992, the ratification debate over The Treaty of European Union added a new and important element to French politics, and most of the major political formations fracture into pro and anti EU currents. The fact that opposition to European integration cuts across most French political families contributes to the loss of meaning of the concepts of Left and Right. In the area of external relations, the Gaullist notions of France or Europe as a third force between East and West make less sense in a unipolar world where American hegemony is out of reach, and events in Yugoslavia have demonstrated Europe's continuing dependence on American military force. On the French right, the threat to French sovereignty posed by America is eclipsed by the closer and more pressing threat of the European Union.

By the French Presidential election of 1995 there is a further reduction in the relationship between left right ideology and opinions about the United States. Data from the French National Election Survey of 1995 indicate that the curvilinear pattern of the cold war era has reemerged, with a reappearance of far right anti-Americanism. (see Figure 2.3) However, this relationship is fairly weak overall, and accounts for only 4% of the variance in opinions about the United States. This substantial erosion coincides with the shift in perceptions of the United States described earlier. The passing of the role of the United States as anchor of the non-communist West shifts perceptions of the United States, and America is increasingly seen not as a model of a successful free society, but as an example of the excesses of free market capitalism.

Systematic polling on French attitudes about the United States resumes in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The data used to analyze this period are drawn from the Eurobarometer series of surveys conducted by the European Commission. Between 2002 and 2007, the Eurobarometer asked respondents across the EU to evaluate the impact of the United States in five policy areas: world peace, the fight against terrorism, world poverty, growth of the world economy, and the environment. Responses to these five questions are combined into an index of perceptions of the United States.

The dominant event for French opinion about the United States is clearly the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This action by the United States, coupled with the very strong French diplomatic campaign against UN authorization for the war, sent French opinions about the United States into a nosedive. As figure 1 indicates, the levels of negative sentiment recorded in 2003, and for the remainder of the administration of George W Bush, were without recent precedent.

The ideological pattern of opinions about the United States essentially vanishes in 2003. The shift in opinion against the United States occurs across the ideological spectrum, and in 2003, the curvilinear model of left-right ideology can account for only .3% of the variation in opinions about the United States. Part of this reflects the low variation in 2003. The fact that opposition to the invasion was led largely by the conservative president of France, Jacques Chirac also helped nudge up anti-Americanism on the French center-right, without a corresponding impact on the extreme right. As figure 2.4 illustrates, even in 2004 there was a discernable peak of anti-Americanism on the center-right of the ideological scale.

By 2006 the ideological profile of French anti-Americanism had become almost uniformly linear, with Anti-Americanism highest on the left, and decreasing across the spectrum to the far right. The curvilinear model finds statistical support for only one of the opinion polls in the 2000s. Part of this change seems to be a decline in Anti-American attitudes on the extreme right, a phenomenon which may be attributable to the Islamophobia of the extreme right, which meshes well with a US war on (Islamic) terrorism. However, the influence of ideology on anti-Americanism seems far weaker during this period than it had ever been during the Cold War.

The weakening hold of Left-Right ideology

While perceptions of the United States have changed in nature and stability since the end of the Cold War, the eroding relationship between left-right ideology and opinion about the United States can also be explained as a result of the general loss of meaning, and recomposition of the left-right ideological dimension. Following the U turn in socialist economic policy in the early 1980's, there was a marked decline in the perceived usefulness of the left-right ideological labels. Figure 3 presents the trend over time in the percentage of the French who describe the labels of left and right to be obsolete or to still have value for describing political positions. The proportion of respondents declaring these labels obsolete jumps by 15 percentage points with the policy U turn of the early 1980s. It then increases again with the first cohabitation (1986-88) and with the collapse of communism/ debate on the Treaty on European Union, reaching a peak of 60% in June 1992.

Perceptions of the obsolescence of the left-right labels holds fairly steady for a decade. The data suggest that this ideological vocabulary is reasserting itself since the presidential election of 2002. The 1990's witnessed both the election of Jacques Chirac in 1995 on a relatively centrist, if not leftist platform, and the renewed fiscal austerity of a socialist government under Lionel Jospin which was

struggling to meet the criteria for membership in the single currency, the Euro. This may reflect the higher profile of neoliberal thought on the right which corresponds with the emergence of Nicolas Sarkozy. The contrast between left and right is much clearer when the right is advocating a neoliberal rather than statist vision of economic policy. The contemporary perception of the United States as an exemplar/cautionary tale of neoliberal policy would mesh logically with a such reassertion of the left-right ideological cleavage, and could restore the strong connection between ideology and anti-American attitudes, albeit in a more straightforward linear fashion.

Whether this reassertion of the content of left right ideology will continue is unclear. The global financial crisis which began in 2008 has undercut neoliberal arguments about self regulating markets. And the unpopularity of Sarkozy has weakened champions of neoliberalism and created a space for a resurgence of statist approaches on the French right, most notably in the form of former prime minister Dominique de Villepin. A resurgence of statist and Gaullist thinking on the right would move France back towards the cold war pattern of a curvilinear relationship between the left-right dimension and opinions about the United States.

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Figure 1. Trends in French Opinions of the U.S.

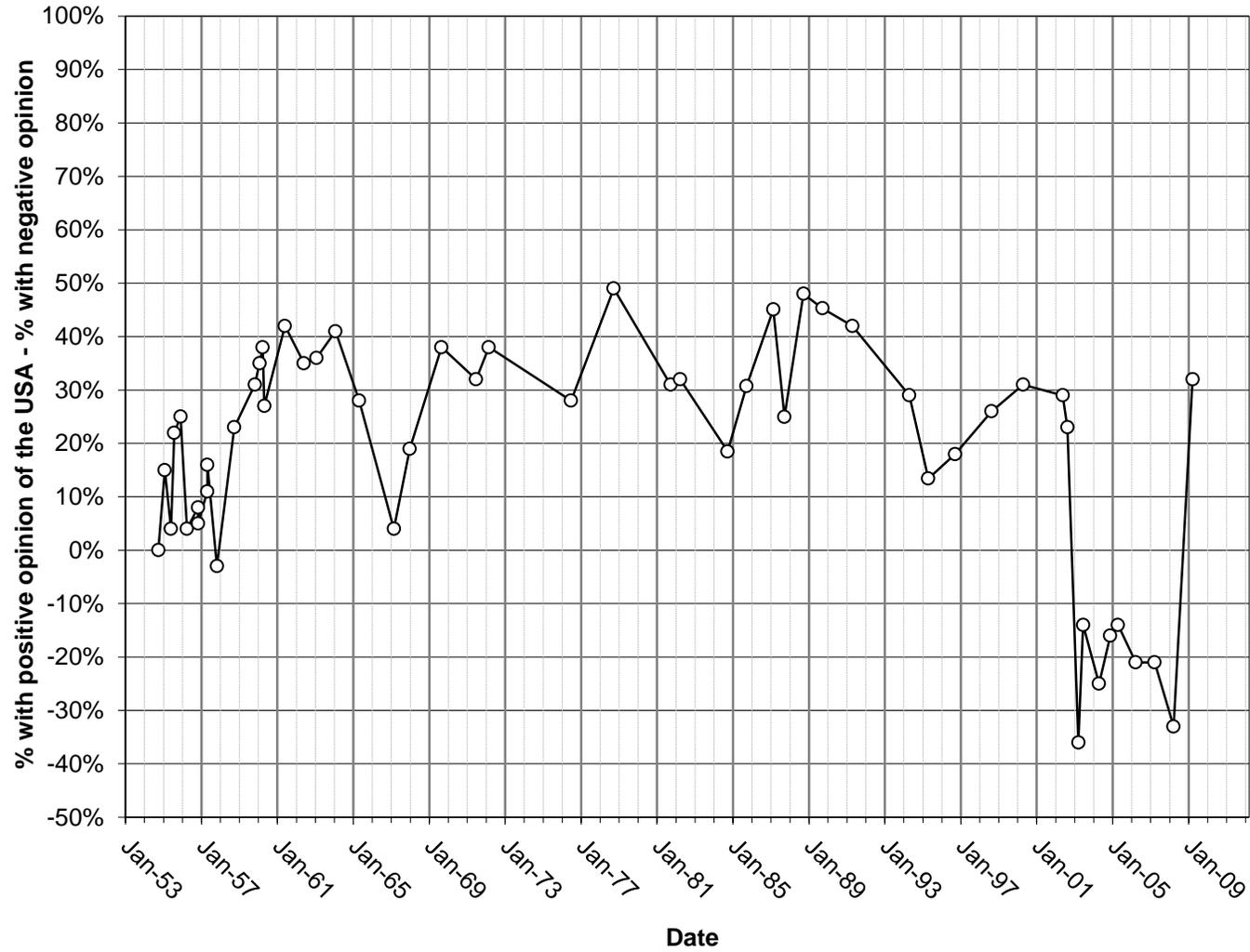


Table 1. Predicting Anti-Americanism with Left-Right Ideology

	1969 ^a	1982 ^b	1984 ^b	1987 ^b	1989 ^b	1995 ^c	2002 ^d	2003 ^d	2004 ^d	2006 ^d
Ideology	-0.275** (0.039)	0.092** (0.012)	0.278** (0.024)	0.159** (0.016)	0.088** (0.012)	0.064** (0.017)	0.214** (0.033)	-0.19** (0.028)	0.322** (0.051)	0.264** (0.046)
Squared Ideology	0.005** (0.001)	0.015** (0.004)	0.027** (0.008)	0.023** (0.006)	0.004 (0.004)	0.012** (0.005)	.000 (0.012)	0.024** (0.01)	-.022 (0.018)	0.01 (0.016)
constant	37.788** (2.300)			3.419** (0.085)	2.587** (0.068)	2.648** (0.087)	2.684** (0.203)	3.237** (0.17)	4.079** (0.291)	3.644** (0.258)
adjusted r2	0.091	0.119	0.156	0.109	0.082	0.041	0.022	0.003	0.050	0.04
f statistic	29	51	77	52	35	27	22	3	20	17
N	564	746	829	834	800	511	1930	2067	684	786

* Significant at the .05 level

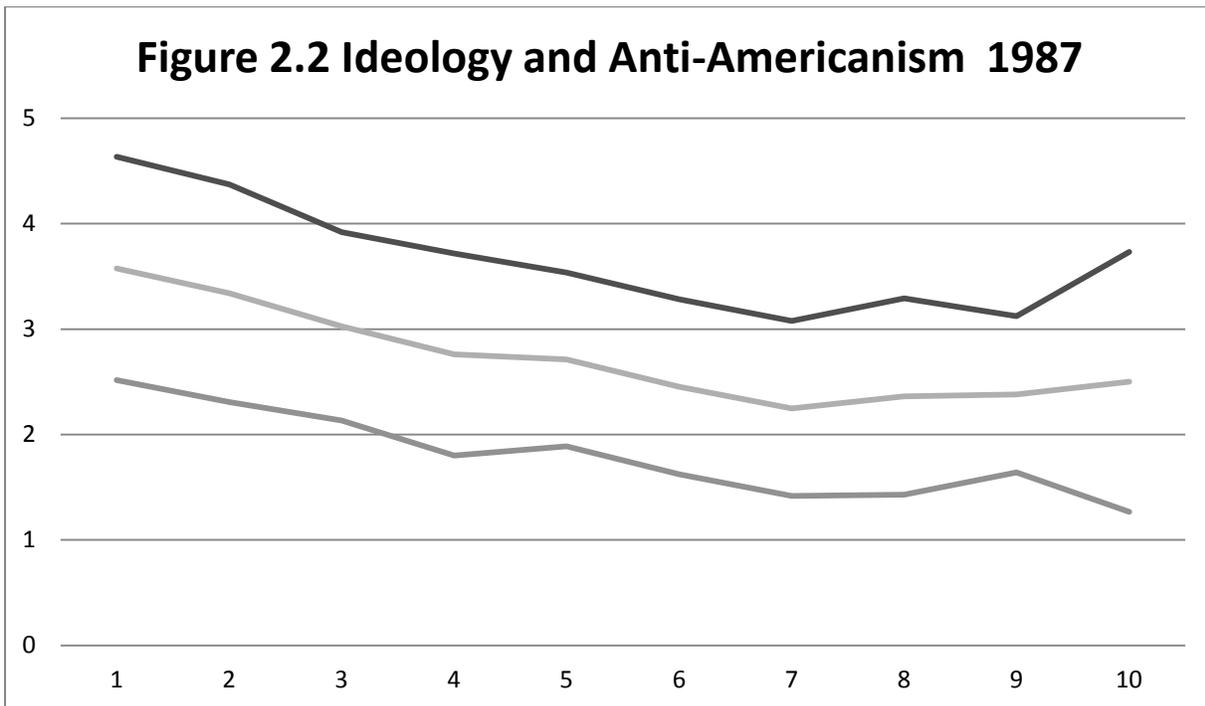
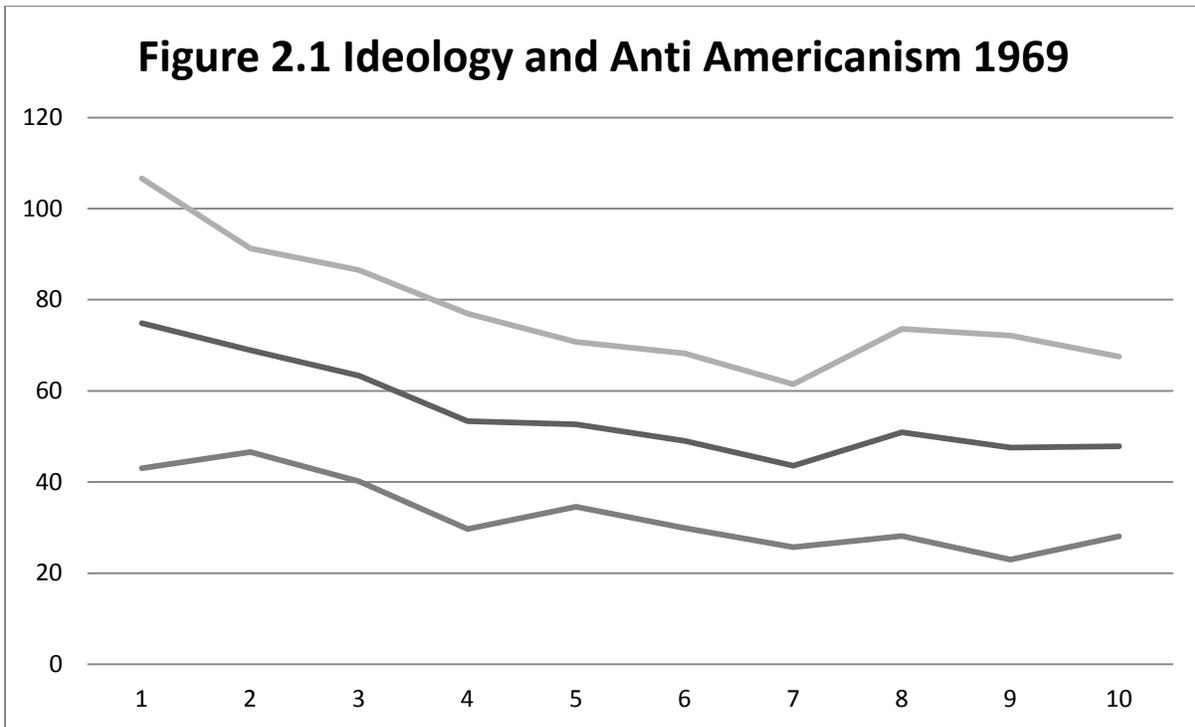
** Significant at the .01 level

^a Dependent variable is a 100 point feeling thermometer

^b Dependent variable is a five point favorability scale

^c Independent variable (Ideology) is a seven point scale

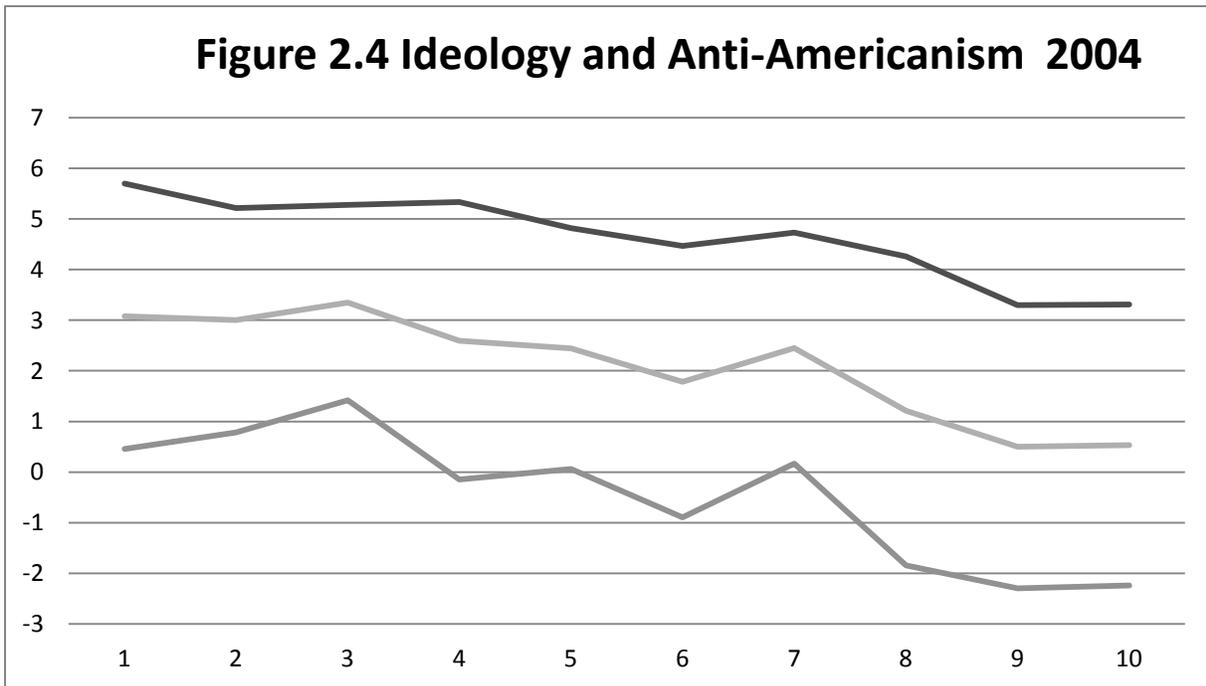
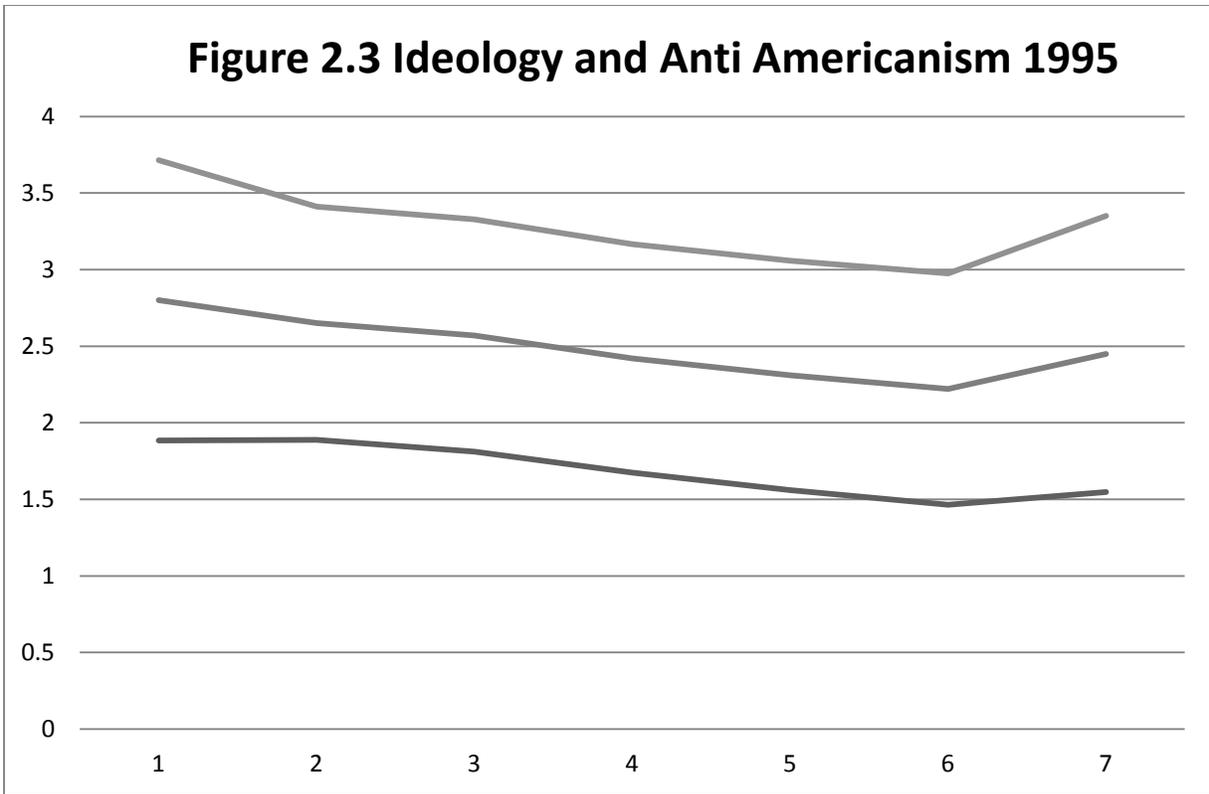
^d Dependent variable is an index of evaluations of the United States across 5 policy areas.



Center line indicates mean for respondents at each ideological position.

Top and bottom lines are mean +/- one standard deviation.

Data for 1969 are feeling thermometer scores from French National Election Study.
 Data for 1987 are a five point favorable to unfavorable scale from Eurobarometer #28.



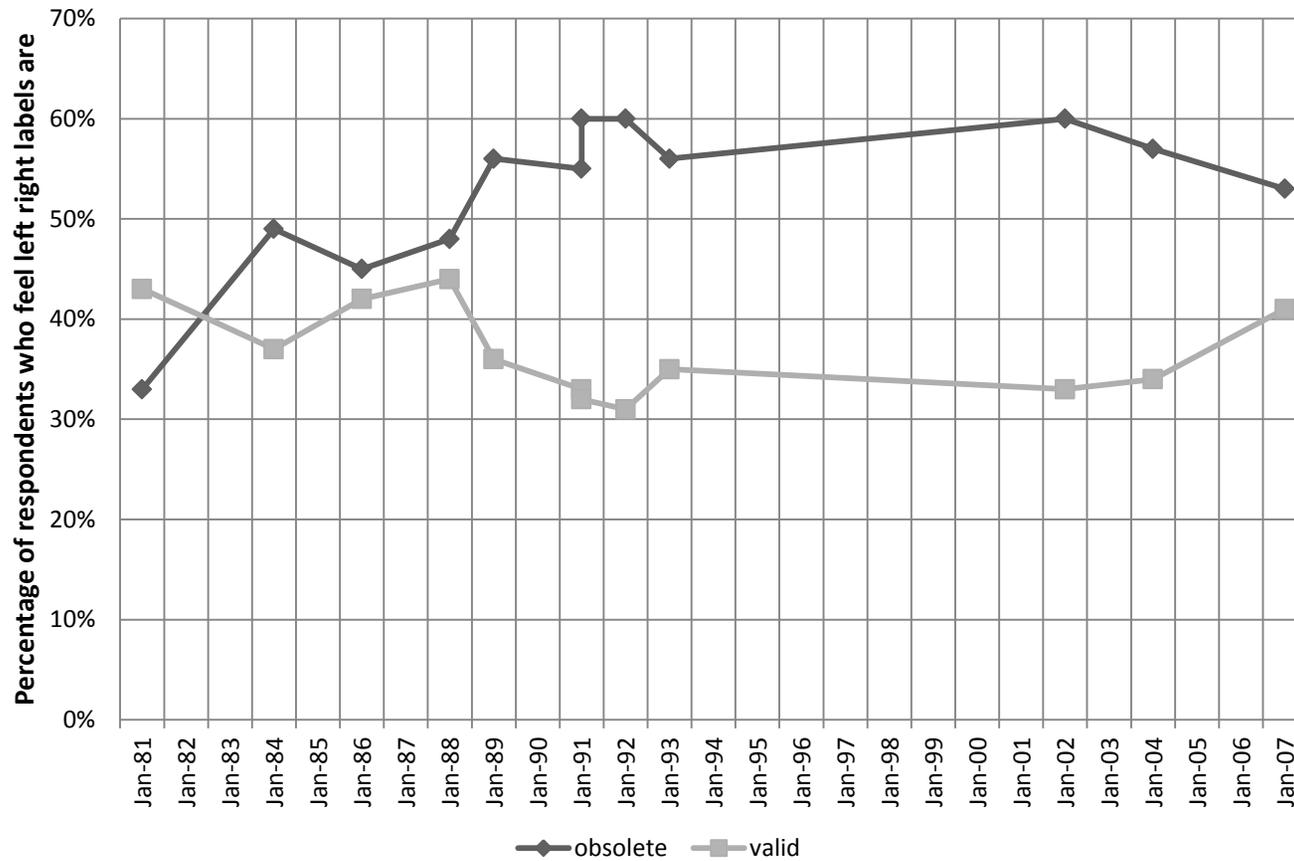
Center line indicates mean for respondents at each ideological position.

Top and bottom lines are mean +/- one standard deviation.

Data for 1995 are a five point favorable to unfavorable scale from the French National Election Study.

Data for 2004 are an index of five questions on America's role in the world from Eurobarometer #62.2.

Figure 3. Evolution of Perceptions of the Utility of Left-Right Ideological Labels



Data drawn TNS SOFRES "Nouveaux clivages/ clivages anciens" from TNS-SOFRES