

# The Etiology of Public Support for the Designated Hitter Rule\*

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## ABSTRACT

Since its introduction in 1973, major league baseball's designated hitter (DH) rule has been the subject of continuing controversy. Here, we investigate the political and socio-demographic determinants of public opinion toward the DH rule, using data from a nationwide poll conducted during September 1997. Our findings suggest that it is in fact Democrats, not Republicans, who tend to favor the DH. In addition, we find no effect for respondents' proximity to American or National League teams, though older respondents were consistently more likely to oppose the rule.

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*Taylor took us to Mets games. Only the National League, he said. We don't do DH. In his growing up in an academic family, there was a secular trinity: NBC, the National League, and the Democratic Party. Anything else was reactionary, racist, anti-intellectual."*

– *Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine (1989).*

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Baseball is *America's pastime* and then some writer David Halberstam has called it “not so much the national sport as the binding national myth” (2002, Ch. 1). The sport, long associated with American tradition and culture, also has strong ties to politics: presidents (and presidential candidates) since William Howard Taft have routinely thrown out the first pitch on opening day, baseball analogies abound in political conversation (cf. Mileur 1999; Brooks 2005), and the current president of the United States was once part-owner and managing general partner of major league baseball's Texas Rangers. Additionally, by acts of the Supreme Court (cf. *Federal Baseball Club, Inc. v. National League of Professional Baseball Clubs* 1922; *Flood v. Kuhn* 1972; Duquette 1999) and Congress, baseball was for decades the only major sport exempted from federal labor laws.<sup>1</sup>

Arguably, the most important change of rules in the game of baseball since the 1920s was the creation, in 1973, of the designated hitter (DH) in the American League (AL). Formally, the DH rule states that “(A) hitter may be designated to bat for the starting pitcher and all subsequent pitchers in any game without otherwise affecting the status of the pitcher(s) in the game” (Official Rules of Major League Baseball. 1998. Section 6.10). In nearly all circumstances, teams substitute pitchers – who, lacking the motivation to practice batting, are often notoriously poor hitters – with individuals who excel at the plate but who may be lacking in defensive skills. This means that, since 1973, teams in the American League have sent roughly 12.5 percent more *true hitters* to the plate (Freeman 2004, 94).

Since its adoption by the American League in 1973, the DH rule has been a source of ongoing and often heated controversy (cf. Caldwell 1998).<sup>2</sup> Disagreement over the DH has exceeded that of all other reforms during the same era, including the lowering of the pitcher's mound, the addition of expansion teams, and the introduction of artificial turf. Talk of eliminating the rule arises every few years, most recently with the league realignment and the introduction of interleague play in 1997 (Newhan 1997). Beyond baseball's sacrosanctity in American life, the reasons for that controversy are, at some level, political, at least to the extent that they touch on values common to political discourse. In particular, debate about the rule often turns on notions of personal responsibility, tradition, egalitarianism, and other concepts which form the basis for individuals' beliefs about what constitutes good public policy. In a few instances, such discussions take on overtly political tones.

Here, we argue that the common attitudinal roots of Americans' partisan and ideological predilections and their opinions about the DH induces a relationship between

<sup>1</sup> Arbitration and the *Curt Flood Act* of 1998 put baseball on par with other major sports, with an exemption from antitrust laws in all of its dealings except with the players. For details on this fascinating history, see Ivers (2004), Johnson (1997, Ch. 8), and Roberts (1991, Ch. 7). An especially creative take on the baseball/politics connection can be found by navigating to Oyez Baseball (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the rule's almost-universal application outside of the major leagues appears to have generated little controversy. The DH is an accepted part of nearly every other organized baseball league in the world, from American Little League, to the NCAA, to the professional minor leagues (Class A teams all use the DH; Class AA and AAA leagues vary, but in general pitchers only bat when *both* teams are National League affiliates). Further abroad, the Mexican League uniformly uses the DH, while Japan's professional leagues mirror those in the US, with the Pacific League adopting the DH rule in 1975 while the Central League did not do so until the advent of interleague play in 2005.

those two phenomena, such that the former will, to a significant degree, drive the latter. More specifically, we outline and examine empirically a theory linking attitudes toward the DH rule to individual-level political beliefs and identities. Our findings put the lie to Mukherjee's fictional Taylor: it is Democrats, in fact, who are more likely to support the rule, though Republicans are no less likely to favor it than are political independents. Along the way, we also uncover unsurprising generational influences on those opinions, as well as evidence that partisans of both stripes tend to take their baseball more seriously than do political independents.

More broadly, we believe our investigation offers insights into the relationship between core values and measures of political attitudes. Historically, this has been a difficult linkage to observe in American politics, with researchers generally relying on easily obtained data from political figures, public administrators, or journalistic sources. In contrast, we believe we can learn a great deal by examining recorded attitudes of average citizens on a change that impacts core values, and how that change relates to standard political measures like party and ideology. In this light, the DH rule serves as an observable marker for understanding the relationship between latent fundamental values and the political choices (such as partisanship) that Americans make.

## THE POLITICS OF THE DESIGNATED HITTER

It will come as no shock, given the significance of the topic among baseball's cognoscenti, that the DH rule has been the subject of extensive empirical analysis. Most prominent among these is Goff *et al.*'s (1997, 1998) studies of the moral hazard problem raised by the DH rule: pitchers who are no longer required to bat do not face the possibility of (personal, physical) retribution for hitting the opposing team's batters, thus lowering the relative costs of doing so. Goff *et al.* support this contention with data on the significant increase in hit batters in the AL, but not the NL, following the 1973 implementation of the rule. In doing so, they sparked a minor tempest of controversy, even eliciting a look at the effect in Japanese leagues (Kawaura and La Croix 2005). In particular, Levitt (1998) and Trandel *et al.* (1998) challenged this claim, countering that the data better support the hypothesis that hit-by-pitch differences are attributable to the rule's increasing the number of AL power hitters, with the correspondingly greater motivation to hit them (and accept the resulting runner on-base) rather than risking something more costly. Somewhat less famously, Domazlicky and Kerr's (1990) analysis of attendance following adoption of the DH found that the rule did in fact increase AL attendance by a little more than 2,000 fans per game. And recent work in the field of operations research has developed algorithms for optimizing pinch-hitting strategies in the presence of a DH rule (Hirotzu and Wright 2003).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> More generally, a large body of work has examined other social-scientific aspects of the nation's pastime. For example, a series of studies has examined the phenomenon of racial discrimination in the market for baseball cards; the most recent of these, by McGarrity *et al.* (1999) and Scahill (2005), find little evidence of such discrimination.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, to date no one has examined public perceptions of the rule itself.<sup>4</sup> Here, we outline our theoretical expectations regarding the link between general attitudes – and, specifically, political attitudes – and support for the DH. We go on to specify a number of other likely influences on opinions toward the rule, before turning to our empirical analysis.

### IDEOLOGY, POLITICAL PARTY, AND THE DH

The concrete ramifications of the DH rule are clear to even the greenest students of the game. Defensively, designated hitters take away the fielding team's ability to *pitch around* strong batters late in the order, particularly with runners on base and/or two outs. The offensive implications of this are equally clear: replacing a weak batter with a strong one yields more offense, particularly more extra-base hits and home runs. Furthermore, managers can be strategic in their use of designated hitters, depending on the characteristics of the opposing pitcher. Second, the DH also allows pitchers to concentrate – some would say fixate – on pitching, and at the same time enables strong (and often older) batters with weak fielding and/or baserunning skills to remain on teams' rosters.

More philosophically, the DH rule embodies a number of key concepts. Perhaps the most significant of these is *change*: as we noted above, no more monumental alternation of the rules of the game had taken place before it, and none has since. Related to this is the nature of that change: the DH rule was, and is, a radical departure from the game's formerly fundamental principal that every player should both come to bat and play a position in the field. By allowing pitchers to stay away from the plate, and (some) batters to avoid the field, the DH rule in effect creates two classes of players: those who play both sides of the ball and those who do not.

Finally, there are the rule's tertiary externalities. For example, as Goff *et al.* note, in nearly every season since its introduction, the AL has led the NL in the number of batters hit by pitches.<sup>5</sup> The DH has also allowed power-hitters to stay active longer, and has arguably increased the abilities of pitchers by allowing them to specialize to an even greater extent than before.

In light of the multifarious changes worked upon the game by the DH rule, the parallels between arguments over the DH and broader political and ideological debates grows clear. The most basic of these is the tension between tradition and change. Social-psychological studies of political conservatism note that one of the central principals of that philosophy is reverence for tradition and a corresponding resistance to change.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, in the mid-1980s, baseball commissioner Peter Ueberroth suggested doing just that, and was roundly criticized in certain circles (see below).

<sup>5</sup> We would note that, while many of the rule's side-effects were undoubtedly anticipated by its creators, we sincerely doubt this one was.

<sup>6</sup> One line of research suggests that this resistance is a manifestation of deep-rooted insecurity and fear (Jost *et al.* 2003a,b; but see Greenberg and Jonas (2003) for an opposing view).

Conversely, those on the political left are typically more accepting – even welcoming – of change, particularly when those changes can be shown (or are believed) to yield tangible benefits. This line of reasoning suggests that those on the political right will be less likely to favor the DH rule, while those on the left will be more likely to support it.

Reinforcing our change-based rationale for the right's opposition to the DH rule is its effect (actual or perceived) on the culture of the game. Opponents of the DH often make the claim that the practice seems to condone a lack of personal responsibility from the very players who play a pivotal (if not *the* pivotal) role in the game – pitchers and sluggers.<sup>7</sup> One of the bedrock Judeo-Christian values woven through American history and society, they argue, is the notion that individuals take responsibility for their own actions and fulfill their obligations to community and country. By allowing pitchers to avoid hitting, and some batters to avoid fielding, the DH rule is suggestive of a larger-scale decline in the culture of personal responsibility in America over the past several decades. To the extent that political conservatives are more likely than liberals to be receptive to this line of reasoning (cf. Feldman and Zaller 1922), it reinforces our expectation that it is political conservatives – including individuals who identify with the Republican party<sup>8</sup> – who most strongly oppose the rule.

A related issue is the impact of the rule on the play of the game. Critics of the DH often highlight what they perceive as its anticompetitive impact, particularly vis-à-vis coaching strategy. This condemnation is consistent with Lakoff's (2002) *Strict Father* morality, which he posits as the root of contemporary American conservatism. Lakoff asserts that "(C)ompetition is a crucial ingredient in such a moral system. It is through competition that we discover who is moral, that is, who has been properly self-disciplined and therefore deserves success." He goes on to note that "(C)ompetition is therefore moral... Correspondingly, constraints on competition are immoral; they inhibit the development and sustenance of the right kind of person" (2002, 68–69).

All of these sociopolitical dynamics suggest that, in general, support for the DH should be especially low among political conservatives. And in fact, such conservatives have been among the most prominent critics of the rule.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps no other commenter has attained a higher profile in this regard than author and syndicated columnist George Will, whose two books on the subject of baseball (Will 1991, 1999) often blend commentary on

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<sup>7</sup> Consider the following, from a die-hard opponent of the rule: "(W)hile I appreciate some of the older veterans hanging around the big leagues into their 40s, I think the DH rule insults the National League old-timer who keeps his roster spot as an everyday player or he hangs up his spikes for good" (Barry and Barry 2001).

<sup>8</sup> The connection between ideology and political party is well-established in American politics. One recent authority, for example, notes that "(T)he Republican party is the party of nostalgia. It seeks to return America to a simpler, more innocent and moral past that never existed. The Democrats are utopians. They seek to create an America so fair and non-judgmental that life becomes an unbearable series of apologies" (Stewart *et al.* 2004, 107).

<sup>9</sup> We should note, however, that conservative opposition to the rule is not monolithic; nor is support among left-leaning commentators uniform. Washington Post columnist David Broder, for example, is a long-time opponent of the rule, calling it *abominable* and *disastrous* (Broder 2001). However, a quick look at cyberspace shows a marked ideological cleavage over the issue, at times even falling along religious lines (e.g., Droleskey 2004).

baseball and politics. In the past, Will has roundly criticized the DH rule in his columns (all taken from Will 1999):

*“(T)he rule is a middle-class entitlement program... and hence is partly to blame for the federal deficit.”*

*“(Joe Cronin) is a defender of the American League’s sinister Bolshevism that already has inflicted the “designated hitter” on baseball and may, unless checked, produce even worse desecrations.”*

*“Peter Ueberroth must go. His reign as baseball commissioner is already six months old, and the wicked designated hitter rule has not been repealed. Worse – infinitely so – he is talking about taking an opinion poll on the subject. The mind reels. The thought occurs: ‘Death, where is thy sting?’”<sup>10</sup>*

## OTHER INFLUENCES

While we thus believe the case for political influences on attitudes toward the DH is, at least in theory, well-founded, such explanations are unlikely to exhaust the range of factors which contribute to peoples’ attitudes about the rule. Moreover, failing to account for such factors as model controls could lead us to inaccurate inferences about the true influence of the political considerations which are our main interest.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, we outline a set of control variables which allow us more precisely to assess our main hypotheses.

### Age

At this writing, if the DH rule were a human being it would be a *thirtysomething*. Many Americans remember baseball before the advent of the DH, but an equally significant number do not. It would not be surprising, then, to uncover generational differences in opinion about the rule. We expect that younger respondents – many of whom have never known baseball without the DH – will be more likely to favor the rule, while older individuals will tend, all else equal, to oppose it.

### Geography

Ideological factors aside, fans are still fans, and will often forgive their favorite team(s) a myriad of sins. We suspect this is true for the DH as well: even those individuals who

<sup>10</sup> More recently, however, Will appears to have mellowed somewhat in his assessment of the rule, suggesting that the rule “serves conservative values” by preserving decorum and ensuring that “only serious batters shall bat” (Will 1999, pp. 81–84).

<sup>11</sup> For example, failing to control for respondents’ age may yield dubious findings if – as we suspect is the case – older individuals are both more politically conservative and less likely to favor the rule.

may oppose the DH in principle might nonetheless accede to it if their season tickets are with the Red Sox or the Mariners. Likewise, we suspect that the strongest opinions against use of the DH come from those individuals supporting National League teams.<sup>12</sup>

Ideally, then, our model would include a variable for the league to which each of our survey respondents' favorite team belongs. Unfortunately, we lack data on which – if any – team or teams are favored by our survey respondents. While one's city of residence is often an excellent proxy for team loyalty, that information is also unavailable, forcing us to adopt an even noisier measure: the state in which the respondent lived. Our expectation is that respondents from states with AL teams will, all else equal, be more likely to support the rule, while those from NL states will be less likely to do so.

### Race and Ethnicity

At the outset, we submit that there is no strong theoretical reason to expect opinion on the DH to vary systematically as a function of one's race or ethnicity. However, interest in baseball is generally higher amongst Hispanics than in the general population (Tygiel 2002), a fact at least partly attributable to the large proportion of Hispanic players in the league. In 2003, for example, 24 percent of the opening day rosters were born in Latin America or the Caribbean (Marcano and Fidler 2004), a figure which does not include American-born hispanics, and teams regularly acknowledge the significant Latino presence among their players and fans.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, Major League Baseball in 2005 had only one African-American manager (Ken Williams), and only 8.5 percent of the players were African-American, a substantial decline from the historical high of 27 percent in 1975 (Fish 2003) and a figure significantly less than either the NFL (69 percent) or the NBA (76 percent) (Lapchick 2005). Accordingly, we include racial variables in our model of support for the DH, both as general controls and to test the (admittedly impressionistic) hypothesis that African-Americans and/or Latinos tend to be more accepting of the rule. Moreover, if there is an ideological basis for support, nuances by race may prove interesting.<sup>14</sup>

### DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION

To examine these questions empirically, we turn to data from a media monthly poll conducted during September 18–20, 1997 (CBS News 1997). The data are a national probability sample of adults, and provide the full range of standard political, economic, and demographic items, as well as an eclectic set of indicators on such varied topics as baseball,

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, this is not to say that fans have a *choice* about whether their hometown team is an AL or NL team, except in the three largest cities.

<sup>13</sup> For example, the Baltimore Orioles routinely schedule an annual *Latino Night at Camden Yards* every September.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to these factors, we include three additional control variables for education, gender, and membership in the Roman Catholic church. We discuss these variables at greater length below.

cyber-sex, and Armageddon. Five questions in the CBS survey focus on baseball, hence our interest in these data. The first is a screening question, which asks: “How interested are you in watching or following major league baseball?” Respondents who answered *very interested* or *somewhat interested* were then asked a series of four follow-up questions relating to the sport; those who responded *not at all interested* were not asked any of the follow-up questions.<sup>15</sup> Of the 1,051 total respondents to the survey, 440 (or 41.9 percent) expressed at least some interest in baseball, and received the follow-up questions.<sup>16</sup>

The measurement of greatest interest here is respondents’ answers to the question “How do you feel about the designated hitter, the DH rule? Do you approve or disapprove of it?”; respondents could answer *approve* or *disapprove*. Of the 440 respondents who answered this question, 217 (49.3 percent) approved, while 137 (31.1 percent) disapproved; the remaining 86 respondents (12.3 percent) did not know or failed to respond.

Our model’s covariates include measures of political party and ideology, as well as the control variables discussed above. We adopt a standard trichotomous party identification measure (*Democrat*, *Republican*, and *Independent*), which we disaggregate into two factors, omitting the latter for use as our reference category.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the indicator we use to measure ideology (**Ideological Conservatism**) is coded as a three-point ordinal scale (*liberal*, *moderate*, and *conservative*); we include this variable as a linear term. As discussed above, the model also includes a variable for **Age** (in years), as well as two dichotomous variables capturing geographical effects. Specifically, we code indicator variables for whether (= 1) or not (= 0) each respondent resided in a state that, as of 1997, was home to an **American** or **National League** team; those respondents from New York, Florida, Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and California received a score of one on both variables. Alternative coding schemes produced substantively identical results. Our measures of ethnicity consist of two naturally coded dichotomous variables **Black** and **Hispanic**, thus implying a reference category of whites and Asians.<sup>18</sup>

Over and above these variables of interest, we also control for the effect of three additional demographic factors. The inclusion of the first, **Education**, reflects the possibility that individuals who are more knowledgeable about the game might differ in their evaluation of the rule from those who are less so. Our measure for education is a five-point ordinal scale: “Not a High School graduate,” “High School graduate,” “Some college,” “College graduate,” and “Post graduate work or degree (MA/MS, MBA, JD, Ph.D.,

<sup>15</sup> In an interesting sidenote, 4.6 percent of those uninterested in baseball believed that the world would end in 2000, compared to 1.5 percent of those who expressed at least some interest in the sport ( $\chi^2_1 = 7.45, p = 0.006, \gamma = -0.53$ ). Perhaps more tellingly, four of the five baseball-following Armageddonites in our sample favored the DH rule, though this latter relationship failed to attain statistical – if not metaphysical – significance.

<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, this percentage is almost identical to that reported in a similar survey from nearly 50 years earlier (Strunk 1951, 382).

<sup>17</sup> Note that the results we report below are substantively unchanged if we instead use either a three-point ordinal scale or a five-point measure that includes *leaners*.

<sup>18</sup> In recent years, there has been a high-profile but low percentage increase in Japanese baseball players in major league baseball. To date, however, no evidence exists to assert that this has increased the sport’s Japanese–American or Asian–American fan base.

**Table 1.** Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Minimum	Maximum
Outcome variables				
DH approval	0.62	0.49	0	1
Favor realignment	0.53	0.50	0	1
Favor interleague play	0.83	0.38	0	1
Explanatory variables				
Republican	0.33	0.47	0	1
Democrat	0.34	0.48	0	1
Ideological conservatism	2.08	0.74	1	3
Age	44.3	15.1	18	90
AL State	0.54	0.50	0	1
NL State	0.52	0.50	0	1
Black	0.10	0.30	0	1
Hispanic	0.06	0.23	0	1
Education	2.98	1.13	1	5
Female	0.34	0.48	0	1
Catholic	0.25	0.43	0	1

Note:  $N = 337$ ; see text for details on variables and their codings.

etc.).<sup>19</sup> Finally, we employ two dichotomous indicators for **Female** and **Catholic**, each naturally coded.<sup>20</sup> Summary statistics for these variables are presented in Table 1.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Our findings regarding public opinion about the DH rule are presented in Table 2.<sup>21</sup> As we noted above, our primary response variable of interest is support for the

<sup>19</sup> Note that operationalizing either **Ideological Conservatism**, **Education**, or both as a series of dichotomous indicators has no substantive effect on the results reported below.

<sup>20</sup> Differences between men and women on a host of opinion issues have been well documented. Likewise, membership in the Catholic church often correlates with beliefs which are socially conservative, but not so in other areas; controlling for this factor thus adds nuance to our measures of ideology.

<sup>21</sup> All data and commands necessary to replicate the analyses presented here are available at the author's website at <http://psblade.ucdavis.edu>. Note that the presence of the screening question raises the possibility that our sample of responses on the DH question may suffer from selection bias. While we are mindful of this, we focus nonetheless on the selected sample, for two reasons. First, the population of interest is limited to those with at least a minimal interest in baseball; accordingly, the fact of selection does not necessarily lead to biases in inference. Second, in an earlier version of the paper, we estimated a probit model with sample selection (cf. Van de Ven and Van Praag 1981) in which the model predicting attention to the game included all of the variables in our

**Table 2.** A model of support for the designated hitter rule

	Coefficient estimate	Robust S.E.	95% CI
(Constant)	0.707	0.660	[−0.586: 2.000]
Republican	−0.200	0.295	[−0.777: 0.377]
Democrat	0.640	0.309	[0.036: 1.246]
Ideological conservatism	0.100	0.166	[−0.225: 0.424]
Age	−0.014	0.008	[−0.029: 0.002]
AL state	0.106	0.271	[−0.424: 0.637]
NL state	−0.138	0.272	[−0.671: 0.395]
Black	−0.111	0.412	[−0.919: 0.698]
Hispanic	−1.006	0.552	[−2.088: 0.076]
Education	−0.052	0.105	[−0.257: 0.153]
Female	1.014	0.262	[0.500: 1.528]
Catholic	−0.184	0.286	[−0.744: 0.375]

Final  $N = 337$ . Confidence intervals are two-tailed.

DH rule, suggesting the application of a standard dichotomous choice model; Table 2 thus presents logit estimates, along with robust (Huber/White) standard errors.

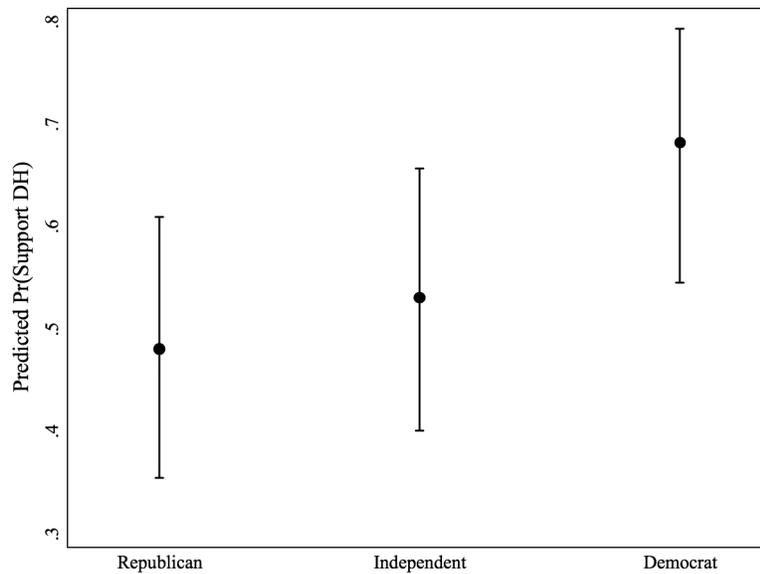
Several aspects of our findings deserve mention. Most important, and consistent with our expectations, we find that self-identified Democratic Party members are more likely to support the DH rule than are either independents or Republicans; the odds ratio of 1.90 suggests that, on average, Democrats are 90 percent more likely to support the rule than are independents. This implies (we think) that the values that draw the respondents to the Democrats are linked to those associated with supporting the rule. At the same time, the reverse is not true: Republicans are no more or less likely to support the DH rule than are political independents. Nor are self-identified political conservatives, once the effects of party are accounted for, any more likely to express hostility toward the rule than are liberals.<sup>22</sup>

The substantive implications of these findings are illustrated in Figure 1, which plots the predicted probability of a respondent indicating their support for the DH across the

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model of DH support, plus terms for the square of *Age* and a variable capturing whether or not the respondent resided in a state with any major league team. Those results indicated that little or no selection bias was present, and yielded results for the equation of interest which were substantively similar to those reported here. While we are mindful that the question of which factors cause some individuals to fail to follow baseball could itself be the topic for a paper, we leave such an analysis to future work.

<sup>22</sup> We also estimated a *reduced-form* model, omitting the two party identification variables, to assess the impact of political ideology; we found none.



**Figure 1.** Predicted probabilities of support for the designated hitter rule, by party identification.

three categories of party identification, along with their 95 percent confidence intervals.<sup>23</sup> Note that the predictions for Republicans and independents are nearly identical (0.48 and 0.53, respectively) while that for Democrats is significantly higher (0.68), and that the confidence intervals for the latter exclude both of the former values.

A number of other findings also deserve mention. Our estimate for the effect of **Age** is, as expected, negatively signed, indicating that older respondents are less likely to support the DH rule; our results suggest that each additional year of age decreases support for the rule by roughly 1.3 percent.<sup>24</sup> It is possible that older followers of baseball are more traditional, and therefore find the DH rule to be a less *pure* form of baseball. While estimated somewhat less precisely ( $p = 0.07$ , two-tailed), we also uncover less support for the rule among Latinos. Also, note that we find no support for the proposition that the DH receives higher levels of approval in geographic areas near American League teams. While the point estimates for both **AL State** and **NL State** have the expected signs, neither is remotely as large as its standard error, leading us to conclude – with the appropriate caveats regarding sample size and measurement error – that differences in opinion about the DH are largely orthogonal to geographic variation. Finally, our

<sup>23</sup> Predicted probabilities are for a mean/median case: a 44-year-old, ideologically moderate, non-black, non-Catholic, non-Latino male from a state with both AL and NL teams.

<sup>24</sup> Note as well that this effect remains even after controlling for the (very slight) positive relationship between age and political conservatism.

results point to significantly higher support for the rule among women than among men; on average, women are nearly three times as likely to favor the DH than are men (odds ratio = 2.76). This finding is both robust and very precisely estimated (two-tailed  $p < 0.001$ ), and suggests that women who are interested in baseball may feel less hidebound by tradition. We also know that women are a priori more likely to be Democratic, and need not ignore overlapping explanations here.

### ATTITUDES TOWARD CHANGE IN THE GAME

As we noted above, a key aspect of the DH rule is the monumental change it represented in baseball. To the extent that political/ideological attitudes motivate opinions about such changes, it may also be the case that individuals may differ in their attitudes toward changes in the game more generally. In particular, if Republicans and/or political conservatives also tend to be *traditionalists* vis-à-vis the game, we might expect them to oppose any significant changes in the game's rules, particularly those which are motivated by factors unrelated to the quality of the play on the field (e.g., those driven by increasing attendance and/or revenues). Fortunately, our data include two additional measures that allow us to tap resistance to change in the game more generally. The first is an indicator of whether or not the respondent favors *interleague play*, a new development at the time of the survey. The second was whether or not the respondent favored a proposed geographic *realignment* of the leagues. Both questions are measured as dichotomous indicators of whether (= 1) or not (= 0) the respondent supports each of the two proposed changes. If, in fact, attitudes toward the DH are driven by larger concerns about change, we would expect to find similar patterns to those described above in our analyses of opinions toward these two phenomena as well.

Table 3 presents the results of two separate analyses of these alternative measures of attitudes toward change in baseball. Interestingly, our findings suggest that the factors which explain attitudes toward these two phenomena differ from those involved in respondents' evaluations of the DH rule. More specifically, we find no partisan or ideological cleavages between supporters or opponents of geographical realignment, though we do uncover a slight tendency for older respondents to be *more* favorable toward this change. By contrast, the data suggest that partisans of both stripes are less supportive of interleague play, as are older respondents. While we are mindful of their limitations,<sup>25</sup> these findings nonetheless imply that the DH rule is – in a word – *different*, and that generalized attitudes toward change in the game have little to do with individuals' feelings about it.<sup>26</sup> Instead, our results are consistent with the idea that the roots of the

<sup>25</sup> Comparisons between the DH rule and the two changes discussed here are necessarily imperfect. For example, both realignment and interleague play – unlike the DH – were innovations that, at the time of the survey, were relatively novel.

<sup>26</sup> Additionally, if we treat the variables for support of realignment and interleague play as exogenous and include them as covariates in the model in Table 2, we find that neither of the two estimated effects are bounded away from zero, and that their joint impact on opinion toward the DH is statistically indistinguishable from zero as well.

**Table 3.** Logit models of support for realignment and interleague play

	Favor realignment		Favor interleague play	
	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.
(Constant)	-1.039	0.658	3.030	0.877
Republican	-0.137	0.295	-0.676	0.376
Democrat	0.095	0.292	-0.814	0.370
Ideological conservatism	0.154	0.165	-0.019	0.206
Age	0.019	0.008	-0.019	0.009
AL state	0.016	0.250	0.433	0.308
NL state	-0.256	0.254	-0.340	0.299
Black	0.482	0.411	-0.504	0.429
Hispanic	1.087	0.643	0.136	0.642
Education	-0.038	0.106	-0.026	0.125
Female	0.163	0.245	0.259	0.290
Catholic	0.365	0.278	-0.025	0.331
<i>N</i>	319		384	

ideological differences toward the rule lie in the rule’s effect – both symbolic and actual – on the game itself.

### CONCLUSION

The year 1973 was a tumultuous one in American sports. All around was momentous change: the Miami Dolphins garnered the first undefeated NFL season with a win in Super Bowl VII, tennis brought us the “battle of the sexes” between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, and George Steinbrenner acquired the Yankees from CBS. The introduction of the DH, however, was likely the sporting world’s most important and lasting legacy of that remarkable year, and the one which has sparked the most debate since.

Our goal here was simple: to elaborate and examine empirically the idea that Americans’ opinions about the DH rule are linked to their larger socio-political beliefs and attitudes. Our evidence to this effect, while not overwhelming, is nonetheless strongly suggestive: even after controlling for a host of other factors, Democrats consistently tend to favor the rule more than others, and do so to a degree that is both statistically and substantively meaningful. Thus, while we uncover no direct evidence for the liberalism/DH connection, our findings with respect to Democrats and the rule square neatly with the theoretical expectations set forth above.

We are, of course, aware of a number of important limitations to these findings. It is possible – particularly for respondents from the Baby Boom generation and younger – that

attitudes toward the DH are the result of socialization relatively early in life. Our analysis lacks a measure of such socialization; moreover, in a society characterized by substantial levels of mobility, such an effect will be badly proxied by the geographical indicators we do have. Similarly, our argument regarding the DH is one which has the potential to divide social and economic conservatives; it is possible that, had the survey instrument made such a distinction, our findings may have differed from those presented here.

At the same time, we also believe our conclusions regarding attitudes toward the DH reflect a larger socio-political dynamic. To the extent that political ideologies embody consistent perspectives on a range of issues in public life, we would be unsurprised to find similar linkages between them and opinions about other sports-related phenomena (e.g., the NCWO's request that Augusta National golf course accept female members, or professional sports' ongoing controversies over performance-enhancing drugs). As with so many other issues of contemporary interest, such phenomena often take on a recognizably (if not explicitly) ideological and/or partisan quality; those qualities, in turn, reflect the core values that are manifested in such *routine* communications. At the end of the day, then, we believe that even the most apparently superficial opinions – including those about sports – embody and express citizens' underlying values, and so can serve as useful barometers of social and political attitudes.

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