Exploring the Bases of Partisanship in the American Electorate: Social Identity vs. Ideology

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Abstract

This paper uses data from the 1952-2004 American National Election Studies and the 2004 U.S. National Exit Poll to compare the influence of ideology and membership in social groups on party identification. Contrary to the claim by Green, Palmquist, and Schickler that party loyalties are rooted in voters' social identities, we find that party identification is much more strongly related to voters' ideological preferences than to their social identities as defined by their group memberships. Since the 1970s, Republican identification has increased substantially among whites inside and outside of the South with the most dramatic gains occurring among married voters, men and Catholics. Within these subgroups, however, Republican gains have occurred mainly or exclusively among self-identified conservatives. As a result, the relationship between ideology and party identification has increased dramatically. This has important implications for voting behavior. Increased consistency between ideology and party identification has contributed to higher levels of party loyalty in presidential and congressional elections.

In *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*, Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler (2002) argue that party identification in the United States is based on voters' social identities rather than on a rational assessment of the parties' policies or performance in office. Challenging many of the conclusions of recent research on party identification in the American electorate, *Partisan Hearts and Minds* has attracted the attention of pundits (Brooks 2004) as well as scholars.

Green, Palmquist, and Schickler make four major claims about the nature of contemporary party identification:

1. Party identification is more stable at both the aggregate and the individual level than most recent scholarship has suggested. Outside of the South, there has been little change in the distribution of party identification in the U.S. for several decades (pp. 52-84).
2. Voters' party loyalties are largely insulated from the effects of current issues such as the state of the economy and the performance of the incumbent president (pp. 85-108).
3. Party loyalties exert a powerful influence on citizens' issue positions, evaluations of political leaders, and voting decisions (pp. 204-229).
4. Most importantly, party identification is based mainly on identification with social groups rather than a rational evaluation of the parties' ideological orientations or policies (pp. 25-51). According to Green et al., "people ask themselves two questions when deciding which party to support: What kinds of social groups come to mind as I think about Democrats, Republicans, and Independents? Which assemblage of groups (if any) best describes me (p. 8)?"

In proposing this social identity theory, Green et al. explicitly challenge rational choice explanations of party identification such as those proposed by Downs (1957) and Fiorina (1981). Green et al. view party identification as an emotional attachment grounded in enduring group loyalties rather than a deliberate choice based on a preference for one set of policy positions over another—a choice that can be modified if parties' policy positions change or new issues arise (Page and Jones 1979; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Carmines, McIver, and Stimson 1987; Luskin, McIver, and Carmines 1989; Franklin 1992).

Like Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960), Green et al. downplay the role of issues and ideology in the formation of party identification. While recognizing that party loyalties can be influenced by dramatic changes in the parties' policy stands or ideological positions, Green et al. argue that such shifts are relatively rare and generally confined to periods of major realignment such as the New Deal era in the United States. In this regard, social identity theory stands in sharp contrast to ideological realignment theory which claims that as a result of the growing ideological polarization of the two major parties since the 1980s, Americans have increasingly been choosing a party identification on the basis of their ideological preferences, leading to a gradual realignment of party loyalties along ideological lines (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998).

According to Green et al., even the one exception to the rule of partisan stability in recent American political history, the dramatic realignment of southern white voters' party loyalties since the end of World War II, was based more on changing perceptions of the parties' ties to social groups than on issues or ideology. They argue that as southerners began to assume leadership positions in the Republican Party during the

1980s and 1990s, Republicanism came to be seen as a respectable affiliation among white southerners. According to Green et al., "As the Republican image improved, Republican identification became increasingly prevalent among all segments of the ideological continuum (p. 160)."

Green et al. argue that "the growing correlation between liberalism-conservatism and party [among southern whites] reflects cohort replacement as older conservative Democrats pass away (p. 161)." With this process of generational replacement largely completed, they claim that, "the pace of partisan conversion [in the South] appears to have slowed to the near-standstill characteristic of party identification in the non-South (p. 163)."

We find much that is persuasive about the evidence presented in *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. We agree with its conclusions that party identification is usually quite stable at both the individual and the aggregate level, that party loyalties are relatively immune from short-term fluctuations in economic conditions and presidential popularity, and that party identification exerts a powerful influence on evaluations of political leaders and voting decisions. However, we take issue with the claim that partisan change in the American electorate in recent years has been limited exclusively to southern whites. We present evidence in this paper that there has been a substantial increase in Republican identification among white voters outside of the South over the past three decades and that this shift has been quite dramatic among several major subgroups including men, Catholics, and the religiously devout. We further show that the extent and direction of these shifts are strongly related to ideology, that the correlation between ideology and party identification has increased substantially over time across a wide variety of social

groups, and that this increase is not due simply to generational replacement. We also present evidence that the increasing correlation between ideology and party identification over time is due primarily to the influence of ideology on party identification.

Most fundamentally, we take issue with the claim that party identification in the U.S. is based mainly on the social identities of citizens rather than their ideological orientations or policy preferences. In fact, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler never actually test this social identity theory, nor do they compare the influence of social background characteristics with the influence of issues and ideology. They argue that, "we lack the luxury of examining a broad range of social identities [because] social class, ethnicity, religion, and party exhaust the list of social categories about which we have adequate longitudinal data (p. 83)."

We find this argument unpersuasive. While measures of identification with social groups may not be widely available, measures of objective membership in a large variety of social groups are widely available and social identity theorists generally view objective membership as a necessary condition for identification with a group and the development of group political consciousness (Gurin, Miller and Gurin 1980; Miller, Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuk 1981; Tajfel 1981; Turner 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Gurin 1985; Turner 1987). Tajfel (1981), for example, defines social identity as, "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership (p. 255)."

In addition to social class, ethnicity, and religion, data on age, race, gender, region, urban-rural residence, and union affiliation are available in the American National Election Studies and many other surveys conducted over the past fifty years. Along with

social class, ethnicity, and religion, these are precisely the social characteristics most commonly associated with support for the major parties in the United States. Social identity theory clearly implies that voters who belong to groups generally associated with one major party or the other—groups such as the poor, union members, single women, and Jews in the case of the Democratic Party, or the wealthy, married men, and evangelicals in the case of the Republican Party—should be more likely to identify with that party. Based on this reasoning, we test the social identity theory by examining the influence on party identification of membership in a wide variety of social groups that are closely aligned with the two major parties. Our results indicate that while there is a group basis to party loyalties, most of these social characteristics are only weakly related to party identification. With the exception of the overwhelmingly Democratic identification of African Americans, party identification is much more strongly related to voters' ideological orientations than to their social identities as defined by their group memberships.

We believe that our evidence shows that there is a much larger rational component to party identification that Green et al. acknowledge. Moreover, the increasing consistency of voters' ideological orientations and party loyalties has had important political consequences. This trend helps to explain the extraordinary levels of partisan voting seen in the 2000 and 2004 presidential contests and other recent elections.

Trends in Party Identification

One of the key claims made by Green et al. is that outside of the South there has been little change in partisanship since the 1960s. However, this claim appears to be contradicted by a considerable body of research that has documented changes in

partisanship based on such factors as gender (Wirls 1986; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999), marital status (Weisberg 1987), religiosity (Guth and Green 1990; Layman and Carmines 1997) and social class (Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003).

In order to test the claim that partisanship outside of the South has been stable, Table 1 presents data from American National Election Study surveys on trends in party identification in the U.S. since the 1960s. We have grouped the data by decade in order to minimize fluctuations due to short-term forces or sampling variation. The measure presented here is simply the difference between the percentage of Democratic identifiers and leaners and the percentage of Republican identifiers and leaners in the overall electorate.[1]

[Table 1 goes here]

The evidence presented in Table 1 does not support the conclusion that outside of party identification outside of the South has been stable since the 1960s. Although the most dramatic change has occurred among white southerners, there has also been a substantial increase in Republican identification among whites outside of the South. During the 1960s, the Democratic Party enjoyed an average advantage of 13 points over the Republican Party among non-southern whites. Since 1980, however, this advantage has disappeared: in the 2002-2004 NES surveys, non-southern whites favored the Republican Party over the Democratic Party by a 5 point margin.

Data from national exit polls also show a substantial increase in Republican identification among non-southern whites since the 1970s. Between 1976 and 2004, the percentage of non-southern whites identifying with the Republican Party in national exit

[1] Excluding leaning independents and calculating net party identification based on the difference between the percentage of Democratic identifiers and the percentage of Republican identifiers produces almost identical results.

polls increased from 28 percent to 43 percent. Moreover, contrary to the claim by Green et al. that the party loyalties of white southerners have stabilized in recent years, the national exit poll data show a continuing movement toward the Republican Party in this group: the Republican advantage in party identification among white southerners increased from 17 points in 2000 to 31 points in 2004.

Outside of the South, Republican gains have been much larger in certain white subgroups than in the overall white electorate. Table 2 presents data from American National Election Study surveys on trends in party identification since the 1960s among various subgroups of non-southern whites. These results show that Republican identification has increased dramatically among men, married voters, Catholics, and the religiously observant. Among white Catholics, for example, the Democratic advantage, which was 42 points in the 1960s and 36 points in the 1970s, has completely disappeared. In the 2002-2004 NES surveys, Republican identifiers slightly outnumbered Democratic identifiers among non-southern white Catholics. Similarly, in the 2004 national exit poll, Republican identifiers outnumbered Democratic identifiers by 41 percent to 34 percent among non-southern white Catholics. The Republican gains in this group are very significant politically because, according to the national exit poll, Catholics comprised more than 30 percent of the white electorate outside of the South in 2004.

[Table 2 goes here]

Ideology in the American Electorate: Meaning and Measurement

The evidence examined thus far indicates that since the 1970s there has been a substantial increase in Republican identification among whites outside the South as well as among those in the South and that this increase has been quite dramatic among certain

subgroups such as Catholics. But why has this shift occurred? Contrary to Green et al., we believe that ideology has played a major role in producing a secular realignment of party loyalties in the United States since the 1970s. According to this ideological realignment hypothesis, the increasing clarity of ideological differences between the parties during the Reagan and post-Reagan eras has made it easier for citizens to choose a party identification based on their ideological orientations.

Before examining the impact of ideological orientations on party identification, however, we need to demonstrate that members of the public, or at least a substantial proportion of them, have meaningful ideological orientations. While the concept of ideology has been defined in many different ways (Gerring 1997), political scientists generally view an ideology as a set of beliefs about the role of government that shapes responses to a wide range of specific policy issues (Converse 1964; Peffley and Hurwitz 1985). Among political elites in the U.S., positions on a wide range of economic, social, and foreign policy issues appear to be structured by a single liberal-conservative dimension (Poole and Rosenthal 1991). However, the extent of ideological thinking in the public has been a subject of debate since the publication of Converse's (1964) seminal study of belief systems in mass publics which suggested that awareness of ideological concepts and use of such concepts by ordinary citizens were quite limited.

Although some subsequent studies have supported Converse's conclusions about the lack of ideological sophistication among the general public in the U.S. (Axelrod 1967; Bishop, Oldenick, Tuchfarber, and Bennett 1978; Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1978; Conover and Feldman 1981; Knight 1985; Jennings 1992), other studies have suggested that the ability of ordinary citizens to comprehend and employ ideological

concepts depends on the extent and clarity of ideological cues provided by political elites. According to this view, the greater the prevalence and clarity of ideological cues in the political environment, the higher the level of ideological comprehension and reasoning should be among the electorate (Field and Anderson 1969; Nie and Anderson 1974; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979; Nie and Rabjohn 1979; Craig and Hurley 1984; Jacoby 1995). From this standpoint, the increased ideological polarization of the parties in recent years and the increased salience of ideological conflict in the media should have produced an increase in ideological comprehension and reasoning among the American public.

While we do not claim that ordinary citizens in the U.S. now possess belief systems as elaborate or constrained as those evident among political activists and elites (Jennings 1992; Saunders and Abramowitz 2004), our evidence does point to a substantial increase in the ability of citizens to apply ideological labels to the political parties, an increase in the coherence of citizens' views across different issues, and a growing connection between the ideological labels that citizens choose and their positions on a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues.

In 1972, when the NES began asking respondents to place themselves and the two major parties on a 7-point liberal-conservative scale, only 48 percent of respondents were able to place themselves on the scale and to place the Democratic Party to the left of the Republican Party. By 1996 and 2004, however, 67 percent of respondents were able to place themselves on the scale and to place the Democrats to the left of the Republicans. These results indicate that public awareness of ideological differences between the parties has increased substantially in the past three decades.

The NES data also indicate that there has also been an increase in the ideological coherence of citizens' policy preferences and in the correlation between ideological identification and policy preferences. Table 3 displays a measure of the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of responses to 8 items that were included in every presidential election year survey between 1984 and 2004. The 8 items include liberal-conservative identification and opinions on 7 policy issues: government responsibility for jobs and living standards, government responsibility for health insurance, government services and spending, defense spending, government aid to blacks, abortion, and women's equality. The table also shows the correlation between liberal-conservative identification and responses to the seven policy issues.

[Table 3 goes here]

The increasing value of Cronbach's alpha over time indicates that citizens' responses to these 8 questions have become more internally consistent since 1984. In addition, contrary to the claim that ideological labels have little policy content for most Americans (Conover and Feldman 1981), the evidence in Table 3 shows that liberal-conservative self-identification was strongly related to preferences on every policy issue in every survey and that this relationship has grown stronger over time. These results indicate that there is an ideological structure to Americans' opinions on policy issues and that ideological self-identification is a valid indicator of the liberalism or conservatism of citizens' policy orientations.

In testing the ideological realignment hypothesis, we use different measures of ideology with different data sets. We use the 7-point ideological identification scale to classify respondents in NES surveys as liberal (1-3), moderate (4), or conservative (5-7)

since this question is correlated with preferences on a wide range of policy issues and it has been included in every survey since 1972. We use a similar ideological identification question with three response categories—liberal, moderate, and conservative—in our analysis of 2004 national exit poll data because the split-sample procedures used in the exit poll make it impossible to create a multiple-item scale for the entire sample. However, in our analyses of the 1992-1996 NES panel survey and the 2004 NES survey we measure ideological orientations with multiple-item scales that include the 7-point ideological identification question along with a number of questions about specific policy issues.

The 1992-1996 ideology scale is based on 11 items included in both the 1992 and 1996 waves of the panel: liberal-conservative identification, abortion, government aid to blacks, defense spending, the death penalty, laws barring discrimination against gays and lesbians, allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military, government vs. personal responsibility for jobs and living standards, government vs. private responsibility for health insurance, government spending and services, and the role of women in society. Because of the small number of respondents interviewed in both waves of the panel, we recoded all of the 7-point issue scales to place respondents with no opinion in the middle position (4) in order to avoid losing cases due to missing data. The 1992 scale has a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .70. The 1996 scale has a reliability coefficient of .74.

The 2004 ideology scale is based on 16 items: liberal-conservative identification, abortion, abortion funding, partial birth abortion, gay marriage, government vs. private responsibility for health insurance, government vs. personal responsibility for jobs and

living standards, government services and spending, gun control, the death penalty, government aid to blacks, government aid to Hispanics, environmental protection vs. job creation, defense spending, use of diplomacy vs. military force, and the role of women in society. This scale has a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .80.

Group Membership, Ideology, and Partisan Change

In order to test the ideological realignment hypothesis, we will first examine trends in party identification among some of the white subgroups that have experienced the largest Republican gains since the 1970s, while controlling for ideological identification. If the ideological realignment hypothesis is correct, we should find that Republican gains have been greatest among conservative identifiers and smallest among liberal identifiers.

[Table 4 goes here]

The evidence presented in Table 4 provides strong support for the ideological realignment hypothesis. For every subgroup examined, the increase in Republican identification was much larger among conservative identifiers than among moderate or liberal identifiers. In fact, Republican identification declined among liberal identifiers in every subgroup except Catholics. Among southern whites, for example, there was a 54 point increase in net Republican identification among conservatives and a 7 point decrease in net Republican identification among liberals. Similarly, among religiously observant whites, there was a 40 point increase in net Republican identification among conservatives and an 18 point decrease in net Republican identification among liberals.

The end result of the process of ideological realignment has been a marked increase in the correlation between ideology and party identification. Table 5 displays the trend in the correlation between ideology and party identification between the 1970s and 2004 for

the entire electorate and for several major subgroups. The correlation between ideology and party identification increases in all groups including southern and non-southern whites. In fact, the increase in the correlation between ideology and party identification is just as great for non-southern whites as it is for southern whites.

[Table 5 goes here]

The increasing correlation between ideology and party identification was not simply a result of generational replacement. Table 6 presents the results of a cohort analysis of the relationship between ideology and party identification among northern and southern whites from the 1970s through the 1990s. Almost every 10-year age cohort shows an increase in the correlation between ideology and party identification over time. For example, among southern whites who were in their 20s during the 1970s, the correlation between ideology and party identification was only .27. However, among members of the same cohort during the 1990s, the correlation between ideology and party identification was .54. Similarly, among northern whites who were in their 20s during the 1970s, the correlation between ideology and party identification was only .34. However, among members of the same cohort during the 1990s, the correlation between ideology and party identification was .61.

[Table 6 goes here]

Ideological Realignment vs. Partisan Persuasion Among White Southerners and Catholics

The evidence examined thus far indicates that the relationship between ideology and party identification became considerably stronger among both northern and southern whites who remained in the electorate between the 1970s and the 1990s. However, cohort analysis does not allow us to determine whether ideology was influencing party

identification, as the ideological realignment hypothesis suggests, or whether party identification was influencing ideology, as Green et al. suggest.

It is possible that the increasing clarity of ideological differences between the parties during the 1980s and 1990s caused Democratic and Republican partisans to adopt ideological positions consistent with their existing party loyalties in a process that might be termed partisan persuasion. However, partisan persuasion cannot explain increasing Republican identification among major subgroups within the electorate. Moreover, evidence from National Election Study surveys indicates that for white southerners and Catholics, two subgroups within the white electorate that experienced substantial increases in Republican identification between 1972 and 2004, ideological realignment rather than partisan persuasion was the primary mechanism of change.

If partisan persuasion was at work, increases in Republican identification among white southerners and Catholics between 1972 and 2004 should have led to substantial increases in conservatism in these groups as the growing ranks of Republican identifiers adopted the conservative ideology of their new party. But the data displayed in Figures 1 and 2 show that there was no increase in conservatism among either white southerners or white Catholics. Throughout the period from 1972 though 2004, the mean conservatism score of white southerners hovered around 4.5 while the mean conservatism score of white Catholics remained in the vicinity of 4.2.

[Figures 1 and 2 go here]

Contrary to the partisan persuasion hypothesis, white southerners and Catholics did not become much more conservative between 1972 and 2004; however, conservative white southerners and Catholics did become much more Republican. Between 1972 and

2004, the proportion of conservative southern whites identifying with the Republican Party increased from 39 percent to 80 percent and the mean score of conservative southerners on the seven-point party identification scale rose from 3.7 to 5.5. During the same period, the proportion of conservative Catholics identifying with the Republican Party increased from 48 percent to 82 percent and the mean score of conservative Catholics on the seven-point party identification scale rose from 4.1 to 5.7. This evidence clearly indicates that ideological realignment rather than partisan persuasion was responsible for the increasing correlation between ideology and party identification among white southerners and Catholics.

Evidence from the 1992-1996 NES Panel Survey

Additional evidence concerning the relative importance of ideological realignment and partisan persuasion can be obtained from the only major long-term panel study conducted by the NES between 1976 and 2000—the 1992-96 panel survey. Although the study covers only a four year period and the sample is fairly small (only 597 respondents were interviewed in both 1992 and 1996), the panel design of the study allows us to estimate the influence of ideology on party identification as well as the influence of party identification on ideology.

[Figure 3 goes here]

Figure 3 presents the results of a path analysis of ideology and party identification among white respondents in the 1992-96 NES panel survey. These results indicate that there was a high degree of stability in both ideological orientations and party identification among survey respondents. In fact, ideological orientations were even more stable than party identification over the four years of the panel. Despite the high

degree of stability of party identification, however, the results of the path analysis provide strong support for the ideological realignment hypothesis. Even after controlling for 1992 party identification and a wide variety of social background characteristics, 1992 ideological orientations had a significant impact on 1996 party identification. Over this four year period, conservatives tended to become more Republican while liberals tended to become more Democratic. There is much less support for the partisan persuasion hypothesis. Over the same four year period, Democrats did not become significantly more liberal and Republicans did not become significantly more conservative.

Social Identity, Ideology and Party Identification

According to the social identity theory, party identification is based largely on membership in social groups—citizens choose a party identification based on their perception of the fit between their own social characteristics and the social characteristics of supporters of the two major parties. Since the New Deal, the Democrats have generally been viewed as the party of the poor, the working class, union members, urban dwellers, racial and ethnic minorities, Catholics, and Jews while the Republicans have generally been viewed the party of the wealthy, business executives, small town and rural residents, and white Protestants outside of the South. However, the social images of the Democratic and Republican parties have undergone considerable change in recent years. As Green et al. point out, southern whites, who were once a key component of the Democratic coalition, have been moving into the Republican camp since the 1950s. More recently, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs have emerged as important correlates of party affiliation: members of traditional families and

those with strong religious convictions tend to be Republicans while singles, gays, and less religious voters tend to be Democrats.

The changing relationship between social groups and the parties raises the question of whether membership in social groups has a direct impact on party identification, as the social identity theory proposes, or whether partisan differences between social groups are simply a result of the policy preferences of group members. According to this ideological differences hypothesis, the reason that some groups such as white evangelicals have become increasingly Republican in recent years while other groups such as gays and lesbians have become increasingly Democratic is because of the policy preferences of their members.

As a first test of the social identity and ideological differences hypotheses, Table 7 presents data from the 2004 national exit poll on net party identification among members of a number of groups that are closely aligned with either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party, controlling for ideological orientation. We measured the ideological orientations of respondents in the exit poll with the three-point liberal-conservative identification question because this question was included in all three versions of the exit poll questionnaire.[2]

[Table 7 goes here]

The results in Table 7 show that, except for African-Americans, the differences between liberals and conservatives within each social group were much larger than the differences between social groups. African-Americans, regardless of their ideological

[2] However, responses to this question were strongly related to opinions on three policy questions that were included in different versions of the questionnaire: abortion (r = .40), gay marriage (r = .42) and the role of the federal government (r = .31).

orientation, strongly favored the Democratic Party. Otherwise, across all social groups, liberals strongly preferred the Democratic Party and conservatives strongly preferred the Republican Party. While the large majority of Hispanics identified with the Democratic Party, the large majority of conservative Hispanics identified with the Republican Party. Jews overwhelmingly identified with the Democratic Party but conservative Jews overwhelmingly identified with the Republican Party. Wealthy liberals favored the Democrats while poor conservatives favored the Republicans; conservative gays and lesbians preferred the Republican Party by a wide margin while liberal evangelicals (yes, there were some) preferred the Democratic Party by a wide margin.

The results in Table 7 provide only limited supported for the social identity theory. It is true that the partisan orientations of certain groups cannot be completely explained by their policy preferences. For African-Americans, in particular, social identity and party identification seem to be closely connected. African-Americans, regardless of ideology, tend to be Democrats. For other groups, however, the connection between social identity and party identification is much weaker or nonexistent. Even for members of groups with very close ties to one party or the other, such as Jews or evangelical Christians, ideology trumps social identity. The reason why most Jews identify with the Democratic Party is because of their liberal policy preferences, not because of their social identity; the reason why most evangelical Christians identify with the Republican Party is because of their conservative policy preferences, not because of their social identity.

Social Identity, Ideology, and Party Identification in 2004

In order to directly compare the effects of ideology and group membership on contemporary party identification, we performed a logistic regression analysis of party

identification. Our dependent variable in this analysis was a dichotomous measure of party identification with strong, weak, and independent Democrats classified as Democrats and strong, weak, and independent Republicans classified as Republicans. Pure independents were excluded from the analysis.[3] Independent variables in the analysis included a 16-item liberal-conservative scale and a variety of social background characteristics including age, education, income, gender, marital status, religion, church attendance, and household union affiliation. The results of the logistic regression analysis are presented in Table 8.

[Table 8 goes here]

To facilitate comparisons of the effects of the independent variables on party identification, we converted each of the logistic regression coefficients into a change in probability score. This score can be interpreted as the change in the probability of identifying with the Republican Party associated with a change between categories of any of the dichotomous independent variables such as gender, union membership, or martial status, or the change in probability associated with a change between the 25th percentile and the 75th percentile on any of the continuous independent variables such as age, education, or ideology.

The major conclusion that emerges from Table 8 is that the impact of ideology on party identification was much stronger than that of any of the social background variables. Most of the estimated coefficients for the social background variables are not statistically significant. In addition, the change in probability scores for most of the social background variables are generally small, with the largest effect (.16) being for

[3] An OLS regression analysis using the 7-point party identification scale as the dependent variable produced almost identical results.

education. Many social characteristics including age, income, gender, martial status, and church attendance had little or no impact on party identification after controlling for ideology. In contrast, the estimated coefficient for the ideology scale is highly statistically significant and the change in probability score is almost four times larger than that for education. Even after controlling for social background characteristics, the probability of identifying with the Republican Party was 63 percentage points higher for a voter at the 75th percentile of the liberal conservative scale than it was for a voter at the 25th percentile of the liberal-conservative scale.

According to Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, the questions most voters ask themselves in deciding which party to support are: "What kinds of social groups come to mind as I think about Democrats, Republicans, and Independents?" and "Which assemblage of groups (if any) best describes me?" Based on our evidence, however, it appears that the questions most voters ask themselves in deciding which party to support are actually: "What do Democrats and Republicans stand for?" and "Which party's positions are closer to mine?"

The Consequences of Ideological Realignment for Voting Behavior

The growing consistency of ideology and party identification has important consequences for voting behavior because voters whose party identification and ideological orientation are consistent are much more loyal to their party than voters whose party identification and ideological orientation are inconsistent. In the 2004 presidential election, according to data from the national exit poll, 96 percent of liberal white Democrats voted for John Kerry compared with only 62 percent of conservative

white Democrats. Similarly, 97 percent of conservative white Republicans voted for George W. Bush compared with only 58 percent of liberal white Republicans.

Overall, according to both national exit polls and the NES post-election surveys, over 90 percent of Republican identifiers and almost 90 percent of Democratic identifiers voted for their own party's presidential candidates in the 2000 and 2004 elections. These two elections produced the highest levels of party voting in the history of the National Election Studies. Party voting was also very prevalent in recent congressional elections, especially in competitive races (Abramowitz and Alexander 2004).

The high level of partisan voting in recent presidential and congressional elections is due largely to the fact that an ideological realignment has taken place among white voters in both the South and the North since the 1970s. As a result of this realignment, voters' party affiliations are now more consistent with their ideological orientations than in the past. According to data from the American National Election Studies, liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans made up only 42 percent of all white party identifiers in 1972, while conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans made up 20 percent. By 2004, liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans made up 59 percent of all white party identifiers while conservative Democrats and liberal Republicans made up only 9 percent. Because of this growing consistency, the outlook for the 2006 and 2008 elections is for a continuation of high levels of partisan voting.

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Table 1. Net Party Identification in the United States by Race and Region

Group	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000	2002-2004	Change
ALL	+ 24	+ 20	+ 13	+ 11	+ 7	- 17
African-Americans	+ 72	+ 74	+ 72	+ 72	+ 75	+ 3
Whites	+ 18	+ 13	+ 1	0	- 7	- 25
South	+ 36	+ 25	+ 9	- 7	- 17	- 53
North	+ 13	+ 9	- 2	+ 3	- 5	- 18

Source: American National Election Studies

Note: Net party identification = percentage of Democratic identifiers and leaners minus percentage of Republican identifiers and leaners.

Table 2. Net Party Identification of Northern White Subgroups

Group	1962-1970	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000	2002-2004	Change
Males	+ 14	+ 8	- 6	- 6	- 10	- 24
Females	+ 12	+ 9	+ 2	+ 11	- 1	- 13
Married	+13	+ 6	- 7	- 5	- 14	- 27
Unmarried	+ 12	+ 16	+ 6	+ 14	+ 10	- 2
Protestant	- 5	- 10	- 18	- 14	- 20	- 15
Catholic	+ 42	+ 36	+ 17	+ 13	- 2	- 44
Jewish	+ 72	+ 58	+ 46	+ 72	+ 67	- 5
Other, None	+ 29	+ 28	+ 16	+ 23	+ 15	- 14
Observant	+ 6	0	- 9	- 16	- 16	- 22
Nonobservant	+ 27	+ 21	+ 9	+ 18	+ 15	- 12

Source: American National Election Studies

Note: Net party identification = percentage of Democratic identifiers and leaners minus percentage of Republican identifiers and leaners.

Table 3. Analysis of 8-Item Liberal-Conservative Scale, 1984-2004

	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Cronbach's Alpha	.65	.66	.70	.75	.74	.77
Correlation of Lib/Con Id with						
Jobs/Living Standards	.36	.23	.28	.36	.35	.43
Health Insurance	.19	.23	.30	.39	.31	.43
Spending/Services	.24	.33	.32	.38	.46	.42
Aid to Blacks	.31	.26	.27	.37	.32	.37
Defense Spending	.27	.30	.28	.35	.35	.34
Abortion	.14	.21	.32	.37	.39	.33
Women's Role	.19	.23	.28	.31	.32	.32
7 Policy Issues	.44	.46	.51	.60	.60	.62

Source: American National Election Studies

Note: Correlations are Pearson's r. All coefficients are highly statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 4. Net Party Identification of Selected White Subgroups by Ideological Self-Identification

Group	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000	2002-2004	Change
ALL WHITES					
Liberals	+ 53	+ 52	+ 66	+ 66	+ 13
Moderates	+ 20	+ 10	+ 11	+ 12	- 8
Conservatives	- 29	- 44	- 54	- 67	- 38
SOUTH					
Liberals	+ 55	+ 49	+ 60	+ 62	+ 7
Moderates	+ 33	+ 27	+ 6	+ 3	- 30
Conservatives	- 6	- 31	- 59	- 60	- 54
NORTH					
Liberals	+ 52	+ 53	+ 68	+ 68	+ 16
Moderates	+ 16	+ 7	+ 13	+ 11	- 5
Conservatives	- 37	- 49	- 52	- 70	- 33
MALES					
Liberals	+ 53	+ 49	+ 63	+ 62	+ 9
Moderates	+ 22	+ 12	+ 10	+ 14	- 8
Conservatives	- 30	- 49	- 59	- 70	- 40
MARRIED					
Liberals	+ 51	+ 49	+ 68	+ 63	+ 12
Moderates	+ 20	+ 11	+ 8	+ 7	- 13
Conservatives	- 31	- 48	- 56	- 69	- 38
CATHOLICS					
Liberals	+ 70	+ 54	+ 71	+ 59	- 11
Moderates	+ 43	+ 28	+ 21	+ 6	- 37
Conservatives	- 7	- 30	- 42	- 59	- 52
OBSERVANT					
Liberals	+ 42	+ 54	+ 65	+ 60	+ 18
Moderates	+ 18	+ 13	+ 9	+ 13	- 5
Conservatives	- 29	- 46	- 60	- 69	- 40

Source: American National Election Studies

Note: Net party identification = percentage of Democratic identifiers and leaners minus percentage of Republican identifiers and leaners.

Table 5. Correlation between Party Identification and Ideological Self-Identification by Decade

Group	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000	2004	Change
All Respondents	.35	.39	.49	.58	+ .23
African-Americans	.14	.14	.24	.23	+ .09
Whites	.34	.42	.53	.64	+ .30
South	.26	.33	.50	.55	+ .29
North	.38	.45	.54	.66	+ .28
No College	.26	.27	.34	.49	+ .23
College	.47	.54	.65	.71	+ .24

Source: American National Election Studies

Note: Product-moment correlations between 7-point party identification scale and 7-point liberal-conservative scale. All coefficients are highly statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 6. Cohort Analysis of Correlation between Ideological Self-Identification and Party Identification for White Respondents by Decade

Region	Age Group	1972-1980	1982-1990	1992-2000
South	20-29	.27	.28	.54
	30-39	.36	.39	.58
	40-49	.22	.44	.54
	50-59	.21	.40	.56
	60 +	.32	.32	.45
North	20-29	.34	.44	.59
	30-39	.37	.52	.57
	40-49	.39	.48	.61
	50-59	.38	.49	.57
	60 +	.38	.39	.46

Source: American National Election Studies.

Note: Pearson product-moment correlations between 7-point liberal-conservative scale and 7-point party identification scale. Are coefficients are highly statistically significant ($p < .001$).

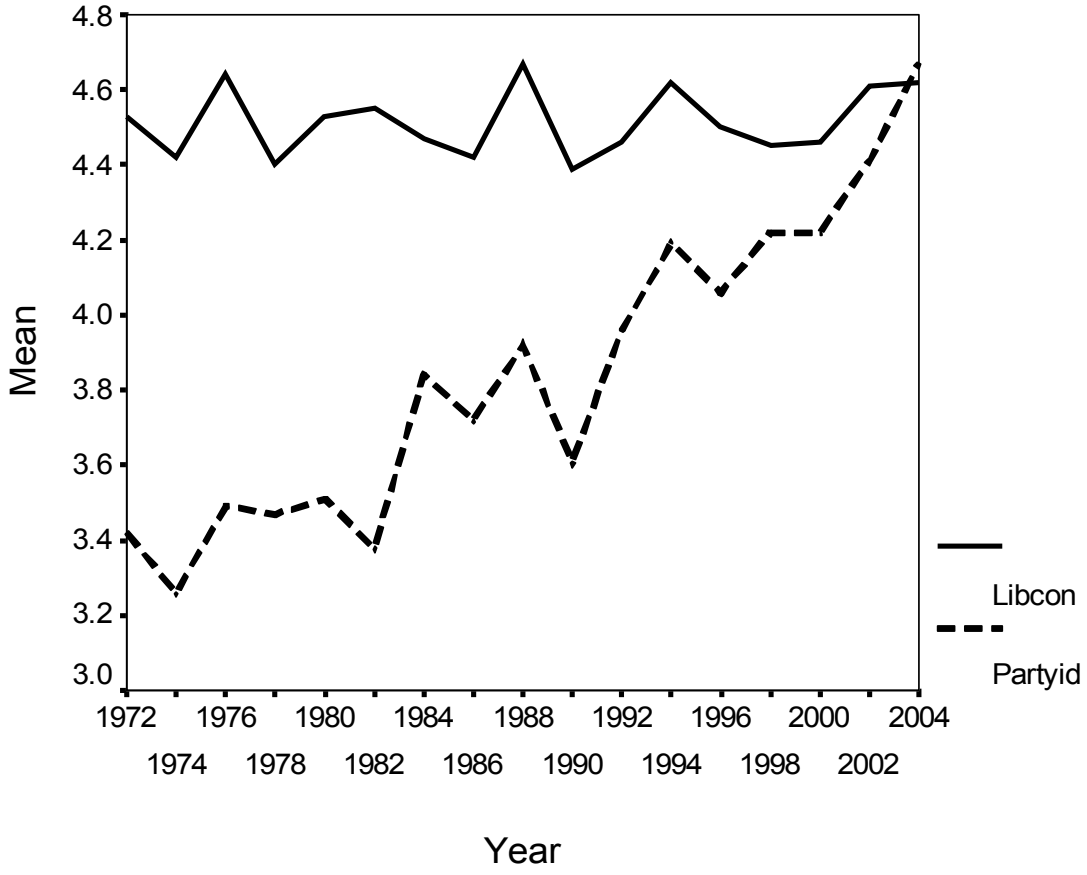


Figure 1. Trends in Ideological Self-Identification and Party Identification for White Southerners

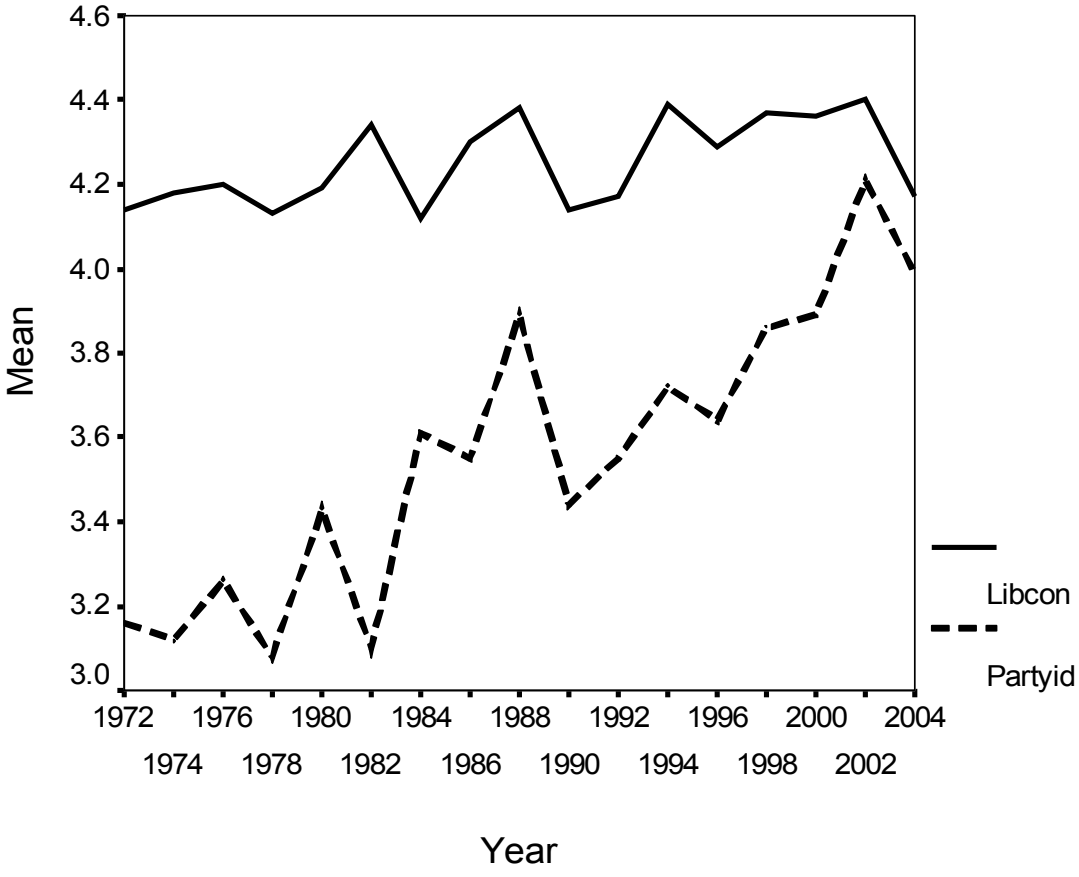
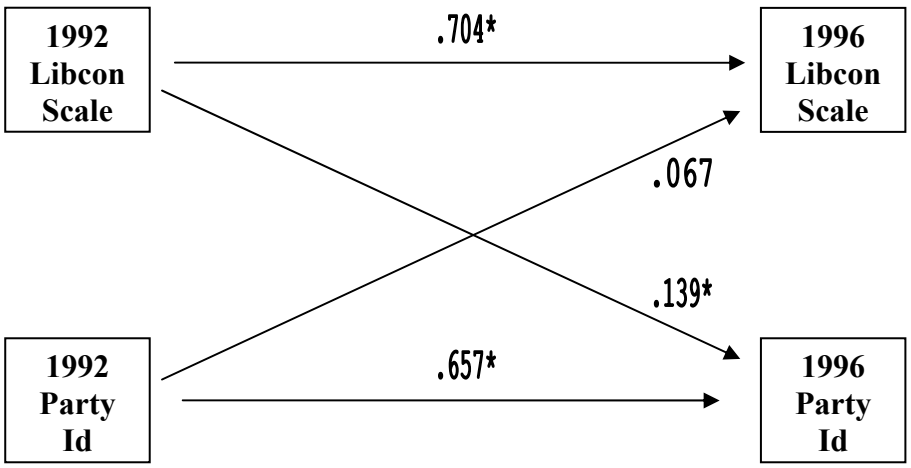


Figure 2. Trends in Ideological Self-Identification and Party Identification for White Catholics



Source: 1992-1996 American National Election Study Panel Survey.

Note: Party Identification measured by standard 7-point party id scale. Ideological orientation measured by 11-item scale. Coefficients shown are standardized regression coefficients. Control variables included in regression analyses are age, church attendance, religion, region, gender, marital status, education, family income, and household union membership. Coefficients marked with asterisk are highly statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Figure 3. Path Analysis of Ideology and Party Identification for White Respondents in 1992-1996 Panel Survey

Table 7. Net Party Identification by Social Identity and Ideological Identification in 2004 National Exit Poll

Group	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
African-Americans	+ 76	+ 71	+ 44
Hispanics	+ 44	+ 16	- 42
Whites	+ 52	- 4	- 70
Income LT $15,000	+ 50	+ 33	- 47
Income $200,000 +	+ 73	- 21	- 88
Union Members	+ 65	+ 24	- 53
Northeast	+53	+ 1	- 61
South	+ 38	- 6	- 75
Big City Dwellers	+ 61	+ 8	- 83
Small Town, Rural Residents	+ 30	- 2	- 62
Protestant	+ 46	- 6	- 74
Catholic	+ 49	- 4	- 61
Jewish	+ 87	+ 27	- 50
Most Observant	+ 39	- 9	- 75
Least Observant	+ 53	- 2	- 55
Born Again/Evangelical	+ 22	- 11	- 73
Male	+ 29	- 19	- 57
Female	+ 45	- 1	- 46
Married	+ 53	- 6	- 73
Single	+ 52	+ 2	- 60
Gun Owners	+ 43	- 8	- 71
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	+ 45	+ 24	- 28

Note: Net Party Identification = Percentage of Democratic Identifiers – Percentage of Republican Identifiers.

Table 8. Logistic Regression Analysis of Party Identification of White Respondents with Liberal-Conservative Policy Scale and Social Background Characteristics in 2004 NES Survey

Independent Variable	B	(S.E.)	z	Change in Probability	Sig.
Lib-Con Scale	.313	(.025)	12.35	.63	.001
Age	- .010	(.006)	- 1.57	- .06	N.S.
Education	.254	(.074)	3.43	.16	.001
Income	.005	(.021)	.26	.01	N.S.
Female	- .230	(.208)	- 1.10	- .05	N.S.
Married	.342	(.222)	1.54	.08	N.S.
Non-Union	.116	(.064)	1.72	.10	.05
Religion					
Catholic	- .584	(.242)	- 2.41	- .14	.01
Jewish	- .672	(.621)	- 1.08	- .16	N.S.
No Religion	- .024	(.323)	- .07	- .01	N.S.
Church Frequency	.031	(.076)	.41	.02	N.S.
Constant	- 1.068	(.745)	- 1.43		N.S.

Pseudo R^2 = .38

N = 706

Source: 2004 American National Election Study

Note: Dependent variable is dichotomous party identification (strong, weak, and independent Republican vs. strong, weak, and independent Democrat). Change in probability is estimated difference in probability of Republican identification between categories of dichotomous variables (non-union vs. union household; female vs. male; Catholic, Jewish, or no religion vs. Protestant; married vs. not married) or between 25th and 75th percentiles of continuous variables and scales (age, education, church frequency, lib-con).