

Abramson, et al., Ch. 8: Party Loyalties, Policy Preferences, and the Vote
(John Aldrich, Duke University)

- I. Introduction: two basic questions:
- A. What is party identification?
 - B. How does it structure other attitudes and behaviors?
- II. Party identification – the standard view:
- A. Seminal study: Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, *The American Voter* (1960)
 - B. The ‘Michigan’ 7-point party-identification scale:
 1. Strong Republican identification (attachment, loyalty, preference, etc)
 2. Weak Republican
 3. Independent leaning Republican
 4. “Pure” independent
 5. Independent leaning Democratic
 6. Weak Democratic
 7. Strong Democratic identification
 8. Other partisan preference
 9. Apolitical
 - C. Findings about party identification in the US:
 1. Most identify with one of the two major parties; few with other parties
 2. Many independents lean toward one of the two major parties
 3. The ‘pure’ independents are less interested, informed, and active in politics than partisans
 4. Party identification (like national identification) usually develops early – in childhood and matching that of the parents (although it is rarely explicitly taught) – and long before policy preferences and other political orientations emerge
 5. Party identification is relatively stable (compared to candidate & issue orientations) and usually only changes if:
 - a. The individual’s social situation changes
 - b. One or more cross-cutting issues arise
 - c. The political parties change
 6. Party identification is a core orientation that shapes other attitudes and behaviors
- III. Party identification – the alternative view:
- A. Seminal study: V.O. Key, Jr., *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting, 1936-1960* (1966)
 - B. Basic findings:
 1. The long-term force of party identification can be outweighed by the shorter-term forces of issue and candidate assessments
 2. But, only if parties and candidates offer the voters a meaningful choice, i.e., distinct policy or candidate-quality differences
 3. Short-term forces can shape party identification producing a more gradual (what Key termed a *secular*) realignment in contrast to the more dramatic and sudden *critical-election* realignments of party loyalties emphasized by the earlier, standard view

IV. Partisan identification in the electorate Table 8-1, p. 171 :

for the full 1952-2000 NES series see: http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/toptable/tab2a_1.htm;
 for the full 1972-2000 GSS series see: <http://sda.berkeley.edu:7502/cgi-bin12/hsda?harcgsda+gss00>

- A. In 2000 (using NES survey data):
 1. Almost 60% were partisans (strong or weak):
 - a. 34% (strong and weak) Democrats
 - b. 24% (strong and weak) Republicans
 - c. Since the 1960s, there has been a decline in Democratic (strong and weak) identifiers as a percent of the *electorate* (Democratic identifiers have declined from the high-40% range to the mid-30% range)
 - d. *However*, Aldrich fails to point out that there has *not* been a corresponding increase in Republican (strong and weak) identifiers as a percent of the *electorate* (Republican identifiers have remained stable in the mid-20% range)
 - e. Where did the ex-Democratic identifiers go? Largely to the increase in independent *leaners* that started in the mid-1960s.

- f. *Because* of the decline of Democratic identifiers, there has been (as Aldrich over emphasizes) an increase in Republicans as a percent of *partisan identifiers* – but, (as Aldrich fails to point out) it is the *stability* of Republicans as a percent of the *electorate* that is the more important trend
 - g. However, Aldrich is correct to point out that the advantage of the Democrats in *identifiers* (as a percent of the voting-age public – 10% in 2000) is often offset by the advantage of the Republicans in *turnout* on Election Day (and can be further eroded when Republican candidates attract more of the independent vote)
2. 40% of the electorate were independents in 2000:
- a. But over 2/3rds of those leaned (in roughly even portions) toward one of the major parties
 - b. Leaving only 12% ‘pure’ independents (roughly 1 out of 8)
 - c. Growth in independents came in the mid-1960s-to-late-1970s
 - d. Since 1984:
 - (1) There has been little growth in independents in the NES data
 - (2) But some growth in the GSS data

B. Whites **Table 8-2, pp. 174-75** :

- 1. The decline in Democratic identifiers is concentrated among white Americans (from a mid-to-high-40% range in the 1950s declining to a low-30-to-high-20% range since 1984)
- 2. However, Aldrich fails to point out that there has *not* been a corresponding increase in Republican identifiers among whites as a percent of the *white electorate* (white Republicans have remained stable in the high-20-to-low-30% range)
- 3. *Because* of the decline of white Democratic identifiers, there has been (as Aldrich emphasizes) an increase in Republicans as a percent of *white partisans* – but, (Aldrich fails to point out) it is the *stability* of white Republicans as a percent of the *white electorate* that is the more important trend

C. Blacks **Table 8-3, pp. 174-75** :

- 1. A majority were strong or weak Democratic identifiers in the 1950s (FDR 1st pulled them over from the party of Mr. Lincoln in the 1930s & Truman increased their loyalty with civil-rights initiatives in the 1940s)
- 2. Kennedy and Johnson upped that majority into the 60-70% range where it has remained since
- 3. Blacks increased significantly as a percent of voters:
 - a. During the late 1940s and 1950s outside the South by the civil rights movement
 - b. Mobilized inside the South by the Voting Rights Act of 1965

V. Party identification and the vote **Table 8-4, p. 177** :

- A. Partisanship influences turnout:
 - 1. Strong supporters of either party are more likely to vote than weak supporters, and independents who lean toward a party are more likely to vote than ‘pure’ independents
 - 2. Republicans are usually somewhat more likely to vote than Democrats
- B. Partisanship influences vote choice even more:
 - 1. Strong and weak partisans of either party are typically highly loyal to the presidential candidate of their party (80% range for Democrats; 90% range for Republicans)
 - 2. Leaning independents are substantially less loyal and more subject to variation from one election to the next
 - 3. Pure independents are least loyal and fluctuate the most across elections, but tend to be slightly more Republican
 - 4. The relationship between partisanship and presidential voting declined in strength between 1964 and 1984, but has rebounded since then.
 - 5. The relationship between partisanship and congressional voting showed a similar decline but has not rebounded as much.

VI. Policy Preference and performance evaluations:

- A. Incumbent job approval **Figure 8-1, p. 179** is strongly and consistently related to party identification
- B. Incumbent’s handling of the economy **Table 8-5, p. 180** is less strongly and consistently related to party identification
- C. Balance of issue positions **Table 8-6, pp. 182-83** is least strongly and consistently related to party identification
- D. Retrospective evaluations **Table 8-7, pp. 185-86; Table 8-8, p. 187-88** are becoming more strongly and consistently related to party identification – probably as a result of increasing polarization between the parties

VII. Conclusion:

- A. Party alignment:
 - 1. At present, neither party has a lock on the presidency
 - 2. At present, neither party has a lock on control of both houses of Congress
- B. All key indicators are closely balanced:
 - 1. Party identification (when controlling for race and turnout)
 - 2. Prospective issues only modestly and not consistently favor either party
 - 3. Retrospective evaluations are more volatile and can help or hurt either party