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## **Partisan Defection and Change in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election**

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*ABSTRACT Party identification remained an important determinant of vote choice in the 2008 election. Indeed, the extent to which people voted their partisanship remained as exceptionally high as it had been in the 2004 election. The Democrats led in partisanship, with a greater lead than in 2004. The ANES 4-wave panel survey shows that some change occurred in the Democratic direction during 2008. The Democrats gained among most population groups, with the exception of older citizens. Obama's victory margin was due to his carrying pure independents and the growth in strong Democrats as opposed to strong Republicans. Both candidates lost the votes of some partisans who disagreed with them ideologically. The rate of defection among major-party identifiers to the other major party hit post-1950 lows in 2004 and 2008, reflecting increased polarization in the electorate. The partisanship shifts of young people and Hispanics could portend realignment, although that depends on their satisfaction with the Obama administration.*

Most Americans consider themselves Republicans or Democrats, they usually maintain their partisanship over time, and they generally vote for their party's candidate. Of course, some partisans don't vote, others defect to the other major party or even to a third party, and some change their partisan loyalties altogether, while political Independents vary in terms of which party's candidate they support. Regardless of those important exceptions, however, party loyalty has been at a sixty-year high in recent presidential elections. Thus, party identification constitutes an important baseline in looking at parties' standings going into an election and is an excellent predictor of how people will vote. Changes in voting results between elections can be due to changes in party identification, which could have long-term implications; however, if party identification is inherently stable, then the changes between elections must be due to the short-term forces of issues and candidates and/or changes in the composition of the electorate.

This paper examines the 2008 American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys to assess the impact of party identification on voting in the 2008 election and its role in understanding the change in the presidential vote from 2004 to 2008.<sup>1</sup> The major parties' vote shares shifted by about 5 percentage points from George W. Bush's victory over John Kerry in 2004 (50.7% Bush – 48.3% Kerry) to Barack Obama's win over John McCain in 2008 (52.9% Obama – 45.6% McCain). The analysis to follow provides insight into the sources of this shift in party performance, as well as permitting some more general comments on party loyalty and defection in the contemporary period.

We find that fundamentals ruled in the 2008 presidential election, with voting following party identification very closely, at least among those actually voting.

However, we do find some change in party identification throughout the election year. In our analysis, we show that vote intentions were being modified to accord with party identification between January and September, but that party identification was more likely to change to fit vote intentions during the fall campaign season. Notwithstanding evidence of some partisan change during the campaign season, we find evidence that party loyalty was near a half-century high in 2008, continuing a pattern observed in recent elections. Paradoxically, we shall see that this increased party loyalty has permitted the Democrats to be more successful in recent presidential elections than in earlier elections when they had a greater lead in party identification.

### **Party Identification Trends**

The concept of party identification was originated as a long-term predisposition that affected voting (Campbell, et al. 1960), but some later researchers found evidence that it was endogenous to the vote (e.g., Jackson 1975). That is, changes in party identification could reflect people changing how they vote rather than preceding changes in their voting. What would be important theoretically is whether the changes in party identification are long-term or transitory. If a person changes from identifying as a Democrat to identifying as a Republican and maintains that new identification over a series of elections, then the identification is long-term. If, instead, the person alternates between voting for Democrats and Republicans in succeeding elections, and if he switches his party identification back and forth accordingly, then the concept loses its role as a long-term aspect of voting. Having admitted this possibility, however, the problem is that it is not usually possible to distinguish between these alternatives with available data. Changes in party identification can have long-term significance, but they

can prove transitory, especially if political events lead to reversals for the party the person switched to.

There are indications of change in party identification between 2000 and 2004. After 9/11, there was a shift toward Republican Party identification that was visible when comparing partisanship in 2004 with that in 2000. This shift was not large, but it is detectable in the ANES time series data, in a small ANES panel survey (Weisberg and Christenson 2007, fn. 8) and in the *New York Times*/CBS News Poll (see below). By the 2004 election, the usual Democratic advantage in party identification was all but erased (Weisberg and Christenson 2007).

The first signs of post-2004 partisan change occurred in 2006, when the Democrats recaptured the U.S. House of Representatives from the Republicans for the first time in 12 years, while also regaining control of the Senate after four years in the minority. Signs of growing Democratic strength were apparent during the following two years, as President Bush's approval ratings fell to the low 30s and occasionally to the 20s while Democratic registration soared ahead of record-breaking turnout in the 2008 Democratic primaries. Then, in the 2008 elections, Democrats substantially increased their majority standing in the House and Senate, while Obama, an exceptionally charismatic and historic candidate, won the presidency quite decisively. Given this compelling evidence of recent movement toward the Democratic Party, it is important to ask whether party identification changed after 2004, whether its relationship to the vote is shifting again, whether the impact of shifting turnout can be assessed, and whether the level of partisan polarization is shifting.

Figure 1 presents the ANES distribution of party identification from 1952 through 2008. The substantial Democratic lead of the 1950s decreased in the 1980s and has not fully recovered since. The Democratic advantage increased some from 2004 to 2008, but this was not a large change. As Table 1 indicates, the proportion of Republicans fell from 2004 to 2008 and the proportion of Democrats rose (although that change was not as large as the drop in Republican identification). There was also a very slight increase in the proportion of Independents, with more people thinking of themselves as pure Independents.

[Figure 1 and Table 1 about here]

All in all, the Democratic lead over Republicans grew by 5 percentage points between 2004 and 2008. However, these Democratic gains were not sufficient to restore them to their large advantage of earlier decades. The proportion of respondents identifying as Democrats on the first party identification question was not only below that of the 1990s and 2000, but it was one of the lowest in this series. With the Republican proportion at its median for the presidential elections of 1952 through 2008, the Democrats' advantage in identification in 2008 exceeded their advantages only in 1988 and 2004. In short, there was change in the Democratic direction by 2008, but not a sea change, at least among the overall sample.<sup>2</sup>

The *New York Times*/CBS News Poll data on party identification show a somewhat greater recovery for the Democrats in 2008. Connelly (2009) has combined their multiple surveys for each year. Her analysis, which employs the ANES party identification question, shows that the Democratic advantage grew overall in recent years. By 2008, Democrats had a 10 percentage point lead over Republicans, the highest

that gap had been since 1984 and well above the 3 point Democratic lead in partisanship in the 2004 *New York Times*/CBS data.

Exit polls also found a shift toward the Democrats among actual voters. The 2004 exit polls had equal proportions of Democrats and Republicans among actual voters, 37% each, with the remaining 26% Independents. The 2008 exit polls showed that a plurality of voters considered themselves Democrats: 39% compared to 32% Republicans and 29% Independents. The ANES data show a more extreme change pattern among voting respondents, also favoring the Democrats: a Republican advantage in 2004 (when 37% of voters were Republican identifiers versus 32% Democrats) was transformed into a Democratic advantage in 2008, with 37% of voters being Democrats versus 31% Republicans.

Thus, there is consistent indication of a small shift in party identification in the Democratic direction since 2004. Looking back, however, the 2004 election is the one that was discrepant, with the 2008 distribution of partisanship being relatively similar to that in 2000. That is evident in the overall distribution of partisanship for the full ANES sample in Table 1. It is also evident in the ANES distribution for actual voters, where the 37%-31% Democratic lead in 2008 is within sampling error of the 38%-30% Democratic lead in 2000.

What we cannot tell with these data is the extent to which these differences between 2000, 2004, and 2008 are due to differences in mobilization patterns in these elections and/or differences in the willingness of Republicans and Democrats to be interviewed. In 2004, Republican conservatives may have been drawn to the polls to express support for the War on Terrorism and because of the gay marriage issue being on



the ballot in several states. In 2008, there may have been less mobilization of Republican conservatives, possibly due to uneasiness with John McCain.<sup>3</sup> The Census Bureau's Current Population Survey found a 1 percentage point drop in turnout among whites from 2004 to 2008, which supports the demobilization hypothesis.

In any case, indications of a pro-Republican realignment in partisanship data after 9/11 had certainly disappeared by 2008. Realignment, of course, can only be detected in historical perspective, but it is clear that Republican hopes of the Bush years leading to a lasting realignment in their favor have certainly been dashed. Change in party identification from 2004 to 2008 was in the Democratic direction, albeit not bringing their partisanship advantage all the way back up to its level in 2000.

Two other aspects of the public's reactions to the parties in 2008 should be emphasized. First, the ANES feeling thermometer ratings of the parties show that the popularity of both parties fell, continuing a clear decline since 1964 (Figure 2). The average thermometer ratings of both parties were the lowest they had been since the ANES started using this measure in 1964 (Table 2). The average rating for the Democrats in 2008 was 57 degrees, and the average rating of the Republican Party fell below the neutral 50-degree mark. That is the first time either party's average rating fell below 50, which raises serious questions about the public's attitude toward the Republican Party's "brand." While the Democrats' rating also fell, their advantage over the Republican Party in the average thermometer score increased from about 5 degrees in 1996-2004 to nearly 9 in 2008, the biggest difference since their 12-degree lead in 1964.

[Table 2 and Figure 2 about here]

While the parties' popularity continued to decline, polarization, as measured by the correlation between respondents' ratings of the two parties, was unchanged in 2008 (see the bottom row of Table 2). This correlation had been becoming more negative over the years: the more people liked their party, the less they liked the other party. But this correlation remained at -0.48 in 2008, its exact level in 2004. This is, of course, only one measure of partisan polarization, but it is one that shows how much partisans dislike the opposite party and this did not change over the four-year period.

### **Party Identification Change in 2008**

If party identification had shifted in the Democratic direction from 2004 to 2008, an important question concerns the timing of that change – whether it occurred in 2008 as a result of the election campaign or prior to 2008 as a result of other factors. Party identification is usually considered to be long-term in nature. However, some studies have found more short-term change, most notably Allsop and Weisberg's (1988) discovery of shifts in the Republican direction during the 1984 election campaign, as measured by rolling cross-section surveys. By contrast, the main report on the 1980 ANES four-wave panel survey (Markus 1982) emphasized the considerable stability in partisan identification across that election year. Brody and Rothenberg (1988) demonstrated that short-term factors could account for changes in partisanship in the 1980 panel, but Green, Palmquist, and Schickler's (2002) later analysis of the 1980 ANES panel and other panels confirmed Markus's finding of inherent partisan stability, with apparent change being due to random response variability.

To look at change in party identification during the 2008 election year, we can inspect an Internet-based monthly panel survey that the ANES commissioned. The first

wave was in January, the second political wave in September after the national party conventions, the third in October, and the last a post-election wave in November. The panel was refreshed in September with a large number of new respondents when it became apparent that there had been considerable attrition by August in the monthly panel surveys in which the ANES political questions were being embedded.

The distribution of party identification across the panel waves shows some shift toward the Democrats from January to November (Table 3). There was a 4 percentage point increase in Democrat identification over this period of time, compared to a 1 point increase in Republican identification. The shift is especially apparent among Independent leaners, with 40% of January's Independent Democrats becoming Democrats by November, compared to only 25% of January's Independent Republicans becoming Republicans by November. Pure Independents also broke sharply toward the Democrats, 18% becoming Democratic identifiers by November compared to 5% becoming Republican identifiers. Given that McCain won the majority of votes in this Internet panel, some caution is appropriate in drawing general conclusions from these numbers. Still, it is apparent from these data that there was some movement toward the Democrats in 2008.<sup>4</sup>

[Table 3 about here]

The amount of party identification change shown in Table 3 may seem unusually high, but it is comparable to the level in the 1980 ANES 4-wave panel survey, the only other available survey of this type. Using the same categories as in Table 3, 69% of the 1980 respondents had the same party identification in November as in January, versus 71% for 2008. The net magnitude of the shifts are similar in the two studies, favoring the

Republicans by under 2% in 1980 versus favoring the Democrats by just over 3% in 2008 (a 4.0% gain for Democrats minus a .8% gain for Republicans). The biggest difference in the findings of these two studies is that pure Independents were much less likely to shift to one side in 1980, just under a 5% net shift to the Democrats versus a 21% net shift to the Democrats in 2008 (32.7% shifting toward being more Democratic minus 11.5% shifting toward being more Republican). That difference may be due to political differences between the two elections or to the difference between the face-to-face survey administration in 1980 and the Internet mode in 2008.

The ANES panel study permits a more detailed analysis of change in party identification across 2008. Rather than showing complex transition tables, Table 4 summarizes some of the more important patterns between adjacent panel waves. The rows show the respondent's partisanship during the earlier wave, while the columns show whether the respondent moved in a Democratic direction, kept the same partisanship, or moved in a Republican direction by the next wave. For example, the first row in the top frame shows that 17.1% of those respondents who identified with the Democratic Party in January no longer identified with it by September. The next row shows that 28.6% of those respondents who leaned toward the Democrats in January had become Democrats by September, 37.3% still leaned toward them, and the remaining 34.1% had become pure Independents, leaners toward the Republican, or Republican identifiers. The summary row at the bottom of that frame shows that 13.9% of the sample moved in a Democratic direction from January to September, 73.9% remained stable in their partisanship, and 12.2% moved in a Republican direction.<sup>5</sup> That the shift between January and September was almost a wash reflects the movement that occurred as the

parties chose their nominees, particularly that the selection of Barack Obama and John McCain rather than early frontrunners Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani may have led to some movement in both directions.

[Table 4 about here]

As to be expected, there was greater stability over shorter time periods, although the difference is smaller than anticipated. Just over four-fifths of the sample maintained the same partisanship from September to October and about the same proportion maintained their partisanship from October to November, whereas just below three-quarters kept the same partisanship from January to September. In each case, the movement in the Democratic direction was one or two percentage points higher than the movement in the Republican direction. Note also that between each pair of waves, more pure Independents moved in the Democratic direction than in the Republican direction, with the Democrats being most advantaged in the January to September shifts and the October to November shifts.

The most interesting comparisons in these tables involve the changes of respondents with the same level of partisan attachment. For example, 13.8% of January's Republicans were not Republican by September whereas 17.1% of January's Democrats were not Democratic by September; thus, the Democrats suffered a disadvantage of 3.3% in terms of change by pure partisans during that time frame. Turning to leaners, 27.5% of January's leaning Republicans shifted away from the Republicans by September, compared to 34.1% of January's leaning Democrats shifting away from the Democrats, a Democratic disadvantage of 6.6%. However, 28.6% of January's leaning Democrats became Democratic identifiers by September, compared to just 14.2% of January's

leaning Republicans becoming Republicans. This 14.4% Democratic advantage was more than enough to offset the January-to-September shifts that advantaged the Republicans, particularly when adding the Democratic gains from January's pure Independents.

A similar set of comparisons for the September to October waves would find that all the party identification shifts benefited the Democrats, including a 2.4% advantage among partisans, a 4.3% advantage among leaners moving toward the other party, and a 5.9% advantage among leaners becoming identifiers with the party they had been closest to. While these were not large shifts, they were consistent in their direction: a movement away from the Republicans possibly related to the September financial meltdown and to Sarah Palin's fall in popularity in public opinion polls.

The shifts from October to the November post-election wave were less consistent and smaller. The shift among partisans benefited the Democrats by 1.2%, shifts of leaners away from their closest party hurt the Democrats by 3.1%, and shifts among leaners towards their party helped the Democrats by 2.4%. These changes would cancel each other out, were it not for the Democrats having a 9.9% advantage in pure Independents shifting in their direction, although this could represent a bandwagon artifact with pure Independents moving toward the winning party.

As stated earlier, the amount of movement in party identification across the panel waves may seem high, but this is partly because we rarely have the data to look for individual-level shifts. We should expect most respondents to give quick approximate answers to these questions rather than taking a great deal of time to decide if, for example, they really are Democrats or Independents who usually vote Democratic; thus, they could easily give different answers when asked about partisanship twice in two

successive months, without actually changing their positions. In short, there is inevitable measurement error in these data, as with any survey data. However, the occurrence of consistent movement in one direction shows that short-term forces in the election did, to some extent, sway party identifications.

Table 4 shows that there was some net movement toward the Democrats from January to September, but there was more net movement toward the Democrats from September to October. By contrast, there was little measurable net change from October to November. We would expect that the Green, Palmquist, and Schickler analysis procedures would find considerable stability in the 2008 ANES panel, but the change patterns found here fit with election year events sufficiently to conclude that there was some real partisanship movement, albeit not large. Some of the change may represent people aligning their partisanship with their vote intention, but we shall see below that partisanship does not always align with vote preference.

### **Party Identification and Demographics**

The demographics of party identification show some sources of the changes described above. Table 5 gives some basic results for non-blacks. (African-Americans are excluded because their vote was 99% Democratic in the 2008 ANES traditional pre-post election survey. The figures are based on whether people consider themselves Republican, Democratic, or Independent. This coding accepts the argument in Johnston et al. (2004) that responses are more stable when leaners are treated as Independents than when leaners are combined with partisans, as Keith, et al. (1992) advocated. The last column of the table shows the Democratic advantage over the Republicans in

identification for the relevant demographic category in 2004, so that comparisons can be made with 2008.

[Table 5 about here]

As has come to be expected, there was a gender gap in partisanship in 2008. About the same proportion of men and women were Republican, but women were more Democratic than men by 8 percentage points. The marriage gap runs the opposite way. About the same percentage of married (including partnered) and unmarried (never married, divorced, separated, and widowed) were Democratic, but married people were more Republican than unmarried by 15 percentage points. The gender gap is about the same size as in 2004, with the Democrats being 11 percentage points less disadvantaged among men than in 2004 and 10 percentage points more advantaged among women. The marriage gap is also about the same size as in 2004, but the Democrats halved their large disadvantage among married respondents.

The relationship between party identification and education is curvilinear. There were more Democrats than Republicans among respondents with more than 16 years of education and among respondents with 12 or fewer years of education, whereas the Republicans held a 6 percentage point lead among respondents with 13-16 years of schooling. Note also that the college-educated were least likely to be Independents. Compared to 2004, the Democrats gained in each education category, but especially among the high school educated, where a 21.7% disadvantage narrowed to 6.4%.

The age relationship is especially important, given its implications for the future. The older part of the population used to be more Democratic, but as of 2008 the over-64 age group was more Republican in identification by 6 percentage points. The younger



part of the population was more Democratic, with the under-30 age group being more Democratic by 5 percentage points in 2008. Traditionally younger people are more Independent, and that remained true in 2008. (However the 56.8% of people under age 30 who were Independent seems unusually high, higher than found in other 2008 polls and 10 points higher than in 2004.) But the sharp contrast involves being Republican. Whereas 38% of the 65-and-over age group were Republicans, only 19% of the under 30 age group were in 2008. This sizable difference has important implications for the future if the young people continue to avoid the Republican Party as they age, just as the young generation that moved in the Republican direction in the Reagan years continued for many years to be less Democratic than other cohorts. While the change among young people has received the most attention, the biggest shifts in partisanship from 2004 to 2008 were for middle-aged people, with 10 point drops in Republican identification for 30-44 year olds and 45-64 year olds.

The other important demographic with important future implications involves Hispanics. The 35% Democratic lead among Hispanics in 2008 compares to only a 14% lead for them in 2004, when George W. Bush made a strong appeal for the Hispanic vote. Republican opposition to immigration reforms likely was one of the causes of this change. (This voting difference counts even more because of the steadily increasing registration and mobilization of Hispanics, as more gain citizenship and as more reach voting age.) The Latino/a population in the United States electorate is expected to grow substantially over the coming decades, so their preponderant identification with the Democrats may be an important harbinger of future electoral trends. Note also that the bottom row in the table shows that a 14 percentage point Democratic identification

disadvantage among non-Latino non-blacks (mostly whites) in 2004 dwindled down to just 3% in 2008.

While the overall party identification shifts from 2004 to 2008 would suggest that most demographic groups would have become more Democratic over this time period, a few of the changes that have been mentioned above stand out. The Republicans lost substantial advantages among middle-aged and high school educated people, and the Democrats scored a large gain among Hispanics. The only counter-cyclical group was older citizens, who moved in a Republican direction, possibly because the older McCain appealed to them more than Obama. This change pattern reminds us that demographic groups can change in opposite directions, so that the net change in partisanship inevitably masks some countervailing shifts. What remains to be seen is whether these shifts become permanent or if they simply reflect the 2008 campaign.

### **Party Identification and Vote Choice**

The relationship between party identification and voting has varied over the years. The initial strong relationship found in the 1950s in *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960) declined in the 1960s and 1970s as the proportion of Independents climbed (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976). The proportion of Independents steadied out through the 1980s and 1990s, but the fact that the relationship between party identification and voting had gone back up was largely unnoticed until Bartels (2000) called attention to this important change.

Table 6 displays the relationship between party identification and vote choice for the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections. Each candidate won the votes of his partisans and the votes of independents who leaned towards his party, but there are

interesting differences as to pure Independents. Al Gore lost the vote of pure Independents in 2000, even though he was the popular vote winner that year. By contrast, John Kerry won the vote of pure Independents in 2004, but he still lost the popular vote because of the shift in the distribution of party identification toward the Republicans between 2000 and 2004. Obama, however, carried the vote of pure Independents as part of his electoral victory.

[Table 6 about here]

Obama's vote percentages within party identification categories are actually fairly close to those of Kerry, a little lower among strong Democrats and pure Independents but better among Democratic leaners and all categories of Republicans. However, the important comparison between 2008 and 2004 is in the percentage of actual voters in the different partisan categories. Obama's victory was possible because the proportion of strong Republicans among actual voters fell by 5.5 percentage points from 2004, negating their increase of 4.6 percentage points between 2000 and 2004. Correspondingly, there was nearly a 4 percentage point increase in strong Democrats among voters for president from 2004 to 2008, and Obama's lock on them helped cement his victory. Thus, the difference between the 2004 and 2008 vote was due to this shift in the partisan distribution of the electorate, more so than being due to increases in Democratic support within the categories. Additionally, it is essential to point out that Table 6 may also reflect movement in and out of the electorate, with a mobilization of conservative Republicans in 2004 being followed by their demobilization in 2008.

In considering these data, however, it is important to think about how partisanship changes. We sometimes think of partisanship as inherently stable, but there is movement.

People who usually think of themselves as strong partisans are less likely to do so when they vote against the presidential candidate of their own party. Leaners typically vote for the party toward which they lean, sometimes even more so than weak partisans do (Petrocik 1974). But, as Shively (1977) suggested, this could be because Independents are saying that they lean towards the party for which they are planning to vote that year. Thus, part of the strong relationship between party identification and vote choice in 2008 may be due to some people aligning their partisanship with their vote intention, although that would not explain the discrepancies that exist between party identification and vote. We explore this possibility further in the next section.

### **Party Identification and Vote Intention**

An important question theoretically is whether party identification changes lead to changes in candidate choice, as theory would suggest, or if changes in candidate choice lead to party identification changes. To investigate this, we compare change in party identification and candidate choice in adjacent panel waves. For this analysis, we consider leaners to be independents and we consider nonvoters and supporters of other candidates to be undecided between the two major party nominees.<sup>6</sup>

To examine the relative importance of party and candidate choice, we employ the analysis procedure developed by Miller (1999). Change in party identification between adjacent panel waves is coded into 9 categories, such as changing from Republican to Democrat or changing from Democrat to Independent. Change in candidate choice is similarly coded into 9 categories, such as changing from McCain to Obama or changing from Obama to undecided. Miller then looked at the crosstabulation between these two variables and classified the different combinations into 10 categories. Party identification

would be considered dominant when people's candidate choice is shifted into greater conformity with their partisanship, such as maintaining a Democrat identification while moving candidate choice away from McCain (from McCain to Obama, from Undecided to Obama, or from McCain to Undecided) between two adjacent panel waves. Candidate choice would be considered dominant when people's party identification is shifted into greater conformity with their candidate choice, such as continuing to support Obama between two successive panel waves while moving away from Republican partisanship (from Republican to Democrat, from Independent to Democrat, or from Republican to Independent).

Table 7 elaborates slightly on the Miller classification so as to display the direction of the various changes. It shows a considerable difference in the changes between successive waves of the panel. Between January and September, party identification is more dominant than candidate preference (categories 1-3 versus 4-6), as Republicans lined up behind McCain even if they did not originally support him, and similarly (though not as frequently) Democrats lined up behind Obama. This type of shifting was important early in the campaign year as supporters of other candidates accepted their party's nominee, but it is important to note that there was much less shifting of this type after September.<sup>7</sup> Shifts between September and October were more typified by people bringing their partisanship into line with their candidate support (categories 4-6). Except for Independents who had a candidate preference in October but did not vote in November (category 2), the changes between October and November also involved candidate dominance somewhat more than party dominance.

[Table 7 about here]

Another important comparison to make in the table involves the extent of “congruent changes” when the person’s party and candidate support move in the same direction versus “dissonant change” when the shifts do not follow a logical pattern (such as moving to Obama support while becoming less Democratic). There were some congruent changes from January to September with independent undecideds becoming identifiers with the party whose candidate they began to support, though concomitant shifts make it impossible to infer whether party or candidate is the moving force in these changes. In any event, congruent changes became rare after September. However, dissonant changes were very common throughout, always more frequent than congruent changes. Between January and September, many people remained Independents or even Democrats while shifting to support McCain; there were also some Independents (though fewer) who remained Independent while becoming Obama supporters. Dissonant changes remained important in the last two months of the campaign, but with somewhat different patterns predominating. Many September Independents continued to be Independents in October even though they switched their support from McCain to Obama over that period, possibly due to the financial crisis, and many people maintained their candidate support while no longer identifying with that candidate’s party.<sup>8</sup> The most common dissonant patterns between October and November involved several Republican McCain supporters and Democratic Obama supporters maintaining their partisanship in November but not voting.

The last row (category 10) in Table 7 shows that constancy was actually the modal pattern throughout and the majority pattern after the candidates were selected. The finding that party predominated over candidates in the first half of the year while

candidate choice predominated over party identification in the fall campaign season is potentially very important, but there is some need for caution. We cannot tell from this analysis whether the importance of candidates after Labor Day was due to reaction to Obama's race, or whether this is a more general phenomenon. Also, it is important to remember that this panel became unrepresentative, with a majority always favoring McCain over Obama, so it may miss some of the dynamics involved in Obama's victory.<sup>9</sup>

### **Party Identification and Ideology**

Fiorina (2002) has pointed out that the strength of the relationship between party identification and the vote is affected by the ideological positioning of the major-party presidential candidates. There is more party defection when one party nominates an extreme candidate, so the relationship between party identification and voting seems to decline. An important caveat in testing this claim is that the candidates' ideological positioning should be assessed independently of who won the election and by how much, rather than assuming that a candidate who lost by a large margin must have been ideologically extreme.

Fiorina's argument reminds us that the greater partisan vote in 2008 could be due to greater ideological separation between the candidates. However, it is unlikely that McCain was seen as very conservative. Perhaps Sarah Palin's candidacy made the Republican ticket seem very conservative, but McCain was a maverick in the Senate, pushing initiatives such as the McCain-Feingold campaign-finance reforms that were anathema to most Republican Party leaders. The Republicans portrayed Obama as very liberal, but he was more moderate in many respects than his main Democratic primary

opponent, Hillary Clinton. It is difficult to view the Obama-McCain contest as having been as ideological as the Johnson-Goldwater or McGovern-Nixon elections.

The ANES survey asked respondents to locate the candidates on a 7-point ideological scale, ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. As usual, some people could not place the candidates on the scale, about 8%-9% of the sample. A quarter of the people who placed the candidates on the scale did not recognize their ideological distinctions, 16% viewing McCain as more liberal than Obama and 9% placing them at the same point on the scale. Among the people who were able to place both nominees on the scale, more people saw Obama as extreme, 20% putting Obama at the liberal extreme versus only 11% putting McCain at the conservative extreme. However, roughly equal proportions considered Obama liberal (50% putting him at one of the two most liberal positions) and McCain conservative (49% putting him at one of the two most conservative positions). Whether the 9% difference in viewing Obama as extreme ideologically is sufficient to invoke Fiorina's argument is open to debate.

Table 8 analyzes how perceptions of candidate ideology affected the 2008 vote. The vote percentages for each party's candidate are shown for partisans of his party by the respondents' ideology and their perception of their party's candidate's ideology. Obama received the votes of all the Democratic liberals in the sample who considered him liberal, but only 91% of the votes from Democratic liberals who viewed him as moderate. Among Democratic moderates, he won the votes of 99% of those who viewed him as conservative, 93% of those who viewed him as moderate, and only 77% of those who viewed him as liberal. This suggests that Republican charges that Obama was too liberal did lose him the votes of some Democratic moderates.



[Table 8 about here]

Meanwhile, McCain won nearly all of the votes of Republican conservatives who viewed him as either conservative or moderate. Among Republican moderates, he won the votes of 95% of those who viewed him as moderate, but only 78% of those who viewed him as conservative and 73% of the few Republican moderates who viewed him as liberal. McCain's loss of Republican moderates who viewed him as too conservative was about the same size as Obama's loss among Democratic moderates who viewed him as too liberal. What we cannot tell with the available data is how many respondents did not vote because of ideological disagreement with their party's candidate.<sup>10</sup>

It should be recognized that there might also have been some shifting in party identification due to ideology. Some Republican moderates may have become Independents because of dissatisfaction with the Bush administration's conservative policy positions, thus making the Republican identification categories more purely conservative. Similarly, some Democratic moderates may have become Independents because they had difficulty in supporting Obama, whether because of his race or because of his defeating Hillary Clinton for their party's nomination, thus making the Democratic identification categories more purely liberal.<sup>11</sup> To the extent to which this occurred, moderates' dissatisfaction with the candidates may have been greater than what is shown in Table 8.

### **Party Defection in 2008**

Finally, we turn to party loyalty and defection, placing the 2008 election in the context of the elections since 1952. As Figure 1 makes clear, the Democratic advantage over the Republicans in party identification was much higher in the 1950s but fell

considerably in the 1980s and has not fully recovered since. But consider the presidential election results of this era. While the Republicans won seven of the ten presidential elections between 1952 and 1988, the only one of the five elections since then in which they carried a plurality of the popular vote was 2004. In other words, the Republicans were more successful in the presidential elections when they were at a greater disadvantage in party identification, while the Democrats have been better able to carry the popular vote since their party identification advantage decreased. This paradox suggests that there have been important changes in how party identification has been affecting voting.

Partisan defection was low in 2008. As Table 6 showed, most partisans voted with their party and most leaners voted for the nominee of the party to which they were closer. Table 9 and Figure 3 put the 2008 defection rates in perspective by comparing them with the presidential elections since 1952.<sup>12</sup> These figures show that the low level of partisans voting for the other party's presidential candidate in 2008 continues a recent trend.

[Table 9 and Figure 3 about here]

Defection had been fairly frequent in the early elections of the series, particularly in terms of Democrats voting for Eisenhower in the 1950s and then Republicans voting for Johnson in 1964. In all the elections through 1984, at least 18 percent of the identifiers of one of the parties voted for the other major party's candidate, with the Democrats suffering more defection than the Republicans except for in 1964. The defection rates were lower in the 1988-96 period, with rates of 15% for Democrats in 1988 and 16% for Republicans in 1996. Defection decreased further in the 2000-08 period with at most 11% of either party's adherents defecting. Furthermore, the defection

rates for the two parties were very even in the 2000-08 period, suggesting that short-term factors were fairly balanced, in sharp contrast to the large disparity in defection rates that typified most of the earlier elections. The summary rows at the bottom of Table 9 emphasize that overall defection has been low in recent elections, although the defection rates are a little larger when voting for minor-party candidates is included. Indeed, the 2008 defection rate was marginally the lowest since such survey data became available in 1952, which might be considered surprising in light of each candidate's presumed crossover appeal and both candidates' uneasy relationship with some of their party's base.

The low defection rate in recent elections helps account for the paradox described at the beginning of this section. Defection is not very common nowadays, so the Democrats have been able to translate their relatively narrow party identification lead into popular vote wins in four of the last five presidential elections. By contrast, the Democrats had a harder time translating a larger party identification lead into presidential election victories in the 1950s-1980s when defection was more common. These statements may sound circular, but they call attention to why defection was higher before the 1980s. In that earlier period, the Democratic lead was based on their coalition of northern liberals and southern conservatives, and the latter were likely to bolt in presidential voting even while being loyal Democrats for state and local offices. The Democratic lead became narrower when the southern conservatives left the Democratic Party, but the greater loyalty of those who remained Democrats allows a narrower lead to translate into greater presidential election success.

We now look directly at the extent to which people vote their party. While the importance of party identification in explaining individual level voting has been stressed in this paper, it is equally important to realize that many people do not vote their party identification. For one thing, many eligible adults do not vote: 36%-48% of eligible citizens in the elections since 1952 have not voted (Table 10). Second, some voters cast their votes for third parties, with a high of 11% of the eligible electorate when more than 19% of voters supported Perot in 1992. Third, political independents (and the few a-politicals who vote) cannot, by definition, vote for their political party since they don't have one, and, depending on the year, they constitute another 2%-6% of eligible voters. Finally, some partisans defect to vote for the other major party, ranging from 4%-14% of eligible voters. As column 5 shows, a reasonable estimate is that that leaves only 37%-52% of the eligible electorate who vote according to their party identification. The 1960 election was the only case when half the eligible voters actually voted their major-party loyalty, until the 2004 and 2008 elections. Thus, regardless of the great predictive power of party identification in its relationship to individual voting, there is considerable room for major-party candidates to appeal for votes -- from people who do not go to the polls, independents, third-party supporters and opposite party identifiers.

[Table 10 about here]

The results in Table 10 shed valuable light on the popular discussion of increased polarization in the electorate. One sign of our more polarized electorate is that the rate of defection among major-party identifiers to the other major party hit post-1950 lows in 2004 and 2008. The percentage of major party loyalists went above 51% in 2004 and 2008 due to a combination of factors: the lowest rates of non-voting since the 1960s,

negligible third-party voting, low rates of pure independents voting, and low levels of defection. There was less polarization in the electorate when there was more non-voting, more third-party voting, more pure independents voting, and less loyalty to one's party.

### **Conclusion**

This paper's analyses reaffirm party identification's crucial role in explaining American political behavior, particularly with regard to presidential voting. Indeed, the 2008 election provides much evidence to suggest that party identification's influence not only continues today, but that it has grown much stronger in recent years. Partisans and leaners remained exceedingly loyal to their parties in 2008, while defection rates reached their lowest point in the ANES time series. Also, while changes in party identification were evident throughout the 2008 ANES panel study, the size and nature of these changes were quite comparable to those found in a previous panel study, this despite such unusual short-term forces as the nomination of the first African-American major party presidential candidate, the selection and nomination of the first female Republican vice presidential candidate, and a national economic meltdown occurring just two months before Election Day.

Still, due caution is needed when interpreting our findings of the increased importance of party identification. While the percentage of the voting-eligible population voting in accordance with their party identification reached its highest levels in 2004 and 2008 in more than four decades, it is still the case that nearly half of all eligible voters either do not identify with a party or do not vote for their party's presidential candidate. Also, while the overwhelming majority of partisans support their party's presidential nominee, one-tenth defect to vote for the other major party's nominee and many others

choose to vote for a third-party candidate or not to vote at all. In short, party identification is a crucial factor in explaining political behavior, more so now than in recent memory, but it still falls far short of being perfectly stable and perfectly predictive of presidential voting.

Recent data also indicate that party identification is evolving in interesting ways. Averaging the CBS News/*New York Times* polls in 2009, the Democrats had a substantial lead with 37% of the samples identifying as Democrats compared to 23% considering themselves Republicans, with 33% being Independent (and the remaining answering “don’t know”). Yet it is important to recognize that this advantage is likely to go up and down as the Obama administration achieves successes and suffers failures, so it is too early to assess what party identification will look like during the 2012 election, let alone in the long term.

Does the 2008 election signify party realignment? Not necessarily. The data show Democratic gains from 2004, but not up to their level before 2000. The demographics of party identification, particularly as regards young people and Hispanics, certainly indicate a considerable potential for realignment if those groups continue to eschew Republican identification. But realignment necessarily depends as much on what happens after an election as during it, and any potential for a pro-Democratic realignment would be lost if political developments during 2009-12 make young people and Hispanics wary of the Democratic Party. As usual, post-election punditry has exaggerated the realignment potential of the election, although it would be foolhardy not to recognize that there is a real potential for realignment in these party identification data. Of course, the same statement could have been made after the 2004 election, albeit in the opposite direction,

which should remind us how much easier it is to create the potential for realignment than to carry it through to fruition.

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**TABLE 1 Party Identification by Year, 1952-2008 (in percentages)****Including Leaners as Independents**

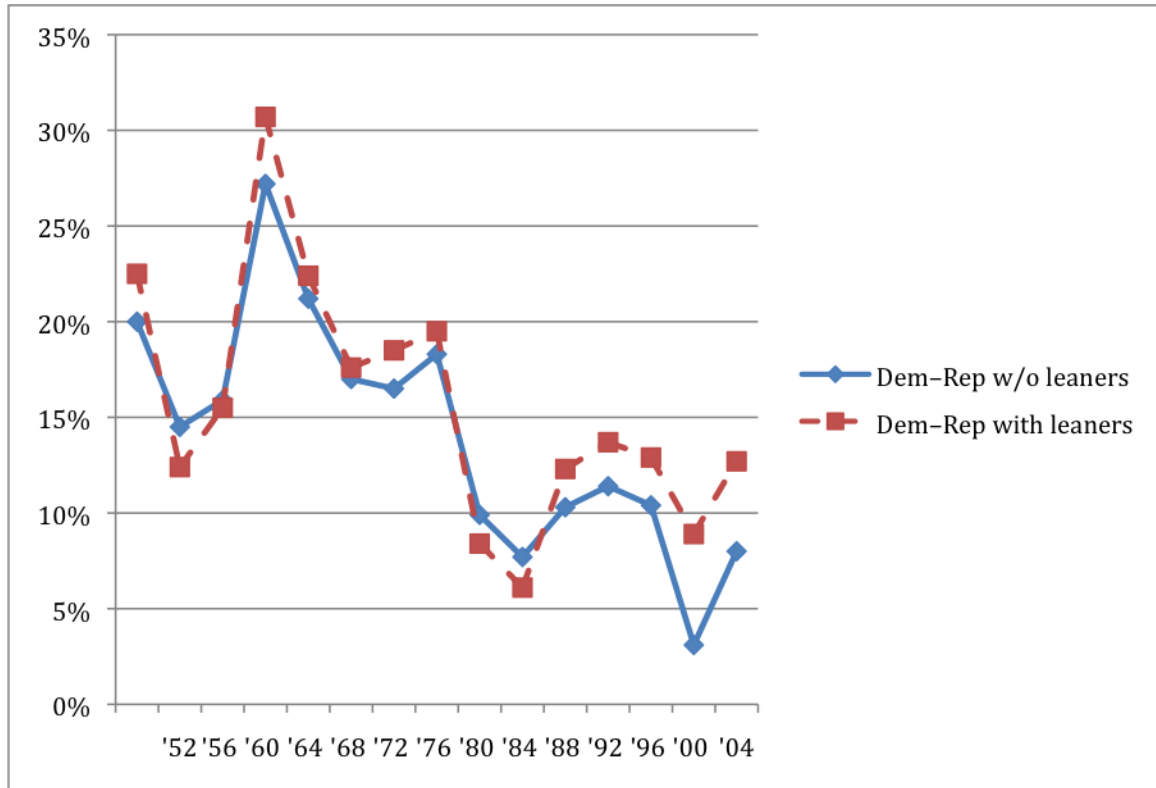
	'52	'56	'60	'64	'68	'72	'76	'80	'84	'88	'92	'96	'00	'04	'08
Dem	47.2	43.6	45.3	51.7	45.4	40.4	39.7	40.8	37.0	35.2	35.5	37.8	34.3	32.1	34.1
Ind	22.6	23.4	22.8	22.8	29.1	34.7	36.1	34.5	34.2	35.7	38.3	34.7	40.4	38.9	39.8
Rep	27.2	29.1	29.4	24.5	24.2	23.4	23.2	22.5	27.1	27.5	25.2	26.4	23.9	29.0	26.1
Dem-Rep	20.0	14.5	15.9	27.2	21.2	17.0	16.5	18.3	9.9	7.7	10.3	11.4	10.4	3.1	8.0

**Including Leaners as Partisans**

	'52	'56	'60	'64	'68	'72	'76	'80	'84	'88	'92	'96	'00	'04	'08
Dem + leaners	56.8	49.9	51.6	61.0	55.2	51.5	51.5	52.2	47.9	46.9	49.8	51.8	49.6	49.6	50.7
Pure Indep.	5.8	8.8	9.8	7.8	10.5	13.1	14.6	12.9	11.0	10.6	11.6	9.1	12.3	9.7	11.3
Rep + leaners	34.3	37.5	36.1	30.3	32.8	33.9	33.0	32.7	39.5	40.8	37.5	38.1	36.7	40.7	38.0
Dem-Rep	22.5	12.4	15.5	30.7	22.4	17.6	18.5	19.5	8.4	6.1	12.3	13.7	12.9	8.9	12.7

Source: ANES election surveys, full sample, weighted.

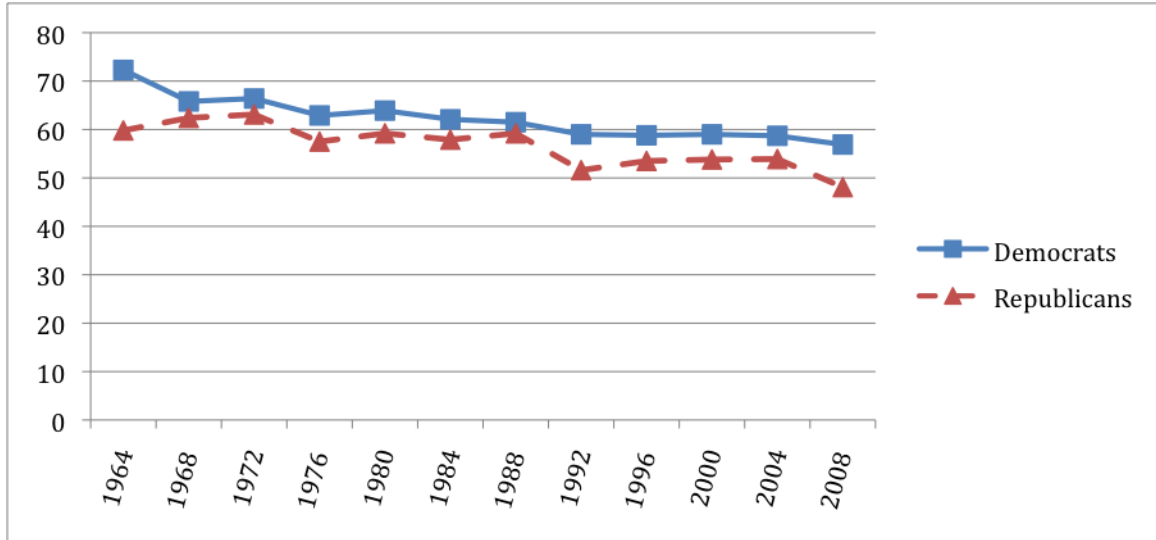
**Figure 1. Democratic Identification Lead over Republicans, 1952-2008**



**TABLE 2 Party Thermometer Means, 1964-2008**

Party	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008
Democrats	72.3	65.8	66.4	62.9	63.9	62.1	61.5	59.0	58.8	59.0	58.7	56.9
Republicans	59.8	62.4	63.1	57.5	59.2	57.9	59.2	51.6	53.5	53.8	53.9	48.1
difference	12.1	3.4	3.3	5.4	4.7	4.2	2.3	7.4	5.3	5.2	4.8	8.8
correlation	-0.28	-0.18	0.02	0.01	-0.23	-0.40	-0.39	-0.27	-0.42	-0.34	-0.48	-0.48

Source: ANES election surveys, full sample, weighted. Thermometer scores range from 0 to 100. Higher scores correspond to more favorable evaluations.

**Figure 2. Party Thermometer Means, 1964-2008**

**TABLE 3 Change in Partisanship, January to November 2008**

<b>November Party Identification</b>								
January Party Identification	Democrat	Lean Dem	Pure Indep	Lean Rep	Republican	January Row Total	% of January Sample	Number of Cases
Democrat Identifier	85.3%	5.7%	4.8%	0.6%	3.6%	100.0%	31.8%	333
Lean Democrat	40.2%	27.4%	20.5%	10.3%	1.7%	100.0%	11.2%	117
Pure Independent	18.2%	14.5%	55.8%	6.7%	4.8%	100.0%	15.7%	165
Lean Republican	4.2%	1.7%	15.3%	53.4%	25.4%	100.0%	11.3%	118
Republican Identifier	2.9%	0.6%	3.5%	6.7%	86.3%	100.0%	30.1%	315
% of November Sample	35.8%	7.5%	15.4%	10.4%	30.9%	100.0%	100.1%	1048

Source: ANES 2008 Panel Survey. Weighted N = 1048.

**TABLE 4 Party Identification Change between Panel Waves\*****January to September**

January Party ID	More Dem by Sept	Unchanged	More Rep by Sept	Total
Democratic Identifier	--	82.9%	17.1%	100.0%
Lean Democrat	28.6%	37.3%	34.1%	100.0%
Pure Independent	22.3%	69.3%	8.3%	99.9%
Lean Republican	27.5%	58.3%	14.2%	100.0%
Republican Identifier	13.8%	86.2%	--	100.0%
Total	13.9%	73.9%	12.2%	100.0%

**September to October**

September Party ID	More Dem by Oct	Unchanged	More Rep by Oct	Total
Democratic Identifier	--	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%
Lean Democrat	28.5%	54.9%	16.6%	100.0%
Pure Independent	14.8%	72.8%	12.5%	100.1%
Lean Republican	20.9%	56.5%	22.6%	100.0%
Republican Identifier	11.2%	88.8%	--	100.0%
Total	10.1%	81.2%	8.7%	100.0%

**October to November**

October Party ID	More Dem by Nov	Unchanged	More Rep by Nov	Total
Democrat Identifier	--	93.6%	6.4%	100.0%
Lean Democrat	26.2%	54.9%	18.9%	100.0%
Pure Independent	24.2%	61.5%	14.3%	100.0%
Lean Republican	15.8%	60.4%	23.8%	100.0%
Republican Identifier	7.6%	92.4%	--	100.0%
Total	9.3%	82.7%	8.0%	100.0%

\*The rows show the respondent's party identification in the earlier panel wave, and the columns show what percentage of the respondents in that row moved in the Republican direction, were unchanged, or moved in the Democratic direction by the next panel wave.

Source: ANES 2008 Panel Survey, including new respondents added in September. Weighted N's: 1135 for January to September; 2389 September to October; 2311 October to November.



**TABLE 5 The Demographics of Party Identification, 2008 and 2004 (non-blacks only)**

	Dem '08	Indep '08	Rep '08	Total '08	Number of cases 2008	Dem-Rep 2008	Dem-Rep 2004
<u>Gender</u>							
Men	24.6%	45.7%	29.7%	100.0%	829	-5.1%	-16.3%
Women	33.2%	37.8%	29.0%	100.0%	1005	4.2%	-5.4%
<u>Marital Status</u>							
Nonmarried	29.8%	49.5%	20.8%	100.1%	843	9.0%	1.9%
Married	28.9%	34.6%	36.5%	100.0%	992	-7.6%	-18.0%
<u>Years of Education</u>							
0-12	30.4%	45.2%	24.4%	100.0%	743	6.0%	-3.5%
13-16	26.0%	41.6%	32.4%	100.0%	812	-6.4%	-21.7%
More than 16 years	36.0%	30.5%	33.5%	100.0%	272	2.5%	-4.2%
<u>Age</u>							
Less than 30	24.0%	56.8%	19.2%	100.0%	396	4.8%	2.8%
30-44	27.9%	41.8%	30.3%	100.0%	426	-2.4%	-25.0%
45-64	31.7%	37.5%	30.8%	100.0%	675	0.9%	-16.0%
65 and over	32.0%	30.1%	37.9%	100.0%	322	-5.9%	5.5%
<u>Ethnicity</u>							
Latino	46.9%	40.7%	12.3%	99.9%	162	34.6%	13.8%
Non-Latino	27.6%	41.5%	30.9%	100.0%	1673	-3.3%	-14.2%

Note: Leaners are included with Independents.

Source: 2008 and 2004 ANES election pre-post election surveys.

**TABLE 6 Vote by Party Identification, 2000, 2004, and 2008 (in percentages)**

Party Identification	Gore % of Two-party Vote	% of Voters		Kerry % of Two-party Vote	% of Voters		Obama % of Two-party Vote	% of Voters
Strong Democrat	97.0	22.1		97.5	18.0		95.3	21.9
Weak Democrat	85.3	15.5		85.2	14.3		86.3	15.0
Leaning Democrat	77.8	12.8		87.8	15.3		91.0	14.2
Pure Independent	44.7	7.2		58.5	5.4		57.1	6.7
Leaning Republican	14.1	12.8		15.3	10.5		18.4	11.2
Weak Republican	16.2	12.3		10.5	14.8		11.4	14.7
Strong Republican	1.7	17.2		2.9	21.8		3.6	16.3
Total		99.9			100.0			100.0

Source: ANES election surveys, full sample, weighted.

**TABLE 7 Changes in Party Identification and Vote Intention throughout 2008**

	Row	Jan to Sept	Sept to Oct	Oct to Nov
<b>Candidate choice aligns with PartyID</b>				
Dems move away from McCain	1	6.5%	1.0%	1.8%
Inds move away from both nominees	2	1.5%	2.3%	4.5%
Reps move away from Obama	3	13.4%	0.9%	1.3%
<b>Candidate choice affects PartyID</b>				
Obama supporters move away from Reps	4	3.1%	3.7%	1.9%
Undecideds move away from both parties	5	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%
McCain supporters move away from Dems	6	1.7%	3.3%	2.3%
<b>Congruent changes</b>				
Away from McCain & Republicans	7	3.1%	0.5%	1.1%
Away from Obama & Democrats	8	2.7%	0.8%	0.7%
<b>Dissonant changes</b>				
Away from Obama but not to Republicans	9a	11.4%	5.3%	6.4%
Away from McCain but not to Democrats	9b	17.4%	4.6%	7.1%
No change in candidate support or party id	10	39.1%	77.4%	72.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Number of cases</b>		<b>1089</b>	<b>2368</b>	<b>2268</b>

**TABLE 8 Loyalty Rates of Partisans by Ideology (in percentages)\***

		Voter's Perception of Obama's Ideology		
		Obama liberal	Obama moderate	Obama conservative
Respondent's Party Identification	Respondent's Ideology			
Democrat	Liberal	100.0% (108)	91.5% (89)	-- (1)
	Moderate	77.4% (84)	92.8% (111)	98.9% (33)
	Conservative	-- (6)	-- (5)	-- (6)

		Voter's Perception of McCain's ideology		
		McCain liberal	McCain moderate	McCain conservative
Respondent's Party Identification	Respondent's Ideology			
Republican	Liberal	-- (0)	-- (3)	-- (2)
	Moderate	73.3% (15)	95.2% (62)	78.0% (82)
	Conservative	-- (0)	97.6% (127)	98.5% (137)

\*The top half of the table shows the percentage of Democrats in each category who voted for Obama; the bottom half shows the percentage of Republicans in each category who voted for McCain. The number of cases in each cell is shown in parentheses; percentages are not calculated for cells with fewer than ten respondents. Independent leaners are not included in this table. Ideology is coded: 1-2 as liberal, 3-5 as moderate, and 6-7 as conservative.

Source: 2008 ANES election pre-post election survey.

**TABLE 9 Defection Rates of Partisans for President (in percentages)\***

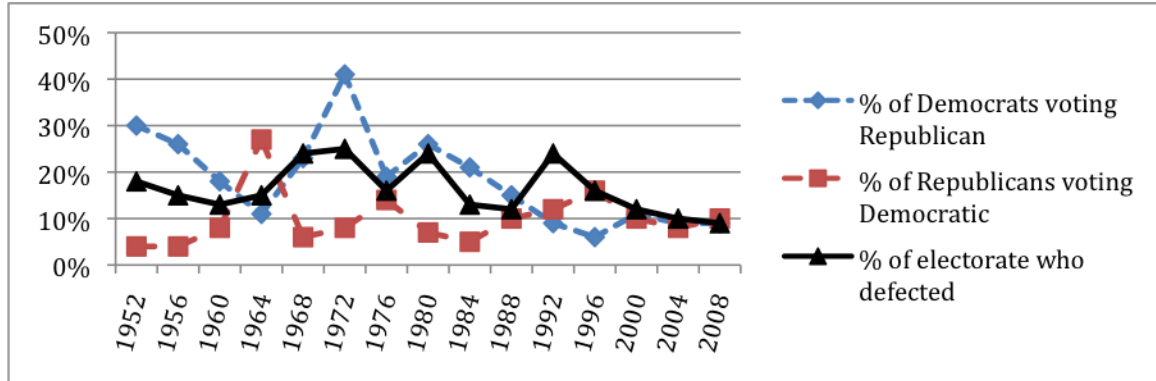
	'52	'56	'60	'64	'68	'72	'76	'80	'84	'88	'92	'96	'00	'04	'08
% of Democrats voting Republican	30	26	18	11	23	41	19	26	21	15	9	6	11	9	9
% of Republicans voting Democratic	4	4	8	27	6	8	14	7	5	10	12	16	10	8	10

	'52	'56	'60	'64	'68	'72	'76	'80	'84	'88	'92	'96	'00	'04	'08
% of electorate who defected, including partisans voting for minor-party candidates	18	15	13	15	24	25	16	24	13	12	24	16	12	10	9
% of electorate who voted for their party's nominee	77	76	79	79	69	67	73	68	79	81	68	78	79	85	84
% of electorate who were pure Independents	5	9	8	5	7	8	11	8	8	7	9	5	8	5	7
Total	100	100	100	99	100	100	100	100	100	100	101	99	99	100	100

\*Independent leaners are combined with partisans. The figures for defectors include votes for minor-party candidates.

Source: American National Election Studies, 1952-2008, full sample, weighted. The bottom three rows are from Stanley and Niemi (2010), 127.

**Figure 3. Defection Rates of Partisans in Presidential Voting, 1952-2008**



**TABLE 10 Party Loyalty in Presidential Elections, 1952-2008**

Year	Non-Voting (1)	Third-Party Voting (2)	Pure Independents (3)	Party Defectors (4)	Major Party Loyalists (5)	Total: All Eligible Voters
1952	37.7%	.3%	3.3%	11.2%	47.4%	99.9%
1956	39.8%	.4%	5.6%	8.9%	45.2%	99.9%
1960	36.2%	.4%	5.1%	7.9%	50.3%	99.9%
1964	37.2%	.3%	3.4%	9.7%	49.3%	99.9%
1968	38.5%	8.5%	4.1%	7.7%	41.2%	100.0%
1972	43.8%	1.0%	4.7%	13.5%	37.0%	100.0%
1976	45.2%	1.0%	5.8%	8.2%	39.8%	100.0%
1980	45.8%	4.4%	4.4%	8.2%	37.2%	100.0%
1984	44.8%	3.9%	4.2%	6.4%	40.8%	100.1%
1988	47.2%	.5%	3.5%	6.2%	42.6%	100.0%
1992	41.9%	11.3%	3.2%	4.4%	39.2%	100.0%
1996	48.3%	5.2%	2.0%	4.6%	39.9%	100.0%
2000	45.8%	2.0%	3.8%	5.1%	43.3%	100.0%
2004	39.9%	.6%	3.2%	4.8%	51.5%	100.0%
2008	38.3%	.9%	4.1%	5.3%	51.4%	100.0%

Notes:

(1) Non-voting (NV%): Based on estimates of voting-eligible population (VEP) from McDonald and Popkin (2001) for 1952-1976 and McDonald (2007) for 1980-2008.

(2) Third-party voting (3P%): Based on votes for third parties (and other candidates) given in Leip (2009), multiplied by VEP.

(3) Pure independents (PI%): Based on percentage of pure independent (and apolitical) major party voters (ANES 1984-2006 cumulative data file and 2008 ANES with post-stratification weights, multiplied by (VEP minus percentage of third-party voting).

(4) Party defectors (D%): Based on percentage of major party identifiers (and independent leaners) who vote for the opposite major party (ANES 1984-2006 cumulative data file and 2008 ANES, with post-stratification weights), multiplied by (VEP minus percentage of third party voting minus percent of pure independents voting).

(5) Major-party loyalists (L%):  $100\% - NV\% - 3P\% - PI\% - D\%$ .

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## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> As usual, this report owes considerable gratitude to the American National Election Studies. Their pre- and post-election surveys have been weighted by the post-election weight (v080102) to adjust for the intentional oversample of African-Americans and Latinos in the survey design.

<sup>2</sup> Figure 1 shows that the trends are quite similar regardless of whether or not Independents who “lean” towards one of the party are included as partisans.

<sup>3</sup> It would seem simple to look at panel attrition in the ANES panel survey to estimate the extent to which partisans demobilized in 2008 out of dissatisfaction with the major party nominees. Attempts to do so, however, are confounded with the usual lower interest in politics and turnout of people with less education, less income, etc., which typically translates into lower turnout for Democrats than Republicans and greater panel attrition for Democrats. Unfortunately there is no obvious way to remove this confounding effect.

<sup>4</sup> There are many plausible explanations for the shift toward Democratic Party identification in 2008. A novel one, suggested by an anonymous reviewer, posits that party primary/caucus registration rules might have “forced” changes in party identification. Specifically, people who had not been registered previously as Democrats might have changed their party identification in order to participate in a closed, or semi-



closed, Democratic Party primary/caucus. Presumably, such changes in party identification would have been more common in the Democratic direction, because the 2008 Democratic Party presidential nomination process continued to be competitive long after John McCain effectively had secured the Republican Party nomination. Thus, some voters might have viewed voting in a Democratic Party primary/caucus as the only way to make their votes count. Since the Democratic Party in 25 states allowed only registered Democrats to vote in their 2008 primaries/caucuses, and 5 states allowed only registered Democrats and independent/unaffiliated voters to do so, it is possible that many voters became registered Democrats or Independents strictly in order to vote in a competitive primary or caucus.

Interestingly, further examination of the ANES panel data indicates the opposite relationship between Democratic Party identification and the type of Democratic Party primary or caucus (closed, semi-closed, or open) in which respondents voted; the correlation between increasing Democratic Party identification across successive panel waves and the extent to which Democratic Party primary/caucuses were closed to voters not registered as Democrats, was statistically significant in the negative direction. In other words, movement toward Democratic identification was much less common among respondents voting in closed and semi-closed Democratic primaries/caucuses than those voting in open primaries/caucuses.

As best we can interpret this information, the act of voting in any Democratic Party primary/caucus made many individuals think of themselves more as Democrats than otherwise would have been the case. Since, by definition, it is easier for non-party members—individuals not previously registered as Democrats—to participate in open

primaries/caucuses, these effects should have been, as in fact they were, more common in states where the Democratic Party held open versus closed or semi-closed primaries/caucuses.

<sup>5</sup> The top frame uses variable `wgtc09` as the weight variable, the middle frame uses `wgtL10`, and the bottom frame uses `wgtL11`, while `wgtc11` was used for Table 3. This allows the September-October and the October-November comparisons to benefit from the extra respondents added to the panel study in the autumn to make up for panel attrition, while the January-September comparison in Table 4 and the January-November comparison in Table 3 are necessarily restricted to the original respondents who stayed in the panel.

<sup>6</sup> The January wave was conducted before it became clear who the major candidates would be, but it included some hypothetical candidate pairings. While it did not happen to include an Obama-McCain pairing, it did ask an approval voting question for a large number of possible candidates. We consider people who indicated they would vote for Obama but not McCain to be Obama supporters, and people who said they would vote for McCain but not Obama to be McCain supporters, with everyone else coded as undecided between the two candidates.

<sup>7</sup> As Hillygus and Henderson (2010) show, there was very little change in candidate support between September and the election, with only one-sixth of their Associated Press/Yahoo News panel respondents showing any change.

<sup>8</sup> As Johnston, Thorson, and Gooch (2010) points out, the economic evaluations of Democrats and Independents were already quite negative before September, so the people

whose evaluations turned most negative when the meltdown hit were Republicans, but they were least susceptible to Obama's appeal.

<sup>9</sup> Additionally we cannot tell whether the difference between the first two waves and between the autumn waves is due to the greater time interval between the January and September waves, but we doubt that is the critical factor.

<sup>10</sup> Liberals were less likely to vote than conservatives, but that reflects the usual tendency of pro-Democratic social groups, like the high school educated, to vote at lower rates than the rest of the population.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion of the Democratic primaries in Jackman and Vavreck (2010) and Grose, Husser, and Yoshinaka (2010) for analysis of the Clinton-Obama race and its implications for the general election.

<sup>12</sup> Leaners are combined with partisans in this comparison.