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Author(s): John R. Petrocik

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Realignment: New Party Coalitions and the Nationalization of the South

John R. Petrocik

University of California at Los Angeles

Among academic and non-academic observers the Reagan election provoked speculation about whether the party system was finally embarking upon a realignment whose symptoms had been visible for some time. The discussion rarely produced a consensus because definitions of realignment are neither explicit nor theoretical, but historical and descriptive. This paper extends an argument which defines realignments as changes in the social group coalitions which distinguish party supporters. It uses this definition to describe changes which have been underway for over twenty years; it identifies the significance of the South in the transformation, and it shows the realignment to be programmatically significant even if the Democratic party retains its numerical dominance.

Kevin Phillips' *Emerging Republican Majority* (1969) was an early entry in a soon-to-burgeon literature on realignment.¹ While Phillips' prophecy was widely discussed, it failed to persuade many scholars because it required Democrats or the offspring of Democrats to become Republicans, and two decades of surveys had found the disavowal of party attachments as uncommon, so the analogy went, as religious conversion. The conventional wisdom foretold a future of modest changes from a present which had barely changed in a quarter of a century. Social mobility might turn some children of working-class Democrats into Republicans, but the weak link between social and political differences would ensure that most socially mobile voters retained the partisanship of their families. Migration to the South would increase its Republican

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in New Orleans August 29-September 1, 1985. Various readers, some unsympathetic and unappreciated, contributed to this revision. Much of the data used in the paper were provided through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. Neither the Consortium nor the principal investigators who originally collected the data are responsible for the analysis or interpretations.

¹ The literature on realignment is too lengthy to cite fully. Moreover, any attempt to do so would surely leave out related, important work. Suffice it to say that if Phillips' book was a major nonacademic statement, the work of Burnham (1970), Ladd (1970), Ladd and Hadley (1975, with a revised edition in 1978, cited below), and Sundquist (1973, with a revised edition in 1983, cited below) were the most comprehensive academic treatises on the topic. Sundquist (1983) is a good source for the literature. All, of course, owe a debt to V.O. Key (1955, 1959).

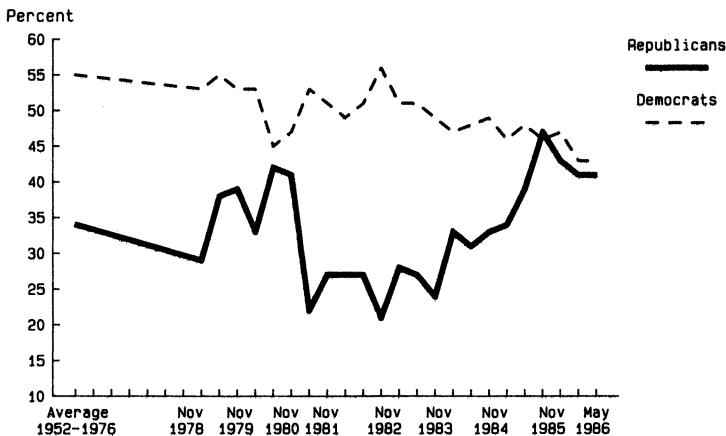
contingent; again, however, most native southerners were expected to retain their Democratic proclivities.

Neither Phillips nor his critics have fared well. The conventional orthodoxy which dismissed Phillips' prediction has been reformulated. While there is no consensus on the magnitude of the changes that have taken place (and even some belief in their exaggeration), there is at least general agreement that the electorate of the 1980s is different from that of the 1950s. Voters seem less partisan, and elections lack the predictability that was made possible by the partisanship of earlier decades. Presidential elections have oscillated between narrow margins and lopsided victories. Defection at least seems higher, and incumbents are immune to all but the most massive short-term surges. In a few words, the party system doesn't show the stable and robust popular foundation invoked by Phillips' critics to reject his prediction of an emerging Republican majority. At the same time, Phillips' prediction is still only a GOP hope.

A Decline in Democratic Identification?

However, history has been kinder to Phillips than were his original critics. Although the Republicans have not become the majority party, there has been both a substantial decline in the familiar 20-percentage-point Democratic plurality and a reshaping of the popular foundations of the parties.

FIGURE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION



NOTE: This figure uses data from the National Election Studies and the national surveys of Market Opinion Research. The data are not completely comparable, nor does either series always agree with other national studies (see Table 1, for example). The November time points for even years are from the NES data, all others are from MOR.

TABLE 1
CHANGING PARTISANSHIP OF THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE

	1979/1980			1985/1986			CHANGE IN PARTY BIAS
	DEM	REP	PARTY BIAS	DEM	REP	PARTY BIAS	
Survey Organization							
Harris	44	23	+21	41	31	+10	-11
CBS/ <i>New York Times</i>	42	26	+16	35	30	+ 5	-11
ABC/ <i>Washington Post</i>	45	22	+23	35	30	+ 5	-18
<i>Time Magazine</i>	51	28	+23	48	33	+15	- 8
NBC	35	29	+ 6	35	33	+ 2	- 4
Roper	50	22	+28	48	26	+22	- 6
Gallup	46	22	+24	36	34	+ 2	-22
Center for Political Studies	41	22	+19	36	27	+ 9	-10
Market Opinion Research	43	22	+21	31	29	+ 2	-19
Average	44	24	+20	38	30	+ 8	-12

Source: Market Opinion Research data provided by MOR; Center for Political Studies data were calculated by the author; all other data were adapted from *Public Opinion* (1985). In this table Democrats and Republicans are only those who are categorized as strong or weak identifiers. In all other tables leaning, weak, and strong identifiers are considered partisans. The treatment of leaning identifiers in this table was required by the published data, which defined leaning partisans as independents.

Prior to 1980 there was no discernible trend in the balance of Republican and Democratic identifiers. The Democratic lead shrank slightly under the pressures that produced strong Republican presidential victories such as Eisenhower's in 1956, only to grow when the Democrats enjoyed a strong balance of popular support for their candidate (e.g., 1964). Changes were occurring, but they produced no net shift in the partisan balance. The dealignment that reduced the percentage of Democrats and Republicans left the competitive balance between the parties almost unchanged. Since 1980, however, there appears to have been a substantial movement toward the Republicans. Some data (table 1) show a 20-point drop (Gallup), while others (Roper) show very little change (only 6 points), but the median estimate of the Democratic decline is about 12 percentage points, and six of the nine series in table 1 show a change of at least 10 points in the party bias of the electorate. The 20-point

Democratic advantage in late 1979 and early 1980 withered to an average of 8 percentage points in late 1985 and early 1986.²

The decline was irregular. Surveys conducted during 1981 found a similar Republican tilt, which was quickly reversed by the recession of 1982 (figure 1). Hopeful Republicans insist that the post-1984 levels are permanent, but many interpret the changes as a "performance realignment" that will not persist beyond Reagan or a significant downturn in the economy (Sussman, 1985). Others equivocate, but even some Democrats (pollster Peter Hart, for example) believe that at least some of the pro-Republican movement is rooted in policy preferences that are not likely to be undone by short-lived economic dislocations.³

Conversion and Persuasion

Whatever the future of this partisan shift, there is no evidence in table 2 that the current GOP success has depended upon volatile younger voters (but see Helmut Norpoth, 1985, for data which contradict this finding). While those who came of age prior to 1960 changed less than the post-1960 cohort, the erosion of Democratic partisanship occurred among all ages.⁴ Conversion has contributed more than the biased mobilization of younger cohorts to the recent surge in Republican identification. This result may not be permanent: As the strong pro-Republican sentiment of the moment recedes, older Democrats could return to their partisan habits while younger voters, whose political tendencies are less well-rooted, remain Republican (the rationale for this is developed in McPhee and Ferguson, 1962; Beck, 1974). At present, however, all age groups have contributed to the declining Democratic plurality.

² The connection between dealignment and realignment may be quite strong. It is possible that the early period of the transformation of a party system will be characterized by a general loosening of the partisan attachments of the electorate. This dealignment might persist until subsequent events facilitate the reestablishment of a stable equilibrium. The common expectation was that the dealignment of the 1970s would create a party politics marked by nonpartisanship and a peripheral electorate for the indefinite future. The apparently greater partisanship of young voters since 1980 and the southern realignment cast doubt on this prediction of a dealigned, peripheral electorate. It also suggests that there might be merit in examining the extent to which dealignment is a harbinger of realignment.

³ While others have since used the ideas of performance and policy realignment, I first heard this distinction from Frederick Steeper of Market Opinion Research, to whom I am indebted for it.

⁴ The finding may also have substantive significance. This cohort averages about 56 years of age. It was also common during 1982 and 1983 to find that Reagan's lowest job approval was provided by voters in the 55 to 64 age group. The suspicion was that those voters, nearing retirement, were the most anxious over discussions of the administration's plans for the social security system. The retired segment of the electorate was, on balance, supportive of Reagan. That group knew that whatever the future might hold, the social security system had not reduced their benefits. Further, they did not believe that their benefits would be affected.

TABLE 2
PARTY BIAS OF AGE COHORTS, 1952-1984

RESPONDENT BECAME ELIGIBLE TO VOTE:	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980	1982	1984a	1984b
Prior to 1948	-18	-22	-18	-25	-27	-11	- 8
Between 1949-1959	-25	-29	-13	-10	-18	-19	-21
In 1960	-27	-24	-15	-11	-23	- 8	- 6
Between 1961-1976		-21	-16	-18	-26	- 3	- 1
Between 1977-1980				-25	-14	- 4	- 6
After 1980					-22	- 9	- 1
Average	-19	-23	-20	-20	-23	- 8	- 6

Note: Table entries are percentage differences. Negative values indicate a plurality of Democrats; positive values indicate a plurality of Republicans. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean. The studies for 1952, 1956, 1958, and 1960 are grouped as the 1950s; the studies for the years from 1962 through 1970 are considered the 1960s; the studies for 1972 through 1978 are considered the 1970s. The 1984a column uses party identification measures collected in the pre-election survey, while 1984b refers to post-election data.

All data are from the National Election Studies of the Center for Political Studies, unless otherwise indicated.

Yet, while the Democratic decline is not specific to certain age cohorts, it is not unstructured or undifferentiated. It is unequally distributed among ethnic groups and regions, and the older cohorts who appear to have changed their party identification are largely from certain segments of the electorate. This paper presents an analysis of these partisan changes in terms of the social groups which constitute the party coalitions. The first part presents the rationale for examining the social foundations of the American parties, while the second part uses this social-group model of the parties to describe their realignment. The third part of the paper considers recent elections (especially 1984) in terms of the still-underway realignment.⁵

⁵ The 1984 NES survey seriously underrepresented men and white southerners. Since the analysis makes over-time comparisons of the groups in terms of their share of the parties, it was important to compensate for this sampling error by reweighting the sample so that it would conform to population parameters.

CONCEPTIONS OF REALIGNMENT

James Sundquist's *Dynamics of the Party System* (1983) documents dissent and inattention to even conventional understandings of realignment. While the diversity has contributed to a fuller appreciation of the complexity of party systems and their processes of transformation, it has not been costless. The focus on the complexity of historical realignments has yielded concepts which aid analyses of prior realignments at the expense of sensitivity to contemporary changes. Earlier party transformations have become benchmarks for diagnosing current changes, to the loss of our ability to analyze the latter. These event-based definitions have also limited our sensitivity to the variability of the links among various aspects of party system change. In consequence we have generally come to regard realignments as clusters of causes, symptoms, and consequences, rather than phenomena with diverse causes, several symptoms, and many consequences—some of which may not occur because of the limitations inherent in the prevailing social and political context.

If we are to avoid judging present realignments for their similarity with past realignments, a more limited conception of the phenomena is needed. Several alternatives are possible, but one which is theoretically and empirically satisfying conceives of realignments as transformations of the social group profile of party supporters. The theoretical rationale for this definition arises from the social cleavage theory of parties and party systems; its practical merit is its correspondence with the way in which parties conceive of their electoral base.

Social Divisions and Political Parties

Religious, economic, ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences provide the social "fault lines" which have been the most common source of social conflict. Parties have been the organized expression of these conflicts, and it contradicts none of the conventional ways of thinking about parties to view them as the traditional (although not the only) instruments of collective action with which groups promote and protect interests that are unmet by the social structure and markets. While the number, salience and centrality, and political significance of the cleavages vary among societies (in the U.S. and Great Britain social differences and political preference are weakly aligned; in Holland and Austria the link is strong), the existence of group differences, their politicization through ideological and policy disputes are virtual constants (LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966;

Dahl, 1966; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Rose and Unwin, 1969).⁶ While programmatic differences among parties do not always reflect social group differences and conflicts, one is hard pressed to find instances where issue conflict is independent of social cleavages. Issue and ideology may be the language of party conflict, but group needs and conflicts are its source in modern party systems.

The importance of this conception of parties as, to quote Lipset and Rokkan (1967), “coalitions in conflict over policies and value commitments within the . . . body politic” is that it leads directly to a conception of realignments as reformulations of the “coalitions in conflict.” The reformulation might be a product of massive changes in a group’s party affiliation; it may reflect the development of a partisan cleavage within a new group in the society (immigrants, for example); it might also come about as a highly aligned group loses its partisan distinctiveness (a major component of coalition changes in the U.S. through the middle 1970s). The outcome in any of these cases—and many unmentioned possibilities—is a realignment of the parties and the electorate.⁷

⁶ The weaker alignment of social and party cleavages in the United States is at the root of several distinctive features of the American polity, among which we might include the frequency with which the American parties have realigned and rebuilt their popular foundations. As coalitions of often competing groups, incompatible policies and programs have occasionally divided coalition groups and sent one or more to the opposite party. Just as frequently, and perhaps with greater net effect, the programmatic orientation of the parties has allowed them to differentially mobilize new entrants into American Politics. The result of this coalition expansion is first a larger party, but also a coalition measurably more diverse and subject to internal differences that may precipitate subsequent realignments.

⁷ This straightforward definition of realignment is theoretically compatible with the coalitional (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) definition of parties, it corresponds to practitioners’ perspectives on the electoral foundations of parties, and it is easily measured. It also provides purchase on related, problematic phenomena. It allows, for example, an ordering of realignments in terms of their magnitude. Some will be “critical” as Burnham (1970) has used the term, filled with consequences and secondary effects of many kinds; others will be more modest in their by-products. A few will yield a new majority and an alteration of the policy agenda of the society; others may produce only one of these changes. Some realignments will follow major social upheavals, while others will issue from more modest policy failures or intraparty divisions. Some realignments will depend upon a change in the party preference of several large groups, while others will reflect changes of one or a few small segments of the electorate. Some realignments will occur quickly, taking on the qualities of Key’s “critical” election; still others will be long-term conflicts producing extended, “secular” realignments. Contemporary party system change in the United States is of the latter type. For more on this see chapter two of Petrocik (1981).

The Politician's Model of the Electorate

Practical politicians deal with groups of voters through the issues which they believe to be of concern to members of the group. When Democratic or Republican office-seekers "talk about the issues" and otherwise present a policy agenda to the electorate, they are soliciting support in several ways. But the central purpose of "dealing with the issues" is to rally groups which normally support the party's candidates. The candidates present themselves as faithful proponents of the interests of the groups which constitute the party coalitions. The "generic Democrat" talks about the social safety net, affirmative action, the need to maintain momentum against racial injustice, and the essential commitment to provide jobs and a decent standard of living to all Americans; the Republican opponent urges reductions in government waste, lower taxes, economic growth, strong opposition to a "predatory" Soviet Union, and a renewal of traditional values and institutions.

Through time and across elections, what the party stands for and the issues its candidates address reflect the preferences of the groups which constitute the core support of the party. Leaders innovate; issues beyond the concerns of their core constituency are placed by them on the party agenda. But over the long run, the programmatic face of the party arises from its constituency, and parties develop reputations for differential issue competence as a result of this constituency-based issue specialization (Budge and Farlie, 1983).

THE REALIGNMENT OF THE COALITIONS

Table 3, which presents the partisanship of each group from the 1950s through 1984, shows major changes in the party identification of the groups which have defined the New Deal party coalitions (for the historical origins of these coalition groups as well as their empirical identification, see Petrocik, 1981). The GOP surge documented in table 1 reflects an abrupt lurch in a 20-year-long shift of the partisanship of the New Deal party coalition groups. Table 4, which traces the social group profile of the Democratic and Republican parties for the past three decades, shows the results of this creeping transformation of the partisanship of the groups. By the end of the 1970s, the Democratic and Republican coalitions had developed social bases that were unlike those of the 1950s.⁸ Changes continued into the eighties. By 1984 northern, white Protestants had declined to about 40% of all Republican identifiers; white southerners, Catholics, and labor households—the mainstays of the New Deal Democracy—represented almost half of all Republicans.

⁸ Unless otherwise indicated, the 1950s refer to the years between 1952 and 1960, inclusive; the 1960s cover the years from 1962 through 1970, and the 1970s refer to the years from 1972 through 1978.

TABLE 3
CHANGING PARTY BIAS OF MAJOR SEGMENTS OF THE PARTY COALITIONS, 1952-1984

	1950s	1960s	1972	1974	1976	1978	1980	1982	1984
White Northern Protestants									
Upper SES	59	39	42	35	39	24	34	31	41
Middle SES	36	18	28	31	21	22	25	5	35
Lower SES	9	-9	-4	6	8	-10	-6	-14	14
White Southerners									
Border states									
Middle-Upper SES	-40	-10	-21	-18	11	-24	6	29	-16
Lower SES	-29	-37	-11	0	-16	-25	-24	-54	-27
Deep South									
Middle-Upper SES	-71	-30	-26	-51	-22	-11	-21	-31	9
Lower SES	-58	-50	-41	-34	-48	-62	-49	-51	-2
Catholics									
Upper SES	-22	-18	-22	-34	-15	-17	-1	-20	5
All others	-34	-45	-44	-36	-39	-54	-36	-61	-21
Jews	-62	-74	-62	-56	-38	-65	-75	-47	-52
Blacks	-37	-70	-65	-79	-77	-72	-73	-93	-67
Northern Union households	-31	-37	-26	-27	-30	-35	-21	-39	-13
Average	-17	-23	-18	-21	-18	-23	-20	-27	-8

Note: Table entries are percentage differences. Negative values indicate a plurality of Democrats; positive values indicate a plurality of Republicans. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean.

TABLE 4
CHANGING PARTY COALITIONS, 1950s THROUGH 1984

	DEMOCRATS									
	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	
White Northern Protestants	18%	20%	17%	16%	20%	16%	20%	17%	19%	
Catholics	14	16	17	14	15	16	14	14	15	
Northern Union households	22	16	19	23	18	16	11	16	17	
White Southerners	31	26	23	17	18	25	24	22	21	
Jews	4	4	3	5	4	2	3	3	5	
Blacks	9	13	16	18	18	17	18	17	19	
Hispanics	1	2	2	3	2	4	6	7	4	
All others	2	2	3	4	2	5	5	5	2	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	102%	

	REPUBLICANS				
	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980	1981
White Northern Protestants	51%	50%	43%	37%	38%
Catholics	10	12	12	14	18
Northern Union households	16	11	14	16	18
White Southerners	15	21	23	22	22
Jews	1	1	1	1	1
Blacks	5	2	2	3	3
Hispanics	0	—	1	2	—
All others	2	3	3	5	1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: The 1981, 1983, and 1985 data were supplied by Market Opinion Research. All other years use NES data. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean. Totals may not equal 100% because of rounding.

Changes in the Democratic coalition have been even larger. Catholics and white union members—the core of the northern faction of the New Deal Democrats—represented a third of the party in the 1950s, southern whites represented another third, northern white Protestants contributed a fifth of the Democratic base, and Jews and blacks added another 15% or so. By 1984, southern whites constituted barely a fifth of Democratic identifiers while the black contribution doubled.

A summary estimate of these changes is not easily calculated simply because there is no obvious denominator against which the coalitional shift can be compared. A reasonable one (given the emphasis on dealignment) might be changes which leave the party coalitions identical; that is, a realignment which leaves the social base of the Democrats virtually identical to that of the Republicans. Against such a standard, the 15- and 20-percentage-point shift in the Democratic and Republican coalitions, respectively, constitute over 50% of the change that is possible.⁹

SOUTHERN WHITES AND THE SHIFTING PARTY BALANCE

The coalition changes in table 4 have been underway for at least two decades. They are not specific to the 1984 election, and they are not just a reflection of the shifting identification of southern whites.¹⁰ However, the contribution of the South to these changes has been disproportionate; the realignment would have been dramatically smaller without the decline of the southern Democracy. In addition, the programmatic distinctiveness of the region, its historical importance for the Democrats, its pivotal role in recent elections, and the increasing influence of southern whites within the Republican party argue for a fuller documentation of their shift toward the Republican party and a better understanding of their impact on the parties.

The Southern Impact

By the middle of the 1970s, southern whites were only marginally different from the total electorate. Not only had the Democratic bias of

⁹ This method of calculating changes is fully described in Petrocik (1981, p. 94).

¹⁰ Several different types of analyses have been done of changes in the South. See, for example, Beck (1977), Campbell (1977a, 1977b), and Rabinowitz et al. (1984). Other important and useful analyses of the transformation of southern politics would include Topping, Szarek, and Linder (1966), Bass and DeVries (1976), and Black (1976). Some of this work, especially Bass and DeVries and Black, focuses on the politics of the South directly. Southern politics is more complex and deserving of fuller attention than it can be given in this paper. The white South for the purpose of this analysis is simply one element, albeit a very important one, of the several which have reshaped the party coalitions.

southern whites declined, but the structure of party preference had taken on a national character, with, for example, the class cleavage reversing itself and assuming the northern pattern of greater Republican support among the better-off.¹¹ Their drift from the Democrats was neither reversed nor slowed by Carter's candidacy. A majority of white southerners voted for Ford, and their party identification continued to move toward the Republicans (see table 3).

TABLE 5
GROUP CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRATIC PLURALITY, 1950-1984

	1952-1960	1962-1970	1972-1978	1980	1984
Southern Whites	+12	+ 8	+ 5	+ 5	+ 1
Jews	+ 1	+ 2	+ 1	+ 3	+ 1
Blacks	+ 3	+ 6	+ 7	+ 9	+ 7
All others	+ 1	+ 7	+ 7	+ 3	- 1
Total Democratic Plurality	+17	+23	+20	+20	+ 8

Note: Table numbers are the net contribution of each group to the Democratic plurality as it appears at the bottom of each column. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean.

Southern realignment is the major component of the change in the Democratic-Republican balance. As table 5 shows, the white South was critical to Democratic dominance in the 1950s, providing over 70% of the Democratic plurality. If white southerners had been as Democratic as the average white voter of the period, the Democrats would have enjoyed a more modest four-point to six-point lead (about 48 or 49 to 43 percent). The decline of the Southern Democracy was apparent in the 1960s, if not before. Had it not been for the growth of Democratic strength among blacks and white northerners in the sixties (partly attributable to Goldwater's candidacy in 1964), a decline in Democratic identification would have been visible 20 years ago. The persistence of the 20-point Democratic plurality for the next two decades depended upon blacks and the erosion of Republican identification among northern whites, especially middle and upscale WASPs. When northern whites resumed their slightly

¹¹ The greater correlation between class and party identification that has been noted in recent years (see Edsall, 1984, as an example) is heavily dependent upon these changes among southern whites. The greater Democratic preference of blacks has also played a part in the stronger correlation between class and party preference.

Republican tilt in 1980, and southern whites became equally divided between the parties in 1984, the Democratic lead dropped to only about 8 points, (see table 5) and virtually all of it came from blacks.

Further changes between late 1984 and early 1985, when a GOP plurality was reported by some polls, were not an exclusively southern white phenomenon. The widely reported post-election surge in Republican fortunes depended upon enthusiasm for the GOP among northern whites. However, even these post-1984 changes were insufficient to alter the preeminent place of the South in the transformation of the party coalitions.

The Sources of the Southern Realignment

Contrary to earlier speculation and even some recent essays on the subject, migration did not cause the decline of the Southern Democracy. Native southern whites are and, even in the 1960s and 1970s, were the major component of the region's realignment. Further, while the relative importance of conversion and mobilization in the formation and realignment of party systems is an unsettled question (see Campbell et al., 1960; Przeworski, 1975; Andersen, 1979; Wanat, 1979; Niemi et al., 1980; Erikson and Tedin, 1981; Petrocik, 1981; Wanat and Burke, 1982; Campbell, 1983; and Petrocik and Brown, 1986), the switching of loyalties among older southerners has figured prominently in the realignment of the region.

The Insignificance of Migration. Early studies expected the Democratic bias of the South to change as result of the migration of much less Democratic northern whites. In fact little of the change has depended upon migration. Virtually all of it rests on the increasing Republicanism of native white southerners.¹²

The data in table 6 present the partisanship of three different groups of southern whites—migrants to the region, native residents of the border southern states, and native residents of the ten states of the Deep South for the 1950s, the 1960s, the 1970s, 1980, and 1984. On average, for the decade of the 1950s, migration had reduced the Democratic identification of white southerners about three percentage points, from the 74% Democratic among natives to 71% among all whites in the region. After that point, the effect of migration on the partisanship of the region becomes even smaller. The second half of table 6 summarizes the data

¹² This conclusion is not as contradictory as it seems. Obviously migrants are still more Republican than natives, and they do contribute to the Republicanism of the region. However, migrants since the 1950s are relatively less Republican than migrants who entered the region prior to 1960. As a result, the relative effect of the increase in migrants as a percent of the population is to make the area less Republican than it would be if the recent migrants had retained the Republicanism of previous migrants.

TABLE 6A
CHANGING PARTISANSHIP OF NATIVE SOUTHERN WHITES

	1952-1960		1962-1970		1972-1978		1980		1984	
	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R	D	R
All White Southerners	71	22	60	29	53	32	54	33	45	43
Native Southerners	74	19	63	25	56	29	58	30	47	41
Deep South	78	15	64	22	61	22	60	25	40	47
Border South	62	33	60	32	47	42	51	41	58	34
Non-native South	36	53	34	51	26	56	45	43	40	47

Note: Table entries are percentages. Within any time grouping the numbers would sum to 100% with the inclusion of independents. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean.

TABLE 6B
COMPONENTS OF PARTISAN CHANGE AMONG WHITE SOUTHERNERS

	DEMOCRATS			REPUBLICANS		
	NET CHANGE	CHANGE AMONG: NATIVES	MIGRANTS	NET CHANGE	CHANGE AMONG: NATIVES	MIGRANTS
Change from:						
1950s to 1960s	-11	-11	-2	+7	+6	-2
1960s to 1970s	-7	-7	-8	+3	+4	+5
1970s to 1984	-8	-9	+9	+11	+12	-13

Note: Changes are calculated by subtracting the appropriate percentages. The 11-point estimated total change from the fifties to the sixties among all southerners is calculated by 60% who were self-identified Democrats during 1962-1970 from the 71% Democrat in 1952-1960.

in the first part of the table by decomposing the total change in the partisanship of the region into the contribution of natives and migrants. For every pair of decades, the migrants add one percentage point or less to the total shift. Between the 1950s and the 1960s Democratic identification declined 11 points and Republican affiliation increased 7 points; migrants (who changed 2 points) contributed almost nothing to the net Democratic decline and only 1 of the 7 points of the Republican increase. The pattern of the change from the sixties to the seventies is identical. Between the 1970s and 1984, the relatively weaker Republicanism of the migrants actually produced a roll-back in southern partisanship (although this change may be measurement fluctuation). In the 1950s, Republicans outnumbered Democrats by 12 percentage points among migrants; in 1984 they were only 8 points more numerous.¹³ What might have been a 48-point decline in the Democratic bias of the white South became, instead, a 45-point change.¹⁴

Old Southerners are Republican, Too. Throughout the 1970s, the South was distinctive for the growing Republicanism of its younger cohort. The difference was small, but measurable, and striking for its variance from the national pattern. In the North, independence increased as partisans on both sides declined. In the South, at least a third of the Democratic decline resulted in an increase in Republicans (Petrocik, 1981, pp. 86-87). But that growth in Republican identification was not confined to new cohorts; older white southerners were also more Republican. The trend accelerated in the late 1970s. As table 7 shows, by 1984 the younger cohort of native white southerners was more Republican than Democratic, and the overwhelming (71% to 22%) Democratic allegiance of the pre-1960 cohort had declined to a more modest 52 to 39 percent. The older cohort contributed over 70% of the decline in Democratic identification and more than 80% of the increase in Republican partisanship.

¹³ The net effect of migrants is greater than the apparently modest 4-point difference because migrants have increased as a share of the white population of the south. Once less than 10%, they now number approximately 14% of the white population of the region.

¹⁴ These over-time differences in the partisanship of migrants are small; it is possible that migrants were not a counter-trend during the 1980s; it is certain that they were an insignificant contributor to the decline in the partisanship of the region. (For more on this, see Petrocik, 1981, pp. 85-86. Thad Brown, 1987, also has relevant data on the political consequences of migration.) Wolfinger and Hagen (1985) argue that migration was a major component of partisan change in the South through the late 1970s. They do not present data that are sufficiently detailed to evaluate that claim. It is certainly contradicted by the NES data presented above, which they claim to have used in their analysis. Moreover, on their face the data seem unlikely to support such a conclusion. A combination of the magnitude of the southern white change and the small fraction migrants are of the total population simply would not allow migrants to be so consequential. Other than this discrepancy most of their analysis parallels findings in Petrocik (1981) and Beck (1977).

TABLE 7
EFFECT OF POST-1960 COHORT ON THE REALIGNMENT
OF NATIVE SOUTHERN WHITES AS OF 1984

	1950s	1984		
	ALL VOTERS	THROUGH 1960	VOTERS ENTERING: AFTER 1960	ALL VOTERS
Democrats	71%	52%	38%	45%
Independents	6	9	15	12
Republicans	22	39	46	43
	100%	100%	100%	100%
	TOTAL CHANGE 1950 TO 1984	CONTRIBUTION OF PRE-1960 COHORT	CONTRIBUTION OF POST-1960 COHORT	
Democrats	-26	-19	- 7	
Independents	+ 6	+ 3	+ 3	
Republicans	+21	+17	+ 4	

Note: Numbers in the last two columns do not sum to zero because of rounding errors. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean.

"Total change" is calculated by subtracting the proportions in the "All Voters" column for 1984 from the "All Voters" column for the 1950s. The values are then signed as appropriate. The contribution of the pre-1960s voters is determined by subtracting their proportion of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans in 1984 from the equivalent proportions for the 1950s. The method of defining the cohorts makes this an appropriate calculation. The difference between the percentage point change of the pre-1960s cohort and the total change is the share contributed by the post-1960 cohort. This method of calculating the differences allows the size of groups and their partisanship to enter into the estimate of the change.

Net Effects. Table 8 summarizes the data for the white South, and includes the contribution of migrants. Without migration or the post-1960 voters, there would have been a 36-point shift in the party bias of the white South in favor of the Republicans: Democratic identification would have declined 19 points and Republican identification would have increased 17 points. Voters who entered the electorate after 1960 pushed Democratic identification down a further 7 points and added another 4 points to the Republican proportion. Migration, as noted above, reversed some of these changes, adding a point to the Democrats and subtracting 2 percentage points from Republican identification. (See Norpoth and Rusk, 1982, for their estimates of the components of partisan change.)

TABLE 8
SUMMARY OF THE EFFECT OF THE POST-1960 COHORT AND
MIGRATION ON THE REALIGNMENT OF THE SOUTH, 1950s TO 1984

	PERCENTAGE POINT CHANGE IN:	
	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS
Deep South		
Pre-60 cohort	-12	+19
Post-60 cohort	-19	+ 8
Net Change	-31	+27
Border South		
Pre-60 cohort	- 3	+ 6
Post-60 cohort	- 5	+ 2
Net Change	- 8	+ 8
All White Southerners		
Pre-60 cohort	-18	+18
Post-60 cohort	- 8	+ 4
Immigrants	+ 1	- 2
Net Change	-25	+20

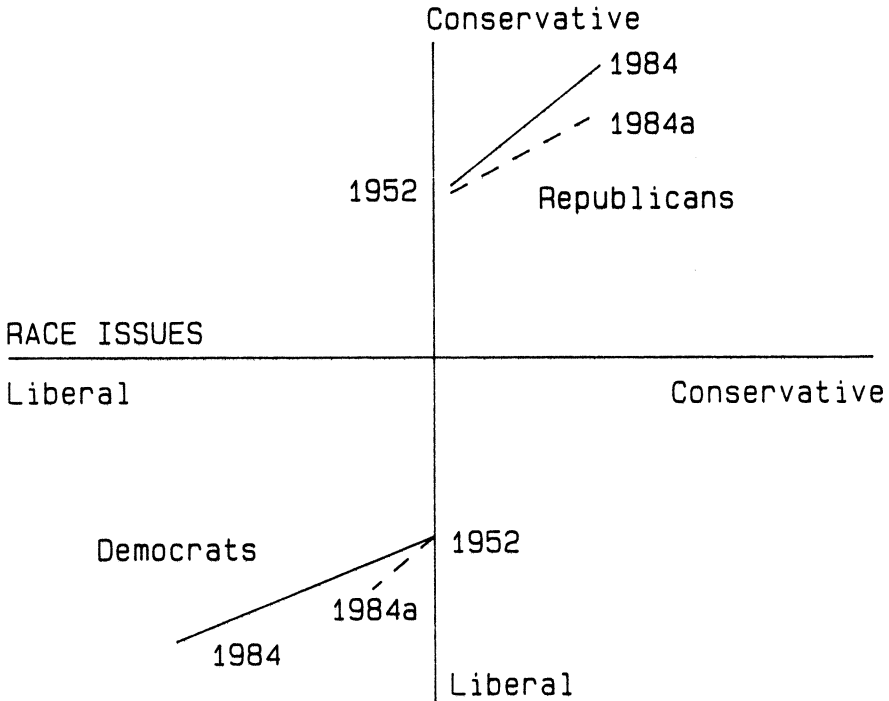
Note: Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean.

THE PROGRAMMATIC ALIGNMENT OF THE PARTIES

This coalitional shift has affected the programmatic distance between the parties on several issues. A complete analysis of the policy consequences of the realignment documented above demands a full treatment by itself (some analysis is presented in Petrocik, 1981), but a brief illustration of what these changes are likely to mean for policy divisions between the parties, especially with regard to race issues, is worthwhile. Consider the data in figure 2.

During the 1950s, Democrats and Republicans differed over questions of economic regulation and social welfare; they were indistinguishable on race issues. By 1984 not only had Democrats and Republicans become more distinctive on welfare questions, but the policy differences between the parties had acquired a racial dimension. While smaller than differences on welfare policy, party differences on race questions were large nonetheless. The realignment is responsible for a significant fraction of this greater programmatic distinctiveness.

FIGURE 2
EFFECT OF REALIGNMENT ON THE
ISSUE PREFERENCES OF PARTY IDENTIFIERS



The solid line in figure 2 connects the race-welfare coordinates for the 1950s with similar coordinates for 1984. The length and slope of the line measures the changes. The hatched line in figure 2 presents the race-welfare coordinates that might have been observed if Democrats and Republicans had retained their New Deal coalitions through 1984.¹⁵ The realignment increased the programmatic differences between the parties.

¹⁵ The second set of coordinates is created by weighting the 1984 data so that each group is represented among all Democratic and Republican identifiers in proportion to their share of the parties in the years from 1952 through 1960.

TABLE 9
 REPUBLICAN VOTE OF PARTY COALITIONS GROUPS, 1952-1984

	1952- 1956	1960	1964	ELECTION YEAR:				1980	1984
				1968a	1968b	1972	1976		
White Northern Protestants	77%	79%	51%	75%	76%	77%	64%	66%	76%
Catholics	61	19	27	41	45	67	48	57	65
Northern Union households	50	37	18	51	57	60	41	43	48
White Southerners	50	53	42	65	75	78	57	60	69
Jews	25	11	11	7	16	31	29	37	31
Blacks	28	29	1	3	3	13	5	7	9

Note: 1968a presents the Republican vote only; 1968b presents Republican vote and the Wallace vote of the group.

The effect is uneven. The GOP, even without its enlarged white southern constituency, would have become more conservative on both race and welfare issues; white southerners simply increased GOP conservatism on welfare issues. The Democrats, however, have become much more liberal, reflecting—in part—the decline of white southerners among Democratic identifiers and the increased contribution of blacks.¹⁶

ELECTIONS AND THE NEW COALITIONS

The group voting patterns for 1984 and other recent presidential elections reflect these changes. Reagan's vote in 1984 (and in 1980) was typical of the vote of Republican candidates. His 76% support among WASPs in 1984 was typical of what winning Republican candidates have received from this group. Seven of the last ten Republican candidates drew at least 75% of the votes of WASPS. In 1980 Reagan did not do quite so well with these voters; nor did Ford in 1976, but both carried two-thirds of the group. Only the hapless Goldwater failed to carry WASPs by a strong majority. Catholics and union members were unusually supportive of Reagan, but, as table 9 shows, their Republican vote was not unprecedented. White southern support for Reagan was also quite normal. The "solid South" has been solidly ambiguous for thirty years. Eisenhower split their votes in the 1950s, Nixon won with a small majority in 1960, Wallace held Nixon to 50% in 1968, and native-son Carter kept Ford's majority to 55% in 1976. On the other hand, Nixon won with a large majority in 1972 and Reagan carried the white southerners with wide margins in both of his elections. Goldwater is the only recent Republican presidential

¹⁶ This effect should not be surprising. Racial conflict precipitated southern white flight from the Democratic party. But the transformation has been sustained by other issues, and by the recognition of white southerners that the Democrats do not represent their more conservative positions. Southern whites have not become more conservative in recent years. Relative to the national norm they are actually less conservative than they were 25 years ago. But in 1984 they do not believe, as they did in the 1950s, that the Democratic party better represents their preferences on the issues. The effect of their migration out of the Democratic party has been to intensify the liberal preferences of Democrats on social welfare and, especially, racial questions. This changed perception of the issue stance of the parties and its role in realigning the white South appears in chapters 8 and 9 of Petrocik (1981). A similar analysis of the role of issues in the realignment of the parties appears in Carmines and Stimson (1981). Wolfinger and Hagen (1985) emphasize the substantial similarity of the attitudes of southern whites with that of other groups in the electorate. Their conclusion seems to be based on comparisons between older and younger southern whites, and on the apparent similarity between southern whites and other white voters in the correlation of the issues with the vote. Their findings do not bear on the importance of race and other issue perceptions of the parties among southerners during the 1960s and 1970s. Also, while younger southern whites are, as noted above, more liberal than older southern whites they are still less liberal than comparable non-southern whites.

candidate to lose the white southern vote. These party identification data simply illustrate that southern partisanship has begun to match southern presidential voting, with consequences for other offices. Only blacks and Jews have remained staunchly Democratic.

The 1984 election was an unexceptional expression of a realignment which has been underway for several years. Reagan's success in 1984 resulted from his substantial appeal to every group which has supported Republican candidates in recent presidential elections. He did not construct an unusual winning coalition; 1984 was not an unanticipated or "critical" election; it was one in a series. The new party alignment pits a Republican core of middle and up-scale northern WASPS and southern whites against a Democratic core of blacks and Jews. Union families and

TABLE 10
THE GROUP FOUNDATIONS OF THE PARTIES, 1984

	PARTY IDENTIFICATION			GROUP PROFILE OF THE PARTIES	
	DEM	IND	REP	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS
White Northern					
Protestants					
Upper SES	28	4	69	2%	6%
Middle SES	28	9	63	7	20
Lower SES	38	10	53	6	10
White Southerners					
Border states					
Middle-Upper SES	54	9	38	5	4
Lower SES	61	6	33	5	3
Deep South	41	9	50	6	9
Middle-Upper SES					
Lower SES	42	18	40	6	7
Immigrants	35	22	43	2	2
Catholics					
Upper SES	42	11	47	6	8
All others	55	12	33	7	5
Jews	73	8	19	3	1
Blacks	79	12	10	17	2
Northern Union					
households	52	10	39	13	12
Hispanics	57	19	24	7	4
All others				8	7
Total				100%	100%

Note: The first three columns can be summed to 100% horizontally. Leaning partisans are considered identifiers of the party toward which they lean.

Catholics represent a target group for both parties; neither can depend upon them for a majority although the Democrats are stronger with both, especially union families. Table 10 summarizes the partisanship of the groups and their share of the new party coalitions as of 1984.

Southern Realignment and the Election of 1986

The parties reassembled their normal coalitions in 1986. Typically Republican voters rallied around Republican candidates; typically Democratic voters supported Democratic candidates.¹⁷ The correspondence between the vote and partisanship was very strong, with only 11% of Democrats voting for Republican Congressional candidates and less than 10% of Republicans voting for Democrats. Party loyalty in the Senate and gubernatorial elections, though not quite as high overall and differing from state to state, was sufficiently great to allow the 1986 campaigns to be characterized as "normal" off-year elections (however frenzied the candidates and parties in their attempt to win the Senate seats at risk).

The "normality" of the outcome is apparent in table 11, which compares the 1986 House, Senate, and Gubernatorial vote of party coalition groups with their presidential votes from 1960 through 1984. The votes of most of the groups match their recent record, and none significantly departs from the historical record.

Republican candidates received three-fifths of the votes of WASPs, with slightly greater support for House candidates and, perhaps, slightly less support for Republican gubernatorial candidates. Recent Republican presidential candidates have done better among them, but the similarity between 1986 and previous elections is undeniable. The Catholic vote was Republican. The 53% support Republican Congressional candidates received from Catholics was exactly the vote to be expected given their partisan balance.

Democrats enjoyed overwhelming support from blacks, Jews, and Hispanics. Union members, reverting to an earlier Democratic affinity, gave less than 40% of their votes to Republicans, a decline that is more than an off-year sag. A comparison of their vote with their partisanship shows an eight-point shortfall. It seems likely that the vote among union members this year registered dissatisfaction with the Republicans.

The striking feature of table 11, given the media emphasis on Democratic success in the south, is the overwhelming Republican vote

¹⁷ References to 1986 data other than the CBS exit polls refer to an election-eve survey of 1201 respondents conducted by Market Opinion Research of Detroit as a part of their post-election analysis. This was a PPS survey that was stratified by region. Sex quotas were imposed on the sample, but otherwise random procedures were used for respondent selection within households that were called by a random-digit dialing procedure.

TABLE 11
 REPUBLICAN VOTE OF PARTY COALITIONS GROUPS, 1952-1986

	ELECTION YEAR:							HOUSE	SENATE
	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984		
White Northern Protestants	79%	51%	75%	77%	64%	66%	76%	62%	58%
Catholics	19	27	41	67	48	57	65	53	52
Northern Union households	37	18	51	60	41	43	48	36	34
White Southerners	53	42	65	78	57	60	69	61	64
Jews	11	11	7	31	29	37	31	25	34
Blacks	29	1	3	13	5	7	9	9	8
Total Republican Vote	49	39	44	61	49	51	59	48	47

Note: 1988 percentages present the Republican vote. The vote for Wallace and Humphrey is the missing percentage. The 1986 data are from an election eve survey conducted by Market Opinion Research as a part of its post-election analysis.

of white southerners. There is no evidence that southern whites have returned or are returning to their Democratic partisanship of an earlier era. On the contrary, all of the data indicate a continuation of their preference for the Republicans (although, to be sure, not always Republican candidates, especially at the local level). As a group they were at least as Republican as WASPs, the traditional Republican core constituency.

Why the Southern Republicans Lost

Republicans lost the Senate races in the south not because the realignment of the past two decades was reversed, but because the parallel effort to enfranchise southern blacks has been exceptionally successful. The CBS exit poll of southern Senate races found whites voting 61% to 38% for Denton in Alabama, 59% to 39% for Mattingly in Georgia, 60% to 39% for Moore in Louisiana, and 56% to 42% for Broyhill in North Carolina. In the gubernatorial races they voted 68% to 30% for Hunt in Alabama, 55% to 43% for Martinez in Florida, and 58% to 39% for Clement in Texas. In 1986, blacks—lopsidedly Democratic—turned out at a high enough rate to overcome the Republican advantage among whites.

Table 12 summarizes the data and illustrates the structure which yielded the 1986 results and which is likely to handicap future Republican statewide candidates in the south. The first column reports the share of the electorate that was black, the next two report their vote. The last column is particularly significant because it indicates the size of the handicap with which Republicans begin every election in these states because of the Democratic loyalty of blacks. Consider Louisiana, where the Democratic advantage was greatest in 1986: black voters elected John Breaux. Given the overwhelmingly Democratic commitment of blacks, Breaux effectively had almost half of a winning vote before the polls opened (25% of the total vote was blacks voting for Breaux). To win, Henson Moore had to hold the non-black vote for Breaux to about 34%. The 39% of the white vote that Breaux actually achieved was more than he needed to win. Louisiana is not unique. Denton started 19 points behind in Alabama, Mattingly began 18 points behind in Georgia. None was able to overcome these deficits because the electorate was not so polarized that whites were prepared to vote Republican as heavily as blacks voted Democrat.

Rules of Thumb for Southern Republicans

In the future, in the absence of a racial polarization in the vote and in the presence of similar black-white turnout rates, Republican statewide candidates will be severely handicapped whenever the black population

approaches 20%. In practice, this means that virtually every southern state and several border states as well (e.g., Maryland) will be marginal Democratic states despite massive changes in their underlying partisanship. To succeed, Republicans must depend upon atypical support from blacks or huge white majorities. For example, Thad Cochran's win in Mississippi in 1984 was made possible by an 81 to 10% vote among whites. With a 30% black electorate—voting 80% for Winter (and likely to vote equally Democratic in most elections)—Cochran began the election about 24 points behind. To overcome this disadvantage he needed to hold Winter to 37% of the white votes. He did better than that, and won.

TABLE 12
SOUTHERN BLACK VOTING AND ITS IMPACT
ON STATEWIDE ELECTIONS IN 1986

	PERCENT OF VOTERS	VOTE		DEMOCRATIC ADVANTAGE
		REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	
Senate Races				
Alabama	21	7	88	19
Florida	10	16	80	8
Georgia	24	18	75	18
Louisiana	29	12	85	25
North Carolina	16	6	88	14
Gubernatorial Races				
Alabama	21	4	91	19
Florida	10	10	85	9
Texas	9	21	74	7

Source: CBS News Exit Polls.

In general it seems to be the case that Republicans must draw in the area of 65% of the non-black vote to win in any of the heavily black southern states. Where this target is missed—as it was in 1986 in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Florida (where Hawkins lost the white vote)—Republicans cannot win despite the continuing (and probably increasing) vitality of the Republican party.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of the social group foundations of the American parties provides both a descriptive and a theoretical improvement over discussions of realignment which focus upon a search for a new majority

party. Theoretically, the recognition that a realignment can occur without the emergence of a new majority party incorporates the dominant social cleavage theory of electoral parties with analyses of party system change. All too frequently the latter have been dealt with *sui generis*, as a phenomenon worth attention simply because it involves a major political institution. While the social value of an institution should be sufficient to legitimize attention to it, social value will not provide a conceptual grasp or, perhaps, even the practical implications of what is recorded.

The wait for a new majority party can too easily blind scholars to the merit of investigating the dynamics and consequences of the changes described above. The wait for a realignment should end because one has occurred and is continuing. Whether it will yield a Republican majority remains to be seen, but that it has significantly affected the parties and conditioned recent presidential elections is beyond question. If, therefore, the post-1984 surge in Republican fortunes recedes (as it seems to have done as of late 1986), leaving the Democrats with only a reduced plurality, the non-critical realignment of the last two decades will not become insignificant. Although the party balance may continue to favor the Democrats, the programmatic underpinnings of the new alignment distinguish it from the New Deal alignment. To the extent that party systems are notable for their axes of agreement and cleavage as well as for their party balance, the United States has undergone the formation of a new party system, and the altered coalitions are the core of the transformation.

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