Purpose. The purpose of our paper is to analyze changes in the American electorate and how they are changing the American party system itself.

Thesis. Our thesis is that party politics in America is responding not only to the forces of cognitive mobilization and dealignment but also to political polarization and partisan sorting. We attribute these trends to rising educational levels, the growth of information and interest in public affairs, demographic changes in the racial-ethnic and religious makeup of the electorate, and the growing salience of social identities in American politics.

How has the American voter changed? Among other things we argue that the American electorate has become:

- More racially and ethnically diverse
  - See Table 1, which displays the changing racial and ethnic distribution of the United State from 1960-2010.
  - See Figures 1 and 2 that plot the steady rise in an index of racial and ethnic fragmentation.

- More inclined to identify with parties on the basis of their racial and ethnic identities and vote for their parties’ candidates on the basis of them.
  - See Table 2, which breaks down Democratic and Republican identification by race and ethnicity.
  - See Table 3, which breaks down party identification by ethnicity.
  - See Figure 3, which shows the growing influence of race in presidential elections.
  - See Figure 4, which breaks down the influence of racial context and identity on the presidential vote.
    - Differences in racial identity account for about 26 percent of the variation
in the Republican vote, while differences in racial context account for about 11 percent of the difference

- See Figure 5, which shows the influence of racial context and identity on party identification.

- Differences in racial identity account for about 5.4 percent of the difference in party identification (scale of 1-7), while differences in racial context account for about 12% of the difference.

- More cognitively mobilized - higher education and greater political interest.

- More independent and less inclined to identify with a political party.

  - In *The Apartisan American*, Russell Dalton reports that approximately 25 percent of the electorate identified themselves as independent in 1952. In 2008 about 40 percent did. But Figure 5 shows what happens when you do not call leaning Democrats and leaning Republicans independents. Then the number of pure independents increases to the early 1980s and then decreases over time.

- More issue oriented

  - Our research shows that the level of economic dissatisfaction always hurts the party in power in the White House and that the electorate is becoming more ideological over time (See Table 4).

- More likely to be activated and mobilized by the political parties and presidential candidates.

  - Table 5 shows the proportion of respondents in NES surveys who report being contacted by either party and the inter-correlations of being contacted with voting in presidential elections.

- More likely to identify with liberal and conservative ideologies that sort them into the Democratic and Republican parties.

  - In *The Polarized Public?* Alan Abramowitz reports an unusually high correlation of .94 between his measures of political polarization and partisan sorting for respondents in NES surveys who say they voted. He measures polarization by the standard deviation of voters on the liberal-conservative ideology scale and sorting by the difference in the mean ideological scores of Democratic and Republican voters. Though recent voting studies suggest that polarization causes sorting and not the other way around, he does not attribute causality to either variable.
Instead, he leaves open the possibility that the correlation could also be due to other causal factors.

**How has the party system changed?** Paralleling changes in the American electorate, the party system has also changed in important and fundamental ways. Among other things, our research shows:

- More electoral volatility up to the early 1980s, but then declining volatility with rising political polarization.
  - In *The Apartisan American*, Russell Dalton contends that electoral volatility has trended upward in “nineteen established democracies” since the late 1970s (Figure 9.9). But he does not include data for the U. S. He measures electoral volatility by the average change in party vote shares. To assess his claim, we gathered data on the electoral votes that the presidential nominees for the two major received from 1960-2008. We plot the swings in Figure 6.
  - This chart suggests it increased sharply in the U. S. up until the early 1980s with the landslide elections of Johnson, Nixon, and Reagan and then declined sharply after that. The sharp increase was also made possible by the growing numbers of independent voters nationally and partisan sub-realignments among white southerners and northern white ethnics. The decrease also seems to support Abramowitz’s thesis of political polarization and partisan sorting.

- The emergence of the well-known red state vs. blue state dichotomy and the creation of a growing number of states that are safe for both parties.
  - This dichotomy and the creation of electoral lock boxes can be seen in the video that shows how the difference in the statewide partisan vote difference for the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates has grown between 1960 and 2008 (Charts 1-14).
  - To measure the growing gap in the distribution of the electoral vote, we computed the standard deviation of the difference in the proportion of the presidential vote received by the Republican and Democratic candidates in each state. Then we correlated it with time. The results indicate a moderately strong correlation of .44.

- Lower public approval ratings for the party in government
  - According to the latest polls reported by Real Clear Politics (10-27-13), even the Democrats can not field a president that gets even a bare majority of support, while congressional approval is at an historic low.
- Presidential approval: About 45 percent approve of Obama’s performance in office. Almost 51 percent disapprove.

- Congressional approval: A little over 8 percent approve. Almost 85 percent disapprove.

- Only 20 percent of all Americans thing the country is headed in the right direction. Some 73 percent feel it is headed in the wrong direction.

Other changes in the party system:

- More polarized decision-making in the legislative and executive branches
  - Whether measured by party cohesion and unity scores or DW-Nominate scores, party unity and the ideological gap between the two parties has been on the rise since the early 1970s.

- Greater centralization of power in the party in government and the rise in power of party leaders.

- Effective one party control in many states like California and Global counties like Los Angeles, California with large numbers of immigrants.
  - This may also help explain why we have witnessed rampant political corruption in some states like New York and counties like Cook County, Illinois, and Cuyahoga County, Ohio, that are under effective one-party control.

- More narrowly based, as opposed to broadly based, political coalitions
  - Howard Dean’s derogatory comment about the Republican Party being the party of white Protestants
  - Exit poll data which suggest that the Democratic Party has become the majority party of political and racial-ethnic minorities: White liberals, blacks, young people, single women, and Hispanics

- More programmatic and ideological parties
  - Litmus tests for 10 Democratic aspirants in 2008: Lined up in lock step over the issues of abortion, gay rights and affirmative action
  - Litmus tests for Republican aspirants in 2012: Held almost identical positions on being pro-life, pro-defense, and their support of limited government.
Stronger parties who are able to implement their agendas when they control both branches of government—e.g. as in congressional passage and implementation of Obama Care— but more dissatisfaction among independents and members of the opposition party.

What’s Behind the Changes? We attribute changes in the American electorate and the party system to three primary factors:

- Direct primaries that elevate the political preferences of conservative and liberal ideologues.
- Changes in American culture that are making it more racially and ethnically diverse and more socially unequal
  - Figures 7 and 8 reveal strong correlations between Abramowitz’s measure of political sorting and indices of racial-ethnic fragmentation and income inequality.
  - Figures 9 and 10 reveal strong correlations between Abramowitz’s measure of political polarization and indices of racial-ethnic fragmentation and income inequality.
- The politics of ethnic nepotism and competition
  - In Figure 10 we present a causal diagram that displays a possible causal logic that may be driving political polarization and partisan sorting.
  - Following Martin Marger and Tatu Vanhanen, we assume that in any ethnically plural society there is ethnic competition by virtue of ethnic nepotism. According to Vanhanen, ethnic nepotism is the universal tendency of people to favor members of their own racial and ethnic group. He argues that it is ingrained in human nature because it derives from Darwinian natural selection. The survivors today are those whose forebears favored their kin, next of kin, and extended kinship groups.
  - Americans have been sorting themselves culturally since the founding period (see Figure 11).

Conclusions and Implications.

- A continuation of current immigration policies that will make the U. S. even more diverse, polarized, and sorted.
- Party identifications and voting behavior that will be shaped more and more by racial and
ethnic differences.

- A growing diversity that will accelerate the marginalization of the Republican Party in state and national politics.

- A growing instability in American politics that will be reflected in continuing episodes of government gridlock, political stalemate, and the continuing erosion of the social welfare state.
Thesis and Arguments

Thesis: Party politics in America is responding not only to the forces of cognitive mobilization and dealignment but also to political polarization and partisan sorting.

Arguments: Attribute these trends to

- Rising educational levels and the growth of information and interest in public affairs
- Direct primaries and the dominance of ideologues
- Demographic changes in the racial-ethnic and religious makeup of the electorate
- Growing salience of social identities in American politics
- The politics of ethnic nepotism and the BIG SORT
How the American Voter Has Changed

- More racially and ethnically diverse
- More inclined to identify with parties and vote on the basis of their racial-ethnic identities
- More cognitively mobilized
- More independent
- More issue oriented
- More politically mobilized
- More ideological
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian(^a)</th>
<th>Native American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>1970(^b)</td>
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<td>11.1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.3</td>
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<td>1980(^c)</td>
<td>79.6</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
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<td>2000(^c)</td>
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<td>3.7</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
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<td>2010(^d)</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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\(^a\)Asian includes Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders  
\(^b\)Data from Census Bureau, Table 1. United States-Race and Hispanic Origin 1790-1990  
\(^d\)Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010 (March 2011)
Index of Racial Fragmentation

0
0.05
0.1
0.15
0.2
0.25
0.3
0.35
0.4
0.45

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<th>Percent Republican</th>
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<td>All</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>91.0</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>85.6</td>
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<td>1968</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>82.3</td>
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<td>1976</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>37.8</td>
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## Party Identification by Ethnicity

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<th>Democrat</th>
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<td>53.3</td>
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<td>12.3</td>
<td>56.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<td>84.4</td>
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Intercorrelations of Republican Vote with Race, Religion, and Social Class
Correlation of White Identity and Republican Vote by Racial Context

Level of Fragmentation in County

Bottom 25 percent | Middle 50 percent | Top 25 percent
### Intercorrelations of Republican Vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Conservative Ideology</th>
<th>Economic Dissatisfaction</th>
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<td>1972</td>
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<td>--</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>-.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>-.55**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>-.15***</td>
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### Intercorrelation between Contact and Turnout

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<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>0.24</td>
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Electoral Vote Totals by Party and Year

Electoral College Votes

- Dem EV
- Rep EV


Electoral College Votes Y-axis

Vote Margins
Lower Public Approval

• Presidential approval
  – 45% approve
  – 51% disapprove

• Congressional approval
  – 8% approve
  – 85% disapprove

• Country headed in right vs. wrong direction
  – 20% say right direction
  – 73% say wrong direction
What’s Behind the Changes?

• Direct primaries dominated by conservative and liberal ideologues
• Growing diversity and income inequality
• The politics of ethnic nepotism and competition
Political Sorting and Racial Fragmentation

![Graph showing the relationship between Republican-Democratic means and Index of Racial Fragmentation with data points for years 1972 to 2008. The graph includes a trend line with an R^2 value of 0.64.]
Political Sorting and Income Inequality

- Scatter plot showing the relationship between Republican-Democratic means and Income Inequality from 1972 to 2008.
- Linear regression line with an R² value of 0.63.
Polarization and Income Inequality

![Graph showing the relationship between polarization and income inequality with data points for selected years.]
Evolution and the Big Sort

- Ethnic Nepotism
- Darwinian Natural Selection
- Ethnic Competition
- Social Inequality
- Cultural Conflict
- Social Sorting
- Political Polarization
- Partisan Sorting
Regional Subcultures of the U.S.
Conclusions and Implications

• More immigration, diversity, polarization and sorting
• Growing influence of racial and ethnic differences on party identifications and voting behavior
• Continued marginalization of the Republican Party in state and national politics
• Growing political instability