The Rise of the Cultural Voter and
What It Means for the American Party System

Abstract. Over the past 40 years, cultural differences and issues have come to play a central role in the outcome of presidential elections and how American voters view the two major parties and their candidates. Their electoral significance derives from the differential turnout rates of different racial-ethnic and religious groups, differences in state and county turnout rates, and how certain cultural traditions and customs, such as religiosity, contribute to the mobilization of voters. Their strategic significance lies in how the Republicans have used them to sunder the New Deal coalition and pick the Democratic lock on both the White House and Congress. In particular, Republican candidates have been able to drive a cultural wedge between white southerners and white ethnics, on the one hand, and liberals and racial minorities, on the other. Their political significance lies in how American voters have begun to supplement, and often replace, old class-based identities with new cultural identities that are rooted in America s growing racial-ethnic and religious diversity. In the 2004 presidential elections, the issues that mattered most to voters were moral issues, cited by 22 percent of exit poll respondents, followed by voter concerns about the economy and jobs, terrorism, and the war in Iraq. But the outcome of this election, more than any other before it, revolved around new culturally-related issues of faith, family, integrity, and trust. Perhaps the Republican trump card in this election were white-evangelical Christians who constituted almost one out of every four voters. However, the emerging wild card in American politics is racial diversity. As America continues to diversify through expansionist immigration policies, ever-increasing proportions of the American electorate will reside in more racially diverse counties. As this happens, the American voter will become more and more sensitized to racial and ethnic divisions and less and less concerned about divisions within Christianity and social class inequalities. By implication, voters will pay less heed to substantive issues and procedural issues of political accountability and place greater stock in electing candidates, and supporting parties, who reflect their racial and ethnic identities. These trends in turn suggest that the presidential vote and party loyalties will become more and more polarized along racial and ethnic lines. Finally, the evidence suggests that racial diversity will accentuate white support for Republican nominees and attenuate it for Democratic nominees. At the same time, it will increase Democratic identifications and decrease Republican identifications. In the short run, the Republican Party should remain competitive in presidential and congressional elections. But as the new immigrants are politically mobilized, the Democratic Party should eventually be restored to majority status. However, in the long run, the country's growing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity should create strong, if not irresistible, pressures for an ethnically-based, multi-party system.

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Over the past 40 years, cultural differences and issues have come to play a central role in the outcome of presidential elections and how American voters view the two major parties and their candidates.

Their electoral significance derives from the differential turnout rates of different racial-ethnic and religious groups, differences in state and county turnout rates, and how certain cultural traditions and customs, such as religiosity, contribute to the mobilization of voters.(Green and Waldman 2005). For instance, in the 1988 presidential election the validated turnout rates for mainline voters–people of British, German, and Scandinavian ancestry who are also the most likely to vote Republican–were on average over 10 percent higher than white-ethnic voters, over 24 percent higher than assimilated "American" voters, over 27 percent higher than African-American voters, over 29 percent higher than Latino-American voters, and over 32 percent higher than Asian-American voters. Ironically, Asian-American voters rank highest in overall educational attainment among the races and second-highest in income. Clearly their low turnout rates can not be explained by class-based interpretations. And contrary to conventional wisdom (Teixeira 1987, 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), the best predictor of individual voting turnout from 1960-1988 is not education, but age (Lieske 2005b).

Their strategic significance lies in how the Republicans have used them to sunder the New Deal coalition and pick the Democratic lock on both the White House and Congress. In particular, Republican candidates have driven a cultural wedge between white southerners and the so-called white ethnics, on the one hand, and liberals and racial minorities, on the other.

Their political significance lies in how American voters have begun to supplement, and often replace, old class-based identities with new cultural identities that are rooted in America's growing racial-ethnic and religious diversity (Lieske 1991, 2005a).

In developing these themes, I will first discuss the causal relationship between American political culture and voting behavior as well as the historical changes in culture that have contributed to the rise of the cultural voter in American politics. Then I will demonstrate how aggregate differences in turnout at the state and county level are linked to contextual differences in general and sub-cultural and racial differences in particular. I will also demonstrate how cultural and sub-cultural effects hold up in the face of controls for all of the factors that are thought to influence turnout at the individual level and how they affect the probability of voting.

Next I will show how racial- and ethnic-based identities have come to supplant social class differences in presidential elections (Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Lieske 1991, 2005a; Leege, Wald, Krueger, and Mueller 2002: Mellow 2005).[1] This development will be linked to the exploitation of the race issue by Democratic and Republican presidential candidates as well as the effects of expansionist immigration policies in diversifying American society and sensitizing voters to racial and ethnic divisions. I will also show how racial diversity tends to accentuate white support for Republican nominees and attenuate it for Democratic nominees, but then how at the same time it increases Democratic identifications and decreases Republican identifications.

Finally I will explore the cultural implications of the 2004 elections and what the rise of

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[1]See Stonecash (2000) for an opposing point of view.

the cultural voter means for the future of the American party system.

The Rise of the Cultural Voter

To begin, what is culture? Why does it matter? And who is the cultural voter? Fundamentally, culture can be conceived as "a way of life" and a system of shared values that legitimate preferred social relationships (Wildavsky, 1987). Culture matters in American politics because it helps shape: (1) people's social identities, (2) societal norms of behavior, and (3) prevailing standards of political legitimacy (Dreitzel, 1977; Wildavsky 1987). Since these tend to vary by state and region, cultural scholars like Daniel Elazar have found it useful to distinguish political subcultures from each other. According to Elazar (1970), a political subculture consists of the political values, beliefs, attitudes, and patterned forms of behavior that differentiate a geographical grouping of people.

What appears to differentiate people for the most part are their racial and ethnic origins, religion, social class, historical settlement patterns, dialect, and regionalism. Based on the historical and cultural differences that distinguish three early waves of British settlement to the United States, Elazar (1984, 1994) has identified three core subcultures–respectively the moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic–that interacted with each other, and then with later waves, to form nine distinctive subcultures that represent dominant and subordinate mixtures of his three core subcultures.[2]

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[2]Unfortunately, Elazar's typology does not include the Border peoples, who constitute the fourth and by far the largest wave of British immigrants (Fischer 1989).

What mostly distinguishes one subculture from another are the dominant racial-ethnic groups and religious belief systems that are found in each subculture. But as Rodney Hero (1998) has noted, there is a moderate to strong correlation at the state level between Sharkansky's unidimensional measure of Elazar's typology and a summated index of racial and ethnic diversity.[3] Thus Elazar's moralistic subculture is the most racially homogeneous; his traditionalistic subculture is the most diverse; and his individualistic subculture falls in between.

Based on these theoretical distinctions, cultural voters can be viewed first, as individuals whose voting behavior is influenced by their social identities, prevailing cultural norms, and standards of legitimacy. Based on Elazar's (1984, 1994) theory, for example, voting turnout should be highest in moralistic subcultures, which are assumed to emphasize the social and political obligations of democratic citizenship; next highest in individualistic subcultures, which are assumed to stress the material and differential benefits of organized political activity; and lowest in traditionalistic subcultures, which are assumed to be the most radically individualistic in outlook and therefore the least committed to civic norms of participation.

Second, cultural voters can be seen as individuals who vote for political candidates and identify with political parties primarily on the basis of their cultural identifications, i.e., their racial-ethnic and religious identities. To explain how the cultural identifications of voters are

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[3] Hero (1998, 159) reports that state minority diversity accounts for 41 percent of the variation in the political culture continuum using 1980 data but only 25 percent of the variation using 1990 data. This is probably due to the time-bound nature (circa 1966) of Elazar's typology.

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translated into political identifications, cultural scholars have identified three primary mechanisms. The first emphasizes the influence of positive and negative reference group feelings in how voters view candidates and the parties. Are they like "us" or "them"? The second stresses the long-term influence of religious belief systems. Presumably voters with strong religious beliefs will gravitate toward candidates and parties who either share or elevate their religious (or secular) values and practices. The final stresses the never-ending struggle for cultural dominance. Whose values and "ways of life" will be favored or preferred by established political processes, governmental institutions, and public policies? And what groups will be best positioned to reap the benefits of American citizenship and pass them on to their posterity?

So when did the cultural voter emerge in American politics? One answer is that the cultural voter has always been around in American politics (Kelley 1979). It is just that American political scientists--given their largely 20th century time horizons, liberal ideologies, and class-based perspectives--have not been able, or willing, to recognize him or her with the same facility as historians. A second answer is that some political scientists, most notably those who studied southern politics and political machines during the old Gilded Age, saw clear examples of strong and enduring patterns of racial and ethnic bloc voting (Key, 1949; Wolfinger 1962; Matthews and Prothro 1966). A third answer is that with the notable exceptions of the Border and Deep South, cultural voting patterns largely died out during the New Deal era and did not reappear again until the late 1950s and early 1960s in response to the emergence of the civil rights and social-cultural issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Lieske 1991; Abramowitz 1994; Leege, Wald, Krueger, and Mueller, 2002).

The emergence of these issues can be attributed to three key developments in American

politics. The first consists of changes in the national political context that were made possible by postwar prosperity, the institutionalization of the social welfare state, and the onset of the Cold War. These served to neutralize the social welfare and foreign policy issues and make them bipartisan. The second was a growing mobilization and counter-mobilization of racial and ethnic groups by presidential candidates and the civil rights movement. During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, liberals in the Democratic Party aggressively courted the votes of racial and ethnic minorities. These overtures in turn spawned a political reaction among Republican conservatives like Barry Goldwater, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan, who began to woo disgruntled Democrats, primarily white southerners and white ethnics. A final impetus has been the gradual racial transformation and diversification of American society through expansionist immigration policies that will reduce whites to minority status by the middle of the 21st century. We can now examine the evidence for the rise of the cultural voter in American electoral politics.

Cultural and Sub-cultural Effects on Voting Turnout

State-level Results

Table 1 presents the results of regressing turnout with selected indicators of economic development, political culture, and social diversity at the state level. Clearly the best predictors of turnout are those that reflect a state's political culture and its social diversity. As expected, states with moralistic subcultures and predominantly white and culturally homogeneous populations tend to have significantly higher rates of turnout than states with individualistic or traditionalistic subcultures and large concentrations of racial and ethnic minorities. In fact, the correlations for

Sharkansky's (1969) unidimensional index of Elazar's typology and percent minority appear to be mirror opposites of each other.

Table 1 about here

The strong negative correlation between turnout and an index of southernness probably reflects both the higher concentrations of racial minorities and the more radically individualistic subcultures that are found in racially bifurcated southern states. The moderate, positive correlations between turnout and prior support for the progressive candidacy of Robert LaFollete as well as contemporary support for female state legislators appear to reflect the enduring legacy of progressive politics in states with moralistic subcultures.

Because some of the indicators of social diversity are linear combinations of each other, I restricted the regression analysis to standard indicators of economic development, political culture, and social diversity that are the most strongly correlated with voting turnout. They are respectively: (1) the violent crime rate, (2) Skarkansky's (1969) unidimensional index of Elazar's typology,[4] and (3) percent minority. The three indicators are able to account for almost three-fifths of the total variation in turnout among the American states. Based on a comparison of the standardized regression coefficients, it is clear that differences in political culture are slightly more important in predicting differences in voting turnout than differences in minority concentration.

Since the standardized regression coefficient for the violent crime rate is not statistically significant, I explored the joint effects of political culture and minority concentration by means of

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[4]The indexed values are: (1) traditionalistic, (2) traditionalistic-individualistic, (3) traditionalistic-moralistic, (4) individualistic-traditionalistic, (5) individualistic, (6) individualistic-moralistic, (7) moralistic-individualistic, and (8) moralistic.

covariance analysis. To simplify the analysis, I collapsed Elazar's traditionalistic, traditionalistic-individualistic, and traditionalistic-moralistic classifications into a combined "traditionalistic" category; his individualistic-traditionalistic, individualistic, and individualistic-moralistic classifications into an "individualistic" category; and his moralistic-individualistic and moralistic classifications into a "moralistic" category. The tests for differential slopes, differential intercepts, and differential slopes and intercepts were statistically significant at the .032, .002, and .001 respectively. Table 2 presents the results of regressing turnout on percent minority for each of the three dominant types of political subculture. Figure 1 displays the three linear equations that were fitted to the data.

Table 2 and Figure 1 about here

The correlation results show that minority concentration is strongly associated with declining turnout in moralistic and individualistic subcultures but only weakly associated with it in traditionalistic subcultures. The regression results show that each percentage increase in minority concentration reduces voting turnout on average by one-half percent in moralistic subcultures, by about one-fourth percent in individualistic subcultures, and hardly at all in traditionalistic subcultures. This suggests that racial and ethnic diversity attenuates turnout the most in moralistic subcultures, next most in individualistic subcultures, and only marginally in traditionalistic subcultures. Unfortunately, the aggregate data do not allow us to infer whether the depressant effects of diversity on turnout are due to the lower odds of electing minority candidates, the greater cultural isolation of racial minorities in moralistic and individualistic subcultures, or some other contextual dynamic.

County-level Results

Table 3 presents the results of correlating and regressing county turnout data on selected

indicators of racial diversity, political culture, and partisanship.[5] Since the variables that measure

party registration and party vote preference are linear combinations of each other and highly

inter-correlated, I first restricted the regression analysis to two linearly independent measures of

party registration (Model 1); and then to two linearly independent measures of party vote

preference (Model 2).

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[5]The index of racial homogeneity is a "deviations" based measure that is the reciprocal of
Amemiya's index of economic differentiation (Coulter 1989, 48-9). The measure of political
culture represents a slight modification of Sharkansky's unidimensional index, since it draws on
Elazar's nine-fold classification of sub-state regions as opposed to his eight-fold classification of
the American states. Elazar designates the additional sub-state region as a "moralistic-
traditionalistic" subculture to fit the merging of dominant moralistic (Anglo) and subordinate
traditionalistic (Latino) streams in parts of the desert Southwest, most notably Arizona. Using
Elazar's sub-state designations, I classified each county into one of his nine sub-state
classifications and then ranked it along a unidimensional continuum ranging from 1, a pure
traditionalistic subculture to 9, a pure moralistic subculture.   The indexed values are: (1)
traditionalistic, (2) traditionalistic-individualistic, (3) traditionalistic-moralistic, (4)
individualistic-traditionalistic, (5) individualistic, (6) individualistic-moralistic, (7) moralistic-
traditionalistic, (8) moralistic-individualistic, and (9) moralistic. Political partisanship in
measured in two ways: first by the proportion of all registered voters who are Democratic,
independent, or Republican; and second by the proportion of the presidential vote received by the
Democratic, leading independent, and Republican nominees.

Table 3 about here

The results show in each case that the variable with the strongest correlation *and* highest standardized regression coefficient with voting turnout is the modified Sharkansky index of Elazar's typology. But as expected, the measure of racial homogeneity does almost as well. Once these variables are entered in the two regression analyses, differences in party registration and party vote preference are virtually insignificant. This suggests that at the county-level of analysis, voting turnout has little to do with political partisanship but a lot to do with culture.

Individual-level Results

Table 4 presents the results of regressing voting turnout at the individual level on 18 cultural, social, and political indicators (Lieske 2005b). It is a very demanding test of cultural and sub-cultural effects because I compare how the effects of political culture and subculture stack up against all of the other factors that have been found to influence voting turnout in U. S. presidential elections including education, age, strength of partisanship, political interest, political efficacy, and electoral mobilization. The data on reported turnout and the independent variables in the probit model are drawn from the 1960-1988 NES cumulative data file. The reported mean slopes represent the average percentile change in the probability of voting for each standard-deviation unit of change from the mean in a given independent variable. All things equal, indicators with the highest mean slopes exert the greatest effects on voting turnout.

Table 4 about here

With the exception of the internal efficacy indicator, all of the variables are statistically significant at the .001 level or higher. In particular, the results show that whites, reformational Protestants, Christians and Jews, regular church-goers, people with more education and higher occupational status, working women, middle-aged persons, married couples, men, residents of

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moralistic subcultures, party stalwarts, the politically efficacious, and the politically interested are more likely to vote than other groups.

Perhaps one of the more surprising results, at least for survey researchers, is the demonstrated effects of political subculture on turnout. In the face of some seventeen multivariate controls, this test represents one of the most rigorous and demanding applications of Elazar's theory to individual voting behavior. Moreover, the index of Elazar's typology employed in this study represents one of the stronger and more consistent correlates of voting turnout throughout the 1960-1988 time period.[6] Another noteworthy result has to do with the marked attenuation of the probit coefficient for race in the face of stepwise controls for other social characteristics. This reduction probably reflects the generally higher rates of social connectedness--due to educational attainment, occupational status, marital status, male civic involvement, and age--that are found in the white population (Teixeira 1987, 1992; Putnam 2000).

With these points in mind, we can now consider the marginal effects of the variables in the model on turnout and turnout decline. Estimates of the marginal effects of the model variables on turnout in 1960 and 1988 as well as on turnout decline between 1960 and 1988 are presented in Table 5.[7] The results show that from 1960-1988 age, not education, exerted by far the greatest marginal effect on turnout as well as turnout decline. .

<center>Table 5 about here</center>

The marginal effect of education on turnout increased markedly between 1960 and 1988,

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[6]This was true for earlier elections as well. In fact, its .31 correlation with turnout in 1952 actually exceeded that of any other indicator including political interest (.30), race (.29), education (.25), and party strength (.17).

[7]See Lieske (2005b) for the statistical formulas that were used.

but it still remained some 40% less than the effect of age. Moreover, its effect on turnout decline

was not much greater than the effect of religiosity. As expected, political interest and party strength

exerted significant effects on turnout in 1960 and 1988, but their contributions to turnout decline

are slightly less than for religiosity. After political interest and party strength, the variables that

exert the next greatest effects on turnout are respectively religiosity, Sharkansky's unidimensional

index of Elazar's typology, marital status, and race. Although race does not appear to have much

direct impact on the post-1960 decline in turnout, its reduced effects are largely due to the

collinearity of race with religious affiliation, religiosity, and political subculture. Finally, the

mobilization of Christians and Jews during the 1960 presidential campaign increased expected

turnout by as much as four percent.

    We can now explore some of the interactive implications of political culture and subculture

on voting turnout that follow from their inclusion in the analysis and the probit methodology that

was used to fit the data. Figures 2-4 present plots of the probability of voting as a function of

education and age controlling for either religiosity or political subculture. In Figure 2 the

"faithful" are those who report going to church every week or regularly; the "secular" are those

who say they never go to church. In Figures 3 and 4 the "moralistic," "individualistic," and

"traditionalistic" subcultures represent "pure" types on the Sharkansky index of Elazar's

typology.[8] All other variables were set at their mean or average values for the 1960-1988 time

period.

<p style="text-align:center">Figures 2-4 about here</p>

    Figure 2 shows that the educational gradient for faithful church-goers is more flat or

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[8]They were obtained by substituting respectively the values of 7, 4, and 1.

shallow than for non-church-goers. It also demonstrates that religiosity has the greatest

differential impact on Americans with less than a high school education. Empirically, this result

suggests that religiosity is a cultural resource that compensates for low levels of education. But

the effects of religiosity extend even to higher levels of education. Thus the probability of

voting for a high school graduate who attends church regularly is actually greater than for a

college graduate who never goes to church.

Figure 3 demonstrates a similar pattern for the joint effects of education and political

subculture. Although the benefits of a supportive cultural environment extend to all educational

groups, the differential effects of subculture are greatest for "average" respondents with a high

school education or less. Depending on education, the probability of voting for a resident of a

moralistic state is from 7-15 percent higher than for a resident of a traditionalistic state. And the

probability of voting for a high school graduate in a moralistic state is actually greater than for a

college graduate in a traditionalistic state.

A slightly different configuration is revealed for the interactive effects of political

subculture and age on the probability of voting (see Figure 4). As expected, there are significant

differentials among the three subcultures when age is held constant. Depending on age, the

probability of voting for a resident of a moralistic state is as much as 9-17 percent higher than for

a resident of a traditionalistic state. Another interesting feature is how the differentials narrow

during the prime voting years of the life cycle and how they broaden for younger and older

Americans.

Collectively, the plots in Figures 2-4 demonstrate an important principle about the impact

of culture on voting turnout. Namely, they show that culture has the greatest impact on

individuals who by virtue of other social characteristics are the least likely to vote. Conversely, it exercises the smallest influence on individuals who are the most likely to vote. I will now show how the changing social identities of the American voter have influenced the outcomes of U. S. presidential elections and party loyalties over the past half century.

Social Identities and the American Voter

Diversity and Presidential Voting

How do voters decide which candidate to support in presidential elections? This study takes into consideration an important factor that, up until now, has been generally neglected by voting researchers (Huckfeldt 1979, 1983, 1984). This is the cultural context in which a voter is located. Thus in contrast to the standard model, I assume that voter preferences are shaped not only by national forces and distinctive candidate appeals but also by how voters respond and react to their immediate cultural environments.

In this revised model, candidate choice is conceived to depend on four major socializing agents--racial-ethnic identity, religious identity, social class, and the cultural context--as well as three mediating agents--party identification, issue orientations, and candidate images--that shape voter preferences. In particular, it is hypothesized that the effects of racial-ethnic identity, religious identity, and social class on party loyalties and candidate preferences depend on the cultural context in which voters live. Thus it is assumed that in racially homogeneous settings, party loyalties and candidate preferences will tend to reflect social and religious divisions. In racially heterogeneous settings, they will tend to reflect racial and ethnic differences.

The sample consists of 20,783 respondents that were drawn from the NES Cumulative

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Data File from 1956-1996. These were matched with county level data for the closest decennial census. Counties that were at least 90 percent white were classified as racially homogeneous or low in diversity. Counties that were less than 90 percent white were classified as racially heterogeneous or high in diversity.[9]

Higher and lower cut points were also explored. But in 1960, Almond and Verba (1963) favorably compared the U. S. with Great Britain and Sweden, namely as a country with a relatively homogeneous culture, high levels of consensus, and low levels of conflict. At the time the U. S. was almost 90 percent white. This cut point also provides a useful benchmark for tracking the changing racial context of American voters from 1956-1996. In the 1956 election study, 1090 respondents lived in homogeneous counties, while 554 lived in heterogeneous counties. In the 1996 study, only 434 respondents lived in homogeneous counties, while 1280 respondents lived in heterogeneous counties.

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[9]Data for 2000 and 2004 were not included because of prohibitive restrictions on FIPS code data that have been imposed by the ANES Board of Overseers for these years. I am indebted to Edward Hasecke for creating the merged data file.

Figures 5-7 present the inter-correlations between the Republican vote and three

indicators of racial identity, religious identity, and social class by election year and racial

diversity. The dependent variable is a dummy measure that takes on the value of zero for

respondents who report voting for the Democratic presidential candidate and one for those who

report voting for the Republican nominee.[10]

<p style="text-align:center">Figures 5-7 about here</p>

The results show, as hypothesized, that racial identities were not important predictors of

the presidential vote in racially homogeneous counties from 1956 to 1996. Conversely,

beginning in 1964 we see a sharp up-tick in racial voting preferences in racially diverse counties

that appears to be linked to the racially divisive candidacy of Barry Goldwater, who only carried

the five Deep South states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, in

addition to his home state of Arizona.

At the same time, there are significant low to moderate correlations throughout this time

period between the Republican vote and Protestant identification, which as expected are slightly

stronger in racially homogeneous than diverse settings. Clearly the "religious factor" played a

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[10]To measure their racial identities, I created dummy variables for respondents who
indicated white or black identifications. To measure their religious identifications, I created
dummies for Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish identifications. And to measure their social class
position, I classified respondents by level of education and gender. College is a dummy variable
that categorizes respondents into two groups, those with a high school diploma or less and those
that report some college course work or more. Female is a dummy on female gender.

crucial role in 1960 when John Kennedy's candidacy galvanized Catholic and Protestant voters. But Catholic identifications with Democratic nominees drop sharply after the 1964 election, especially in racially diverse counties, and by 1988 have reached a position of relative neutrality. Finally, the data indicate that the Democratic proclivities of Jewish voters have remained relative constant over time and appear to be relatively immune to differences in racial context.

The results for the two measures of social class show, as expected, that the strongest and most consistent class-based predictor of support for Republican candidates is college-level education. And this association seems to persist regardless of racial context. However, like those for Protestant identification, the correlations are low to moderate. The data also reveal a secular shift in the female vote from the Republican column in 1956 to the Democratic column by 1996 that also appears to be independent of racial context.

So far, evidence has been found to support a diversity hypothesis in disaggregated form. Now I subject it to a more rigorous and demanding multivariate test by first pooling the data across all election years and then regressing the Republican vote on five indicators of social identity, cultural context, and party identification[11]. The results are presented in Table 6. They show, as predicted, that racial identities are much more important than religious identities in structuring the presidential vote during the 1956-1996 time period. Moreover, contrary to class-based interpretations, education appears to exert no independent effects. Consistent with social identity theory, racial diversity tends to accentuate white support for Republican nominees and attenuate it for Democratic nominees. This is demonstrated by the positive regression coefficient

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[11]Party identification is measured by the traditional seven-point scale, ranging from strong Democrat (1) to strong Republican (7).

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for percent white. We can now turn our attention to the effects of racial diversity on party

identifications.

Table 6 about here

Diversity and Party Identification

Figures 8-10 present the inter-correlations between Republican identification and

indicators of racial identity, religious identity, and social class respectively by election year and

racial diversity. The dependent variable is a dummy measure that takes on the value of zero for

respondents who do not identify with the Republican Party and one for those who do.

Figures 8-10 about here

As can be seen, there are very low correlations in the expected direction for white and

black respondents who live in racially homogeneous counties. Conversely, the results show that

prior to the Goldwater candidacy of 1964, white respondents were somewhat more likely to

identify with the Democratic Party in racially diverse (generally southern) counties, while black

respondents were somewhat more likely to identify with the Republican Party.

After this "sub-realignment," we see the generally accepted patterns of white support for

the Republican Party and black support for the Democratic Party that hold to this day. However,

the tidal shift of racial preferences in 1964 that occurred for white and black respondents who

live in racially diverse settings cannot be overemphasized.   For both racial groups they swing

from low to moderate.

The results for the measures of religious identity are almost the mirror opposite of those

for racial identity. Thus there are low to moderate correlations in the expected direction for

Protestants and Catholics who live in racially homogeneous environments but low to negligible

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correlations for those who live in racially diverse settings. At the same time, the data suggest a

waning of Catholic preferences for the Democratic Party. While Jewish respondents indicate a

consistent preference for the Democratic Party that appears to be independent of racial context,

the correlations tend to be low.

Finally, the measures of social class appear to exert the weakest influence on party

identifications. College education exhibits the highest and most consistent associations with

Republican identification, but the correlations in racially diverse settings are only half as great as

those for racial identity. However, the data reveal another interesting reversal in the party

preferences of women that is independent of racial context. As late as 1956, women were

slightly more likely to identify with the Republican than the Democratic Party. But by 1996

their partisan loyalties were firmly in the Democratic camp.[8] We now move to a consideration

of the relative influence of racial identity, religious identity, and social class on the party

identifications of the American electorate.

Table 7 presents the results of first pooling the data across election years and then

regressing Republican and Democratic identification on racial identity, religious identity, social

class, and cultural context. Although it was not possible to include parental party identifications

 as controls in the logistic regression, the selected indicators provide an acceptable fit with the

data. Moreover, the results tend to confirm the predicted differential effects of racial identity,

religious identity, and social class on party loyalties. Thus, those for racial identity are the

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[8]Consistent with identity theory, there are no discernable age differences in party
identifications.

greatest; those for social class are the least; and those for religious identity fall in between. In addition, the results are consistent with the well-known gravitation of new immigrant groups, who are now mostly nonwhite, to the Democratic Party. Thus the positive regression coefficient on percent white for the first regression suggests that racial diversity decreases Republican identifications; conversely, the negative coefficient for the second suggests that racial diversity increases Democratic identifications.

Table 7 about here

The Cultural Implications of the 2004 Elections

What happened?

First, Republicans expanded their winning presidential coalition, both nationally and in most states. It may be recalled that in 2000 Bush won by only two electoral votes. He actually lost the popular vote to Al Gore by over 500,000 votes. He secured Florida's 25 electoral votes by a mere 537 votes.

In 2004, Bush beat Kerry by some three-and-one-half million votes nationally and carried 31 states with 286 electoral votes, 16 more than he needed. In Florida, he won the state's 27 electoral votes with a vote margin of 377,000 votes, about half of them from the mushrooming I-4 corridor (Drew and Goodnough 2004). He also added New Mexico and Iowa to his coalition, while losing only New Hampshire. It might be noted that states that went for Bush in 2000 gained eight electoral votes in the 2004 election because of reapportionment..

In the Senate, the Republicans picked up four seats including the seat formerly held by Senate minority leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota, who lost to John Thune, a pro-life

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Republican. In the House, the Republicans picked up seven Democratic seats, five of them in Texas, where a controversial redistricting plan pushed by House majority leader Tom DeLay redrew the state's map to make it more Republican friendly.

At the state level, the GOP and the Democrats split eleven hotly contested gubernatorial races, with the Democrats coming out on top in six states and the Republicans taking five. Overall the Republicans now control 28 governorships to 22 for the Democrats. In addition, Republicans are now in control of 20 state legislatures, while the number of state legislatures controlled by Democrats have fallen to 19. Ten states have split partisan control.

In contrast to the improving fortunes of the Republicans, the Democrats continue to be jinxed by the Kennedy curse. Since 1960, the only Democratic candidates to win the presidency have been white southerners: Lyndon Johnson in 1964, Jimmy Carter in 1976, and Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996.

Why?

First and perhaps foremost was a surge in Republican turnout (Bumiller 2004; Drew and Goodnough 2004). Historians will likely remember 2004 as the election in which the GOP defied the conventional wisdom, namely that increased turnout would benefit the Democrats, and turned it on its head. Thus the large turnout for which Democrats had been hoping did not help Kerry the way they thought it would. According to *The New York Times,* Republicans actually surpassed Democrats in registering and turning out voters all over the country, including many states where turnout had increased the most. In fact, the *Times'* comparison of the Bush-Gore contest of 2000 with the Bush-Kerry race of 2004 shows that the Republicans were able to increase the vote for Bush by an average of three percent. This increase reportedly held

irrespective of whether or not a county was carried by Bush or Gore in the 2000 election. (New York Times Staff, 2004) In addition, the Republicans were able to sharply reduce the gender gap and paradoxically increase their support among several core Democratic constituencies, including blacks, Jews, and Latinos.[9]

A second explanation lies in the resurgence of the so-called social-cultural issues: gun rights, abortion rights, gay rights, affirmative action, school prayer, and immigration. How did these issues play out in 2004? For one, a startling 80% of all exit poll respondents who voted for George Bush cited morality issues as uppermost in their minds. Overall the issues that mattered most to voters were moral values, cited by 22% of the respondents. But voter concerns about the economy and jobs, cited by another 20%, and terrorism, cited by another 19%, were not far behind. The war in Iraq, which pollster John Zogby thought would drive this election, came in fourth at 15%. (Seelye 2004; Zernike and Broder 2004)

Perhaps the Republican trump card in this election were white evangelical or born-again Christians, who constituted almost one out of every four (23%) voters. They voted almost four to one (78%) for Bush.

A final set of circumstances that came into play in this election was how the cultural identifications of voters affected their images of the candidates and the parties. As Democratic

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[9]These inroads into traditional Democratic constituencies may be attributed in part to Bush's appointment of African-Americans like Colin Powell and Condoleeza Rice to top administrative positions; his strong support for the state of Israel and military intervention in Iraq, his patronization of Hispanic voters–expressing admiration for their values and speaking their language; his sensitivity to gender issues; and his image as a "compassionate conservative".

Senator Evan Bayh of Indiana lamented to the *New York Times* after the election, "Too often, we're caricatured as a bi-coastal cultural elite that is condescending at best and contemptuous at worst to the values that Americans hold in their daily lives." (Nagourney 2004b, I1)

In this election the values that seemed to work for the Republicans were faith, family, integrity, and trust (Purdum 2004). Yet, as Governor Jennifer Granholm of Michigan ruefully confessed after the election, most Democrats are afraid of "saying God" and "saying that this is a country that is based on faith." (Nagourney 2004b, I1) This is perhaps why the Republicans were successful in painting the Democrats as out of the cultural mainstream in 1980, 1984, 1988, 2000, and 2004. It is ironic that few voters in this election knew that Senator Kerry delivered a heartfelt testimony of what his Christian faith meant to him at a prayer breakfast several years ago on Capitol Hill.

What is also impressive about the Bush victory was the unwillingness of traditional Republican voters to hand over the reins of power to the Democrats. It was almost as if what Bush did, or failed to do, did not matter. Forget Iraq. Forget the economy. Forget the budget deficit. Forget his embarrassing failures of leadership. Forget the debates. After all, he was their president, for better or worse. Kerry was unfit to command. And the Democrats could not be trusted. (Zernike and Broder 2004)

What does it mean?

Clearly Bush and many Republicans saw their victories in the 2004 elections as an electoral mandate (Nagourney 2004a). Some, such as Richard Vigurie, the dean of conservative direct mail, even rhapsodized about a conservative revolution that would eventually privatize social security, ban same-sex marriage, remake the Supreme Court, and overturn the court's

decisions in support of abortion rights (Kirkpatrick 2004).

It is still too early to tell what changes will ultimately be implemented. In the short-term, the Bush Republicans would like to push their agenda of cutting taxes, spending more on the military, restricting abortions, expanding legal immigration, declaring amnesty for illegal aliens, and funding faith-based initiatives. However, opposition to some of these measures is coming from moderate Republicans like U. S. Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, who won re-election in 2004 as a supporter of abortion rights, as well as many social and fiscal conservatives, who want to restrict immigration and rein in the federal budget deficit.

In the long-term, the Bush Republicans hope they are on the way to establishing a new majority party. In 2000, Republicans won control of both the White House and Congress for the first time since 1952. In 2002, they regained control of Congress without Vermont Senator James Jeffords, who became an independent following the 2000 elections. In 2004, the Republicans were able to maintain control of both the White House and the Congress for the first time since 1900.

According to Walter Dean Burnham (1970), America's two-party system is demarcated every 36-40 years by critical elections that usher in a protracted period of "normal party politics" in which one of the two major parties exercises political dominance at the national level. Based on Burnham's calculations, the last critical election occurred in 1968. So another one is about due. But given rising public dissatisfaction with the continuing war in Iraq, rising gasoline prices and interest rates, mounting national debt, a sluggish economy, and Bush's falling approval ratings–currently around 40 percent--it is not at all clear whether the Republicans will become the new majority party, even if a critical election occurs.

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The Future of the American Party System

What does the rise of the cultural voter mean for the American party system? Perhaps one conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that culture and racial context matter. In racially homogenous settings, the primary political cleavages that divide voters tend to fall along lines of social class and religion. In racially diverse settings they coalesce around divisions in racial identity.

A second conclusion is that American electoral politics, especially voter party identifications and the two-party vote itself, is becoming more and more structured and organized along racial lines. It is tempting to pose the questions: What if Goldwater and the Republicans had not played the race card during the 1960s? Would the racial voting patterns and the growing racial divide in America's two-party system that is evident today be any different? Perhaps. But probably not. (Kessel 1968; Phillips 1969)

Strictly speaking, the race card had already been played by Strom Thurmond and the Dixiecrat delegates who walked out of the 1948 Democratic Convention in protest over a strong civil rights plank that had been introduced into the platform by Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey and other northern liberals. And it would be played again four years later by another Dixiecrat, George Wallace, who campaigned for president on the promise of "Segregation today; segregation tomorrow; and segregation forever." So the recent apology to the NAACP Convention by Republican National Committee Chairman Ken Mehlmann, though calculated to win back black voters and long overdue, is probably beside the point.

From a social identity perspective, the growing sub-realignment of white southerners and

white ethnics into the Republican camp, and the parallel alignment of racial minorities and

non-western immigrants into the Democratic camp, were almost inevitable. Moreover,

cross-national data show that racially and ethnically plural societies tend to develop racially and

ethnically based parties (Vanhanen 1991).

A third conclusion concerns how the rise of the cultural voter has influenced the kinds of

political coalitions that have developed since WWII. In retrospect, the Democratic New Deal

Coalition of economic "have-nots", put together by FDR and northern liberals, probably comes

closest to the progressive and populist ideals. Its two major constituent groups were white

southern Protestants and white northern Catholics. But it also included racial minorities,

primarily northern blacks, and liberal Jews. However, it could only be held together in difficult

economic times and then only as long as the race issue and civil rights issues were swept under

the rug.

When sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and other Columbia researchers came to Erie County,

Ohio, to study political attitudes in the 1940 presidential election, they expected to find major

media effects that shaped voter preferences (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). Instead they

found "minimal effects" and strong brand loyalties to the parties and their nominees that seemed to

fall largely along class lines: socioeconomic status, religion, and place of residence. Based on

their survey data, they developed an Index of Political Predisposition, the forerunner of the party

identification variable, that appeared to do a pretty good job in predicting and explaining the vote.

The picture projected by the Columbia sociologists was one of social determinism: "…a person

thinks, politically, as he is, socially. Social characteristics determine political preference."

(Quoted in Kovenoch et al.1973) But in 1940, Erie County, Ohio, was a racially homogeneous

county. Hence, the results of the Columbia study are not only time- and location-bound; they are also culture- bound.

Even though class voting peaked in the 1948 presidential election, fissures in the New Deal Coalition produced by rising postwar prosperity, the onset of the Cold War, public dissatisfaction with the Korean War, and racial divisions in the Democratic Party had allowed the Republicans, under a popular war hero, to take control of the White House and Congress in 1952. Moreover, though the GOP lost control of Congress in 1954, researchers at the University of Michigan had discovered a new set of variables at the tip of the funnel of causality--party identification, issues, and candidate images--that outperformed the Columbia model. This led to the so-called standard model of party identification where elections "could be won or lost by the marginal votes of those whose party identification was weak or non-existent." (Kovenoch et al. 1973, I-8)

The "religious factor" in the 1960 election seemed to be a step backward in the funnel of causality. But the "sorrows of empire" produced by American involvement in a second civil war on the Asian continent, coupled with the emergence of new civil rights, ideological, and social-cultural issues, had produced a fragmented electorate that was less and less wedded to longstanding party loyalties. As V.O. Key (1966) reminded political scientists in *The Responsible Electorate*, American voters are not "party fools." So a host of revisionist studies emerged during the 1970s that emphasized voter rationality and documented the influence of issues in shaping voter preferences (Miller et al. 1972; Kovenoch et al. 1973; Fiorina 1978)

By the 1980s Republican presidential candidates had used the civil rights and social-cultural issues to alienate the political affections of the two largest constituencies in the New Deal coalition--white southerners and northern white ethnics–and forge a new coalition in

American politics, the so-called Reagan Coalition. Its major constituent groups include social conservatives, primarily evangelical Christians and southern, and now, northern whites who are concerned about racial issues, affirmative action, and abortion; fiscal and economic conservatives, primarily the business class and free market expansionists; neo-conservatives and internationalists who want to establish a new world order; and traditional moderates and "independent Republicans".

Running on a platform of economic nationalism, fiscal responsibility, patriotism, and self-sacrifice in 1992 and 1996, Ross Perot was able to attract enough disillusioned moderates and independents to deny George Bush, Sr., reelection and ensure a second term for Bill Clinton. However, the Republican's new cultural base was able to coalesce around the party's new "Contract with America" in 1994 and win the presidency in 2000 and 2004. Although George Bush, Jr., tried to chip away at some of the core Democratic constituencies in 2004, it is unlikely, given the evidence presented here, that the Republicans will be able to secure any long-term gains.

Clearly demographic data suggest that if that if current expansionist immigration policies persist, ever-increasing proportions of the American electorate will reside in more racially diverse counties. The results of this study suggest that as this happens, the American voter will become more and more sensitized to racial and ethnic divisions and less and less concerned about religious divisions within Christianity and social class inequalities. They also suggest, by implication, that voters will pay less heed to substantive issues and procedural issues of political accountability and place greater stock in electing candidates and supporting parties who reflect their racial and ethnic identities.

These trends, in turn, suggest that the presidential vote and party loyalties will become

more and more polarized along racial and ethnic lines. Finally, the evidence suggests that racial

diversity will accentuate white support for Republican nominees and attenuate it for Democratic

nominees. At the same time, it will increase Democratic identifications and decrease Republican

identifications.

In the short run, the Republican Party should remain competitive in presidential and

congressional elections. But as the new immigrants become politically mobilized, the Democratic

Party should eventually be restored to majority status. However, in the long run, the country's

growing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity should create strong, if not irresistible, pressures for

an ethnically-based, multi-party system.

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