An analysis of the changing social bases of America's political parties: 1952–2008

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ABSTRACT

In this article I address two interrelated questions: have the group bases of the American political parties changed over time and what factors have lead to the observed changes? I determine social group memberships significantly influence individual partisanship with a multivariate analysis using 56 years of ANES data. I then measure how many votes each politically relevant social group contributed to the party coalitions in each presidential election from 1952 to 2008. I discuss how group contributions have changed over time and establish the demographic and behavioral causes of group contribution change. I find that the party coalitions have been restructured as a result of groups' changing voting behavior and the changing ratio of groups in the electorate.

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It is difficult to discuss electoral politics in the United States without talking in terms of social groups. Journalistic accounts of party competition often stress the important role that specific constituencies play (such as the "evangelical" or "Latino" vote) in determining the outcome of presidential elections. A society's socio-demographic cleavages are typically the same divisions that give structure to political competition—one party derives the majority of its support from voters on one side of the cleavage while the opposing party obtains its support from voters on the other side (Key, 1949; Schattschneider, 1960; Lipset and Rokkan, 1964). Yet, the party system is dynamic in spite of enduring social cleavages; the group bases of party support have dramatically changed. How have the parties' social bases changed over time? In this article I investigate and identify the demographic and behavioral forces that drive changes in the party coalitions.

I must ask and answer two related questions in order to understand how the party coalitions have changed. First, I must determine what the parties' social bases actually are—what social group memberships actually structure individual level voting behavior? Second, once I have established the set of politically relevant groups, the task becomes measuring the number of votes each group contributes to the party coalitions and then assessing how demographic and behavioral changes have affected the size of each group's contribution. Electoral behavior is most often thought of in terms of partisan vote choice and there is a considerable amount of research devoted to understanding how and why patterns of vote choice change over time. My approach goes beyond looking at one aspect of voting behavior and assesses the combined effect of both behavioral and demographic factors. Political parties must capture more votes than the opposition in order to win—thus, any process that leads to a party obtaining more or less votes is politically consequential. Any change of a group's voting behavior (vote choice or turnout) or size affects how many votes the group contributes to a party's coalition. Analyzing these components in conjunction with one another allows for a more holistic understanding of

party coalitions than can be gained from examining any of one of these behavioral or demographic components individually.

This paper is organized in the following format. In the first section I use a multivariate analysis of ANES data to uncover the group determinants of individual vote choice in each presidential election spanning 1952 through 2008. This analysis establishes which group memberships serve as political reference points and which group memberships do not.[2] Individuals are members of numerous overlapping groups, but only some of these group memberships actually affect political behavior. Establishing what groups shape individual vote choice will allow me limit the proceeding analyses of the group bases of the electoral coalitions to only "politically relevant" groups—defined as group memberships that have a significant effect on individual voting behavior. In the second section I assess how many votes each politically relevant group contributes to each party's coalition. In addition, I analyze how the sizes of groups' contributions have changed and I assess the behavioral and demographic sources of these changes. I discuss the implications of the parties' changing sources of electoral support in the third section and make several brief concluding remarks in the fourth section.

1. Identifying the group bases of political competition

The link between group identification and political behavior is well established—group memberships form the mouth of the American Voter's "funnel of causation" that ultimately explains vote choice (Campbell et al. 1960, 292; also see Miller and Shanks, 1996; Lewis-Beck et al. 2006). Social groups are an important part of politics—group memberships influence an individual's political attitudes and behaviors (Campbell et al. 1960; Dawson, 1994; Green et al. 2002) and party appeals are often targeted towards members of specific social groups (Huckfeldt et al. 1995). Thus, party coalitions are often thought of in terms of an aggregation of groups (Axelrod, 1972; Manza and Brooks, 1999) and the most dramatic reshuffling of the party coalitions occur when a group that was once loyal to one party begins to support the opposition.

However, any analysis of the group bases of politics must address several practical and theoretical issues before moving forward. Firstly, there is the question of what group memberships actually serve as the basis for political organization? Individuals are simultaneously members of a number of overlapping groups (e.g. African American, female, heterosexual, left handed, baseball fan) and not all group memberships serve as "political reference points" for the formation of attitudes—some group memberships are politicized while others are not (Campbell et al. 1960; Stanley et al., 1986). Thus, I need to establish what group memberships significantly influence vote choice before assessing how the group bases of the political parties have changed.

I adopt a similar empirical approach to that of Stanley, Bianco and Niemi in an effort to accomplish this task (1986; and updated in 1991, 1995, 2006 and 2010 by Stanley and Niemi; also see Manza and Brooks, 1999; Raymond, 2011). Stanley et al. utilized a multivariate logit model with partisanship as the dependent variable and a battery of group memberships as independent variables to determine what group identities influence an individual's partisan attachments. They defined politically relevant groups as those group memberships that are statistically significant predictors of partisan identification, while groups that are not reference points have an effect that is statistically indistinguishable from zero. I am employing this same analytical approach as Stanley et al.; only I am utilizing vote choice in presidential elections, as opposed to partisanship, as the dependent variable.[3] The strength of this approach is that I am not determining what groups are politically relevant *a priori*—my analytical choice of what groups to include in further analyses is determined by an objective empirical measure. Excluding groups that do not affect vote choice from the analysis allows me to narrow down the subsequent analysis and examine only the groups that significantly affect individual level political behavior.

I incorporate a similar set of demographic independent variables as Stanley, Bianco and Niemi.[4] All of the variables included in this analysis come from the ANES cumulative file. The independent variables are a battery of group membership variables, including race and ethnicity, income group, religious group, church attendance, gender, age, birth cohort, union membership, and level of urbanism. All of the independent variables included in the model are binary. Many of these group memberships are binary by nature (race, ethnicity, union membership and age cohort), but some variables such as church attendance, age and income have been dichotomized from variables with more than two categories. There are several reasons for operationalizing the independent variables in this way. The first reason is analytical. The variables for all of these group memberships are set up as comparisons against a base category (e.g. the comparison between being African American versus white, which is the base category). The question here is, "does belonging to a group make an individual more or less likely to vote for a Democratic presidential candidate compared to the reference category?" Collapsing these categorical variables into binary dummy variables facilitates a straightforward comparison. The second reason is practical. The data in the ANES cumulative file spans 56 years. The mean value of many variables, such as income, has changed drastically

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[2] 1952–2008 is the span of available ANES data necessary to conduct the analysis.

[3] While the battery of independent variables that I am employing is largely the same as those used by Stanley and Niemi in their series of analyses, there are several important differences. Stanley and Niemi include white Protestant fundamentalist in their analyses (from 1991 onward) opposed to weekly church attendee (my measure). I include weekly church attendee opposed to fundamentalist white Protestant because it is available for more survey years. Secondly, I do not include self-reported social-class in my analysis—a variable that Stanley and Niemi included in some of their earlier analyses. The set of independent variables are broadly similar with the exception of these few differences.

[4] The list of demographic independent variables included in the analysis is essentially all of the demographic variables available in the entirety of years included in the ANES cumulative file.

Table 1
Logit models regressing democratic vote on group memberships—by decade (Year fixed effects and birth cohorts included but not shown).

Variables	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Black	−.045	1.08***	1.14***	1.19***	1.12***	1.48***
	(.14)	(.12)	(.11)	(.099)	(.11)	(.092)
Latino	–	–	.10	.62***	.50***	.39***
			(.27)	(.14)	(.15)	(.10)
Asian	–	–	.57	−.43	−.30	.049
			(.46)	(.41)	(.31)	(.20)
Female	−.33***	−.044	.054	.22***	.37***	.34***
	(.071)	(.070)	(.070)	(.065)	(.071)	(.062)
Income Top Third	−.094	−.027	−.098	−.14*	−.093	−.15*
	(.088)	(.086)	(.085)	(.080)	(.088)	(.081)
Income Bottom Third	−.12	−.21**	−.031	.031	−.028	.012
	(.093)	(.092)	(.090)	(.078)	(.087)	(.072)
White Southerner	.25***	−.068	−.22**	−.080	−.091	−.44***
	(.098)	(.085)	(.090)	(.084)	(.091)	(.087)
College Graduate	−.038	−.082	.34***	.55***	.41***	.64***
	(.16)	(.12)	(.10)	(.084)	(.087)	(.074)
Union Member	.72***	.52***	.46***	.68***	.66***	.47***
	(.081)	(.081)	(.080)	(.075)	(.091)	(.088)
Jew	1.98***	2.06***	1.04***	.93***	1.49***	1.42***
	(.20)	(.22)	(.20)	(.19)	(.25)	(.22)
Catholic	.60***	1.23***	.47***	.46***	.46***	.34***
	(.094)	(.092)	(.088)	(.085)	(.095)	(.093)
Weekly Church Attendee	.13	.15**	.050	.088	−.27***	−.31***
	(.082)	(.073)	(.081)	(.074)	(.083)	(.075)
Non-Religious	.26	.17	.31**	.31***	.40***	.18**
	(.20)	(.19)	(.14)	(.11)	(.10)	(.087)
Urban	.068	.18*	.15*	.35***	.20**	.16
	(.096)	(.093)	(.089)	(.081)	(.087)	(.14)
Rural	.056	.30***	.073	.12	−.078	−.22
	(.092)	(.086)	(.085)	(.077)	(.084)	(.15)
Under 35	−.010	−.22	−.30**	−.29***	−.14	−.12
	(.10)	(.14)	(.15)	(.11)	(.17)	(.11)
Over 65	.30***	−.26**	.11	.0065	−.0050	−.15
	(.10)	(.12)	(.21)	(.13)	(.21)	(.13)
Constant	−1.17***	−1.14***	−1.85***	−2.03***	−1.42***	−1.34***
	(.0958)	(.121)	(.112)	(.108)	(.106)	(.101)
Pseudo R^2	.058	.104	.052	.068	.066	.096
Log Likelihood	−2441	−2555.8	−2637.4	−3142.1	−2490.9	−3198.9
Observations	4323	4309	4953	5911	4199	5341

Standard errors in parentheses ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$.

over the course of the time series. Using categories such as the top or bottom third of the income distribution provides a metric that common across all years in the series (Stanley and Niemi, 1991, 191).

I run a separate regression for each decade, starting in the 1950s and ending in the 2000s, with the goal of assessing how the influence of each group membership changed over time. Table 1 contains the results of these logit models and Fig. 1 substantively illustrates the effect of each variable by decade. The base category in Fig. 1 is a white, Protestant, non-Southern male in the middle third of the income distribution between the ages of 36 and 64. The effect of each independent variable is the first difference comparison against the base category.[5]

The results in Table 1 indicate that the effect of specific group memberships have evolved over the past sixty years while the effect of other group memberships has remained consistent. Jews, Catholics, Latinos and union members have been significantly more likely to support the Democratic Party than non-group members in all decades included in the analysis. African Americans were not significantly more likely to support the Democratic Party during the 1950s (the Republican Party held the civil rights mantle at the time) but became so in the 1960s. Unsurprisingly, since the 1960s, African Americans have been twenty to thirty percentage points more likely than non-African Americans to vote for the Democratic Party (compared to whites, the base category) even when controlling for income. Indentifying as a Jew has a similar effect on the likelihood of voting for the Democratic candidate as identifying as an African American, both in terms of magnitude and consistency. Union members and Catholics are consistently ten percentage points more likely to vote for the Democratic presidential candidate than non-group members across all decades, indicating that the political importance of these specific group memberships has endured through time.

[5] Fig. 1 displays the first differences of each coefficient. A first difference of .1 means that when the variable is set to 1 (opposed to 0) an individual is .1 more likely to support the Democratic Party. Point predictions at zero with no confidence intervals surrounding them should be interpreted as categories with no data for the given decade. For instance, the ANES did not include "Latino" as a racial/ethnic category in the 1960s, hence there is no estimate of the coefficient.

The Effect of Group Membership on Democratic Vote Choice in Presidential Elections
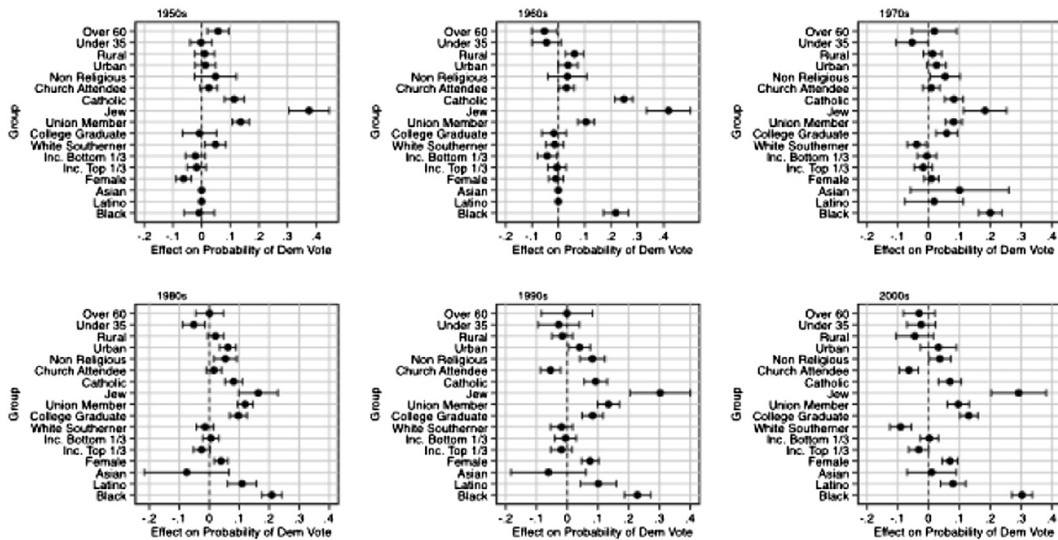

Fig. 1. The predicted effect of group memberships on vote choice (from Table 1).

The effect of other group memberships have not been consistent, rather they have evolved over time. White Southerners were significantly more likely to support the Democratic Party than other whites during the 1950s. However, Southern whites have drifted towards the Republican Party. Southern white group membership became an increasingly strong predictor of Republican vote choice over the second half of the 20th century. Similarly, weekly church attendees were significantly more likely to support Democrats during the 1960s, but became progressively less Democratic over the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, weekly church attendees were significantly more likely to vote for Republican presidential candidates. In recent elections, both Southern whites and weekly church attendees were nearly 10 percentage points more likely to support the Republican candidate when compared to the base category. Likewise, in the 1950s women were significantly more likely to support the Republican Party. However, females were no more likely than males to support the Republican Party in the 1960s and 1970s and from the 1980s onward women have been 5 to 7 percentage points more likely to support the Democrats. Other group memberships that were once not significant predictors of vote choice have recently become significant predictors of Democratic vote choice. College graduates and the non-religious became more likely to vote for the Democratic candidate beginning in the 1970s—by the 2000s college graduates were 10 percentage points more likely to support the Democratic candidate while the non-religious were 5 percentage points more likely.

The majority of the other group memberships included in the analysis never have a statistically significant effect or only have only a fleeting influence on vote choice (e.g. the variable has a statistically significant effect in one decade but none of the others). Voters under 35 were significantly

more likely to support Republican candidates during the 1970s and 1980s but not in any other decades. Likewise, voters over 65 were more likely to support Democrats in the 1950s, but more likely to support Republicans in the 1960s and then statistically indistinguishable from the base category after that. Income category, Asian and urban did not have a consistent effect over the course of the analysis. Birth cohort never has a significant effect on vote choice, therefore I have omitted the birth cohort variables from Table 1 and Fig. 1 in order to clarify the presentation. Stated briefly, the main conclusions that can be drawn from the information displayed in Table 1 and Fig. 1 can be summarized as this:

1) Some group memberships have a consistent and significant effect on vote choice across all (or nearly all) decades including—African Americans, Latinos, Jews, union members, whites, Protestants and Catholics.

2) The effect of some group memberships moves in a consistent direction over time as the group becomes consistently more Democratic or Republican. These groups include—white Southerners, the non-religious, weekly church attendees, college graduates, men and women.

3) Other group memberships never have a consistently significant effect on vote choice across all decades including—age group, birth cohorts, income category, urbanism and Asian.

The preceding analysis demonstrated that the effect of some group memberships has been consistent, while the effect of others has changed over the course of the last 60

Table 2
Group contributions to the party coalitions 1952–2008.

		Democratic groups							Republican groups				
		L	F	NR	AA	U	C	CG	SW	WC	M	W	P
1952		–	.45	–	.08	.31	.36	.07	.16	–	.53	.98	.70
1956		–	.41	–	.06	.34	.34	.09	.16	–	.53	1.00	.66
1960		–	.42	–	.07	.31	.53	.09	.21	–	.52	1.00	.93
1964		–	.50	–	.14	.33	.34	.08	.26	–	.54	1.00	.73
1968		–	.50	–	.19	.27	.34	.10	.24	–	.52	1.00	.76
1972		.05	.53	.13	.23	.27	.30	.16	.27	.48	.54	.96	.67
1976		.05	.47	.07	.17	.28	.31	.14	.26	.51	.54	.98	.70
1980		.05	.52	.07	.23	.26	.29	.22	.29	.48	.56	.98	.63
1984		.07	.54	.12	.21	.28	.33	.29	.27	.50	.53	.94	.61
1988		.10	.51	.13	.18	.23	.33	.30	.26	.45	.56	.96	.60
1992		.07	.52	.15	.18	.22	.30	.27	.27	.51	.54	.93	.61
1996		.11	.54	.14	.16	.24	.28	.27	.32	.56	.59	.98	.57
2000		.09	.53	.16	.19	.18	.26	.36	.35	.48	.57	.88	.50
2004		.13	.54	.17	.21	.19	.26	.26	.34	.40	.53	.86	.47
2008		.15	.56	.17	.26	.14	.25	.35	.43	.44	.51	.93	.49
Trend		+	+	+	+	–	–	+	+	–	/	–	–

+ = Increasing, / = No Change, − = Decreasing.
L = Latinos.
F = Female.
NR = Non-Religious.
AA = African American.
U = Union.
C = Catholic.
CG = College Graduate.
SW = Southern White.
WC = Weekly Church Attendee.
M = Male.
W = White.
P = Protestants.

years. The fact that the influence of some group memberships changes over time highlights the dynamism of party competition. However, the dynamics of coalition formation are more complicated than understanding what group memberships influence individual vote choice. Winning elections is not simply a function of having some core groups of loyal supporters; parties have to obtain enough votes to form an electoral majority. A party's ability to form an electoral majority is ultimately determined by the number of votes they are able to acquire. How many votes a group actually contributes to a coalition is a product of a group's size and rate of turnout in addition to party loyalty. Gaining an understanding coalition dynamics requires an understanding of where the parties' votes are actually coming from and how these sources of electoral support have changed over time. In the next section I develop a measurement strategy with the goal of estimating how many votes each politically relevant group contributed to the party coalitions in each election from 1952 to 2008.

2. Group contributions to the party coalitions

I demonstrated the following group memberships significantly influence individual vote choice in the previous section:

Having established what group memberships structure individual voting decisions, I now turn to assessing how many votes politically relevant groups contribute to the

Democratic Groups[a]	Republican Groups
African Americans	Whites
Latinos	Protestants
Catholics	Weekly Church Attendees
Union Members	Southern Whites
Non-Religious	Men
College Graduates	
Women	
Jews	

[a] I was forced to exclude Jews from the subsequent analysis due to the extremely small sample size in the ANES.

party coalitions. The size of a group's contribution to a party's coalition is a product of three factors:

1) Loyalty—the proportion of group members that support the party

2) Turnout—the proportion of group members that actually vote

3) Size—the group's proportion of the total population

All three of these components must be taken into account when measuring group contributions because no individual component tells the entire story on its own (Axelrod, 1972, 12). My estimates of group contributions

are generated using the measure created by Robert Axelrod in his 1972 (and updated in 1974, 1978, 1982 and 1986) APSR article entitled "Where the votes come from: An analysis of electoral coalitions 1952–1968." Axelrod's measure combines a group's size, turnout and loyalty to create a single measure of a group's contribution to a party's coalition (please consult the Appendix for the computational details). A group's contribution to a party's coalition is defined as the proportion of the party's votes that come from members of the group (Axelrod, 1972, 12).[6] Table 2 displays the contribution that each group has made to the party coalitions in each election from 1952 thru 2008. The table's final row summarizes any trends—either growth or decline—of each group's contribution (please consult the tables in the Appendix for the tables containing group loyalty, turnout and size during each election).

Table 2 demonstrates that the Democratic Party has been obtaining a greater amount of support from several social groups. African Americans, Latinos, the non-religious and women have been consistently making up a greater proportion of the Democratic coalition since the 1960s. African Americans now consistently provide more than 20 percent of the Democratic vote—even in years where the Democratic candidate wins widespread support among other groups. Prior to 2004, the only times that African Americans provided more than 20 percent of Democratic Party's votes were in 1972 and 1980–1984; all years where white voters defected from the Democratic Party's coalition at a high rate.[7] The contribution of Latinos to the Democratic coalition has increased as well, moving from 5 percent in 1972 and peaking at 15 percent in 2008. The contributions of the non-religious and women have also modestly increased over the course of the last several decades. The increase of the size of the African American, Latino, non-religious and female contribution to the Democratic Party's coalition has coincided with a decrease in the size of the contribution that is being made by union members and Catholics. Union members made up 14 percent of the Democratic coalition in 2008, less than half of the peak union contribution of 34 percent in 1956. Likewise, the Catholic portion of the Democratic Party's vote has dropped from an average of 35 percent in the 1950s and 1960s to an average of 25 percent in the 2000s.

The Republican Party's coalition has been overwhelmingly comprised of white voters across the entire span of the data. However, the contribution made by Southern whites to the Republican coalition has increased dramatically. Southern whites contributed less than a quarter of the Republican Party's votes during the 1950s and 1960s, but the group's contribution increased and Southern whites made up more than a third of the Republican Party's votes in 2000–2008, topping out at 43 percent in 2008. The contribution made by Protestant voters to the Republican coalition has sharply declined in recent in recent years as well. Protestants contributed over 70 percent of the Republican Party's votes in the 1960s and 1970s—by 2008 this number has declined to under 50 percent. The size of the male contribution to the Republican Party's coalition has remained largely unchanged. I now turn towards uncovering the sources of group contribution changes in the next subsection.

2.1. Exploring the sources of group contribution change

There are three reasons why a group's contribution could change over time:

1) Conversion —A group's loyalty to a party increases or decreases

2) Mobilization—A group's rate of turnout increases or decreases

3) Demographic Change—There are more or less voters in the group as a proportion of the total population compared to previous elections

Electoral change is frequently discussed in behavioral terms—observers of politics frequently discuss the electoral consequences of changing group loyalty or turnout. However, demographic changes can have a profound impact on political competition. The political history of the United States is marked by numerous examples of changes in electoral outcomes that occurred as a result of a shifting pool of voters—the creation of the New Deal Coalition in 1932 is a particularly striking example of this process in action. Andersen (1979; also see Key, 1955; Petrocik, 1981; Sundquist, 1983) argued that the entrance and subsequent mobilization of new immigrant voters in the electorate was the driving force behind the establishment of the Democratic New Deal Coalition. Widespread Southern and Eastern European immigration changed the demographic composition of the U.S. quite dramatically; by the 1930s many of the major eastern U.S. cities had populations that approached 50 percent foreign-born (Andersen, 1979, 30–

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[6] The measures of group size, national turnout, and national loyalty (measured as party share of the two party vote) are all obtained from the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. The group turnout and loyalty measures are derived from the ANES survey, but corrected to reflect national turnout and loyalty measures. It is typical that more individuals report having voted on surveys than actually did in reality, likewise, more individuals typically report having voted for the election winner than actually did in reality. In order to correct for the over reporting of voting, the group turnout and loyalty rates derived from the raw ANES data are adjusted in order to make them congruent with the known national totals. According to Axelrod (1972, pg 13), "The adjustment procedure is an iterative process by which a contingency table with given marginal distributions while preserving the nature and strength of the association, as measured by appropriate criteria." Mosteller initially developed this technique in a 1968 article entitled, "Association and Estimation in Contingency Tables." Any difference between the Axelrod's reported estimates and my own are the result of Axelrod's use of pairwise deletion to deal with missing data or with slight variations in the data coding. However, the differences between Axelrod's estimates and my own estimates are trivial when we construct estimates for the same groups.

[7] It is important to note that the proportion of party's coalition that is comprised of a specific group is a function of both the group's size and voting behavior as well as the voting behavior of the rest of the electorate. For instance, African Americans are very loyal to the Democratic Party. In poor Democratic years, many voters abandon the Democratic Party for the Republicans, but African Americans typically do not. Therefore, African Americans tend to make up a greater proportion of the Democratic coalition in years where the Democrats fair poorly among most other groups.

Table 3
Trends in group loyalty, turnout and size.

	Democratic groups							Republican groups				
	L	F	NR	AA	U	C	CG	SW	WC	M	W	P
Contribution Trend	+	+	+	+	−	−	+	+	−	/	−	−
Loyalty	/	+	/	/	/	−	+	+	+	+	+	−
Turnout	+	+	/	+	/	−	/	+	/	−	/	/
Group Size	+	/	+	/	−	/	+	+	−	/	−	−

+ = Increasing, / = No Change, − = Decreasing.
L = Latinos.
F = Female.
NR = Non-Religious.
AA = African American.
U = Union.
C = Catholic.
CG = College Graduate.
SW = Southern White.
WC = Weekly Church Attendee.
M = Male.
W = White.
P = Protestants.

33). The rapid growth of the electorate made it possible for the Democratic Party to form a winning coalition by mobilizing voters that were not previously incorporated within the coalition.

Recent political history reaffirms the role that both behavioral and demographic changes play in reshaping the party coalitions. Table 3 displays the trends in voting behavior and demographics that are responsible for the changing group contributions to the party coalitions. The first row in Table 3 shows the long-term trend of each group's contribution to the party coalition, which can be increasing, declining or stable. The next three rows summarize the trend in the group's partisan loyalty, turnout and size. If the group's contribution has changed, it must ultimately be a result of variation in one or more of these three inputs.[8]

2.2. Changes in the Democratic coalition

The Democratic Party has been acquiring an increasing proportion of their total votes from African Americans, Latinos, the non-religious, college graduates and women; but there are disparate reasons why these groups are contributing more votes to the Democratic coalition. The contribution made by African Americans has steadily increased. African Americans have become a larger proportion of the Democratic coalition as a result of increasing turnout. African American group size and loyalty have remained essentially unchanged over the last sixty years, however, turnout has increased substantially. In recent years, African American turnout was on par with white turnout, eliminating the historical disparity between white and black turnout and increasing the size of the African American contribution to the Democratic coalition.

Latinos have also been making greater contributions to the Democratic Party's coalition. There are two reasons for this increase: markedly higher levels of mobilization and rapidly growing group size. Latinos have been consistently loyal to the Democratic Party—but recent elections have seen an unprecedented increase in mobilization amongst this previously electorally latent group. Only 20 to 30 percent of Latinos were mobilized during 1990s.[9] Latino turnout has increased over the last several elections; Latino turnout hit 43 percent in 2008. The increase in mobilization is doubly consequential because Latinos have more than doubled as a proportion of the total U.S. population over the last 30 years, which is largely attributable to the dramatic shift in U.S. immigration policy in 1965 (Tichenor, 2002). Another group that is becoming an increasingly important Democratic constituency is the non-religious. Non-religious voters have always been loyal to the Democratic Party but the portion of the population that identifies as non-religious has moved from 7 percent of the population in 1972 to 18 percent in 2008. This growing group of secular voters—a group that barely existed at the time of Axelrod's initial analysis—is now an important constituency in the Democratic coalition.

The opposite is true of union members. The behavior of union members has been relatively constant over the past 60 years—union members have remained loyal to the Democratic Party and have continued turnout at a rate that is higher the national average. Yet, the proportion of the electorate made up of union members has steadily declined. Right to work laws and an increasingly service-based economy have reduced union membership considerably (Moore, 1998)—from a third of the population in the 1950s to less than 15 percent in the 2000s. The stability

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[8] Trends in group loyalty and turnout were figured relative to the national average in a given year in order to account for year-to-year variations in national level turnout and party loyalty. Thus, these trends should be interpreted as, "how does group loyalty and turnout compare to the national average over time," opposed to "what is the trend in the absolute level of group loyalty and turnout."

[9] It is important to note that this figure is for all Latinos including those who might not be eligible voters.

in the voting behavior of union members is indicative of the fact that the change in union contribution to the Democratic coalition is due almost entirely to the shrinking size of the group. The proportion of the Democratic Party's coalition that is comprised of Catholics has also declined. Unlike union members, the size of the Catholic population has remained stable over the past sixty years. The shrinking Catholic contribution is a product of declining Democratic loyalty and turnout. Inner city Catholic immigrants were a core component of the Democratic "New Deal" coalition (Andersen, 1979; Petrocik, 1981). As Catholics have become more integrated into American society they have become less politically cohesive—the nomination of Catholic Democrat John Kerry in 2004 did not produce the same surge of Catholic Democratic support compared to the nomination of John F. Kennedy in 1960 or Al Smith in 1928.

The Democratic Party has drawn an increasing proportion of votes from women over the past 60 years. Obviously the proportion of females in the population has not changed, which implies that the growth of the female contribution is a result of behavioral changes. The gender gap in partisan loyalty that emerged during the 1970s has become increasingly pronounced. Women were more likely than men to support the Republican Party during the 1950s and 1960s, but female Republican loyalty eroded during the 1970s. Women have been 8 to 10 points more loyal to the Democratic Party than men in recent elections. While the gap between male and female partisanship is frequently discussed, what frequently goes unnoticed is that female mobilization has increased as well. Female turnout lagged behind men's for the majority of the elections covered in this analysis—but turnout in recent elections has matched or exceeded male turnout in both 2004 and 2008. These two elections were the first times that women had a higher rate of turnout over the fifty-six year span of the data.

Finally, college graduates have also become an increasingly important component of the Democratic coalition. College graduates make up a much larger portion of the population now (30%) compared to even 30 years ago (15%). Moreover, college graduates were once a reliably Republican constituency, but the group has drifted towards the Democratic Party in recent elections. The increasing group size and Democratic loyalty of college graduates has dramatically increased the group's contribution to the Democratic coalition.

2.3. Changes in the Republican coalition

The Democratic Party has benefited from the fact that many loyal Democratic constituencies are growing. The Republican Party is facing the opposite scenario; many traditionally Republican constituencies are declining as a proportion of the electorate. The decline of the white proportion of the population is perhaps the most striking demographic change that has occurred in the county over the last half century. In 1960 the country was 89 percent white, by 2008 this number had shrank to 63 percent. While the white population is still growing in absolute terms, the growth in the white population has been outstripped by the rapid growth of the Latino and Asian populations. White turnout has not substantially changed over the past 60 years—but whites have become increasingly loyal to the Republican Party in recent elections, which explains why the white contribution to the Republican coalition has not substantially declined in spite of the decline of group size.

The uptick in white Republican loyalty is largely a product of the Republican conversion of Southern Whites. Southern Whites were once thought of as one of the core groups in the Democratic "New Deal" coalition—Axelrod identified the South as one of the key *Democratic* constituencies in his 1972 analysis. The dramatic social upheaval that surrounded the civil rights movement in the 1960s had a profound and lasting impact on the voting behavior of Southern whites. Southern whites were predisposed to vote for Democratic Party until the Democratic Party adopted a progressive stance on civil rights (see Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Huckfeldt and Kohfeld, 1989; Frymer, 2010; and numerous others), which lead to the long-term realignment of Southern whites to the Republican Party. From the 1960s onward, Southern whites have become increasingly likely to support the Republican Party. Additionally, the Southern white population has grown as a function of the growth of the Sunbelt states. Southern whites are making up a greater proportion of the electorate in spite of the fact that whites as a whole are a shrinking demographic. The combination of increasing Southern white Republican loyalty, turnout and group size has made Southern whites a critically important source of votes for the Republican Party. In contemporary U.S. politics, Southern whites are one of the most reliably Republican groups of voters in the United States—71 percent of Southern whites voted for Republican John McCain in 2008—an all-time high. While Southern whites' Republican loyalty has been quite high over the past twenty years, it has yet to be seen if the uptick in Southern whites' Republican support between 2004 and 2008 was a function of the Democratic candidate's race or a function of a further shift in the underlying preference for Republican candidates.

While Southern whites are contributing more and more votes to the Republican coalition, many traditionally Republican constituencies are now contributing fewer voters as a result of population declines. The percentage of individuals identifying as Protestants has dropped sharply (65 percent in 1952 to 41 percent in 2008) as more people have started to identify as having no religious preference. The decline in the membership of mainline Protestant denominations has coincided with the decline in Republican loyalty among Protestants—the Protestant vote split evenly between Obama and McCain in 2008. While Protestants have become less politically cohesive over time, the religiously devout have been an increasingly important Republican constituency. The religiously observant have become increasingly loyal to the Republican Party starting with the rise of the Christian Coalition in the 1980s (Nesmith, 1994). However, the increasing loyalty of weekly church attendees is partially mitigated by the fact that the proportion of weekly church attendees has dropped—declining from 40 percent in 1972 to 31 percent in 2008. The religious divide is now defined by the cleavage between the secular and the religious opposed to the

cleavage between Catholics and Protestants, which has declined in political importance. Finally, males' contribution to the Republican coalition has remained unchanged. While male turnout has slightly declined, male loyalty to the Republican Party has slightly increased, resulting in no net change in contribution.

3. Implications for the future of U.S. party competition

The previous analysis demonstrated the important role that demographic and behavioral changes play in reshaping party coalitions. In this section I discuss the how the parties' changing social bases are likely to affect the future of American party competition. The results of this analysis clearly demonstrate that demographic changes are of considerable political importance. While many analyses of group support focus on the rate that groups support one party over the other, this analysis shows that the ratio of groups is also consequential. The outcome of recent elections highlights the importance of demographic changes.

Prior to Barack Obama in 2008, the Democratic candidates that have managed to win over the last 40 years have done so by being able to form a coalition that includes significantly more white voters than losing Democratic candidates. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were both able to win by attracting a much larger percentage of the white vote (especially in the South) than did the candidates that preceded or followed them (or in Carter's case, better than he did in his own reelection bid in 1980). The Obama victory in 2008 marked a departure from the previous Democratic victories of Carter in 1976 and Clinton in 1992 and 1996. Obama did not significantly improve upon the performance of Kerry or Gore among whites (and preformed even worse than Kerry or Gore among Southern whites), yet he managed to win by assembling a coalition comprised of an unprecedented amount of minority voters—which was made possible by the country's changing demographic composition. In addition, Obama also benefitted from record high turnout among African Americans and Latinos. Obama's level of support among whites was nearly identical to Walter Mondale's in 1984. The key difference is that while Mondale managed to only win one state (and the District of Columbia), Obama was able to form an electoral majority in both the popular vote and Electoral College.

Thus far the Republican Party has been able to offset the shrinking size of their core groups by winning a greater proportion of the white vote and by turning out core groups at a high rate. The Republican Party must find a way to expand their base of electoral support in future elections in order to remain electorally competitive. The Republican Party could accomplish this by gaining a higher level of support from groups that are already loyal to the Republican Party or by attracting more support among groups that currently favor the Democrats. Further evolution of the party coalitions seems likely in the future, given the political consequences of inexorable demographic trends and the competitive nature of American presidential elections.

4. Concluding remarks

The make up of the party coalitions has changed a great deal over the second half of the 20th century and in the first decade of the 21st century; the Democratic Party's coalition increasingly consists of non-whites and Republican Party has become more Southern. Perhaps the most interesting theoretical question that is implied by this analysis is how the stability of the party system is maintained. National elections are consistently competitive in the U.S. (Bartels, 1998). Yet, the electorate is always changing and demographic changes often benefit one party over the other. Stokes and Iversen (1962) were the first to demonstrate the fact that there are "forces that restore party competition" in the United States. These forces are still unidentified, but the level of electoral stability amidst all of the change implies that these unidentified restorative forces are indeed at work. A possible extension of this analysis would be to see if groups move "in tandem," or in other words, is the decline in Democratic support by one group is typically offset by the gain in support from another social group? Ultimately, the questions addressed in this article are fundamental to understanding party competition. Understanding how many votes groups actually contribute to the party coalitions how these contributions have changed over time is essential for understanding the patterns of continuity and change in American electoral politics.

Appendix

Appendix A. Variable coding.

Group	Coding
White	White respondents were indentified using the "Race" variable (VCF0106a) from the ANES cumulative file. Whites were coded as a 1 if "VCF0106a" equaled 1
African Americans	African American respondents were indentified using the "Race" variable (VCF0106a) from the ANES cumulative file. African Americans were coded as a 1 if "VCF0106a" equaled 2
Latinos and Asians	Latino and Asian respondents were indentified using the "Race" variable (VCF0106a) from the ANES cumulative file. Latino was coded as a 1 if "VCF0106a" equaled 5. Asian was coded as a 1 if "VCF0106a" equaled 3
The South	Southern respondents were indentified using the when the variable (VCF0112 == 3) from the ANES cumulative file. South is defined as occupying the 16 State "Southern" Census region.
Southern Whites	Southern White respondents were indentified using the "Race" and "South" variables (VCF0106a == 1 and VCF0112 == 3 respectively) from the ANES cumulative file. South is defined as occupying the 16 State "Southern" Census region.
Protestant	Protestant respondents were indentified using the "Religion" variable (VCF0128) from the ANES cumulative file. Catholic was coded as a 1 if VCF0128 == 1

(*continued*)

Group	Coding
Catholic	Catholic respondents were indentified using the "Religion" variable (VCF0128) from the ANES cumulative file. Catholic was coded as a 1 if VCF0128 == 2
Gender	Gender was coded using variable (VCF0104) from the ANES cumulative file. Female was coded as 1 if VCF0104 equaled 2)
Income	Grouped into thirds using the family income variable (VCF0114) from the ANES cumulative file. The bottom third of the income distribution are respondents in category 1&2. The middle third of the income distribution are respondents who answered 3. The top third of the income distribution are respondents in the category 4 &5.
Non-Religious	Non-Religious voters were identified using the religion variable (VCF0128 == 5)
Weekly Church Attendees	Weekly Church Attendees were identified using the church attendance variable (VCF0131 == 1) before 1972 and (VCF0130 == 1) in 1972 and after.
College Graduates	College Graduates were identified using the education variable (VCF0110 == 4)
Age Category	Respondents under 35 and over 65 were identified using the age variable (VCF0101)

Appendix B. The calculation of the Axelrod measure of group contribution.

Robert Axelrod (1972) developed a measure that combines group size, turnout and party loyalty to create one combined measure of group's contribution as a proportion of a coalition. The formula used to generate the measure is depicted below:

$$\text{Group Contribution} = \frac{\text{Group Size}^*\text{Group TO}^*\text{Group Loyalty}}{\text{National TO}^*\text{National Loyalty}}$$

If one works through the math and cancels out redundant terms, this formula can simplified to the following form (Axelrod, 1972; pg 12):

$$\text{Group Contribution} = \frac{\text{Voters in Group for Party}}{\text{Voters for Party}}$$

The final product of the equation is a measure of total group contribution as measured by the proportion of a party's votes that are cast by the group. A substantive illustration of this formula in action is depicted below, which is a calculation of the African American contribution to the Democratic Party's coalition in 2008. In 2008, African Americans represented 12.4 percent of the population, turned out to vote at a rate of 62.7 percent and were 99 percent loyal to the Democratic Party. When these numbers are plugged into the formula along with national turnout and the national Democratic loyalty, the final measure that is produced is the total African American contribution to the Democratic Party's coalition. According to my calculation below, African Americans provided almost 26 percent of the Democratic Party's total vote in 2008:

African American Contribution

$$= \frac{12.8 \text{ AA in Nation}^*62.7 \text{ AATO}^*99 \text{ AA Loyalty}}{57.1 \text{ National TO}^*52.9 \text{ National Loyalty}}$$

$$= 25.9$$

The strength of the Axelrod measure of group contribution to a coalition is that it is easy to calculate, interpret and flexible enough to apply to virtually any group where sufficient data exists. Moreover, the Axelrod's approach actually allows an analyst to measure how many votes a group actually contributes to a parties' coalition.

Appendix C. Core groups in the Democratic coalition 1952–2008.[a]

Year	Contribution							=	turnout							*	loyalty							*	size							/	National	
	AA	U	C	L	F	NR	CG		AA	U	C	L	F	NR	CG		AA	U	C	L	F	NR	CG		AA	U	C	L	F	NR	CG		To%	Dem%
1952	.08	.31	.36	–	.45	–	.07		.27	.65	.71	–	.57	–	.82		.81	.60	.54	–	.44	–	.32		.10	.22	.26	–	.50	–	.07		.62	.44
1956	.06	.34	.34	–	.41	–	.09		.22	.63	.69	–	.52	–	.82		.65	.56	.48	–	.40	–	.34		.10	.24	.26	–	.50	–	.08		.59	.43
1960	.07	.31	.53	–	.42	–	.09		.29	.64	.80	–	.57	–	.86		.73	.65	.81	–	.47	–	.35		.11	.24	.26	–	.50	–	.09		.63	.50
1964	.14	.33	.34	–	.50	–	.08		.50	.69	.69	–	.60	–	.74		.99	.80	.74	–	.63	–	.42		.11	.22	.25	–	.50	–	.1		.61	.61
1968	.19	.27	.34	–	.50	–	.10		.53	.61	.65	–	.59	–	.79		.97	.59	.63	–	.50	–	.40		.11	.23	.25	–	.50	–	.1		.61	.42
1972	.23	.27	.30	.05	.53	.13	.16		.51	.56	.57	.36	.54	.57	.68		.88	.47	.43	.59	.42	.63	.43		.11	.22	.26	.05	.50	.07	.12		.55	.37
1976	.17	.28	.31	.05	.47	.07	.14		.42	.57	.54	.37	.50	.40	.70		.95	.66	.58	.64	.52	.62	.37		.11	.20	.27	.06	.50	.08	.15		.54	.50
1980	.23	.26	.29	.05	.52	.07	.22		.49	.55	.53	.31	.50	.45	.80		.94	.57	.46	.56	.49	.42	.36		.12	.20	.28	.06	.50	.09	.18		.53	.41
1984	.21	.28	.33	.07	.54	.12	.29		.44	.60	.58	.38	.53	.48	.77		.88	.57	.45	.52	.45	.51	.40		.12	.18	.28	.07	.50	.10	.2		.53	.40
1988	.18	.23	.33	.10	.51	.13	.30		.37	.55	.55	.46	.48	.43	.79		.91	.59	.52	.69	.49	.59	.41		.12	.16	.27	.08	.50	.11	.22		.50	.46
1992	.18	.22	.30	.07	.52	.15	.27		.48	.66	.59	.35	.54	.48	.75		.93	.64	.58	.65	.57	.70	.46		.12	.16	.26	.09	.50	.12	.23		.50	.43
1996	.16	.24	.28	.11	.54	.14	.27		.35	.60	.54	.37	.47	.38	.69		.99	.73	.56	.76	.61	.71	.45		.12	.15	.25	.11	.50	.14	.24		.49	.49
2000	.19	.18	.26	.09	.53	.16	.36		.42	.56	.57	.32	.48	.41	.71		.92	.61	.48	.57	.56	.62	.49		.13	.14	.24	.13	.50	.15	.26		.50	.48
2004	.21	.19	.26	.13	.54	.17	.26		.52	.62	.56	.42	.56	.55	.72		.88	.65	.50	.58	.52	.51	.49		.13	.13	.25	.14	.50	.16	.28		.56	.48
2008	.26	.14	.25	.15	.56	.17	.35		.63	.62	.56	.44	.60	.46	.75		.99	.59	.54	.67	.57	.61	.48		.13	.12	.25	.16	.50	.18	.3		.57	.53

AA = African American.
U = Union.
C = Catholic.
L = Latino.
F = Female.
NR = Non-Religious.
CG = College Graduate.
[a] Note: Latino is blank before 1972 because the ANES did not ask respondents about Latino/Hispanic ethnicity before that point. Non-Religious is blank before 1972 because I was unable to find data of the actual percentage of non-identifiers in the population before 1972.

Appendix D. Core groups in the Republican coalition 1952–2008.

Year	Contribution					=	turnout					*	loyalty					*	size					/	National	
	W	P	SW	WC	M		W	P	SW	M	WC		W	P	SW	M	WC		W	P	SW	M	WC		To%	Rep%
1952	.98	.70	.16	.47	.53		.65	.60	.47	.67	.66		.58	.61	.47	.54	.56		.89	.65	.24	.50	.44		.62	.56
1956	1.00	.66	.16	.47	.53		.64	.54	.47	.67	.63		.60	.62	.48	.54	.57		.89	.66	.24	.50	.44		.59	.57
1960	1.00	.93	.21	.52	.52		.67	.67	.56	.69	.74		.53	.66	.49	.47	.5		.89	.66	.24	.50	.44		.63	.50
1964	1.00	.73	.26	.47	.54		.64	.59	.55	.63	.68		.44	.45	.47	.41	.39		.87	.65	.24	.50	.42		.61	.39
1968	1.00	.76	.24	.42	.52		.62	.61	.54	.62	.69		.58	.59	.56	.52	.51		.85	.65	.25	.50	.37		.61	.58
1972	.96	.67	.27	.48	.54		.56	.54	.51	.56	.60		.69	.66	.72	.65	.67		.83	.63	.25	.50	.40		.55	.63
1976	.98	.70	.26	.51	.54		.56	.55	.50	.57	.63		.56	.54	.53	.49	.54		.81	.62	.25	.50	.39		.54	.50
1980	.98	.63	.29	.48	.56		.55	.54	.54	.55	.63		.65	.56	.60	.59	.58		.80	.61	.26	.50	.38		.53	.59
1984	.94	.61	.27	.50	.53		.57	.52	.50	.53	.67		.67	.64	.66	.63	.64		.78	.58	.26	.50	.37		.53	.60
1988	.96	.60	.26	.45	.56		.54	.50	.43	.53	.60		.63	.60	.63	.57	.56		.77	.55	.26	.50	.36		.50	.54
1992	.93	.61	.27	.51	.54		.59	.55	.49	.56	.64		.53	.54	.54	.50	.58		.76	.52	.26	.50	.35		.55	.57
1996	.98	.57	.32	.56	.59		.54	.50	.50	.51	.63		.55	.52	.54	.52	.58		.73	.49	.26	.50	.34		.49	.51
2000	.88	.50	.35	.48	.57		.55	.50	.53	.52	.60		.58	.54	.64	.55	.61		.70	.47	.26	.50	.33		.50	.52
2004	.86	.47	.34	.40	.53		.60	.55	.59	.55	.63		.61	.55	.63	.55	.57		.67	.44	.26	.50	.32		.56	.52
2008	.93	.49	.43	.44	.51		.59	.62	.60	.54	.67		.65	.50	.72	.50	.56		.64	.41	.27	.50	.31		.57	.47

W = White.
P = Protestant.
SW = Southern White.
M = Male.
WC = Weekly Church Attendee.

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