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Partisan Hearts and Minds

Political Parties and the Social Identities
of Voters

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the context of public opinion research, the term *partisanship* is something of a double entendre, calling to mind both partisan cheering at sports events and affiliation with political parties. Both meanings, as it happens, comport with what those who study elections typically have in mind when discussing partisan attitudes. Ask a sample of ordinary citizens to assess the president's integrity, policy initiatives, or performance in office, and one finds sharp disagreement between Democrats and Republicans. Indeed, Democrats and Republicans offer contrasting views not only on party leaders and their programs but also on their family, friends, pets—anything that has become emblematic of a political party.

Of course, it is hardly news that Democrats and Republicans disagree about politics. Early survey researchers noted in 1936 that 83% of Republicans believed that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's policies were leading the country down the road to dictatorship, a view shared by only 9% of Democrats (Key 1961: 246). What makes partisanship interesting, and what was not apparent to researchers until the 1950s, is the fact that voters who call themselves Republicans at age thirty-two

will most likely continue to do so at age eighty-two. Recessions, wars, and dramatic swings in the political fortunes of the parties tend to leave a shallow imprint on the partisan affiliations of adults, just as doctrinal and organizational disputes within Christian sects typically have little effect on the religious affiliations of churchgoers. To be sure, one generation may be more enamored of the Republican Party or the Lutheran church than the last, but the pace at which adults change their group attachments tends to be slow.

This degree of persistence is surprising because identification with political parties is a minor part of the typical American's self-conception. Race, sex, ethnicity, religion, region, and social class come immediately to mind as core social identities; political party does not. The core identities suffuse nearly all of our day-to-day interactions with others; it is difficult to imagine a social gathering in which people fail to take notice of accents, skin color, or secondary sexual characteristics. Partisan stereotypes and self-images, by contrast, are called to mind sporadically, when one glances at the newspaper or discusses politics with friends. It is not unusual for people to be unaware of the party affiliations of their friends, even when these friends' other group identities are known in minute detail. The political self is for the most part eclipsed by other selves—cultural, economic, spiritual, sexual, familial, athletic, artistic. In those instances when our attention turns to politics, however, partisan attachments become highly influential, whereas more fundamental social identities, such as sex, religion, or social class, tend to have less predictive power.

A simple example drawn from the classic Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study (Jennings, Markus, and Niemi 1991) illustrates the point. In this survey, a national sample of 728 parents of high school students were interviewed in 1965 and reinterviewed in 1982. In 1965, respondents were asked the canonical question about their political partisanship: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?" On the basis of this question, respondents were classified as Democrats (45.5%), Republicans (30.0%), or Independents (24.0%) or as "apolitical" (0.5%). In 1982, these respondents reported which presidential candidate they had voted for in 1980. Ronald Reagan received votes from 89.5% of those who in 1965 had labeled themselves Republicans but from just 33.8% of those who had earlier labeled themselves Democrats. Independents fell in the middle, at 65.1%. It is remarkable to think that identities formed before the rise and fall of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, bell-bottoms, disco, stagflation, and gasoline shortages could so powerfully shape presidential preferences seventeen years later.

Remarkable, too, is that these sharp partisan differences eclipse corresponding sex, class, or religion effects. For example, in this survey, Reagan received 57.8% of the male and 58.6% of the female parents' votes. He garnered the support of nearly identical proportions of Protestants and Catholics (58.2% and 60.7%, respectively). A mere sixteen-point gap separated Jews (41.9%) from Protestants. Even class differences pale compared with the predictive power of party identification: 63.9% of those identifying as middle class in 1982 voted for Reagan, whereas 47.1% of those identifying as working class voted for this conservative Republican. It is notable that sex, religion, and class were weaker predictors of the vote for Ronald Reagan than was party identification measured during the Johnson administration.

Of the seemingly "fundamental" social identities, only race is a powerful predictor of electoral choice. The relationship between race and voting, however, is largely traceable to the fact that since the early 1960s, a preponderance of African Americans have identified themselves as Democrats. Seldom have black voters since that time offered much electoral support to black Republicans or Independents running against white Democrats. Tellingly, groups with less sharply defined partisan proclivities, such as Chinese Americans, are less prone to vote in distinctive ways. Our point is not that race is unimportant but rather that its influence on electoral choice is mediated largely by partisan affiliation.

The persistence and motive power of partisan identities vis-à-vis other sorts of social identities are all the more remarkable given that political party organizations have almost no detectable presence in Americans' everyday lives. In many ways, political parties in the United States have declined since the 1950s, as urban political machines, patronage jobs, party levers in voting booths, and backroom nominating procedures have waned or disappeared. As campaigns have grown more reliant on direct mail, commercial phone banks, and television, the role of party activists has receded. As the percentage of adults who work for or with parties has dropped (Putnam 2000), the level of personal contact with party activists has diminished accordingly. To be sure, the parties have access to a great deal of money. But the so-called soft money that courses through the veins of the political parties, although justified politically as a means of "party building," tends to fund candidates' advertising campaigns that, ironically, seldom bother to mention political parties (Krasno and Seltz 2000). Given these changes in institutional structure and campaign style, it is tempting to assume that partisan identities have become a thing of the past and hold little sway over voting decisions in what has increasingly become a candi-

date-centered, rather than party-centered, political environment. It turns out, however, that the decline of party institutions has not rendered party attachments irrelevant, nor has it diminished the influence of party attachments on vote choice. Parties are not what they used to be, but partisan *groups*—Democrats and Republicans—remain important objects of social identification.

This book builds a case for the continuing theoretical and political significance of party identities. Because we do not view party attachments as a product of how voters evaluate party leaders or party platforms, our view of party identification differs from that of other leading interpretations. Currently in political science the prevailing way of thinking about partisan identities emphasizes the extent to which they are shaped by rational evaluations of party platforms and performance in office. Following in an intellectual tradition founded by Anthony Downs (1957), many scholars contend that partisanship reflects a citizen's level of policy agreement with the two parties. Voters with more conservative views gravitate toward the Republican Party; liberals, to the Democratic Party. Over time, the relative attractiveness of the two parties may change, as leaders in each party maneuver left and right in an effort to garner electoral support. Another prominent argument concerns the manner in which people adjust their party identification as they assess the incumbent administration's management of domestic and foreign affairs. Morris Fiorina (1981) argues that partisanship constitutes a "running tally" of performance evaluations, as citizens accumulate information about each party's capacity to govern. Whether people focus on policies or performance in office, the characterization of partisan identification is similar. Voters, like consumers in the marketplace, form loyalties based on their evaluations of what parties deliver.

Our view, which harkens back to earlier social-psychological perspectives on partisanship, draws a parallel between party identification and religious identification. Partisan attachments form relatively early in adulthood. To be sure, party issue positions have something to do with the attractiveness of partisan labels to young adults, much as religious doctrines have something to do with the attractiveness of religious denominations. But causality also flows in the other direction: When people feel a sense of belonging to a given social group, they absorb the doctrinal positions that the group advocates. However party and religious identifications come about, once they take root in early adulthood, they often persist. Partisan identities are enduring features of citizens' self-conceptions. They do not merely come and go with election cycles and campaign ephemera. The public's interest in party politics climbs as elec-

tions draw near, but partisan self-conceptions remain intact during peaks and lulls in party competition.

These are strong empirical claims, and all of them have been challenged at one time or another in the enormous corpus of research on party identification. Our aim is therefore to reevaluate the evidence on partisan stability and change. Much of the research on partisanship suffers from a simple but nonetheless debilitating weakness: Scholars tend to look at only one type of data. Some researchers work exclusively with panel surveys; others, with aggregate data (for example, the percentage of Democrats recorded in successive surveys). Or they tend to focus attention on one country, one time period, or just one survey. This book pulls together a wide array of survey data—aggregate, individual, U.S., comparative—dating back to the 1950s. This approach enables us to develop a synoptic account of the nature of partisanship and the sources of partisan change.

Another distinctive feature of this book is its attentiveness to methodological nuance. Many previous analysts of party identification have overlooked measurement problems in the survey data they analyzed. The standard measures of party identification, although more reliable than most survey questions, are nonetheless fallible. Respondents, interviewers, and data coders make mistakes. As a result, quantitative ratings derived from surveys do not always reflect respondents' true levels of identification with political parties. Of course, differentiating mistakes from true changes in attitude is a complicated matter, and in the chapters that follow we devote a great deal of attention to this complex but important issue. Recognizing that some readers may be reluctant to wade through the arcane technical details, we intersperse our mathematical discussions with summaries of the substantive results. Suffice it to say that standard survey assessments of party identification contain enough measurement error to distort statistical findings, and unless one makes specific allowances for measurement error, one risks overstating the malleability of party attachments.

The most important contribution of this book, however, is theoretical. Few subjects in political science have received as much attention as party identification. Yet it is very difficult to find a single work that offers a clear explanation of what it is and why it behaves as it does. Those who return to *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960) for guidance find its discussion of party identification terse and a bit vague. Party identification is characterized as a "psychological orientation," an "enduring attachment," but there is little discussion of self-

conceptions, and one must read between the lines to work out the implied analogy between party identification and class identification.¹ Subsequent works on partisanship have generally used *The American Voter* as a foil; as a result, the “traditional” view of party identification has not been fully articulated and defended empirically.

IDENTIFICATION VERSUS EVALUATION

To highlight our interpretation of partisan attachments, we return to the analogy between parties and religious denominations. Like members of political parties, members of a religion or religious denomination comprise an identifiable social group, cleave to distinctive underlying doctrines, and maintain (to varying degrees) an adversarial relationship toward other religions. And like party identification, religious identification is often acquired early in life as a product of one’s family environment or early adult socialization. As a member of a religion, one is indoctrinated into that religion’s precepts, much as partisans learn the slogans and nostrums of their party. To be sure, some adults choose their religion by canvassing various sects’ theological positions, selecting the one that best fits their personal values. But these people seem to be a minority, for among adults over thirty years of age, religious affiliation, once established, tends to remain intact. A more common avenue for shifting religious affiliation is a changing small-group environment, in particular, marriage to a person of another faith. In such instances, people may commit themselves to their new faith for reasons that have little to do with its overall doctrinal attractiveness, or they may alter their perception of the new religion as they come to see it through their spouse’s eyes. Parallel observations may be made about partisan identities, which also change as regional and occupational mobility put adults into contact with new friends and social groups, some of which may have different partisan coloration (Brown 1981; Gimpel 1999).

The analogy between partisan and religious identification has an implication that many political scientists find disconcerting: Partisan change among adults often has little to do with unfolding political and economic events. Scholars who study politics like to think that politics matters. They are right for certain limiting cases, such as the party realignment precipitated by the Great Depression or the advent of two-party competition in the South after the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Seldom, however, do political events alter the stereotypes of partisan groups, and that is why most reversals of political fortune—scandals, diplomatic crises, economic news, legislative outcomes—leave little imprint

on the partisan attachments of the adult electorate. To the extent that they alter the partisan balance, it is because they shape the newly forming partisan attachments of young adults and immigrants.

Why do changing political and economic circumstances not have a bigger effect on party attachments? The answer offered by the authors of *The American Voter* is that partisans ignore or deflect information that is inconsistent with their party attachments. Echoing a theme originally set forth by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954), Campbell et al. (1960: 133) argue that “identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation. The stronger the party bond, the more exaggerated the process of selection and perceptual distortion will be.” Rational updating based on new information is undone by “subtle processes of perceptual adjustment by which the individual assembles an image of current politics consistent with his partisan allegiance” (Stokes 1966: 127). This biased processing of information functions to insulate party attachments from political events.

This argument goes hand in hand with another recurrent theme in *The American Voter*: the public’s inattentiveness to politics. The general public, it is argued, follows politics in only the most cursory fashion and shows a dim awareness of newsworthy names, places, and points on the globe. Thus, it should not be surprising to discover that partisanship persists in the wake of changing political events. These events remain largely unknown to all but the most attentive, who also tend to possess the deepest partisan attachments and thus the greatest propensity toward perceptual bias.

Although this book is on the whole sympathetic to the propositions advanced by early theorists of partisanship, we disagree about how partisans attend to and retain information about party performance. Like those scholars who emphasize the rational underpinnings of public opinion, we are skeptical of the notion that partisans ignore or reinterpret discordant information. We find that although citizens often lack specific information about day-to-day political events, they do update their overall assessments of national conditions and the capacities of the parties to handle important problems. Moreover, partisanship does not seem to prevent people from assimilating new information. As party fortunes shift due to changes in economic performance, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents change their evaluations of party competence, often dramatically. Thus, for example, when the economy soured between 1991 and 1992, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents each became less sanguine about the Republican Party’s capacity to manage the economy. To be

sure, Republicans have more faith in the party's economic stewardship than Democrats, but the process by which the two partisan groups update their evaluations is similar. These patterns of voter learning, we argue in Chapter 5, suggest that partisan stability cannot be traced to biases in the way citizens gather and retain information.

Evaluations of party capabilities are distinct from partisan identities, both conceptually and empirically. People may assimilate new information about the parties and change their perceptions of the parties without changing the team for which they cheer. We find, for example, that when a Democratic administration presides over a long period of economic prosperity, Republicans may become more impressed with Democratic economic management, but they tend not to reconsider whether they think of themselves as Republicans. It is also telling in this regard that electoral landslides do little to alter the balance of partisan attachments. Indeed, this is the central insight that the authors of *The American Voter* derived from their observation of the Eisenhower era. One may vote for a Republican candidate and yet feel part of a Democratic team.

To explain the stability of partisan attachments, we must focus on the special characteristics of social identities. How do people define themselves in relation to political groups? To what extent are perceptions of these groups susceptible to change?

PARTISAN IMAGES

The occasional disjuncture between what voters think of the parties and the degree to which they identify with partisan groups suggests the need to reconsider the motivational assumptions of revisionist models. The underlying premise of such models is that voters attach themselves to the party that offers the most attractive platform, able leaders, and charismatic candidates. The attachment is hollow, scarcely more than an expression of beliefs about which party will best pursue one's interests. The contrasting view, which we explore in this book, focuses instead on identification with social groups. Social identification involves comparing a judgment about oneself with one's perception of a social group. As people reflect on whether they are Democrats or Republicans (or neither), they call to mind some mental image, or stereotype, of what these sorts of people are like and square these images with their own self-conceptions. In effect, people ask themselves two questions: What kinds of social groups come to mind as I think about Democrats, Republicans, and Independents? Which as-

Not many surveys have addressed the first question, but those that have attest to the remarkable persistence of stereotypes over time. In 1953, Gallup asked a national sample of adults, "When you think of people who are Democrats, what type of person comes to your mind?" Respondents could offer multiple responses (though few did so), and these were assembled into broad group categories. The groups "working class," "common people," and "poor" accounted for 34% of the responses and "union person" and "middle class" an additional 4%. Just 1% fell under the rubric "rich, wealthy, high class." When next asked about Republicans, respondents painted the opposite picture. Just 6% of the responses fell under the headings "working people," "average person," or "middle class." On the other hand, "rich, wealthy, people of means," "business executive," "capitalist," and "high class" accounted for 31% of all responses. In 1997, some four decades later, the Roper Starch organization conducted face-to-face interviews with a national sample of adults. This time respondents were presented with a card containing a variety of words and phrases; their task was to choose those words that described Democrats and Republicans (respondents could choose as many descriptors as they liked). When asked about Republicans, 55% selected the descriptor "big business" and 52% "rich people." Only 18% chose "middle class" and just 6%, "minorities." By contrast, over 40% of the sample selected the terms "middle class" and "minorities" to describe Democrats; less than 20% chose the terms "rich people" or "big business." The partisan stereotypes of the New Deal are alive and well. The only innovation seems to involve minorities, which pollsters and respondents neglected to mention in 1953.²

It should hardly be surprising that stereotypes persist over a long time. Studies of racial tolerance have documented again and again the notorious stubbornness of mental images of various ethnic or racial groups. Moreover, these studies indicate that even those people who may be ideologically predisposed to reject negative group stereotypes (for example, Jews are stingy) are nonetheless familiar with them and struggle to resist their influence (Devine et al. 1991). Although not as elaborate or as emotionally charged as racial stereotypes, partisan group images are coherent, widespread, and influential (Lodge and Hamill 1986).

Stereotypes concerning social groups are not only powerful, they are also pervasive. It has long been recognized that even those who are on the losing end of a negative stereotype often fall under its spell. One interesting but seldom mentioned fact about partisan stereotypes is that they are held in more or less equivalent form by Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. Ask whether

phrases such as “forward looking” or “able leadership” describe Republicans, and naturally Democrats will say “no” and Republicans, “yes.” Yet Democrats and Republicans do not differ much in the associations they draw between partisan groups and “minorities,” or “big business.”³ Granted, Republicans are somewhat less likely to select a loaded term such as “rich people” when describing Republicans, but to a remarkable extent Democrats and Republicans operate with similar group stereotypes.

What differentiates Democrats and Republicans is how they think of themselves in relation to these group stereotypes. Both may associate “minorities” with Democrats and not Republicans, but are “minorities” an aversive or attractive group? How one orients oneself vis-à-vis certain key social groups has a profound influence on one’s party identification. In 1996, respondents to the American National Election Study (NES) were presented with a list of social groups and were asked to indicate which ones they felt “particularly close to.”⁴ To reflect the dominant stereotypes associated with the two parties, we focus our attention on working- and upper-class groups (the poor, blacks, union members, working class, and Hispanics on one hand; business people on the other), although we could just as easily have chosen more evocative political groups (for example, feminists, liberals). Suffice it to say that even this rather limited inventory of groups provides an effective means by which to sort Democrats from Republicans. Of those who feel close to business people but not minority or working-class groups, 62.1% identify as Republicans and 15.3% as Democrats. Of those with the converse pattern of group affinities, 65.7% are Democrats, and 6.5% are Republicans. Citizens whose group attachments conflict or do not involve these social categories split more or less evenly between the parties, with a plurality calling themselves Independents.⁵ The terms *Democrats* and *Republicans* clearly call to mind different constituent groups, and how people feel about these social categories has a great deal to do with whether they identify with a partisan group and, if so, which one.

The matching process by which people examine the fit between their self-conceptions and what they take to be the social bases of the parties tends to evolve rapidly in young adulthood and slowly thereafter. One reason is that young people are still learning to sort out which groups “belong” to each party. Another is that the self-conceptions of young people evolve rapidly.

Compared with their older counterparts, younger voters tend to experience much more significant and frequent changes in their social surroundings. They leave home, launch careers, start families, and make new acquaintances. By their early thirties, however, rapid change in primary social groups has begun to

subside, and partisanship, along with many other sorts of social identifications, becomes much more deeply entrenched. From this point, partisanship changes gradually. In short, partisanship tends to be stable among adults because both stereotypes and self-conceptions tend to be stable.

Our perspective on social identification, it should be stressed, differs from what is commonly termed *social identity theory* (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). The latter emphasizes an individual’s drive to achieve positive self-esteem. People attach themselves to socially valued groups, and those who are trapped in low-status groups either disassociate themselves or formulate a different way of looking at groups, such that this group is more prized than others. This depiction is very different from ours. We focus on how people categorize themselves and remain agnostic about the underlying psychological motives that impel people to form social identities such as party attachment. Indeed, it seems to us unlikely that the pursuit of self-esteem drives the formation and adjustment of party attachments. One would think that esteem-seeking voters would climb aboard the victorious party’s bandwagon after a landslide victory, yet we do not see citizens severing their party attachments in the wake of scandals or electoral defeats. Nor do we see adherents to the losing party resisting these bandwagon pressures by demonizing the victorious party and finding new virtues in their own. Instead, we find party identification to be stable amid changes in party fortunes, and we find that Democrats’ and Republicans’ assessments of the parties’ merits change in similar ways over time. Conceiving of party identification as the solution to a strategic problem of esteem-maximization seems to lead down a blind alley. At most, voters can be said to be maximizing the fit between their social mores and their self-conceptions, but even here, we must be careful not to overstate the degree to which people switch their attachments when the party’s platform or performance goes awry. To paraphrase Lyndon Johnson, our party may be led by jerks, but they’re *our* jerks.

PARTISAN CHANGE

The discussion thus far has tended to downplay the causative role of party politics in favor of social-psychological influences. To argue that political events seldom affect partisan identities is compatible with the claim that events do matter under certain conditions. Party platforms and performance in office from time to time touch on these partisan self-conceptions. During the early 1980s, mobilization of Christian fundamentalist leaders on behalf of a conservative social agenda altered both the platform of the Republican Party and how

Republicans as a social group were perceived. Similarly, evidence of widespread corruption throughout Italy's Christian Democratic Party robbed this partisan group of its social respectability as an object of identification during the early 1990s, leading to the party's rapid collapse after four decades of dominance. But such dramatic and highly publicized instances in which partisan stereotypes are altered occur infrequently. Seldom does a scandal run so deep as to impugn the character of a political party from top to bottom. Watergate and the Iran-Contra Affair, to say nothing of less-memorable scandals, had faint effects on party identification, even though these events grabbed headlines for long periods of time. Generally speaking, parties' efforts to attract groups of potential supporters do little to alter partisan stereotypes and are therefore incapable of loosening the bonds of identification. Scarcely an election goes by without an announcement by the Republican Party that it intends to reach out to minorities or by the Democratic Party that it seeks to appeal to business leaders. Such gestures are generally too short-lived and transparently strategic to be taken seriously. Interestingly, experiments designed to change party identification by altering (randomly) the ideological stances of the Republican and Democratic candidates confirm the stubbornness of party attachments (Cowden and McDermott 2000).

The stability of partisanship in the wake of party maneuvering is well illustrated by the campaign of 1948, during which Harry S. Truman announced his plan to desegregate the armed forces. Both commentators of that day and political historians tended to regard this announcement as a watershed event that precipitated both a revolt among Southern white Democrats and a secular realignment that brought blacks into the Democratic Party. Although Truman's actions proved to be much more profound and long-lasting than most election year gestures, their short-term effects on partisanship were subtle at best. Daniel Dowd's (1999) careful analysis of public opinion polls during this era reveals that black partisanship did not shift appreciably during 1948 and moved only gradually in the Democratic direction until the late 1950s. As for whites, Truman's policies triggered an election day bolt to the Dixiecrats in Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana but did not set off widespread changes in party identification. And with the exception of Louisiana, the Deep South did not exhibit Republican voting during the landslide presidential victories of the 1950s. Republican voting, which occurred only at the presidential level, was instead confined to the border states of Florida, Texas, Tennessee, and Virginia. Truman's executive order was doubtless a turning point in race rela-

By stressing how difficult it is to alter the partisan balance, we do not mean to suggest that parties are altogether incapable of producing change. From time to time, a party alters the social group composition of its leadership and, by extension, its public persona. For example, the Republican Party in the 1980s began to put Southerners into top party positions, and by the 1990s Southerners such as Phil Gramm, Newt Gingrich, Haley Barbour, Trent Lott, and Dick Armey ranked among the party's most prominent public figures. The Southern face of the Republican Party has, as we will see in Chapter 6, made the party more congenial to young Southerners entering the electorate. In effect, gradual changes in perceptions about which regional and racial groups "go with" each party caused a sea change in the way Southerners and blacks defined themselves in relation to the parties.

At the same time, one cannot but be impressed by how slowly this partisan transformation occurred. In 1966, Philip Converse (p. 220) observed that since the election of 1948, pundits had been predicting the Republicanization of the South, an event that never seemed to materialize. In Converse's estimation, the slow pace of partisan change meant that the North and South could be expected to have the same partisan complexion by the early 1980s. With the benefit of hindsight, we see that this cautious forecast actually overestimated the pace of partisan change. Despite several Republican landslides in national and regional elections, whites in the North and South achieved parity only at the century's end. Party images can and do change, but the accompanying change in party identification unfolds gradually.

The psychology of group attachments works in conjunction with institutional incentives to slow the pace at which party systems change. Parties (or, more specifically, politicians and staff who inhabit and depend on parties) institute rules, such as ballot qualifications and provisions for public subsidies, that create barriers to entry for new parties. Moreover, parties create platforms, some of which eventuate into government action, that solidify their interest group coalitions. As Lipset and Rokkan (1967) point out in their description of how preindustrial party systems shaped politics after industrialization, these coalitions may endure long after the political conditions that forged the coalition have changed. Finally, the psychology of party attachment dovetails with the parties' interest in maintaining their distinctive and widely recognized brand labels, to use Aldrich's (1995) metaphor. The psychological processes of self-categorization and group evaluation are therefore most apparent in established party systems, in which parties have cultivated symbols and group imagery.

EXAGGERATED RUMORS OF PARTISANSHIP'S DEATH

Since the late 1960s, students of electoral behavior have been fed a steady diet of skepticism about party identification. Party identification has lost its sway over voting decisions; voters feel a sense of indifference about the parties; split-ticket voting runs rampant. It would scarcely make sense to write (or read) a book in defense of partisanship if its effects on electoral choice were weak or diminishing, so before proceeding, we must address the notion that partisanship has ceased to be influential.

Table 1.1 shows the distribution of political partisanship over time. Using data gathered by the NES, we find that the partisanship of the population has evolved gradually. In 1952, 48.6% of voting-age adults called themselves Democrats and only 23.3% Independents. By 1978, the Independents category had grown to 38.5%, at the expense of both parties. The 1980s saw a resurgence of the Republican Party, and the 1990s saw a gradual decline in the proportion of Independents. By 1996, the balance of partisans to Independents had returned to pre-Watergate levels. Indeed, the distribution of partisanship in 1996 looks very much as it did in 1972. The oft-repeated thesis of the 1970s that the American political system was teetering toward a "dealignment" in which most citizens identified with neither of the two major parties now seems overdrawn. There are still more than enough partisans to make partisanship a viable topic of study.⁶

This point is underscored when we confine our analysis to the American *voting* public. Restricting our attention to survey respondents who actually went to the polls, we find even less support for the view that the death of partisanship has given rise to unattached voters. Table 1.2 shows that 71.4% of those voting in 1996 identified with the two major parties. The corresponding figure for 1956 is 75.9%. From these figures, it would appear that the partisan character of the de facto electorate is similar to what it was several decades ago.

But are today's partisans as loyal as the partisans of decades ago? Table 1.3 presents a cross-tabulation of vote choice in presidential elections since 1952. In each year, the NES conducted a postelection interview in which voters were asked for which presidential candidate they had voted. For ease of comparison over time, entries in this table are the percentage of respondents in each partisan category (Democrats, Republicans, Independents) who reported having voted for the Democratic contender. The numbers provide compelling evidence against the claim that party loyalty in elections isn't what it used to be. In

Table 1.1. Distribution of Partisanship, 1952–98

	Democrat (%)	Independent (%)	Republican (%)	N
1952	48.6	23.3	28.1	1,729
1954	49.3	22.7	28.0	1,088
1956	45.3	24.4	30.3	1,690
1958	51.0	20.2	28.9	1,737
1960	46.4	23.4	30.0	1,864
1962	48.3	22.1	29.7	1,237
1964	52.2	23.0	24.8	1,536
1966	46.2	28.7	25.1	1,263
1968	46.1	29.5	24.5	1,531
1970	44.0	31.3	24.7	1,490
1972	41.0	35.2	23.8	2,656
1974	39.7	37.5	22.8	2,433
1976	40.1	36.4	23.5	2,824
1978	40.3	38.5	21.1	2,224
1980	41.7	35.3	23.0	1,577
1982	45.1	30.6	24.4	1,383
1984	37.7	34.8	27.6	2,198
1986	40.9	33.5	25.6	2,120
1988	35.7	36.3	28.0	1,999
1990	39.8	35.3	24.9	1,935
1992	35.9	38.6	25.5	2,447
1994	34.0	35.9	30.1	1,769
1996	38.2	35.1	26.7	1,692
1998	38.1	35.2	26.7	1,256

Source: American National Election Studies.

Note: Cases are weighted by sample weights. Data from presidential election years were taken from preelection surveys.

1952, Adlai Stevenson won 72.6% of the Democrats' votes, 33.5% of the Independents', and just 3.8% of the Republicans'. Forty years later saw another contest between nonincumbents following a long stint of one party's control of the presidency. In 1992, Bill Clinton won 82.4% of the votes cast by Democrats, 42.3% by Independents, and 8.9% by Republicans. The magnitude of the chasm between those who identify with different parties remains as wide as ever.

The same conclusion emerges when we compare 1956 and 1996, both years in which popular incumbents won decisive reelection victories. Stevenson re-

Table 1.2. Distribution of Partisanship among Voters, 1952–98

	Democrat (%)	Independent (%)	Republican (%)	<i>N</i>
1952	45.5	23.2	31.3	1,187
1956	44.0	24.1	31.9	1,278
1958	50.2	17.7	32.1	1,032
1960	45.4	21.9	32.7	1,421
1962	46.9	19.3	33.8	776
1964	52.4	20.0	27.6	1,119
1966	46.6	24.1	29.3	788
1968	45.3	27.6	27.1	1,052
1970	44.0	26.1	29.9	884
1972	40.8	30.8	28.3	1,651
1974	40.1	32.1	27.8	1,317
1976	39.2	33.6	27.2	1,711
1978	40.1	33.9	26.0	1,248
1980	41.2	32.0	26.8	1,000
1982	48.8	24.1	27.1	845
1984	38.3	31.2	30.5	1,454
1986	44.5	28.1	27.5	1,136
1988	36.5	30.2	33.3	1,231
1990	44.8	27.1	28.0	921
1992	36.9	35.2	27.9	1,689
1994	35.6	30.5	33.9	997
1996	40.1	28.6	31.3	1,092
1998	41.2	28.1	30.7	665

Source: American National Election Studies.

Note: Cases are weighted by sample weights. Data from presidential election years were taken from preelection surveys. Samples were restricted to those respondents who reported having voted.

ceived votes from 74.5% of Democrats and 3.7% of Republicans. Clinton won 90.4% of the Democratic votes and 12.3% of the Republican votes. (Note that if one were to gauge the size of these partisan effects using logistic regression, so as to account for the fact that it is in some sense harder to move from 85% to 95% than it is to move from 75% to 85%, one obtains almost identical coefficients for these two races.) With the exception of the Nixon-McGovern election, the gap between Democrats and Republicans in presidential elections has remained marked over the past four decades. Indeed, Bartels's (2000) detailed analysis of presidential elections since 1952 suggests that partisanship's effects

Table 1.3. Party Identification and the Presidential Vote, 1952–96

	Republican	Independent	Democrat	Total
1952	3.8 (370)	33.5 (269)	72.6 (536)	42.0 (1,175)
1956	3.7 (403)	26.4 (303)	74.5 (554)	40.3 (1,260)
1960	6.8 (459)	45.6 (298)	80.8 (640)	49.0 (1,397)
1964	27.5 (306)	66.2 (219)	89.3 (581)	67.6 (1,106)
1968	6.7 (283)	26.3 (281)	70.8 (462)	40.9 (1,026)
1972	6.3 (458)	33.8 (474)	58.2 (648)	35.8 (1,580)
1976	13.5 (451)	45.3 (532)	82.0 (644)	51.0 (1,627)
1980	4.6 (263)	27.5 (295)	72.7 (396)	39.9 (954)
1984	4.4 (427)	34.0 (421)	78.5 (521)	41.7 (1,369)
1988	8.4 (404)	46.6 (358)	84.0 (430)	47.1 (1,192)
1992	8.9 (462)	42.3 (574)	82.4 (613)	47.8 (1,649)
1996	12.3 (332)	47.9 (288)	90.4 (427)	54.0 (1,047)

Source: American National Election Studies.

Note: Entries are the percentage of each partisan group voting for the Democratic presidential candidate, with the number of observations in parentheses. Party identification was measured in preelection surveys. Vote preference was measured in postelection surveys. Samples were restricted to those respondents who reported having voted for president, regardless of whether they voted for a major party candidate.

have grown steadily since 1972, to the point that partisanship is now more influential than ever.

What about split-ticket voting? Hasn't voting for one party for president and another party for Congress become more commonplace, suggesting a decline in party attachments? Although ticket splitting is widely cited as evidence of party decline, voting is an inadequate measure of self-conception. Party identification is by no means the sole determinant of vote preference. Changes in the

Table 1.4. Party Identification and Congressional Voting, Open House Seats, 1956–98

	Republican	Independent	Democrat
1956	8.7 (23)	41.2 (17)	93.3 (30)
1958	10.2 (49)	69.6 (23)	91.0 (67)
1960	8.3 (36)	35.3 (17)	82.1 (56)
1964	37.5 (32)	60.9 (23)	96.7 (61)
1966	5.6 (18)	28.6 (7)	72.7 (22)
1968	14.8 (27)	54.5 (22)	84.8 (33)
1970	17.4 (23)	44.4 (18)	83.3 (30)
1974	15.6 (64)	56.1 (41)	84.6 (52)
1976	17.9 (39)	55.2 (58)	87.3 (79)
1978	18.8 (32)	42.9 (35)	83.1 (65)
1980	20.0 (15)	26.1 (23)	63.2 (19)
1982	11.5 (26)	35.0 (20)	88.9 (36)
1984	7.0 (43)	31.7 (41)	59.3 (27)
1986	36.0 (25)	41.4 (29)	71.1 (38)
1988	3.6 (28)	70.0 (20)	76.2 (21)
1990	17.9 (28)	24.0 (25)	84.6 (26)
1992	25.3 (79)	46.9 (81)	77.9 (104)
1994	12.8 (47)	27.5 (40)	79.0 (62)
1996	6.3 (16)	64.0 (25)	90.0 (50)
1998	12.5 (24)	46.7 (15)	90.0 (20)

Table 1.4. (Continued)

Source: American National Election Studies.

Note: Entries are the percentage of each partisan group voting for the Democratic candidate, with the number of observations in parentheses. The NES cumulative file was used for elections dating back to 1970. For years before 1970, open seats were classified using King (1994). Party identification was measured in preelection surveys during presidential election years. Vote preference was measured in postelection surveys. Samples were restricted to those respondents who reported having voted. Although these data are weighted, the resulting sample is a nationally representative cluster sample, which may or may not be representative of the population of open-seat districts.

nature of electoral competition distort assessments of partisan motivation.⁷ Strong incumbents in the House and Senate frequently scare off serious challengers, leaving voters to choose between a popular, well-known incumbent and an obscure challenger. It should hardly be surprising that under such conditions, proincumbent voting tends to occur, creating a pattern of split-ticket voting in many districts. More telling is how voters behave when a seat is vacated and two challengers square off. Table 1.4 shows that partisan attachments come to the fore, regardless of whether one looks at data from the 1950s or 1990s. In the 1960s, Democrats running for open seats won 87% of the votes cast by Democrats and 18% by Republicans. The corresponding percentages for 1990–98 are 82% and 18%. Partisanship is by no means a weak predictor of vote choice in congressional races, and rates of party loyalty in the late 1990s do not differ markedly from those of the late 1950s (see Bartels 2000).

Perhaps voters still vote their partisan sympathies but do not bring any partisan passion to the voting booth. One of the most prominent critiques of party identification contends that citizens nowadays view political parties with indifference, as politics becomes increasingly candidate-centered (Wattenberg 1994). Although this argument enjoys wide currency, it is deficient in at least two respects. First, when we look at responses to survey questions going back to the early 1950s asking people whether they care about which party wins the national election, we find very little movement over time. The most recent NES surveys to ask this question occurred in 1984 and 1988, when 64.8% and 61.0% claimed to care. These figures are higher than the 56.6% and 55.9% registered in 1976 and 1980 but scarcely different from the 66.8% and 63.0% obtained in 1952 and 1956. Second, although it is true that survey respondents today are less

likely than respondents in the 1950s to report that they “like or dislike something” about the two political parties, they are hardly awash in indifference. Fully 71.9% of the NES respondents to surveys conducted during the 1990s claimed to like or dislike something about the parties. In sum, people continue to identify as partisans, continue to vote on the basis of these identifications, and seem to cheer for one of the parties. Although lacking the partisan zeal of elected officials and interest group leaders, ordinary citizens do not look upon party competition with indifference.

PARTISANSHIP OUTSIDE THE UNITED STATES

Although this book draws many of its examples from American politics, our arguments apply to other political systems as well. For a variety of reasons, analysts of other countries have tended to resist party identification as an explanatory concept. Some have argued that party identification is less stable outside the United States and therefore less compelling as a putative cause of electoral choice. Others have argued that class, linguistic, or religious attachments are simply more predictive of electoral choice than party attachments, especially in electoral systems in which parties emerge to voice the concerns of particular social groups, such as farmers or regional separatists.

These are important hypotheses that may be addressed by using data from other countries. As we point out in Chapter 7, a wide-ranging synthesis of panel survey data from other democracies indicates that party identification in those democracies functions in much the same ways as it does in the United States. Provided that one allows for the special difficulties of measuring party identification in countries with several parties, one finds that partisan attachments both persist over time and exert great influence over electoral choice. Our point is not that party attachments matter to the exclusion of other factors but rather that a common explanatory framework—one that focuses on identification with social groups—can be usefully applied across very different political settings.

For example, the period 1974–79 in Britain saw major swings in party popularity, yet party identification remained remarkably stable and continued to be an extremely strong predictor of the vote. Amid labor unrest and the first international oil crisis, the Labour Party secured enough seats to oust the Tory government of Edward Heath in 1974. But the Labour government’s popularity fell precipitously during its term—in part because of continuing economic problems—and the party was soundly defeated in May 1979 by Conservative

leader Margaret Thatcher. The five-year period thus spans two changes of government and a dramatic reversal of party fortunes. Yet just 9% of those respondents who identified with the Labour Party in February 1974 voted for the Tories in 1979, and just 4.5% of Labour identifiers from 1974 called themselves Tories five years later. Of the Tory identifiers in February 1974, just 3% voted Labour in 1979, and only 1.5% considered themselves Labour identifiers that year. Fully 86% of Labour identifiers and 90% of Tory identifiers continued to identify with the same party after five turbulent years.

Placing party identification in comparative perspective highlights what is distinctive about the American case. For decades, there has been relatively little change in America’s core political institutions—the rules governing how representatives are elected, how different branches of government interact, how laws are enforced, and the like. In this respect, the United States and Great Britain are similar. The situation is different in Italy, where waves of scandal and the fall of Soviet communism led to the abrupt dissolution of several long-standing political parties in the early 1990s. The emergent party system featured an array of new parties that continually split and entered into coalitions. Meanwhile, electoral rules have changed, and the prospect of further constitutional change hovers over the party system. Italy therefore presents an interesting contrasting case in which the objects of partisan attitudes have passed out of existence. Old attachments to partisan groups tend to shape new identities, but the pace with which the parties fracture or coalesce has prevented these incipient identities from solidifying. The result is a fluid party system that makes for an apt contrast to the United States.

PLAN OF THIS BOOK

The chapters that follow critique the myriad attempts to depict party attachments as unstable, ineffectual, or epiphenomenal. At the same time, we develop and test a set of propositions about the conditions under which partisan change does occur. The evidence suggests that partisan affiliation is best understood as a form of social identity and that partisan stability is traceable to constancy in citizens’ primary group environment and their mental images of partisan groups, which in turn reflects stability in the structure of party competition within the electoral system.

The next chapter discusses the conceptual underpinnings of party identification and delves more deeply into survey evidence. Both Chapters 2 and 3 make the case for the distinctiveness of party identification, as against other

kinds of attitudes and evaluations. Attention is devoted to the definition and measurement of party identification, concerns that bear directly on the question of how much party attachments change over time, which is the central question addressed in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 marshals evidence from a variety of sources and statistical approaches to demonstrate the persistence of individuals' partisan identities. In Chapter 4, we track the partisan balance of the electorate as a whole, a quantity often termed *macropartisanship*. Both in absolute terms and in comparison with other types of political evaluations, macropartisanship changes slowly. The partisan balance gently sways with the prevailing political winds but afterward returns to its long-term equilibrium.

What stable attachments mean for the understanding of party identification is taken up in Chapter 5. Many scholars have stressed the "rational" character of partisanship, contending that voters adjust their attachments based on the performance of the parties when in power and the stances that they take on the leading issues of the day. This interpretation has a variety of testable implications. As assessments of party competence change, so too should party attachments. As party platforms change or as new issues arise, party identities should gravitate toward the party that has the most ideological resonance. It turns out, however, that the process of partisan adjustment is so gradual that it often escapes detection, even when survey respondents are tracked over long periods.

In the face of such findings, proponents of these hypotheses sometimes argue that rational partisans might update their evaluations very slowly, particularly if they receive little novel information about what the parties stand for or how they conduct themselves. In other words, the banality of American political competition draws rational updating to a standstill. But this revised position is untenable because perceptions of the parties often shift abruptly while party attachments remain unchanged. If rational partisanship is stable under these conditions, it is arguably because perceptions of partisan groups—as distinct from the quite variable assessments of party leaders—tend to remain intact.

Although we claim that partisanship is typically stable and unresponsive to environmental forces, we are quick to acknowledge that this need not be the case. The central question animating this book is not simply "Is partisanship stable?" but rather "Under what conditions is partisanship stable?" In Chapters 6 and 7, we explore several instructive cases in which the party system changes in ways that induce shifts in party attachments. As mentioned above, these include the revitalization of the Republican Party in the South after the Voting Rights Act and the transformation of the Italian party system following the col-

lapse of the Christian Democrats and Socialists, the reorganization of the Communists, and the emergence of new regional and center-right parties. We shall argue that these kinds of political changes alter the public's mental image of the parties' followers. Few people associated middle-class Southerners with the Republican Party in 1948; by 1998, this had become a plausible association. The so-called Red and White cultural groups of Italy were readily associated with Communist and Christian Democratic constituencies; the breakup and division of the old parties brought about more diffuse partisan stereotypes. Finally, at the individual level, we have evidence that party attachments change as people migrate from one political environment to another. Examples such as these, although by no means definitive, suggest that large-scale partisan change may take two forms. In cases such as Italy, the sudden collapse of a party dislocates partisan attachments. In cases such as the South, the creation or resuscitation of a party gradually alters existing identities, as partisan stereotypes take root and begin to attract people who take a genial view of these stereotypes. The fact that residential mobility affects partisanship further attests to the social dimension of party attachment.

Although most of the book focuses on developing and testing our social identity model of partisanship, the final chapter turns to the implications of partisan ties for electoral competition. We demonstrate partisanship's profound influence on both individual-level vote choice and the structure of electoral competition more generally.

As the title of the book suggests, our thesis is that partisan identities reflect a blend of cognition and affect. People know who they are and where they fit in the matrix of prominent social groups. Citizens' group attachments shape the way that they evaluate political candidates and the policies they espouse. These evaluations change as new information becomes available, but seldom does the political environment change in ways that alter how people think of themselves or their relationship to significant social groups. For this reason, voters' attachments may remain firm even as their voting preferences shift. Thus, the basic structure of electoral competition remains intact even as the personae and policies that dominate politics change.

Chapter 2 Partisan Groups as Objects of Identification

The term *identification* is commonly used in two ways. One use is synonymous with empathy, as when a person identifies with a sympathetic social group. The groups in question may be real or imaginary, contemporary or historical. When we read *The Peloponnesian Wars*, for example, we typically identify with the Athenians in the sense that we side emotionally with Athenian culture and institutions. Athenians are our kind of people; they are humane, articulate, and high-minded, if a bit fractious. Their Spartan adversaries are coarse and cruel. We identify with them only in those passages when their battlefield misfortunes elicit our sympathies.

Another usage of identification is synonymous with self-conception, as when a person labels himself or herself an ancient Athenian. Membership in the social group "ancient Athenian" is a necessary condition for identification of this sort. Pericles identified with ancient Athenians: He lived in ancient Athens and clearly regarded himself as an Athenian. Absent some sort of delusion, this form of identification is unavailable to modern people because we cannot *be* ancient Athenians.

As this example makes apparent, the two meanings of identification, affinity and self-categorization, need not be conterminous. A person may identify with a group but perceive no membership in it. Conversely, people may perceive themselves to be members of a group but feel no affinity for it or its members. Disaffected group members may recognize an identification *as* without feeling an identification *with*.

Although it is important to keep these two meanings of identification distinct for purposes of defining party identification, they will often overlap empirically. For one thing, members of social groups, particularly groups that the broader society accords great significance, tend to view the group and its members in a positive light. By and large, Jewish people display more positive feelings toward Jews as a group; attorneys give higher ratings to lawyers as a group; those who describe their class status as "lower" or "lower-working" class offer more favorable ratings of "poor people"; self-described gay men express much more positive evaluations of homosexuals than do the rest of the public. Although members of unpopular groups tend to harbor some of the same negative stereotypes about these groups as nonmembers, members' overall evaluations of these groups tend to be positive.

A second reason why affinity and self-categorization tend to go hand in hand is that the criteria by which one judges membership in a social group are often vague and indeterminate. No formal or widely shared standards exist for determining whether a person is a feminist, a baseball fan, a member of the underclass, or a patriot. Most Americans, for example, seem to think of themselves as environmentalists even though they do not belong to any formal environmental organization or, indeed, engage in any readily identifiable environment-friendly behavior (Guber 1998). Criteria for membership in the social category "environmentalist" are sufficiently porous to allow anyone who identifies with environmentalism (or its proponents) to identify as an environmentalist. One need only be an environmentalist at heart.

Murky standards of group membership are of special importance to the conception of party identification in most political systems. Although some parties have official membership lists (for example, the Chinese Communist Party and Britain's Conservative Party), American parties and many mass-based parties elsewhere have formal standards for membership that vary from meager to vernal. Any citizen willing to part with a few dollars may visit the Web sites of the Republican or Democratic parties and become a member of one or both. Some U.S. states have party registration, but this, too, is membership of the most minimal kind. Party registration in a (diminishing) number of states is a pre-

requisite for voting in a party primary, but Democrats and Republicans who seek to vote against candidates they detest may freely switch their registration. Indeed, anyone willing to put up with the annoyance of filling out forms is entitled to change party registration without fear of being purged for disloyalty. Party membership may have some formally defined meaning, but this meaning is much more diffuse than for other organizations, such as the Rotary Club or the American Civil Liberties Union.

The diffuse nature of mass-based parties creates a puzzle: If *identification* as presupposes some form of membership, to what do partisan identifiers belong? The ingenious answer supplied by Angus Campbell et al. in *The American Voter* (1960) is that voters frequently (but by no means invariably or to any great degree) see themselves as belonging to partisan groups, Democrats or Republicans. The group in effect is suspended by the psychological image it conjures. It exists as a stereotype in the minds of voters, who in turn harbor a sense of attachment toward this group image. Democrats, for example, are people who think of themselves as Democrats.

This solves the puzzle of how a public that is traditionally skeptical of parties, has little information about their activities, and virtually no contact with them as organizations could identify themselves as partisans. The conceptual focus is not on identification with the parties per se but with Democrats and Republicans as social groups. Valid measures of party identification must focus attention on these social groups and invite respondents to define themselves using these group nouns. Scholars have sometimes lost sight of this definition when studying party identification. Merely asking respondents whether they like a political party, support it, vote for it, feel close to it, believe it to be effective in office, or find its ideas attractive is not the same as asking about self-definition and group attachment. As James Campbell et al. (1986) point out, these distinctions are central to the conception of party identification laid out in *The American Voter*:

Partisanship was conceptualized as a psychological identification with a party. . . . As thus conceived, partisans are partisan because they think they are partisan. They are not necessarily partisan because they vote like a partisan, or think like a partisan, or register as a partisan, or because someone else thinks they are a partisan. In a strict sense, they are not even partisan because they like one party more than another. Partisanship as party identification is entirely a matter of self-definition.

In the same vein, we would argue that to appreciate the special properties of party identification, it is essential to maintain a clear distinction between it and

other sorts of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. To make this case, we must address two related questions: What *isn't* party identification? How do we know that party identification is genuine?

To be sure, party identification tends to be correlated with a variety of political attitudes, particularly those directly related to parties. People who think of themselves as Democrats tend to like the Democratic Party (and not the Republican Party). Consider, for example, how self-described Democrats, Independents, and Republicans rated their feelings of "warmth" about the parties on scales ranging from zero ("cold") to 100 ("very warm") in the 1996 NES. Democrats on average assigned the Democratic Party a score of 77, compared with 41 for the Republican Party. A similar gap in evaluations was evident among Republicans, who on average rated the Democratic Party a 37 and the Republican Party a 73. Independents fell in the middle, assigning average evaluations of 53 and 54 to the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. The correlation between partisan identification and partisan opinions remains high as we move from rather diffuse feelings of "warmth" toward more focused assessments about which party can better handle foreign affairs or manage the nation's economy. Only 2% of the Republicans polled believed that the Democratic Party does a better job of handling the economy; 71% believed the Republican Party to be superior. Among Democrats, 56% gave the Democratic Party the edge, and only 7% endorsed the Republican Party's economic stewardship. As usual, Independents fell in between, with 21% preferring the Democratic Party and 27% the Republican.

Finally, partisanship is correlated with opinions on questions of public policy. On most political issues, Democrats stand to the left of Independents, who in turn stand to the left of Republicans. One must be cautious when interpreting this correlation, however. As Gregory Markus (1982) has noted, the direction of causality flows in two directions. On the one hand, citizens occasionally drift toward parties that take ideologically appealing stances on the issues of the day. On the other hand, parties also instruct partisan supporters on how right-thinking Democrats or Republicans view these issues. Classic examples of this phenomenon are Richard Nixon's decision to open diplomatic relations with China in 1972, which produced a dramatic transformation of Republicans' views about how the United States should deal with this Communist regime. Another is Ronald Reagan's proposal to cut taxes during the 1980 campaign. Reagan contended that his tax cut would stimulate the economy to such an extent that the government would experience no loss of tax revenue. This idea went from a relatively controversial campaign plank (derided as "voodoo eco-

nomics" by Reagan's primary opponent, George Bush) to the centerpiece of the Republican legislative agenda in 1981 and a key article of faith among Republicans in the turbulent years that followed.

Another point to bear in mind is the fact that the correlation between party identification and stances on issues is often weak. Consider, for example, the relationship between partisanship and views on the question of whether civil rights leaders are "pushing too fast," an NES question that dates back to 1964. This item has attracted special attention because it is often argued that racial issues have played a central role in disrupting the Democratic coalition forged during the New Deal. Carmines and Stimson (1989) contend that racially conservative white Democrats became alienated by policies such as affirmative action and school desegregation, which increasingly became identified with the Democratic platform. Although the civil rights question typically ranks among the most reliable measures of racial attitudes in the NES, Table 2.1 shows that it tends to be weakly correlated with party identification. In any given year, a greater fraction of Republicans than Democrats expressed the view that civil rights leaders are "pushing too fast," but the gap between them is not large, often just a few percentage points. Although racial issues have profoundly altered party coalitions at the congressional level (Carmines and Stimson 1989), it is by no means clear that the same has been true of the mass public (Abramowitz 1994).

A stronger correlation emerges when we shift attention to questions concerning the scope of the welfare state. The NES has traditionally asked respondents whether "the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living" or instead whether government "should just let each person get ahead on his own." As shown in Table 2.2, the gap between Democrats and Republicans has been fairly marked since 1972 when the question was first asked in its current format. In 1996, one-third of all Democrats supported job guarantees, compared with one in ten Republicans. Orientations toward the welfare state do not coincide exactly with party affiliation, but the two are certainly related.

Stronger still is the relationship between party identification and ideological self-categorization (Table 2.3). Ideological self-categorization differs in subtle but important ways from ideology itself. It taps not what the respondent thinks about various issues but rather the ideological label he or she finds most suitable. In that sense, it bears a certain similarity to party identification: One need not be a card-carrying conservative to call oneself a conservative. It is hard to tell from available data whether survey respondents are primarily describing

Table 2.1. Partisan Identification and Opinions about Civil Rights

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
1964	62	62	71
1966	63	63	71
1968	57	70	65
1970	44	48	56
1972	44	44	52
1974	39	43	43
1976	38	40	41
1980	29	34	41
1984	23	31	38
1986	23	22	28
1988	20	25	31
1990	24	29	30
1992	29	25	31

Source: American National Election Studies, 1964–92.

Note: Entries are the percentage of each partisan group saying that civil rights leaders are pushing too fast. Note that the civil rights question does not appear in certain NES surveys. The question reads: "Some say that the civil rights people have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. How about you: Do you think that civil rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving about the right speed?"

their intellectual orientation or their opinions of the social groups known as liberals and conservatives. As Converse (1964) points out, many survey respondents have difficulty supplying adequate definitions of liberalism and conservatism, and ideological self-categorization is only moderately correlated with stances on issues such as the death penalty, abortion, and defense spending.¹

We will revisit the nexus between issues and partisanship in Chapter 3. For now, our point is that although party attachments tend to coincide with partisan evaluations and other political orientations, identification with political parties is both conceptually distinct and empirically quite different in character. The statistical association between partisanship and issue stance, although often strong, is far from exact; partisans need not and do not invariably agree with the leaders of their party. This point takes on special importance with re-

Table 2.2. Partisan Identification and Opinions about the Scope of Government

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
1972	43	27	17
1974	31	23	14
1976	33	20	13
1978	23	17	7
1980	37	22	12
1982	32	24	14
1984	35	31	18
1986	33	22	14
1988	34	23	14
1990	38	30	19
1992	37	25	14
1994	37	27	16
1996	34	23	10

Source: American National Election Studies, 1972–96.

Note: Entries are the percentage of each partisan group saying that government should guarantee jobs. The question reads: "Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his own. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" Entries are the percentage of respondents placing themselves at points one through three on the seven-point scale.

gard to voting preferences. Nothing in the definition of party identification precludes Democrats from voting for Republican candidates. (Whether doing so in fact erodes the Democrats' sense of identification is a separate question, to which we will return.) Partisan identification is not the sole factor governing how voters evaluate candidates. Democrats would have liked the avuncular war hero Dwight D. Eisenhower better if in 1952 he had turned out to be a Democrat, but they still held him in high esteem, and it was Eisenhower's stature and popularity that enabled him to defeat Adlai Stevenson. Many scholars have assumed that partisans "defect" from their party on account of their weak party attachments, but defections could just as well be ascribed to the lopsided way in

Table 2.3. Ideological Self-Categorization and Partisan Self-Categorization

	Percentage of Democrats Who Call Themselves Conservatives	Percentage of Republicans Who Call Themselves Conservatives	Percentage of Conservatives Who Call Themselves Democrats	Percentage of Conservatives Who Call Themselves Republicans
1972	18	43	27	41
1974	17	47	25	41
1976	16	48	24	44
1978	18	54	26	41
1980	17	51	25	41
1982	16	51	25	46
1984	16	52	20	49
1986	18	52	24	44
1988	19	55	21	48
1990	16	47	25	44
1992	17	55	20	46
1994	16	64	15	53
1996	16	66	18	54

Source: American National Election Studies, 1972–96.

which the public evaluates certain candidates. When a Republican candidate is popular, Republicans inevitably look more loyal and Democrats less so. It would be a mistake to interpret every landslide election as a sign that partisanship is waning or voters are changing parties.²

These distinctions may seem like splitting hairs, but a number of important empirical insights grow out of them. As we will point out in the pages ahead, party identification tends to be correlated with vote choices among individuals at a given point in time, but this relationship is far from exact. Party attachments are more than mere summaries of momentary vote intentions. Moreover, voting and partisanship look very different when traced over time. Votes can swing markedly from one election to the next without changing the distribution of partisan attachments. Much the same may be said for a variety of other attitudes, such as presidential approval or assessments of the parties' competence. They are correlated with partisanship at a given time but are much more prone to change over time.

Before turning our attention to the contrast between party identification and other attitudes and behaviors, let us first examine more closely the meaning and measurement of party identification itself. We have called attention to par-

isan identities, as distinct from partisan attitudes more generally. How do we know that party identification is more than a figment of social scientists' imagination? How do we know that party identification is a distinct and enduring psychological orientation and not simply a by-product or summary of other attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors? In answering these basic conceptual issues, we will lay the groundwork for a more detailed discussion of partisan stability and susceptibility to short-term influences.

WHAT DO PARTISAN SELF-CATEGORIZATIONS MEAN?

Why should we believe that citizens harbor genuine, long-lasting attachments to partisan groups? Seven types of evidence speak to this issue. We now consider each in turn.

1. *Partisan attachments are professed repeatedly during the course of a survey interview, even when these attachments are at variance with vote choice.* The strategy behind conventional measures of party attachment is straightforward: Determine whether people identify with partisan groups by asking them directly. In one form or another, these queries ask respondents, "Do you think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent?" Although this approach seems sensible enough, it could be the case that respondents are simply guessing or supplying meaningless, random answers. To placate an insistent interviewer, perhaps respondents *call* themselves Democrats and Republicans, but they do not really *feel* like Democrats and Republicans.

Survey researchers have long been concerned with the possibility of vacuous survey responses, sometimes termed "nonattitudes" or "doorstep opinions." Such responses are either outright fabrications or reflect sentiments that flickered at the moment the question was answered but disappeared shortly thereafter. More sophisticated survey analysts have warned against reading too much into the response options that people choose, particularly when respondents are not offered a chance to duck the question entirely. On the other hand, if opinions are real, people should express them again and again, even when they are presented with different response options.

Because the standard partisanship measure has been widely assumed to be both valid and reliable, few surveys have tried to gauge party identification in different ways during the course of a single interview. One important exception is the 1973 National Opinion Research Center (NORC) Amalgam Survey.³ In the NORC survey, a national sample of 1,489 adults were randomly as-

signed to three subgroups and interviewed in person. All three groups were initially asked the standard Survey Research Center (SRC) party identification question:

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Later in the questionnaire, each subgroup was presented with *one* of the following questions about self-definition:

On this card is a scale with strong Democrats on one end and strong Republicans on the other, and with Independents in the middle. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Democrat or a Republican?

No matter how you voted in the last couple of national elections or how you think you might vote in next November's national election—do you basically think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Toward the end of the lengthy interview, all respondents were asked the Gallup party identification question, which asks about one's *current* sense of self:

In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Responses to these questions paint a similar picture of party affiliations, notwithstanding variations in wording. As shown in Table 2.4, 87% of the respondents who called themselves Democrats in reply to the SRC question also dubbed themselves Democrats when asked to describe their basic partisan tendencies, holding voting choices in abeyance. The same holds for 79% of self-described Republicans. In general, the correlation between responses to any pair of party identification measures is 0.85 or higher, suggesting that answers to partisanship questions are anything but ephemeral.

To be sure, the distribution of answers varies somewhat, depending on how the question is phrased and which response options are offered to respondents. The seven-point self-placement scale dubs 23% of the sample "Independents," and just 19% of the sample volunteer "Independent" when asked to describe themselves as either Democrats or Republicans. By contrast, 33% of the sample label themselves "Independents" when asked about their affiliations "in politics

Table 2.4. How the Survey Research Center Measure of Partisanship Relates to Alternative Measures

	Democrat (%)	Independent (%)	Republican (%)
Basic self-regard			
Democrat	87	12	4
Independent	7	75	9
Republican	1	5	79
Other (volunteered)	0	1	2
Don't know/refused	5	7	6
<i>N</i>	215	140	107
Forced pair			
Democrat	93	25	4
Independent (volunteered)	2	52	0
Republican	2	13	96
Other (volunteered)	0	3	0
Don't know/refused	4	6	0
<i>N</i>	198	157	94
Self-placement scale			
Strong Democrat	35	0	0
Weak Democrat	34	3	2
Leaning Democrat	26	26	2
Independent	4	52	10
Leaning Republican	0	16	31
Weak Republican	1	1	35
Republican	0	0	17
Don't know/refused	1	3	2
<i>N</i>	188	158	121

Source: 1973 National Opinion Research Center Amalgam Survey.

as of today." Not surprisingly, the precise accounting of who is a partisan depends on the yardstick one uses to gauge identification. In Chapter 7, we point out how variations in the wording of questions may frustrate attempts to compare partisanship in different countries.

It should be stressed, however, that each of these survey measures paints a similar picture of the balance of Democratic and Republican identification. When presented with the standard SRC question, 65% of all partisan identifiers were Democrats. The seven-point self-placement scale produced the same rates of Democrats and Republicans. The figure rose to 66% for the Gallup measure, to 67% for the forced pair question, and 69% for the basic self-regard

item. Thus, a preamble that draws respondents' attention to "politics as of today" produces faintly different answers from one that warns them to disregard past voting decisions. Question wording affects the absolute size of each partisan group, but a similar portrayal of the relative numbers of partisans emerges regardless of variations in wording or response format.

If alternative measures of party identification each tap the same underlying attitude, why would they not be perfectly correlated with one another? Consider, for example, the imperfect correspondence between answers to the SRC question and the basic self-regard item, which are similar in focus and response options. Why do a handful of respondents initially label themselves Democrats but later call themselves Republicans? Why do some respondents variously claim to be partisans and Independents? One possibility is that attitudes are changing during the course of the interview. This explanation seems unlikely, given the evidence presented below suggesting that partisanship changes so gradually that shifts in party attachment are detectable only over a period of years. A more likely explanation (discussed at length in Chapter 3) is that respondents and interviewers make errors when moving quickly through a lengthy interview schedule. Interviewers may misread questions or inaccurately record answers. Respondents, for their part, may misunderstand the questions or response options. At a more basic level, respondents may have difficulty expressing their opinions in rigid and unfamiliar response categories. Even those accustomed to survey research may find it difficult to summarize and distill the myriad of feelings and thoughts that come to mind at the mention of partisan groups. Add to this the fact that respondents must answer a long series of such questions, and it becomes easier to understand the sloppy manner in which survey responses are supplied.

For these reasons, one should expect variation in survey responses, even when underlying opinions remain intact. Respondents may from time to time portray themselves as more Democratic or Republican than they really are. The survey analyst who wishes to take these measurement errors into account therefore uses multiple readings of the same underlying attitude, anticipating that respondents will, on average, give an accurate account of their feelings of attachment. This principle of redundant measurement undergirds well-known tests of scholastic aptitude, personality, and other psychological traits. A single math problem may give an unreliable indication of quantitative reasoning skills because some students may or may not be prepared for any particular math puzzle. But a lengthy math test will effectively differentiate those with high and low levels of mathematical acumen.

A statistical method used to assess the degree of measurement error and differentiate measurement-related fluctuation from true change is called *confirmatory factor analysis*. Applying confirmatory factor analysis to the various partisanship questions asked on this survey (Green and Schickler 1993), we estimate that the standard three-category SRC measure of party identification has a reliability of approximately 0.86, indicating that about 14% of the observed variance in partisanship is meaningless noise. (See Chapter 3 for more on how we ascertain the reliability of a measure.) As we point out in the next chapter, this figure can be expected to vary somewhat across time and demographic groups because different populations have different amounts of dispersion in their partisan orientations. Younger voters, for example, are less likely to have partisan ties. Thus, a greater proportion of the observed variance in their expressed party affiliations stems from measurement error, which means that the reliability is lower for younger samples. Nevertheless, the finding that 86% of the variance in the three-point SRC party identification item is genuine is corroborated by no fewer than eight other surveys in which party identification was measured repeatedly over time (Green and Palmquist 1994). As a practical matter, this finding means that correlations between any two measures of party identification will seldom be much greater than 0.86, even if underlying partisanship were perfectly stable.

Another indication that multiple measures of partisanship ferret out measurement error is that scales built from multiple questions have greater predictive power than measures based on a single survey question. Consider, for example, the correlation between party attachment and preferences for possible presidential nominees. The 1973 NORC sample was confronted with a series of hypothetical "ballot tests" pitting Democrats against Republicans; adding all of these vote preferences together, we created a scale of support for potential Republican nominees. Taken by itself, the SRC party identification item bears a correlation of 0.62 with this vote index ($N = 341$). When we augment the SRC item by adding to it responses to the "regardless of vote intentions" version of the party identification measure, we obtain a correlation of 0.65 with the vote index.⁴

This small increase illustrates how supplementary measures of party identification help to expunge random response error in what is otherwise a fairly reliable measure. We are left with a purer assessment of respondents' party attachments—and a clearer sense that such attachments are genuine.

2. *People who use partisan labels to describe themselves also indicate their "identification with" and "identification as" members of these partisan groups.* Three in-

novative studies (Greene 1999, 2000; Weisberg and Hasecke 1999) have augmented the standard SRC party identification item with a series of questions designed to tap "social identification" with partisan groups. Using survey measures adapted from Mael and Tetrick's (1992) Identification with a Psychological Group scale, Greene (2000) presented a sample of Franklin County, Ohio, residents with a series of statements with which they could agree or disagree. These statements included "When someone criticizes this group, it feels like a personal insult" and "When I talk about this group, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they.'" Weisberg and Hasecke used a similar scale in their statewide probability survey of Ohio.

This measurement approach is somewhat different from that of the 1973 NORC study, wherein respondents simply repeated the self-labeling exercise using three similar types of questions. Here, respondents were asked to describe their feelings of attachment to partisan groups, with special reference to the extent to which these partisan groups elicit a "we-feeling." Unfortunately, none of these studies reports the relationship between the traditional measure of party identification and comparable measures of social identity. To fill this gap, we crafted three questions for the October 1999 Roper Starch survey, which conducted face-to-face interviews with a national sample of 1,638 respondents. Half of the sample was randomly assigned a battery of social identity questions concerning Democrats; the other half, Republicans. These questions read as follows:

People have different feelings about [Democrats/Republicans]. I'm going to read three short statements, and for each one, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree . . .

When I talk about [Democrats/Republicans], I usually say "we" rather than "they."

When someone criticizes [Democrats/Republicans], it feels like a personal insult.

I don't have much in common with most [Democrats/Republicans].

For ease of presentation, these three four-category responses were combined into a single ten-point index by adding the first two responses and subtracting the third.

When indices of Democratic or Republican identification are compared with a traditional self-labeling measure, the two prove to be highly correlated.⁵ As shown in Table 2.5, 45.5% of all self-described Democrats scored in the top four categories of the Democratic social identity index, compared with 5.1% of all self-described Republicans. Conversely, just 2.1% of all Democrats strongly rejected all Democratic affinities, compared with 25.6% of Republicans. A sim-

Table 2.5. Party Identification by Measures of Social Identification with Democrats or Republicans

	Democrats (%)	Independents/ Don't Know (%)	Republicans (%)
Strong Democratic identity	12.6	0.4	0.0
	5.3	1.1	0.5
	8.8	2.9	0.5
	18.8	4.0	4.1
	16.1	8.6	6.2
	15.5	15.8	8.2
	11.7	35.6	20.5
	4.1	10.4	17.4
	5.0	14.4	16.9
	2.1	6.8	25.6
Weak Democratic identity			
N	341	278	195
Strong Republican identity	0.3	0.4	14.0
	0.0	0.4	3.1
	0.3	0.7	10.9
	3.4	4.7	19.2
	6.5	5.4	18.7
	8.8	12.9	13.0
	21.0	24.5	14.5
	12.2	13.7	2.1
	18.1	18.3	3.6
	29.5	19.1	1.0
Weak Republican identity			
N	353	278	193

Source: Roper Starch National Survey, October 1999.

ilar correspondence between self-label and social identity appears when the questions concern Republicans. Fully 29.5% of all Democrats strongly repudiated any suggestion of Republican we-feeling, a response pattern characteristic of just 1% of the Republicans. The sharp separation between Democrats and Republicans on questions of social identity lends credence to the view that self-categorization and group identification are empirically quite similar phenomena.

Self-described partisans vary somewhat in the extent to which they feel a common bond with members of their partisan group, but that is to be expected based on what we know about the imprecise way in which respondents are classified by both traditional measures of partisanship and the brief three-item so-

cial identity index created here. By the same token, we detect some partisan sentiment among self-described Independents. Keith et al. (1992) have demonstrated that some of the people who categorize themselves as Independents are closet partisans, who think and act as though they harbor partisan attachments but refuse to describe themselves in partisan terms. In our sample, 17% of the Independents scored in the top five categories of Democratic identification and 12% scored in the top five categories of Republican identification. The three-category designation of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans masks a certain amount of heterogeneity within categories. Still, alternative measures of partisan identification reaffirm the idea that the canonical SRC question elicits genuine self-conceptions.

3. *People offer the same descriptions of their partisan attachments over long stretches of time, even when the political context has changed.* We have seen that people offer similar responses when asked to describe their party attachments repeatedly during the course of a single interview. What happens when people are reinterviewed years later? In Chapter 1, we discussed a survey that tracked parents of high school students from 1965 through 1982. This study not only showed that party attachments in 1965 were strong predictors of the vote in 1980 but also attested to the staying power of party attachments among adults. Of the 855 parents interviewed in both 1965 and 1982, 633 (or 74%) gave the same response when asked whether they think of themselves as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents. Of the 644 respondents who in 1965 called themselves Democrats or Republicans, just 37 (5.7%) switched parties seventeen years later. Interestingly, Democrats were as likely to become Republicans as the reverse, but because there were more Democrats to begin with, the total sample drifted slightly toward the Republican Party. This rate of interparty conversion exceeds what could be expected from response error alone. Yet when one reflects on the remarkable political changes that occurred between these two surveys, the degree of stability in party identification is truly impressive.

The same picture emerges when we look at a narrower slice of time. As noted in Chapter 1 (see Table 1.1), the Watergate scandal that drove Richard Nixon from office and led to a rout of the Republican Party in the 1974 elections did not bring about wholesale desertion from the ranks of Republican identifiers. The NES, which fortuitously conducted a panel study spanning the years 1972 to 1976, recorded only modest movement in the Democratic direction during this period. For example, when we look at identification from the Nixon landslide of 1972 to Jimmy Carter's victorious campaign against Gerald Ford, we

find that 76% of the 343 Republicans interviewed in 1972 were still Republicans in 1976. This rate of retention is only slightly greater among Democrats; 79% of the 495 Democrats interviewed in 1972 still called themselves Democrats four years later. Just 3.4% of all Democrats and 5.5% of all Republicans switched parties during this period.

Lest one think that the results from the mid-1970s reflect the special political tumult and partisan disarray of the times, the same pattern of persistence over time holds for other panel studies that span changes in party control of the presidency. For example, when partisan affiliations are traced from Eisenhower's landslide victory of 1956 to the aftermath of John F. Kennedy's win in 1960, we find relatively little movement. Of the 989 respondents interviewed at both times, 761 (77%) reported the same partisan label. Only 42 of the 747 partisan identifiers (5.6%) switched party; the bulk of the movement was in and out of the intermediate category of Independent. Similarly, when partisanship is tracked from the Bush administration of 1992 through Clinton's reelection in 1996, we find modest rates of interparty conversion. Of the 500 respondents interviewed at both times, 351 (70.2%) gave consistent answers, and just 14 of the 312 partisan identifiers (4.5%) switched parties.

We defer to the next chapter a more statistically rigorous treatment of the over-time stability of individuals' party attachments, which distinguishes between real partisan change and transitory fluctuations in survey responses. For now, the point is that simple cross-tabulation of opinion over time reveals a high degree of persistence, even when partisan orientations are measured in very different political climates.

4. *The distribution of partisan identification changes slowly over time.* Much of this book relies on the analysis of panel surveys, which track a set of individuals over time. These data enable us to examine change at the individual level—we can detect partisan change even when the overall proportions of Democrats and Republicans remain constant over time. The drawback to panel data is that they are often in short supply. Panel surveys are expensive, difficult to execute, and therefore rare. Those who wish to chart partisanship over long periods eventually must compare cross-sectional surveys conducted at different points in time. Because each cross section contains a different set of respondents, we cannot distinguish between individual-level change and change in the composition of the electorate over time. Nevertheless, in conjunction with panel data, these surveys convey useful information about the pace and direction of partisan change.

By far the most carefully executed survey of this kind is the American Na-

tional Election Study, which has gauged party identification every other year since 1952. Recall from Chapter 1 that the proportions of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents have changed gradually during the past half century. In the early 1950s, partisans accounted for more than three-quarters of the adult population. Large numbers of new voters born after World War II caused the ranks of the Independents to swell during the mid-1960s. From 1972 on, approximately 35% of the public labeled themselves Independents. Another trend concerns the balance between Democrats and Republicans. In 1952, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by a ratio of 1.7 to 1. Apart from a brief upward spike in 1964, this ratio was more or less constant until 1984, when it dropped to 1.4 to 1, where it has since remained. In subsequent chapters, we will take a closer look at both the pace of change and the extent to which it was concentrated in the South during the early 1980s. For the time being, we wish only to underscore the basic point that party affiliation changes gradually over time. If pollsters in 1976 had gazed twenty years into the future of American politics, witnessing Carter's demise, Reagan's ascendancy, the end of the Cold War, and the like, would they have guessed that the party identification numbers of 1976 could forecast all subsequent NES surveys within an error of plus or minus seven percentage points?

5. *The proportion of the public identifying with any party tends to be relatively unaffected by whether the survey takes place during an election campaign.* Party identification is properly categorized as an attitude, an enduring predisposition to respond to a class of stimulus objects. People harbor a sense of who they are and how they fit in relation to partisan groups. When asked about this self-conception, partisans will respond in consistent ways over time, allowing for the vagaries of survey measurement. The alternative view holds that party identification is situational. It lies dormant or fades away during periods between elections, only to reemerge when awakened by party competition. Fueling this concern is the fact that NES surveys typically are conducted during election years, prompting speculation about the character of partisanship between elections.

Do party identities wane during interelection hiatuses? The answer seems to be "no." Major surveys occasionally interview respondents during off years, and these surveys show no evidence that party identities wane or wander during these years. The parents in the 1973–82 panel were rock solid in their identification over this period. By the same token, the 1993 wave of the 1992–96 panel shows no signs of distinctiveness. And panel studies that have tracked partisanship over the course of an eventful campaign (for example, the four-

wave 1980 NES panel study) do not show special signs of volatility. In sum, the over-time correlations in individual-level data do not support the claim that the character of partisanship changes amid the campaign season.

These individual-level findings leave open the question of aggregate shifts toward or away from partisan identities. Do more people identify with political parties during national election years, particularly presidential election years? To make the strongest possible case for this argument, we compiled 677 Gallup Polls that were conducted in person between 1953 and 1996. These polls were conducted at various times of year, with increasing coverage during election years. Because these polls asked respondents to reflect on their partisanship "in politics, as of today," they arguably offer a more volatile rendering of partisan attachments than other polls, which direct respondents' attention to "politics in general" (see Abramson and Ostrom 1992, 1994; for dissenting views, see Bishop, Tuchfarber, and Smith 1994; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992). Thus, these surveys provide an upper bound on the degree to which partisan ranks swell during a campaign cycle.

The dependent variable in this model is the percentage of respondents in each poll who label themselves Independents. Our statistical model uses dummy variables to mark each quarter of a presidential and midterm election year. Each of these markers enables us to compare the proportion of Independents in each election quarter with the proportion of Independents in off years. For completeness, we present the regression results with and without controls for linear and quadratic time trends in the proportion of Independents. Such trends improve the fit of the model but do not alter the results concerning election years. Thanks to the large number of polls at our disposal, we are able to estimate the effects of election years with a high degree of precision.

From Table 2.6, we see that presidential and midterm elections are associated with a statistically discernible but small decrease in the number of Independents. National elections lead to a drop of about one percentage point in the percentage of self-identified Independents, regardless of whether we take time trends into account. The maximum seasonal gap is between an off-year election and the third quarter of an election year. Although this contrast is statistically significant, the magnitude is puny: less than two percentage points. Thus, for example, one might expect to see the proportion of Independents climb from thirty in the wake of the 1984 elections to thirty-two in 1987. At best, these findings lend minimal support to Clarke and Stewart's (1998: 365–69) assertion that the proportion of the public claiming a party identification rises during election years as campaigns "mobilize" partisan sensibilities in the electorate.

Table 2.6. How Independent Partisanship Varies with the Election Cycle

Independent Variable	Regression Estimate	Standard Error	Regression Estimate	Standard Error
Constant	28.01	0.24	19.65	0.34
Presidential election year				
First quarter	−0.37	0.75	−0.18	0.48
Second quarter	−1.11	0.73	−1.04	0.48
Third quarter	−1.53	0.72	−1.52	0.46
Fourth quarter	−1.07	0.81	−1.19	0.52
Midterm election year				
First quarter	−0.66	0.72	−0.27	0.47
Second quarter	−0.57	0.69	−0.73	0.46
Third quarter	−1.76	0.69	−1.68	0.45
Fourth quarter	−0.60	0.78	−0.50	0.50
Years since 1953			0.68	0.04
Years since 1953, squared			−0.01	0.001
R^2	0.02		0.59	
N	677		677	

Source: Gallup Polls conducted face-to-face, 1953–95.

Note: The dependent variable is the percentage of respondents calling themselves Independents.

Indeed, the Gallup results may even overstate the effects of election campaigns if apolitical respondents are especially prone to decline an interview during an election season. The weak effects we detect are reduced further as we shift our attention to surveys such as the General Social Surveys (GSS), which use the "politics in general" wording, engage in more rigorous sampling of respondents, and do not embed the partisanship question within a survey focused largely on current political events. Unlike the NES, the GSS routinely takes place during nonelection years as well as election years. Looking at the proportions of party identifiers during the period 1972–98 (Table 2.7), we see absolutely no evidence that party identification surges during presidential or midterm election years. (Analyzing these data with a regression model that allows for either linear or nonlinear time trends does nothing to bolster the argument that elections foster or resuscitate partisan identities.) Party identification does not seem to depend on the partisan atmosphere of electoral campaigns. Even if the true influence of campaigns lies somewhere between the GSS and Gallup results, it seems clear that party attachments endure even during lulls in party competition.

Table 2.7. How Independent Partisanship Varies between Election Years and Off Years

	Percentage Identifying as Independent	N
1972	26.1	1,607
1973	31.9	1,493
1974	31.3	1,461
1975	36.6	1,485
1976	37.0	1,495
1977	33.3	1,518
1978	36.3	1,527
1980	38.4	1,465
1982	33.5	1,851
1983	34.6	1,593
1984	36.0	1,465
1985	30.2	1,529
1986	33.7	1,467
1987	30.8	1,809
1988	34.2	1,481
1989	29.0	1,532
1990	31.5	1,368
1991	32.3	1,511
1993	34.6	1,597
1994	33.7	2,943
1996	37.0	2,898
1998	37.9	2,823

Source: General Social Surveys.

6. *Despite the marked differences between state and national voting patterns, the distribution of American partisanship does not change appreciably when attention is focused on state rather than national political parties.* During the 1980s, impressed by the success of Republican presidential candidates and Democratic congressional and statehouse candidates, scholars began to wonder whether voters had different “levels” of party identification. Southern voters in particular were suspected of harboring attachments to their state-level Democratic parties that did not extend to their national-level counterparts. The underlying assumption was that partisans were able to make peace with their inconsistent voting patterns by distancing themselves from the national Democratic Party while embracing the local one.

This contrast, however, fails to materialize in surveys of the general public. When respondents are asked to report their partisan affiliations with regard to different levels of government, the discrepancy between “state” and “national” party identification proves to be slight, even though the sequencing of the questions invites respondents to express contrasting affiliations at the two levels. Results from a 1987 NES survey show that people seldom give different answers to state- and national-level questions. In this survey, just under 1% (2 of 237) switched parties when asked about state-level identification. (As we saw earlier, simply due to response error, approximately 1% of major party identifiers can be expected to “switch parties.”) The marginal distributions of the state-level and national-level responses are also very similar, with a slight tendency toward more Independents at the state level, and the correlation between state and national party identification (excluding those with no preference) is 0.89—close to the upper bound that one could expect from any pair of imprecise measures.

Why, then, the scholarly emphasis on “multiple levels of party identification,” which supposedly “contaminate” traditional national measures of partisanship (Niemi, Wright, and Powell 1987: 1,094)? Explanations abound. First is the extraordinary appetite for supposed problems with the traditional measure of party identification. It is no exaggeration to say that every word in the conventional SRC question has sparked scholarly controversy. Here, the phrase “In general, when it comes to politics” is the culprit. Politics obviously takes place on many different levels, and it is natural to wonder whether individuals attend to these different levels when forming attachments. Second, scholars have been led astray by ignoring the problems of response error. Niemi, Wright, and Powell (1987) define a “multiple identifier” as anyone who jumps from one of the three-point partisan categories to another. Thus, weak partisans who variously call themselves Democrats and Independents are said to have “multiple identities.” Our earlier results suggest that this pattern is more likely to be the result of coarse response categories and careless responses than of multiple identities. Third, leading published work on multiple identification in the United States relies on surveys of campaign contributors rather than of the general public (Niemi, Wright, and Powell 1987; Bruce and Clark 1998). Given the political sophistication of these respondents and the close contact that they have probably had with the parties as organizations, it is not hard to understand how some of them might harbor different orientations toward state and local partisans. Even here, it should be stressed that very few of these contributors simultaneously identify with different political parties at the state and national levels.

Finally, some of the emphasis on multiple identities in the United States has drawn inspiration from surveys in other countries, where multiple levels of identification seem more apparent. Clarke and Stewart (1987) and Stewart and Clarke (1998) contend that Canadians frequently identify with one party at the federal level and another party at the provincial level. For example, Clarke and Stewart report that in 1974, 1979, and 1980, between 17% and 25% of Canadians identified with different parties at the federal and provincial levels (p. 391). To some extent, this kind of switching reflects the lack of an "independent" or "none of these" option in the party identification question posed to Canadians (Johnston 1992). An unknown number of nonpartisan respondents are forced into one partisan category at one point, only to bounce randomly to another in a subsequent question. We do not wish to rule out the possibility of multiple identities, but as we note in Chapter 7, surveys that are explicitly designed to uncover them often fail to do so.

7. *Partisans find politics more engaging than Independents.* One indication that partisans harbor real attachments to social groups is that they take an interest in the continual competition between parties. Although the level of political engagement varies within and between partisan groups, partisans differ on average from Independents in terms of the way that they look at campaigns. Partisans are more likely to take an interest in electoral competition, to care which candidate prevails, and to participate in elections (Campbell et al. 1960: chap. 5).

The 1992–94–96 NES panel survey illustrates the persistent differences between partisans and Independents. Before the 1992 and 1996 elections, this group of respondents were asked, "Generally speaking, would you say that you personally care a good deal who wins the presidential election this year, or that you don't care very much who wins?" Since both elections featured a prominent third-party candidate, Ross Perot, Independents might have been expected to find these elections unusually engaging. It turns out, however, that 58% of those who labeled themselves Independents in 1992 ($N = 234$) claimed to "care a good deal" about both elections, compared with 76% of Democrats ($N = 187$) and 77% of Republicans ($N = 159$). A similar pattern emerges when we examine responses to the question "Would you say that you were very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns this year?" This question was asked four times between 1992 and 1996. Fully 40% of Independents never once report being "very much interested," as opposed to 27% of Democrats and Republicans.

In some ways, these figures understate the contrasts between partisans and

Independents. How people describe their own level of interest may fail to convey the sense of engagement they feel when presented with partisan competition. The best example of how partisan sensibilities express themselves is the election dispute surrounding the 2000 presidential election. The national outcome depended on the vote count in Florida, whose electoral votes were sufficient to make either Albert Gore Jr. or George W. Bush the winner. When the votes were first machine-tallied, Bush held a slender margin, and the Gore campaign demanded that certain counties recount their ballots by hand. Exactly how to recount half-punched or unpunched ballot cards immediately became a point of contention, and Republicans charged that subjective standards would allow the Democrats to steal the election. Meanwhile, Democrats alleged that irregularities caused large numbers of Democratic votes to go uncounted, because voters either were turned away at the polls or had voted in ways that disqualified their ballots. The controversy surrounding the disputed election outcome drew far more public attention than the campaign leading up to Election Day.

Partisan sentiment immediately suffused opinions about election procedures. Republicans discovered new virtues in the way that machines count ballots, and Democrats came to appreciate the advantages of hand-counting. When asked by ABC/ *Washington Post* pollsters ten days before the end of the election crisis "Do you think there should or should not be hand-counts of all the votes in Florida?" a national sample of Democrats favored hand-counts by a margin of 67% to 29% (with a small number of undecideds), whereas Republicans thought otherwise by a margin of 18% to 81%. Independents were predictably divided, with 46% favoring and 52% opposing. In the immediate aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision that effectively declared Bush the winner, *Los Angeles Times* pollsters asked a national sample "Do you personally feel that George W. Bush won the election legitimately or not?" Independents gave Bush the benefit of the doubt by a margin of 53% to 37%, with 11% saying that they did not know. Republicans and Democrats were more certain. Republicans felt that Bush won legitimately by a margin of 91% to 4%, with 5% expressing no opinion. Just 23% of Democrats thought Bush won legitimately, 71% did not, and 6% were unsure.

One may argue that lying beneath the surface of partisanship is a desire to elect an administration that will do one's ideological bidding. By this interpretation, Republicans and Democrats tug in opposite directions because of their policy differences, not their team attachments. The aftermath of the 2000 election shows this interpretation to be insufficient. On every question about the

election dispute, the gap between self-described liberals and conservatives is much smaller than the gap between Democrats and Republicans. For example, when asked "If the U.S. Supreme Court had allowed all the disputed ballots in Florida to be counted, who do you think would have ended up with the most votes, Al Gore or George W. Bush?" Republicans with an opinion came down six to one in favor of Bush, Democrats came down six to one in favor of Gore, and Independents were split evenly. By comparison, conservatives sided with Bush by a four-to-three margin, and liberals sided with Gore by a three-to-two margin.

The presidential election crisis of 2000 also illustrates the role of emotions among those who identify with a party. Although the election crisis captivated the entire country, it elicited especially heartfelt reactions among partisans. Table 2.8 presents responses to a Gallup Poll conducted a few days after the resolution of the crisis. Respondents were presented with a series of adjectives and asked whether the word described their "reaction to the fact that George W. Bush has been declared the winner of the presidency." Compared with Democrats, Republicans were vastly more likely to describe themselves as "thrilled," "pleased," and "relieved." Democrats, by contrast, were from six to fifteen times more likely to describe themselves as "angry," "cheated," and "bitter" than Republicans. In every instance, Independents were in the middle, seldom expressing the extreme feelings of anger or thrill. Unlike Democrats, whose primary emotional reaction was a sense of having been cheated, those without a party attachment primarily expressed a sense of relief that the dispute had been brought to a close.

To characterize party identification as an emotional attachment perhaps goes too far in downplaying the role that cognition plays in shaping self-categorization. As we will see in subsequent chapters, citizens do seem to respond to information that changes the way that they perceive the social character of the parties. At the same time, however, the data in Table 2.8 remind us of the emotions that arise from group attachments. Those who root for and empathize with a partisan group feel the emotions of someone who is personally locked in competition with a long-standing and often ungracious rival.

Finally, a less dramatic but more politically significant indication of partisan engagement is voter participation. Table 2.9 tallies rates of self-reported partisan turnout for the 1992, 1994, and 1996 November elections.⁶ In each election we see a significant relationship between turnout and party identification ($p < .01$, one-tailed test). Republicans turned out to vote at higher rates than Democrats, and both partisan groups voted at higher rates than Independents. In

Table 2.8. Emotional Reactions to the Resolution of the 2000 Presidential Election Crisis

	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Angry	5	15	33
Cheated	4	29	60
Bitter	3	12	31
Thrilled	59	16	6
Pleased	91	46	16
Relieved	90	60	40
<i>N</i> (weighted)	276	401	334

Source: CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll Election, December 15–17, 2000.

Note: Entries are the percentage of each partisan group feeling a given emotion. Don't know/refused responses are in each case less than 3%.

1992 and 1996, for example, Independents accounted for more than half of all nonvoters but approximately one-third of all voters. The relationship between voter turnout and political partisanship is among the most robust findings in social science, extending across a wide range of elections. Given that no single vote is likely to alter the election outcome, voting is an expression of support.

Table 2.9. Voter Turnout by Party Identification, 1992, 1994, and 1996

	Party Identification, in 1992		
	Democrat (<i>N</i> = 191)	Independent (<i>N</i> = 216)	Republican (<i>N</i> = 149)
Voted in 1992	72%	65%	81%
Did not vote	28%	35%	19%
	100%	100%	100%
Voted in 1994	85%	74%	91%
Did not vote	15%	26%	9%
	100%	100%	100%
Voted in 1996	85%	74%	91%
Did not vote	15%	26%	9%
	100%	100%	100%

Source: American National Election Studies, 1992–94–96 panel survey.

Note: Voter turnout is self-reported turnout in the November general elections.

Those who identify with a political party are more likely to have something to express.

The link between partisanship and political engagement suggests that partisan feelings grow out of group attachments. Although for many people, partisans included, politics is a remote and uninteresting activity, those who identify with partisan groups are more likely to be engaged spectators if not active participants.

SUMMARY

Party identification is anything but an ephemeral "doorstep opinion." When, like attorneys cross-examining an equivocating witness, we quiz people about their partisanship repeatedly within the same interview, we develop an increasingly precise sense of their party affiliations. When we cross-validate these responses with measures designed to tap social identification, it seems clear that self-described partisans harbor genuine attachments to partisan groups. When respondents are reinterviewed many years later, their partisan attachments remain largely intact. Partisan identities seem unusually resistant to context effects, for the ranks of partisans remain relatively constant amid the ebb and flow of campaign activity. We shall see in subsequent chapters that the same may be said of the ratio of Democrats to Republicans; the changing political fortunes of the parties for the most part leave little imprint on party identification.

Our emphasis on the continuing significance of party attachments runs counter to the torrent of scholarship suggesting that genuine partisanship is a thing of the past. To be sure, the proportion of self-labeled partisans declined after the 1950s, not only in the United States but in many other countries as well. Dalton, McAllister, and Wattenberg (2000: Table 2.1) charted eighteen democracies over time and found a statistically significant decline in the number of partisan identifiers in nine of these countries. These trends mean that fewer citizens are impelled by their partisan attachments to go to the polls and to support their party's candidates. That said, it is important for one to maintain a sense of proportion when interpreting this trend. First, in countries such as the United States, the level of partisan identification has rebounded considerably from its nadir in the 1970s. As the U.S. population has aged and as the stereotypes of partisan groups have changed in the eyes of certain regional or social groups, party attachment has grown. News of declining partisanship is out-of-date here and may become so elsewhere. Second, the decline in party at-

tachment has by no means driven partisans to extinction. In surveys conducted since the mid-1980s, approximately two out of three American adults describe themselves as Democrats or Republicans, and when pressed further in subsequent questioning, some of the remaining Independents reveal partisan inclinations, a point demonstrated forcefully by Keith et al. (1992). This is hardly a case of "parties without partisans," as Dalton and Wattenberg (2000) would suggest. Last, as we saw in the previous chapter, partisanship packs the same wallop as it did a generation ago. In terms of candidate preference in presidential races, the gap between Democrats and Republicans remains as large as ever. Although political scientists sometimes wax nostalgic about the days when partisanship really meant something, the fact is that the elections of 1912, 1920, 1924, 1928, 1948, and 1952 all featured large numbers of partisans voting against their party's nominee. Partisanship is alive and well, and as far as we can tell, it is as influential for us as it was for our parents and grandparents.