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Volume II. 1986-87 - Minorities in the Post-Industrial City

Title

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Publication Date

1986-05-01

ISSR Working Papers Volume 2, Number 3/1986

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PARTY COALITIONS AND ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN A MULTI-ETHNIC CITY

John R. Petrocik and Dennis P. Patterson

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A version of this paper was presented at the Conference on Minorities in the Post-Industrial City, held in May, 1986 at UCLA. Ten of the papers from the Conference are available through the ISSR Working Papers Series.

Social Divisions and Political Parties

Historically, the emergence of mass politics has depended upon a minimum of social heterogeneity (LaPalombara and Weiner 1966; Dahl 1966; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Religious, economic, ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences provided social cleavages along which organizations, especially political ones, developed. The number, salience and centrality, and political significance of the cleavages varied among societies but the existence of differences, their expression as groups within the larger society, and their politicization are virtual constants. In all mass democracies, not excluding the United States, parties are instruments of collective action through which groups promote and protect interests, which are not satisfied by the usual operation of the social structure and markets.

As a result, groups provide the working politician with a guide to the electorate, and it is there are one who deals with it in any other fashion. The variety of groups with which parties and office-seekers must deal varies greatly among societies. In some cases the lines of cleavage are few and, relatively speaking, simple; parties coincide with a few groups, and sometimes only one. In other cases, supporters of a party are religiously, ethnically, racially, linguistically, and class heterogeneous; no group, however defined, represents more than a fraction of a party's supporters (Rose and Urwin 1969). Whether their base is heterogeneous or homogeneous, politicians reinforce it through their appeal to the electorate. The heterogeneity of a party's support is, however, an important variable. Parties with a homogeneous clientele present a homogeneous programmatic facet to the electorate because, *ceteris paribus*, the interests and concerns of their supporters are more focused. Heterogeneous parties, by contrast, enjoy agreement on a small number of issues because, again, *ceteris paribus*, the social and economic differences that divide their supporters also promote inconsistent issue agendas among them. The apparent programmatic vagueness of the American parties reflects the diversity of their coalitions.

Southern California is an appropriate observatory for the study of party coalitions because it offers an opportunity to examine further some political consequences of social heterogeneity. Two issues are examined in this paper. First, how is the social diversity of the electorate represented in the parties? Do the parties mobilize groups different from those in the national parties? Do the "new" ethnics have a particular impact on the coalitions? Second, how do the local parties represent the policy agendas of the groups that constitute their support base? The analysis begins by setting out the national pattern.

The American Parties

The American parties are particularly heterogeneous. A fair sense of their social diversity is presented in Figure 1, which compares them with parties in 20 other countries in terms of a measure of the alignment of social differences with party. The value of the measure used to distinguish these party systems is 100 when party preference is perfectly predicted by social characteristics and 0 when social characteristics are not correlated with partisanship. Differential calculating methods and some recent research have called into question the position of some of these countries (see, for example, Chibber's 1986 analysis of India), but, on the whole, the pattern in Figure 1 seems correct. While the order of the countries may change slightly, the party system of the United States is always one of the most heterogeneous. Moreover, the diversity does not reflect any distinctiveness in the social cleavages, which structure partisanship in the United States. The partisanship of Americans, like that of the electorate of most of the countries in Figure 1, depends upon religion, language, subnational ethnic attachments, and class, in approximately that order (Rose and Urwin 1969; Lijphart 1979).

A summary portrait of group differences appears in Table 1, which presents a segmentation of the American electorate along religious, economic, and regional lines. Group differences between the Democratic and Republican Party coalitions of the middle of the 1980s are smaller than they were two decades ago (Petrocik 1981; 1986): southern Whites are much less Democratic, Catholics and union members are less committed to the Democrats, and WASPs -- even upscale "silk-stockings Yankees" -- are less politically distinctive than they were three or four decades ago. Still the differences are quite sharp and both parties think of their support and their electoral strategies in terms of these groups.

However, while Table 1 efficiently maps the social basis of partisanship in the United States, it displays poorly the social cleavages that are linked to the parties. In particular, it minimizes the importance of ethnicity (defined by nationality, race, and religion), which, by itself, accounts for almost five times as much of the variance in party affiliation as social class, region, size of place of residence, gender, or age. Figure 2, which displays the proportion of Democrats and Republicans within each ethnic group, gives a clearer sense of the link between ethnicity and partisanship in the United States. Differences among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics provide only part of the variability; there are also large differences among Whites, reflecting religious traditions and the inter-action of the culture of different nationality groups with American society at the time the groups were politically mobilized (see Kleppner, 1970). German and English Protestants represent the most Republican segment of the electorate, while Blacks and Jews are the most Democratic. Catholics occupy the middle ground, with some nationality groups tilting toward the Democrats and others embracing them. Polish and Irish Catholics are substantially more Democratic than, for example, Italian and other East European Catholics. German Catholics are the most Republican of all Catholic nationalities, but, of course, significantly less so than German Protestants.

Contrary to still widespread belief, social class factors such as income, education, and occupation do not account for the differences among the religious-ethnic groups in Figure 2; it only exaggerates them, and then for only a few groups. For example, wealthy German and British Protestants are more Republican

Table 1. The Group Foundations of Partisanship, 1984.

Group Profile	Party Identification of the Parties	Dem	Ind	Rep	%
Democrats					
Republicans					
White Northern Protestants					
Upper SES	28	46	9	26	
Middle SES	28	9	63	37	
Lower SES	38	10	53	61	
White Southerners (border states)					
Middle - Upper SES	54	9	38	54	
Lower SES		61	63	35	
White Southerners (deep south)					
Middle - Upper SES	41	9	50	69	
Lower SES	42	18	40	6	7
Immigrants	35	22	43	22	
Catholics					
Upper SES	42	11	47	68	
All others	55	12	33	75	
Jews	73	81	93		
Slacks	79	12	10	72	
Northern Union Hhlds	52	10	39	13	
Hispanics	57	19	24	74	
All others		8			7
TOTAL	100	100			

Note: The first three columns are summed to 100 percent horizontally.

Figure 1: The linkage between social characteristics and party preference in 20 electoral democracies

65	-
Netherlands	
60	-
55	-Finland
50	-Belgium
Austria	
Denmark	
Sweden	
45	-Switzerland
New Zealand	
Norway 40	-Italy
Great Britain	
Germany	
35	-
France Israel	
Australia	
30	-
Canada	
25	-
Japan	
Ireland	
20	-United States
15	-
India	
10	-

FIGURE3

PARTNERSHIP
INLOSANGELES

OFGROUPS

I

70

I

I

60*SCANPROTS/EASTEUROPEANCATHS
PI*GERMANP ROTESTANTS

EI

RI*BRITISHPROTESTANTS

C

E50

NI*OTHERPROTESTANTS

TI*MIDDLEEASTERNS

40

R*IRISH

E*GERMANCATHOLICS

P

U30*ITALIANS

BI*ASIANS

L*OT

HERCATHOLICS

I20+HISPANICS**JEWS

C

A

NI

I

10

I

I*BLACKS

f

0

-----+-----+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+ +--+--+
25303540455055606570758085

PERCENTDEMOCRATIC

than their less well-off co-religionists, and they remain so even when the effect of income and education is eliminated; the greater Republican sentiment of German Protestants survives controls for social class; the Democratic partisanship of Blacks and Jews is unaffected by social class. Table 2 presents the relevant data.

Politics and Ethnicity in Los Angeles

The similarity between Los Angeles and the United States is striking. There are differences among Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, but also among whites depending on their national origin and religion. The political ties of the comparable ethnic groups in Figure 3 are as similar to the national data (Figure 2) as possible given the differences in the distribution of the groups in the two electorates. There is no evidence of a partisan alignment dividing the "new" and the "old" ethnics into different parties. Instead, the "new" ethnics have simply added more complexity to the ethno-religious differences that typically characterize the Democratic and Republican coalitions. Traditional differences in the partisanship of nationality and religious groups have not been reshaped by divisions between "new" and "old" ethnics; they have simply been augmented and made more complex.

There are good reasons to have expected more dissimilarity between Los Angeles and the national electorate. As many scholars have argued, one of the consequences of being in a place where the volume has been turned upon the "silent revolution" of post industrialism might include a transformation of older patterns of political support for the parties (Inglehart 1977; Dalton et al. 1984). Further, Los Angeles' reputation as an anomalous patch of the nation's political landscape reflects a society that departs from the national norm in several ways. The most obvious, of course, is that California is the land of the "new" ethnics: east and southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, Middle Easterners, and Central and South Americans. The stark social and economic contrasts that gave political significance to being "Yankee," Italian, Irish, or Polish in the eastern US are largely absent in Southern California. Not only have such differences declined greatly in recent decades, but also the Southern California social system provides comparatively little reinforcement for older ethnic divisions. There also lack the formal institutions and traditions that allow these groups to maintain their primordial commitments and political identity but it has a culture that might actively assault the group identities of the past.

Yet, however reasonable a departure from the national pattern might have been, it is the similarity, which commands attention. The social cleavages that distinguish partisans in Los Angeles reproduce the national divisions. The older ethnic divisions may be less salient than the new ones, but they contribute as much to the definition of the Democratic and Republican coalitions in Los Angeles as they do in the nation at large. The most immediate impact of the new ethnicity will be to increase the heterogeneity of a particularly heterogeneous party system.

Ethnic-based Party Coalitions in Los Angeles

The zero-order correlation ratios (η^2) in Table 3 indicate that nationality and race are the strongest predictors of partisan attachment in southern California. Status variables--education and income--account for little of the variance, while the age and sex of the voter, and union membership, are of almost no importance at all. There are, of course, party affiliation differences by union, class, etc., but they do not explain the partisanship of the ethnic groups.

Table 2. Partisan Tendencies of Groups in the National Electorate Controlling for Socio-Economic Class.

MEAN CONTROLLING GROUP PARTISANSHIP FOR STATUS		
Southern White	-.0100	
WASP.33.31		
Scandinavian.05		.06
German Protestants.26.25		
Other Protestants.23.23		
Irish	-.16	-.17
German Catholics.08.06		
Polish	-.41	-.40
Other E. Europeans	-.15	-.15
Italian	-.10	-.10
Other Catholics	.01	-.01
Jews	-.37	-.43
Blacks	-.49	-.47
Hispanics	-.19	-.17
Others.06.05		

Table 3. Percent of Variance Explained in Partisan Tendencies.

Race	.13
Nationality	.15
Religion	.04
Education	.01
Income	.03
Sex	.00
Age	.00
Union Membership	.01
Ideology	.15

Table 4 clusters these ethno-religious traits in a way that highlights the differences among religious and ethnic groups. The cells of the table contain the arithmetic difference between the proportion that identify as Republicans minus the proportion that identify as Democrats. Negative scores indicate a Democratic bias within the group while positive values show a bias in favor of the Republican Party. The first column highlights the familiar Democratic proclivities of Blacks and Hispanics; it registers the more modest Democratic preference of Asians; it displays the (weak) Republican preference of Whites. But there are significant nationality-linked differences among these racial-religious groups. Hispanics are quite diverse, with those of Mexican extraction far more supportive of the Democrats than other Latin Americans. Religious tradition and nationality yield even greater distinctions among Anglo whites. Jews are as Democratic as Hispanics, Anglo Catholics only tilt toward the Democrats, while Protestants are quite Republican. Catholics of Italian and Irish extraction are particularly Democratic; German and Scandinavian Protestants are the most Republican. The last column presents a profile of the Democratic and Republican Party identifiers in terms of a demographic typology based on ethnicity and religion.

Ethnicity and Class

As is true at the national level, partisan differences among ethnic groups in Los Angeles are not manifestations of social class. Income and education are less predictive of partisanship (Table 3) and they are unable to explain partisan differences among the groups: the .37 zero order correlation between ethnicity and partisanship is almost unchanged at .35 after controlling for both education and income. Table 5, which presents the party bias of each ethnic group among those

Table 4. Party Bias of Racial, Religious, and Nationality Groups, Los Angeles, 1984.

Group Profile of the Parties	
Party Bias Democrat/Republicans	
Black	-.8219% 1%
Mexican	-.58167
Other Hispanic	-.244 5
Asian	-.2444
Anglo White	.06
Jews	-.5472
Catholics	-.172022
German	-.13
Irish	-.19
Italian	-.22
Other nationalities	-.28
Protestants	.192654
English	.18
German	.30
Scandinavian	.29
Other nationalities	.10
100%	100%

NOTE: In this and all subsequent tables and figures "party bias" is the percentage difference between those who are self-described Republicans minus those who describe themselves as Democrats. A negative value indicates the group is that many percentage points more Democratic than Republican. A positive value indicates an excess of Republicans. Self-described independents with a preference for one of the parties are treated as partisans.

Table 5. Partisan Bias of Ethno-Religious Groups Controlling for Income, Los Angeles, 1984.

ANNUAL FAMILY INCOME
GROUP Under \$30,000 \$30,000 and above

Anglo Protestants	16.20	
Anglo Catholics	-.32	.11
Jews	.44	-.54
Mexicans	-.62	.58
Other Hispanics	-.39	-.06
Blacks	-.87	-.72
Asians	-.48	-.07
Others	-.16	.03

CORRELATION RATIO .40 .32

with high and low incomes, illustrate the importance of ethnicity in structuring partisanship. While higher income predisposes individuals to support the Republicans, it is important to note that income does not eliminate the ethno-religious differences. As the summary correlation ratios at the bottom of the table indicate, an individual's ethno-religious identity predicts the party preference of the wealthy and then of the less wealthy. Of course, there are class differences. Wealthy Anglo Catholics and Protestants are more Republican than their less well-off coreligionists. Wealthy Irish and Italian Catholics are almost equally divided in their partisanship, but they are still 20 or more points less Republican than Anglo Protestants. Less well-off Irish and Italian Catholics are staunch Democrats, while lower income Protestants are solidly Republican. Wealthy Asians are less Democratic than their less fortunate compatriots, but, again, they are not Republicans. The pro-Democratic bias of Hispanics, Jews and Blacks is virtually unaffected by income. Clearly, the concerns and interests that have linked ethnic groups to the parties in Southern California are not simple expressions of class interests. Their sources are more likely to be rooted in beliefs and traditions that arise from the culture and history of the groups (what Bellah and his associates, 1985, have called "habits of the heart").

Declining Differences?

The "melting pot" metaphor has persuaded many observers that ethnic subcultures are fragile and, unless strongly reinforced by intergenerational socialization or by the society (through discrimination?), become weaker with every generation. Recently, Alba (1981) pronounced the "twilight of ethnicity among American Catholics" and, before him, Dahl (1966), Wolfinger (1965), Parents (1967), Greeley (1974), and Glazer and Moynihan (1963) have examined the durability of ethnic subcultures as political enclaves. The general, though heavily qualified, consensus is that differences are smaller than they once were and will continue to become smaller. While the Los Angeles data conform to this expectation they also show that group differences are likely to persist for some time to come.

Stratification by age, as is done in Table 6, is not equivalent to a generational analysis. However, to the extent that aged differences are not completely misleading, it would seem that generational changes have been small. Anglo Protestants, Jews, and Blacks do not differ by age; Catholic partisanship changes

Table 6. Partisan Bias of Ethno-Religious Groups Controlling for Age, Los Angeles, 1984.

AGE GROUPS

54 and GROUP 18	-24-25-	39-40-	53 and older	
Anglo Protestants	.26	.12	.17	.25
Anglo Catholics	-.01	-.16	.18	-.27
Jews	-.50	[-.55]	
Mexicans	-.30	-.66	.55	-.89
Other Hispanics	-.08	[-.51]	
Blacks	-.76	.81	-.88	-.84
Asians	-.24	.33	.09	
CORRELATION RATIO	.36	.35	.38	.46

NOTE: The number of cases of Jews and Other Hispanics in the sample was too small to support an analysis by all four age categories. The values within brackets indicate the age ranges used for these groups.

slightly; only Asians seem to vary strongly by generation. As the correlation ratios at the bottom of each column of Table 6 show, partisanship is distinguished by ethnicity among the youngest and the oldest cohorts. In brief, ethnicity is a non-spurious source of partisanship and there is every indication that it will continue to define the electorate of the parties for some time to come.

The Issue Basis of Partisanship

When Democratic or Republican office-seekers "talk about the issues" and otherwise present a policy agenda to voters, they are soliciting support by rallying groups that normally support the party's candidates. The candidates present themselves as faithful proponents of the interests of the groups that constitute the party coalitions. The "generic Democrat" talks about the social safety net, affirmative action, the need to maintain momentum against racial injustice, and the essential commitment to provide jobs and a decent standard of living to all Americans; the Republican opponent urges reductions in government waste, lower taxes, economic growth, strong opposition to a "predatory" Soviet Union, and a renewal of traditional values and institutions. These are issues with differential appeal. Some Democrats are invigorated by discussion of the social safety net and employment but inclined to reject affirmative action. Similarly, there are Republicans who are excited by lower taxes and economic growth but unenthusiastic about a return to traditional values. The diversity of the national coalitions is responsible for this programmatic tension. Its consequence is the frequently noted weak programmatic orientations of the parties. Democratic identifiers differ with Republicans on a narrow range of questions, allowing many others to serve as a source of intra-party conflict and inter-party vagueness. The Los Angeles pattern repeats this trait of thenational parties. The result is local parties, which, by virtue of their heterogeneous support base, display greater intra than inter-party issue diversity. Consider Table 7, which presents the correlation ratio between several different issues and party identification and between the same issues and the ethno-religious typology of the electorate. On average, as the correlation ratios indicate, the issue differences between the parties are smaller than the issue differences among the groups that constitute the mass base of the parties. Further, these group differences persist even among those who share a similar party identification. For example, Anglo-Protestants who are Democrats are more liberal than those who are Republicans, but they are the most conservative of all Democrats. Similarly, Asian and non-Mexican Latinos are generally quite liberal, they are strongly Democratic in their partisanship, and those who are Republican represent the most liberal fraction of

Table 7. Correlation of Issues and Ethnicity with Issue Attitudes.

Party Identification Typology

thno-religious

ISSUE

Government's responsibility
for social problems in general. 21.31

Government's responsibility
to assist minorities. 29.47

Need for more effort to
improve the environment. 12.12

Support for the death penalty. 15.22

Support for women's equality
issues. 08.13

Support for learning English
at the expense of maintaining
previous national culture. 08.15

NOTE: The measures in the table are correlation ratios (η^2)
calculated by treating the issue as the dependent variable.

the Republican party. Table 8 illustrates this for the two different issues. 3. As the data indicate, being "more or less" liberal or conservative influences party preference, but since no absolute standard of liberal and conservative regulates party support, these group differences create a mass base for the parties which is extremely heterogeneous. The results in Table 8 repeat themselves for most issues. As a consequence, the supporters of the parties create a condition of programmatic diffuseness. On most issues, the proper responsibility of the government for social problems in general, the condition of minorities in particular, the status of women in

Table 8. Issue Preferences of Ethno-Religious Group by Party Identification.

Issue: Size of Government Importance of learning English rather than keeping original culture	Dem	Rep
Group		
Anglo Protestants	.03.29	.50.67
Anglo Catholics	.03.23.63.54	
Jews	-.13.28*	
Mexicans	-.33	-.36.41.74
Other Hispanics	-.26.19.48.55	
Blacks	-.31.50*	
Asians	-.14.14.01.93	
Avg for party supporters	-.14.20	.47.64

NOTE: Table entries are percentage differences between those who offer a conservative position minus those who offered a liberal preference. Negative numbers, therefore, indicate a plurality of liberal opinion in the group; positive numbers indicate a conservative plurality.

An asterisk (*) indicates that there are fewer than 30 cases in the group. Values are not reported for subgroups smaller than 30.

society, the death penalty, or treatment of minority languages in California --the supporters of the parties limit the parties' ability to assert a clear position. The programmatic differences of the American party system characterize the parties precisely because of the similarity of their coalitional structure.

Conclusions

It is common to think of political parties as "autonomous" institutions that, through officeholders, offer policy orientations and programs to voters in the hope of support. The cause-and-effect is more nearly the reverse. Party elites and office-seekers are representatives of groups that have developed links to parties for reasons that are often poorly represented by the immediate differences between (or among) the parties. The parties represent the groups and gain their support by appealing to the concerns of their constituency at election time. The more diverse the constituency, the more diverse the appeal. The exceptionally heterogeneous American parties have leaders who are more practiced than most at managing their diverse coalitions by offering diverse policy agendas.

The social diversity of Southern California has been managed by the parties in much the same fashion that they have dealt with social diversity in other parts of the country, and throughout history. Old elements of the party coalitions remain, augmented by new groups and new agendas. The parties and their adherents present broad issue differences, not sharp ones. The "more liberal" members of any group are Democrats; the "more conservative" are Republicans. But at any time, the range of group-based issue differences within a party are nearly as large (and sometimes larger) than the inter-party differences. The new ethnicities of Southern California appear unlikely to change this core characteristic of the American parties. The available evidence indicates that it will simply exaggerate it.

1. The values are recalculated according to Alford's measure of cleavage. The particular measure of cleavage alignment used for Figure 1 is obtained from Powell (1980), whose estimate is an average of the relationship between party preference and social class and between party preference and religion. Other methods of calculating the cleavage alignment, e.g., Rose (1974), yield the same general order among the countries.
2. This paper understands ethnicity as a segmental variable defined by religion, race, and national origin. Normally such a distinction would separate Catholics and Protestants according to what the individual perceives as his or her national origins. However, the sample is too small to support analyses of these differences and clustering nationalities in order to increase subsample sizes distorts group differences.
3. General sentiments about the government's responsibility for a broad range of social and economic problems has been the central distinction between the parties for the last half century and it is the issue which has best predicted individual party preference (Cantril and Free, 1967; Ladd, 1970). Group differences in party affiliations should parallel differences among the groups in their beliefs about the government's responsibility for society's problems. In contrast, beliefs about women's roles, environmental policy, or the death penalty are largely peripheral to the conflicts around which the party coalitions were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s, and remain marginal to the parties and their supporters today.

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