

When and Why Do African Americans Not Identify as Democrats?*

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Since 1970 the proportion of African Americans identifying with the Democratic Party has declined to the point where over 40 percent of blacks now identify as Independent or Republican. We find that traditional accounts pointing to class gains or increased conservatism among blacks fare poorly in explaining declining Democratic identification. Rather we show that a racial group calculus better explains the change. Growing skepticism about the Democratic Party's efforts to help the black community and strong support for black autonomy explain much of the change. We conclude by examining the behavioral implications of not identifying as Democratic.

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African Americans have traditionally been viewed as one of the most politically cohesive demographic groups in the nation. Some go as far as to claim that “the relative homogeneity of black public opinion has been generally considered one of the few certainties of modern American politics” (Dawson 2001:44). Since the landmark 1964 presidential contest, in which 94 percent of African American voters reported preferring the Democratic nominee Lyndon B. Johnson over the Republican nominee Barry Goldwater and the third-party candidate George Wallace, African Americans have overwhelmingly supported the Democratic Party's candidates for elected office (Bositis 2004). Despite this clear behavioral preference for candidates of one party, African Americans do not overwhelmingly identify as Democrats. Roughly one out of every three African American respondents in biennial American National Election Studies surveys do not identify as a Democrat. Put simply, on party identification – which has been described as “the single most important determinant of individual voting decisions” (Kinder and Sears 1985: 686) – African Americans are far from homogeneous.

In this paper we seek to explain this relatively neglected dimension of African American politics. Specifically, why do some African Americans choose *not* to identify with the Democratic Party? To answer this question, we embed the question of non-Democratic identification within a broader consideration of African American partisanship *per se*. We start with the conventional view of party identification, in which partisanship is viewed largely as a function of one's underlying liberal-to-conservative ideological beliefs. By this view, African Americans who identify as Democrats do so because of their reliably liberal views and those who do not reject the Democratic Party because their ideological views are discernibly more conservative. This possibility is especially pronounced given the putative growth of a black middle class and the potential conservatising effect of improved economic status on the party

preferences of African Americans (Hutchinson 1999; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997; Wilson 1978, 1987).

We offer an alternative view. We suggest that black partisan choice is a function of an entirely different set of dimensions. Building on the work of Dawson (1994) and others we maintain that African Americans' partisan preferences reflect a racial group calculus. Like Dawson, we believe that because life chances are often linked to race, many blacks feel a strong sense of linked fate with the larger black community and tend to base their partisan judgments by matching racially-defined group interests with the perceived pursuit of those interests by the Democratic and Republican parties. We part ways from Dawson, however, by not assuming that a "black utility heuristic" mechanically translates a strong sense of linked fate into Democratic party identification.

Rather, we contend that the link between group interests and party identification is much more complex and is in fact contingent on making two logical connections. For African Americans to identify as Democrats they must first believe that mainstream political institutions like political parties are the best avenue to pursue black interests. For the large segment of the black population that supports various forms of black autonomy or black nationalism neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party may represent an attractive tool to further black interests. Second, they must decide that the Democratic Party rather than the Republican Party is better able to accommodate black interests. For many African Americans, inattention to the black community from the Democratic Party and the increasing prominence of black elites in the Republican Party may make this a difficult decision. In short, neither of these connections is automatic. Logically then, exit from the Democratic Party can happen in one of three ways: either by attenuation of a sense of group identity, by an intensification of black autonomy, or by

updating one's evaluations of whether the Democratic Party effectively serves the interests of African Americans.

The multiple dimensions to black partisanship that we find in this paper have implications not only for *which* party African Americans choose but also for the *structure* of partisan choice. The relevance of multiple dimensions means that the relationship of African Americans to the U.S. two-party system is distinct from that of whites. Specifically, for African Americans the parties are not neatly ordered along a linear continuum ranging from liberal to conservative. Instead, pairwise choices between partisan and non-partisan attachments represent distinct choices that reflect different motivations that include not just liberal-conservative ideology but also black nationalism, racial identity, and the institutional and social environments that structure African American politics. For many blacks, Independent does not fall in the middle between Democrat and Republican.

This paper proceeds as follows. We first review existing explanations of partisanship and explain why these accounts fail to explain the partisan decision of non-whites and especially African Americans. We then propose to explain party identification among African Americans through a general, multi-dimensional view of party identification. We test these distinct pathways to partisanship using data from the American National Election Studies, the 1984 National Black Politics Study, and the 1993 and 1996 National Black Election Studies. We close with a discussion of the implications of this multi-dimensional model for African American politics as well as its applicability to other racial/ethnic groups.

Existing Accounts of Party Identification

To date, one view dominates our understanding of partisan choice. Despite a welter of analysis and argument about the nature of partisanship in American democracy, party

identification is still viewed as fitting fairly neatly into a single left-right ideological dimension (Green et al 2002, Franklin 1992, Franklin and Jackson 1983). Each of us fits into a linear scale which ranges from Republicans on the right through Independents in the middle to Democrats on the left. As Campbell and his collaborators note,

The partisan self-image of all but the few individuals who disclaim any involvement in politics permits us to place each person in these samples on a continuum of partisanship extending from strongly Republican to strongly Democratic.

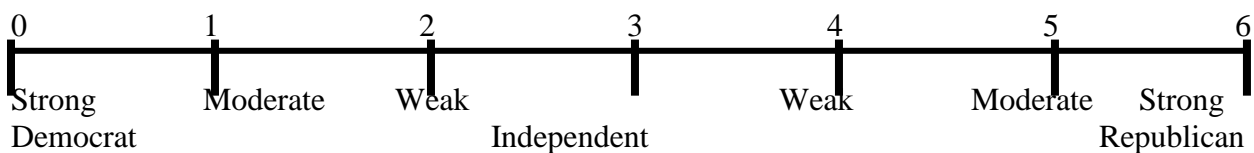
This single left-right ideological dimension is epitomized by a linear scale that is constructed of the following three items (or similar versions) and is employed in almost every study of American voting behavior:

Q1. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Q2. [IF REPUBLICAN OR DEMOCRAT] Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat) or not a very strong (Republican/Democrat)?

Q3. [IF INDEPENDENT] Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?

Most often, these or similar party identification questions are used to construct a variable comprised of seven ordered categories, such as the one below:



In the past few decades, considerable effort has been undertaken to assess various aspects of this conventional model. One line of research has shown that in terms of voting behavior there is little to distinguish partisans who do not identify strongly with their party from independents who lean towards a party (Keith, *et al*, 1992; Miller and Wattenberg, 1983 but see Dennis 1992). Other scholars have suggested a two dimensional view of party identification.

Claggett (1981) and Shively (1979) have argued that party identification consists of party acquisition and partisan intensity.

A different set of studies have focused less on the ideological underpinnings of partisanship and more on the role of socialization in childhood and early adulthood (Campbell, et al, 1960; Beck and Jennings 1991). Although several variants of this model have been put forward, all maintain that partisanship is acquired early in life and remains with us throughout our remaining years. In most cases, we simply assume the partisan choices of our parents.¹

But in the end the notion of a linear scale anchored by a single left-right dimension remains largely intact (Green 1988). Indeed almost every study attempting to understand voter behavior or some other aspect of political behavior includes this basic linear model of party identification. As Petrocik notes, “The index of party identification is so universally accepted as the variable around which to organize a discussion of political behavior in the United States that it is difficult to find a monograph or research article which does not introduce [the linear party index] as a consideration in the analysis” (1974:31). Despite decades of revision, Keith et al’s exhaustive study of partisanship concludes, “We see no problems with the traditional measure” (1992:196). Thus, outside of a sense that people identify as partisan because of where they fit on

¹ This almost primordial view of party identification has been sharply criticized. The brunt of the attack has come from more rational choice oriented political scientists. These critics purport to show that in important instances party identification is not stable but rather varies as a function of macroeconomic conditions as well as one’s own candidate preferences, issue positions, and vote choice in any given election (Franklin and Jackson 1983; Allsop and Weisberg, 1988). Other scholars of political parties counter that while party identification is clearly not unaffected by campaigns and other political events throughout one’s lifetime, it is an enduring self-classification and, when measurement error is explicitly taken into account, largely exogenous to candidate evaluations, issue positions, and vote choice (Green et al 2002, Beck and Jennings 1991).

an liberal-conservative ideological dimension or because of how they were socialized as children, we have little sense of the origins and the meanings of partisan choices.

Existing Accounts of African American Party Identification

A potentially serious flaw with conventional accounts of party identification is that they ignore race and ethnicity. The usual strategy in empirical studies of partisanship is to exclude groups like African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. The authors of the *Myth of the Independent Voter*, for example, note curiously, that “because blacks are the most disaffected of any major population group, omitting them also avoids complications if one examines relationships between alienation and independence (32).” Latinos and Asian Americans are not even mentioned in their study. To take a more contemporary example, even in *Partisan Hearts and Minds*, which adopts a social identity framework for party identification *ab initio* acknowledges the salience of race as a prominent social identity in American life – African Americans are to be found virtually nowhere in any of the tables or figures or other empirical analysis in the book.” (Green et al 2002).² Fortunately, scholars have begun to focus more directly on the partisan choices of non-white racial and ethnic groups (eg Cain et al 1991, Desipio 1995, Welch and Sigelman 1993, Wong 2000).

Among scholars of black politics, two standard views of black partisanship have emerged. The first view is simply an application of the conventional model. African Americans, just like whites, choose party based largely on where they fit along the liberal-conservative ideological continuum. As an overwhelmingly liberal population, African Americans should and

² "In discussing the salience of race in American life, the implication that Green *et al* draw is “not that race is unimportant but rather that its influence on electoral choice is mediated largely by partisan affiliation (2002, 3).” That is, that race has no unique and independent contributing influence on party identification.

do identify overwhelmingly with the Democratic Party (Gilliam 1986, Hamilton 1982, Welch and Foster 1987).³ Defection, to the extent it occurs, results from growing conservatism among at least certain segments of the African American population.

Importantly, there are signs that black liberalism is waning. Data from the biennial American National Election Studies reveal a clear shift among African Americans away from self-identification as liberals. In the early 1970s, roughly 40 percent of African Americans identified as liberals, with roughly 50 percent identifying as moderates and less than 10 percent identifying as conservatives. But by the late 1990s, only about one in six African Americans identified as liberals, while more than two out of three identified as moderates and almost one in six identified as conservatives. To put it provocatively, African Americans today are almost as disproportionately moderate, ideologically, as they are disproportionately Democratic, institutionally.⁴ Clearly then, the decline in Democratic Party identification could be tied to this ideological shift. This conventional view leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The more conservative a person's ideological views, the greater the likelihood of not identifying with the Democratic Party.

³ If anything, many blacks are too liberal for the Democratic Party and would prefer to have an option to the left of the mainstream Democratic Party (Walters 1988, Pinderhughes 1986, Dawson 2001). As such, blacks are effectively captured by the Democratic Party (Frymer 1999).

⁴ Some have questioned what these labels mean for blacks and whether these changes represent a real shift in policy views (Hamilton 1982, Tate 1994, Dawson 2001). However, analysis of individual policy positions reveals a similar shift to the right. Both the NES and the three political surveys of African Americans we examine in this chapter indicate that blacks are also becoming less liberal on a range of specific policy issues including overall government spending, aid to blacks, ensuring full employment, and health services. On only one issue in the NES, women's rights, were blacks markedly more liberal over time. Analysis of the General Social Survey data reveals an almost identical trend in black public opinion over time.

Another important and potentially related change in the black community that could be contributing to declining Democratic Party identification is the growth of the black middle class. Between 1950 and the mid 1990s, the proportion of blacks calling themselves middle class grew from 12 percent to 41 percent (Farley 1996). By some socioeconomic measures, blacks are now more divided than are whites. The disparity between the top and bottom fifth of the black population in terms of income, education, victimization by violence, and job status is greater than the disparity between the top and bottom fifth of the white population (Hochschild and Rodgers 1999).

To the extent that standard accounts of class politics apply to blacks, the advantaged economic position of middle class blacks could lead to a desire to maintain the economic status quo, more conservatism, and thus greater support for the Republican Party (Hamilton 1982, Wilson 1978, 1987, Hutchinson 1999, Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997).⁵ Much of the effects of increased class status are likely to work through increased conservatism but there may also be a direct link between class and partisanship. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: The higher a person's socioeconomic status, the greater her likelihood of not identifying with the Democratic Party.

There is a second, alternate view of black partisan choice that relies less on the basic liberal-conservative ideological dimension. According to Dawson (1994) and Tate (1994), African Americans overwhelmingly and consistently support the Democratic Party out of a sense of racial solidarity. Because the Democratic Party has advocated a series of pro-black policy stances over the past half century, it has become the party of minority interests (Carmines and Stimson 1989, Lee 2002). And because race continues to so deeply affect black life chances, a

⁵ Critics have argued that the political effects of class have become much weaker in recent decades in the American context (eg Clark 1996) but others sharply disagree (Evans 2000).

‘black utility heuristic’ leads blacks of all classes and circumstances to continue to identify as Democrats (Dawson 1994). In Dawson’s words, “belief in the importance of black interests translates into preference for the Democratic Party” (1994:113). For most blacks then, one’s primary social identity (as African American) determines one’s primary political identity (as Democrat). Logically then, defection from the Democratic Party should follow from a declining sense of linked fate.

There is a sharp debate over whether the importance of race in determining life chances has or has not declined over time.⁶ There are also few clear signs of diminished black fate. In our three surveys, the proportion of blacks believing that “what happens generally to black people” has at least “some” effect on their own life chances increases from 62 percent in 1984 to 68 percent in 1996 and 73 percent in 1996. Nevertheless, Dawson’s account of black partisanship leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The weaker a person’s sense of racially linked fate, the greater her likelihood of not identifying with the Democratic Party.

A Multidimensional View of Black Partisanship

Although we do not disagree with these three theories of black partisanship, we believe that they are incomplete. To supplement existing models, we offer a more multidimensional account of black partisanship. Our theory begins by accepting the central role of ‘the black utility heuristic’ in African American partisanship. We do not, however, believe that a sense of linked fate leads automatically to support for the Democratic Party. We suggest that there are

⁶ Declines in overt acts of discrimination, at least marginal increases in racial integration, and economic gains for many blacks have led some to argue that race is declining in significance and thus that blacks should feel less of sense of linked fate (Wilson 1978, Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Others strongly disagree citing continued racial inequality, segregation, and discrimination (Dawson 1994, Massey and Denton 1993)

two key intermediary steps before the connection between black interests and the Democratic Party can be made. First, African Americans must believe that black interests are best served through mainstream political institutions such as parties. This is a critical step because there is a strong sense of mistrust of mainstream white institutions within the African American community and strong sentiment in favor of autonomous black organizations. In the three black politics surveys we examine, a large minority of African Americans supported key elements of a black nationalist ideology. Well over half of all blacks felt that blacks “should shop in black owned stores” and that “black children should study an African language.” Almost half of all African Americans agreed that “Black people form a nation within a nation,” 40 percent called for blacks to “participate in black-only organizations whenever possible” and 38 percent expressed support for a black political party.⁷ Given that such a large segment of the black community is suspicious of alliances with those outside the black community and given that the Democratic Party is still clearly dominated by white actors, there is every reason to believe that support for black autonomy could severely undercut the link between black group interests and the Democratic Party. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The stronger a person’s support for black separatism, the greater her likelihood of not identifying with the Democratic Party.

Even if individual African Americans conclude that black interests are best served by supporting white institutions and mainstream parties, they still must determine whether black interests are best served by the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. While it may be obvious to many that the Democratic Party, as the ‘minority’ party, works harder for African American interests, it may be less obvious to others. Perhaps surprisingly, the three surveys we

⁷ What about changes in the salience of, and adherence to, black nationalism in the last few decades? Polls since 1980 present a mixed picture with increased support on certain measures and little or no change on others.

examined, revealed some real ambivalence in the black community about which party really served black interests. Almost thirty percent of blacks felt the Democratic Party did not work hard for black interests. Another 20 percent believe that the Republican Party works hard for black interests. Combining the two questions indicates that 31 percent of blacks believe that the Republican Party works as hard or harder than the Democratic Party for black interests. Moreover, given the increasing prominence of conservative black elites, a stated effort by the Republican Party to target minority voters, and some sense that the Democratic Party is reluctant to actively cater to its African American base, ambivalence about which party best serves the black community may be growing. Thus, we specifically test how attitudes about the degree to which either party works for black interests shape partisan choices.

Hypothesis 5: The less a person views the Democrats as working for the interests of black Americans or the more a person views Republicans as working for the interests of black Americans, the greater her likelihood of not identifying with the Democratic Party.

A Different Structure of Choice

The multiple pathways to partisanship that we put forward in this paper have implications not only for *which* party African Americans ultimately choose to align with but also for *how* African Americans go about choosing between the three options of Democrat, Independent, and Republican. African Americans should not only differ from whites in terms of the dimensions that predict partisanship but more fundamentally, we believe they should differ in terms of how they structure the choice. For whites, the choice may be one of simply deciding where to place oneself along a linear continuum ranging from strongly Democratic on the left to Independent in the middle and finally to strongly Republican on the right. In the case of African Americans, we argue that the structure of party choice is more complex than this simple linear continuum suggests. Indeed the three choices may not be ordered at all but different dimensions will come

into play at different points in the decision process. Thus, we expect that the factors that divide Democrats from Independents will differ from the factors that divide Democrats from Republicans.

Data and Research Design

First, to provide a longer-term perspective on African American party identification, we examine some data from the standard tool of American public opinion research - a pooled sample (1948-2000) of the American National Election Studies (Miller et al 2000). However, to try to understand African American partisan choices, we have to utilize data from the three more in-depth national studies of African American political orientations: the 1984 National Black Election Study, the 1993-4 National Black Politics Study, and the 1996 National Black Election Study.⁸ Each of these three surveys is a stratified random sample using random digit dialing of all black households in the United States. Sample size is 1150, 1206, and 1216 respectively. Response rates for the three surveys were 57 percent, 65 percent, and 65 percent respectively. See Gurin et. al. (1989), Dawson (2001), and Tate (2003) for details on the survey methodology for each study. Since all three surveys were attained through a similar sampling design and each contains a series of nearly identical measures of partisan orientation and similar measures of racial identity, organizational involvement, and socioeconomic status, we are able to pool respondents from the three surveys in our analysis. We should note, however, that we arrive at essentially the same conclusions if we re-run the analysis separately on each survey. Unfortunately, given the short time frame of these three surveys, we are not able to explain

⁸ Since the ANES does not include an adequate set of questions on racial identity, has no questions related to black autonomy, and each year includes an inadequate number of African American respondents to allow for more in depth analysis, we are unable to repeat most of the analysis on the ANES.

changes over time but rather simply try to understand African American partisan choice during one time period.

Dependent variable

Party identification is determined in the same way in each survey. Respondents are first asked whether they generally think of themselves as Democrats, Independents, or Republicans. Those who profess no clear party allegiance are then asked whether or not they lean toward one party or the other. For most of our analysis, we use these questions to generate the standard seven point linear scale of partisanship with Democrats on one pole, Independents in the middle, and Republicans on the other.

The Independent Variables

To help explain partisan choice we focus on five different sets of factors. First, to determine the extent to which party identification is based on a traditional liberal-conservative ideological dimension, we include responses to a question asking respondents how they would self-identify in ideological terms. Since one of our central contentions is that the relationship between ideology and party identification is not linear, we examined the effects of ideology through a series of “dummy” variables that allow us to estimate, separately, the effects of self-identifying as a strong liberal, a weak liberal, a weak conservative, and a strong conservative on one’s party identification (compared to the effect of being an ideological moderate). Second, to examine the effect of socioeconomic background on partisan choice, we test for the independent effects of four dimensions of class status: family income, educational attainment, home ownership, and employment status.

In addition to class and conservatism, we test for the three factors that we believe are key mediators between a demographic group definition and one’s political organizational

identification: racial group consciousness, black autonomy, and the racially-based evaluation of the Republican and Democratic Parties. Racial group consciousness is measured by the standard linked fate question that asks respondents how much their personal well-being is defined by the well-being of the larger black community. Following Brown and Shaw (2002), we test two separate dimensions of black nationalism.⁹ First, we constructed an index of nationalism as support for community control, measured by four items – “blacks should shop in black-owned stores whenever possible,” “blacks should have control over the government in mostly black communities,” “blacks should have control over the economy in mostly black communities,” and “blacks should rely on themselves and not on others.” Second, we constructed an index of nationalism as a more explicitly political, separatist movement, measured by four items – “black people should always vote for black candidates when they run,” “blacks should form their own political party,” “black people should have a separate nation,” “black people form a nation within a nation.”¹⁰ Finally, to see if perceptions about either party’s efforts on behalf of the black community affected partisan choice, respondents were asked “How hard do you think the Republican (Democratic) Party works on issues black people really care about?” Given our strong theoretical priors that party identification (and party evaluation) is not linear, we specify

⁹ The use of Brown and Shaw’s scales are admittedly somewhat controversial given the counter evidence by Davis and Brown (2004) that black nationalism is a unidimensional, not multidimensional scale. While we do not contest the findings of Davis and Brown or attempt to adjudicate the differences between the two interpretations of black nationalism in this paper, there are valid conceptual grounds for distinguishing the two dimensions of nationalism that Brown and Shaw identify vis-à-vis one’s party identification, and as Table Two shows, the two dimensions can lead to quite opposite effects on one’s partisan attachments.

¹⁰ The alpha reliability coefficients for the community nationalism scale is 0.65 and for the separatist nationalism scale is 0.54.

separate variables for African Americans' evaluation of the Democratic and the Republican parties (rather than taking a measure of the difference in party evaluations).¹¹ Exact question wording, coding, and descriptive statistics are available from the authors.

RESULTS

Are African Americans Beholden to the Democratic Party?

Despite the widespread perception that African Americans are an exceptionally cohesive political group, analysis of African American partisan preferences over the last three decades reveals significant and growing division. As illustrated by Figure One which presents a moving average of African American partisan identification using the ANES, since 1970 there has been a gradual and significant move away from the Democratic Party. Although, most African Americans still choose to identify with the Democratic Party, the proportion of African Americans allied with Democratic Party has declined by over 10 percentage points during this period.¹² Today, about a third of the African American population is not Democratic.

Among those who opt out of the Democratic Party, by far the vast majority leave to become Independents. According to the ANES, some 38 percent of all blacks in 2004 identify as

¹¹ In addition to these five factors, we also included several control variables – the age and gender of respondents, the race of the interviewer (see, e.g., Davis 1997 for the importance of controlling for the potential social interactive effects of an interviewer's race), and the fixed effects of each survey (measured by dummy variables for the 1993 NBPS and the 1996 NBES). In alternate tests, we also tested for a range of contextual effects including region (south vs non-south), racial context (percent black in the respondent's neighborhood), and poverty context (percent poor in the neighborhood). Our main findings is that blacks in the south were marginally more Democratic than blacks elsewhere.

¹² This trend is mirrored in a range of different surveys (see Luks and Elms 2003). The figure is a smoothed trend using the Kalman Filter (Green Samplemeister).

Independents.¹³ The remainder, about two percent, identify as Republicans. Although these divisions over partisanship are unlikely to flow neatly into divisions in voting preferences, it is clear that perceptions of the black population as a united political community need to be amended. In short, the African American community is no longer united over party. FIGURE ONE HERE

Explaining Black Partisan Choice: Conventional Explanations

Can existing theories account for the departure of large numbers of African Americans from the Democratic Party? We begin by looking at a simple model of partisan choice. The first column of Table One presents the results of an ordered logit regression that includes measures for each of the three conventional accounts of black partisanship. Subsequent models expand upon this baseline model to include our two black nationalism scales (Model Two) and our full account that also includes the evaluation of how well the two parties represent the interests of African Americans (Model Three). Each of the three models in the table uses the standard seven point linear scale of partisanship as the dependent variable. A higher value thus indicates movement away from the Democrats toward identifying as Independent or Republican. Later in the paper, we will examine whether this assumption about the linearity of the choice is warranted. TABLE ONE HERE

The results from the first column of Table One do confirm some of the conventional views of partisanship and black partisan choices. First, there is a clear link between liberal-conservative ideology and partisan choice.¹⁴ The effect is discernible on only one end of the

¹³ These results are consistent with the three other surveys we examine.

¹⁴ There is some concern that the relationship between liberal-conservative ideology and party identification is reciprocal and thus that liberal-conservative ideology is in part the result rather than the cause of party identification. However, existing research that tests for this reciprocity has generally found that party identification has only a very

ideological continuum, however. That is, extreme liberals are about 16 percent more likely to identify as strong Democrats than moderates and moderate liberals are somewhat more likely to do so as well.¹⁵ But there are no differences between moderates and conservatives, ideologically, in their partisan attachments. This one-sided relationship is especially meaningful given the over-time trend in African-American ideological self-placement. As we noted already, there has been a conspicuous rise of ideological moderates and decline of ideological liberals. The fact that there are both fewer ideological liberals and fewer partisan Democrats in the African American population today no longer seems coincidental. As one might have predicted, alternate tests indicate that fiscal and social liberalism – as opposed to moral or religious liberalism – is the main reason for the link between liberal-conservative ideology and party identification among African Americans. Specifically, views on the government’s role in creating jobs, assistance to blacks, and spending on crime all affected partisanship while views on gay rights and hand guns had no significant effect (analysis not shown).

Class effects are more complex. Specifically, in Model One, we find no support for the upward mobility thesis, except in its obverse. That is, the first column of Table One shows that unemployed African Americans are significantly more likely to identify with the Republican Party than the Democratic Party. This effect, moreover, is rather substantial: unemployed blacks are about 16 percent less likely to identify as a strong Democrat than working African

small effect on most individual policy positions and has never found an effect of partisanship on overall liberal-conservative ideology (Franklin 1984, Page and Jones 1979).

¹⁵ For this and all other predicted probabilities detailed in the paper, we utilize a simulation procedure developed by King, Tomz, and Wittenburg (2001). In each case, we vary values on the dimension of interest (ie moving from strongly liberal to strongly conservative views) while holding constant all other factors at their mean (or modal value for categorical variables).

Americans. Once we control for our three racial factors in Model Three, however, family income and home ownership become significant determinants of party choice. Consistent with the expectation of the upward mobility thesis, African Americans who garner higher wages are more likely to seek alternatives to Democratic party identification. The effect here, however, is modest: African Americans in the highest income bracket in our surveys are 8 percent less likely to identify as a strong Democrat than their counterparts in the lowest income bracket. The effect of home ownership, like unemployment, again runs counter to the logic of the upward class mobility thesis: black home owners are actually about 4 percent *more* likely to identify as a Democrat than African Americans who do not own the homes they live in. The contrarian results on employment and home ownership suggest a potentially counter-narrative to the usual story that is told about class and politics. It may be the case that with the attainment of building blocks of economic security, like owning a home and being gainfully employed, black Americans may actually be more inclined to reward their party of choice (much like retrospective voters) than to set up new partisan roots.

Table One also confirms the importance of a group-based political calculus. Consistent with prior work by Dawson (1994) and Tate (1993), a sense of racial linked fate influences party identification.¹⁶ The effect, however, is relatively small: African Americans who believe that their own well-being is strongly linked to that of other African Americans are between 7 percent

¹⁶ As one might expect, we found that the dominant factor explaining linked fate is assessments of the racial fairness of American society. The more that blacks believe that discrimination is prevalent and that the American system will never be fair, the stronger their sense of linked. African Americans who are more actively involved in social institutions and who presumably more regularly interact with other members of the black community also tend to hold a stronger sense of linked fate (analysis not shown).

(Model One) and 4.5 percent (Model Three) more likely to identify as strong Democrats than African Americans who believe that fates are unlinked.

With black nationalism, only our community nationalism scale appears to be a significant factor. Specifically, African Americans who strongly advocate local control and autonomy in predominantly black communities are between 10 percent (Model Two) and 8 percent (Model Three) more likely to identify as strong Democrats than are blacks who reject all aspects of community nationalism.¹⁷

The strongest influence on black partisanship, by far, however, is the evaluation of how hard the Democratic and Republican parties work for African Americans. Table One shows that African Americans who strongly think that the Democratic party works harder for blacks' interests are 34 percent more likely to identify as a strong Democrat than those who disagree; African Americans who strongly think that the Republican party works harder for blacks' interests 28 percent less likely to identify as a strong Democrat than those who disagree.¹⁸

These results, taken together, give moderate support for our main storyline. Class and ideology do influence the partisan choices of African Americans, but not as forcefully, consistently, or coherently as we might think. The evidence for a racially-based political

¹⁷ Black separatism is itself a function of at least two different kinds of factors. Concerns about widespread racial discrimination and a strong sense of black linked fate both, as expected, led to increase support for black separatism. Younger and lower class blacks were also more apt to express separatist views (analysis not shown).

¹⁸ Race is also the dominant factor in trying to explain why some African Americans are skeptical about how well the Democratic Party serves black interests. Those who did not see discrimination as a real problem were less likely to see Democrats as working harder for blacks. By contrast, younger African Americans and those more involved in politics were much more apt to see the Democrats as strong advocates of black interests.

calculus is somewhat stronger. The rational and racially conditioned evaluation of both parties – that is, pairwise comparison of the Democratic and Republican parties conditioned on each party’s advocacy of African American *group* interests, not the interests of an individual *per se* – this racial calculus is easily the most potent influence on one’s party identification. However, racial solidarity itself – as measured by the belief in a linked fate – is only modestly predictive. Moreover, black nationalism is an influence on party identification, but only in its community control dimension. Racial separatism, at least in this linear, ordered probit specification, appears to have no influence on one’s party identification.¹⁹

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of the results in Table One is that very little of the variation in black party choice is explained: even our full model explains only 5.5 percent of the variation in our dependent variable.

The Structure of Black Party Choice

In this next section, we show that this limited explanatory power and the sometimes varied success of our theoretical expectations is the result of estimating our parameters on a linear, ordered dependent variable. The multiple pathways to partisanship that we put forward in this paper have implications not only for *which* partisan option African Americans ultimately choose to align with but also for *how* African Americans go about choosing between the three options of Democrat, Independent, and Republican. African American choices should not only

¹⁹ Among our control variables, age and gender are both significantly related to one’s party identification. Younger African Americans and black men are more inclined to move away from the Democratic Party. The age effect in particular suggests that black political unity may be fading over time and that African American political choices may be responsive to changes in the nature of American race relations.

differ from conventional accounts of white party identification in terms of the dimensions that predict partisanship but more fundamentally, we believe they should differ in terms of how they structure the choice. The relevance of multiple, orthogonal dimensions means that most blacks do not perceive of the parties the way many whites might. For many whites, the choice may be one of simply deciding where to place oneself along a linear continuum ranging from strongly Democratic on the left to Independent in the middle and finally to strongly Republican on the right. For blacks, the three options are not likely to be neatly ordered along this linear continuum. Indeed the three choices may not be ordered at all but different dimensions may come into play at different points in the decision process. For many blacks, Independent will not fall in the middle.

In order to more closely examine the structure of black partisan choices and to better test the role of black autonomy we drop the assumption that party identification is linear and instead test a multidimensional model of partisanship. The estimator we use to test the non-linearity of party identification is multinomial logit, which allows us to capture the effect of each independent variable on each pairwise combination among possible party identification categories (see Aldrich and Nelson 1984, Greene 2000). That is, rather than modeling party identification as a continuum from Democrat to Independent to Republican, multinomial logit allows us to estimate the relative probability of identifying between each pair of choices. The categories of party identification that are examined here are “Democrat,” “Republican,” and “Independent,” so the pairwise choices that we model are Independent or Democrat, Republican

or Independent, Democrat or Republican.²⁰ Unlike many other studies of party identification, we have chosen not to separate out partisan leaners among the Independents because we view the choice to identify firstly as an Independent as meaningful in its own right, because there are clear behavioral differences between leaners and weak partisans within the black population, and also because the results do not differ markedly by reserving the category only for “pure Independents.”²¹

A few other points on the interpretation of Table Two bear note. First, because multinomial logit is an explicit non-linear statistical estimator, the parameter estimates can be somewhat of a challenge to interpret. To make the result clearer, we transform these parameter estimates into odds ratios (“relative risk ratios”) that allow for assessments of relative magnitude – the relative odds of, say, identifying as a Republican or an Independent, given a one-unit change to an independent variable of interest, say, of being employed or unemployed.²² Also,

²⁰ The results in Table Two also exclude the interviewer race and survey year fixed effects as controls. In specifications that include these variables, they are not significant factors, so we allow the greater parsimony of the model specified in Table Two to prevail.

²¹ In terms of voting for President, Congress, and the Senate, there are real differences between black ‘leaners’ and weak identifiers. Especially on the Republican side, leaners are much less likely (5-20 percent) to vote for Republican candidates than are weak Republican identifiers. In other words, equating leaners and weak identifiers may only be appropriate for whites. When we repeated the analysis in Table Two with Independent leaners included as partisans, we reach essentially the same set of conclusions regarding black partisan choices. This analysis is available from the authors.

²² For each pairwise comparison, say between identifying as a Democrat or Independent, Table Two shows three statistics – the parameter estimate and its corresponding standard error and relative risk ratio.

Table Two, unlike most presentations of multinomial logit regressions, presents estimates for every pairwise combination of the three categories.²³ TABLE TWO HERE

There are two claims we wish to make based on the results in Table Two. The first is that black nationalism represents a new and important dimensions to black partisan choice that works orthogonally to conventional linear models of party identification. That is, support for black nationalism in its various forms can lead both to support and opposition to the Democratic Party. The second claim is that an unordered model of partisan choice better fits black party identification. In other words, black partisan choices are not neatly ordered along a single dimension.²⁴

As Table Two demonstrates, once the assumption of an ordered dependent variable is discarded, the importance and orthogonality of black nationalism are evident.²⁵ Specifically, we

²³ Technically, a “baseline” category against which other alternatives are compared must be chosen for the model to be statistically “identified,” and in many cases, there are strong theoretical grounds for choosing that optimal base category. In our case, the theory argues that each pairwise choice is significant. Hence Columns One and Two show the results from two separate estimates – first, with “Independent” and then with “Democrat” as the base category.

²⁴ The structure of black partisan choices may be even more complicated than Table Two suggests. Different segments of the black population differ not only in terms of which partisan option they prefer but also in how difficult it is to choose a party in the first place. For black nationalist separatists, in particular, we might expect an especially high level of ambivalence and uncertainty given that there is no viable black party at the national level and thus no obvious partisan choice. A heteroskedastic probit analysis of party identification supports this view and reveals that of all the sub-groups in the black community, it is most difficult to predict the partisan choices of those who believe strongly in black autonomy [analysis not shown].

²⁵ Further evidence of the orthogonality of black nationalism emerges out of an analysis of those who respond don’t know or no preference to the party identification question. One of the strongest predictors of not providing a clear

find significant and contrasting effects for the two aspects of black nationalism. Once again, as in Table One, belief in nationalism qua community control significantly increases one's likelihood of identifying as a Democrat. But here we also find that belief in nationalism qua racial separatism works in essentially the opposite direction by increasing one's likelihood of identifying as a Republican. Race, at least in the sense of support for black autonomy can work for or against the Democratic Party.

Table Two also sheds significant light on the unordered nature of black partisan choices. The chief criterion for assessing the utility of estimating a given model of choice assuming an ordered or unordered dependent variable is in what one might call the "transitivity" of the coefficients across pairwise choices in the unordered condition. That is, if party identification is in fact an ordered sequence of choices from identifying as a strong Republican to identifying as a strong Democrat, then the estimated parameters for the intermediary choices – Democrat or Independent, Independent or Republican – should reflect lighter shades of the more boldly colored estimates we derive for the full spectrum of choices. There are strong and weak criteria for gauging the utility of our multinomial logit estimates. The strong criterion is that we should not see relationships that appear to switch from night to day - to reverse signs while retaining significance. The weaker criterion is that relationships that did not exist in the ordered probit

answer to the question is holding black nationalist views [analysis not shown]. The fact that nationalist are particularly likely to answer 'don't know' suggest that their views do not fit neatly along the liberal-conservative dimension separating the two parties. Overall, about five percent of all blacks answer don't know or provide no answer to the party identification question.

estimates should not come to light in the multinomial logit estimates.²⁶ In both cases, Table Two shows compelling evidence that partisan choices are not neatly ordered for African Americans.

The strongest evidence for this is found in the relationship between ideological self-identification and party identification. For the pair-wise choice between identifying as an Independent or Democrat, extreme liberals and moderate liberals are more likely to identify as a Democrat than ideological moderates, as we might expect. But Table Two shows that moderate *conservatives* are also more likely to identify as a Democrat than staunch moderates, and by almost the same magnitude of effect as we find among the liberal categories. In the choice between Republicans and Independents, extreme conservatives, as we might expect, are significantly likelier to choose to identify as a Republican. Quite surprisingly, however, extreme *liberals* too appear likelier to choose to identify as a *Republican* rather than an Independent (although the statistical significance of this result is much weaker).²⁷ The relationship between ideology and partisanship is anything but linear. This non-linear relationship coupled with the earlier non-linearities we found between partisanship and black nationalism make a convincing case for the added value of estimating African American party identification as an unordered phenomenon.

The analysis presented in Table Two also suggests an answer to our question about the declining rates of identification with the Democratic Party over time. Much of the change in

²⁶ The latter is a weaker condition because the premise that a dependent variable is ordered could be consistent with the uncovering of new statistically significant relationships under multinomial logit if there are strong non-linearities in the relationship of the dependent variable to a given explanatory variable.

²⁷ For the pair-wise choice between Republicans and Democrats, the results are straightforward: only extreme conservatives are distinctive from moderates, and they are significantly likelier to choose to identify as a Republican. This effect is strong.

black partisanship since the 1960s is the exit of black Democrats who identify as Independents and, among Independents, the increasing proportion of Democratic leaners. Thus to explain the out-migration of African Americans from Democratic party identification, the critical comparison is not between Democrats and Republicans, but between Democrat and Independents.

Here Table Three points to two principal factors: ideology and the evaluation of each party's efforts vis-à-vis African Americans. These findings must be interpreted with care, however. The quick-and-dirty conclusion to draw would be that African Americans are increasingly becoming conservative and that race is declining in its significance for African Americans. Let's take each of these in turn. The danger in reading too much into a conservative turn in black political ideology is that, as we earlier noted, most of the variation over time and across individuals comes from liberals who now self-identify as moderates. Similarly, from Table Two we see that most of the variation across individuals in choosing between identifying as a Democrat and Independent comes from the distinctiveness of ideological moderation, not conservatism. Thus, the explanation for black exit from the Democratic Party, to the extent that it is driven by ideology, rests not on a more conservative black polity but on a growing consensus on ideological moderation within the African American community.

The story on the relevance of a racial group calculus is similarly nuanced. Our findings from Table Two underscore several parts to the story. First, African American partisan choice is in substantial measure a reflection of considerations beyond a person's class status and orthogonal to one's liberal-conservative orientation. Second, it shows once again that racial considerations can and do push African Americans away from the Democratic Party. But it is a more consistent factor in pushing African Americans who identify as Republicans. This finding,

coupled with the selective effect of our measures of a racial group calculus on the pairwise choice between Democrat and Independent – recall that neither linked fate nor racial separatism are factors affecting this choice – points, rather persuasively, to the conclusion that the lion’s share of the decline in black Democratic identification, vis-à-vis racial considerations, is not the result of a declining significance of race *per se*, but from a shift in the pairwise evaluation of how hard the Democratic and Republican parties work on behalf of African Americans’ interests. This evaluation, importantly, is a perfectly reasonable response to the rise of “Third Way” new Democrats, who have rendered issues of race to the periphery of the Democratic policy agenda, if not off-stage altogether (Walters 1988, Frymer 1999).

Implications for Black Electoral Politics

What are the consequences of this diversity in black partisanship? By some obvious indicators there are almost none. Despite some reservations about the Democratic Party and some movement toward Independence, blacks remain fairly steadfast supporters of Democratic candidates in national partisan contests. In the last thirty years, data from the NES indicate that when blacks voted, they supported Democratic candidates 90 percent of the time at the Presidential level, 86 percent of the time in the Senate, and 90 percent of the time in Congressional elections. At least in some circumstances, divisions in public opinion and diversity partisanship do not flow neatly into voting patterns.²⁸

²⁸ At the same time, party identification did make some difference, even in these contests. One quarter of all black Independents voted Republican in these contests and almost one half of all black Republicans (60 percent among strong Republican identifiers) supported Republican candidates. By contrast, well under 10 percent of black Democrats supported Republican candidates.

Nevertheless, we suspect that this data is masking important underlying differences of opinion that at least have the possibility of driving defections from the Democratic Party. As Frymer (1999), Walters (1988), and others have argued, black voters may effectively be captured at the national level where there are few attractive alternatives to the Democratic Party. Black voters who are displeased by the movement of the Democratic Party to the center, in particular, have few options. Similarly, African Americans who support black autonomy are unlikely get much support for their agenda from the Democratic Party but they may get even less support from either the Republican Party or the range of third party candidates that have emerged in recent decades. Unity in these contests may be less the result of ongoing agreement over where the country should go and more the result of a lack of viable alternatives for African Americans voters.

To begin to test this proposition, we looked at black voting in different contests where the options available to black voters were more varied than in national partisan contests. Specifically, we collected data on the black vote in a range of big city mayoral elections and in a comprehensive set of direct democracy elections in California. The options available to voters in both cases are quite varied. The political platforms and race and ethnicities of the candidates in mayoral contests are much more diverse than what you would see in a typical set of national electoral contests. Similarly, the direct democracy data set includes 51 different propositions that run the gamut of policy questions with voters deciding issues as diverse as criminal sentencing, health care policy, immigration policy, affirmative action, school vouchers, Indian gaming, campaign finance reform, tax policy, and nuclear power.

For the mayoral vote, we collected data on the vote by race/ethnicity for any contested primary or general election that occurred in the nation's twenty largest cities between 1991 and

2002. The data set includes racial voting patterns in 45 elections.²⁹ We assess the black vote in direct democracy by examining black preferences on every California statewide proposition that was included in any of the 17 Los Angeles Times Exit Polls between 1978 and 2000.³⁰ Neither data set should be viewed as a representative indication of how blacks across the national generally vote but both data sets do represent a broad enough set of cases that the division they expose should not be dismissed as anomalies.

Table Three Division in the Black Vote

	Presidency	Congress	Mayoralty	Direct Democracy
Blacks Opposing the Black Majority	10%	14%	26%	38%

²⁹ Estimates of the vote by race came largely from exit polls or pre-election polls (within a week of the contest) but in some cases, we also used ecological inference or homogenous precinct analysis (see Hajnal and Trounstein 2005 for more information). Two factors limit the generalizability of the findings. First, we were only able to obtain estimates of the vote by race for about a half of all elections in these cities. Second, these twenty cities have slightly different racial demographics (fewer whites) than the nation as a whole.

³⁰ Each survey contains a representative sample of California's voters (average N of 4145 in each poll, for a total of 195,019 proposition votes by respondents in the dataset). There are, on average, 284 African American respondents in each poll. The demographic characteristics of each racial and ethnic group in each poll closely match the demographic characteristics of the total population of each group in the state. Further, the exit poll data are very accurate, correctly reflecting the winning side in 50 of the 51 votes. The actual vote and the estimated vote based on the exit poll data differ by an average of 2.6 percentage points (standard deviation 2.3). The statewide black votes on each proposition also closely match estimates from Voter News Service/CBS Exit Polls as well as to estimates derived from ecological inference analysis of actual precinct level returns. As a final check on the data, we analyzed statewide surveys conducted by the Field Institute between 1970 and 1998. This Field Institute California Poll series asks about voter preferences on a much larger set of propositions (131) but it is limited by a significantly smaller sample size and the fact that it is a pre-election poll rather than an exit poll. Both data sets produce roughly equivalent results (see Hajnal and Louch 2001 for more information on the data set).

As Table Three shows, context matters very much to the unity of the black electorate. In urban elections, where the kinds of options available to black voters on the ballot are often much more diverse than they are in partisan contests for President or Congress, we see less unity in the black vote. Across a range of big city mayoral elections, we found that 26 percent of black voters opposed the candidate favored by the black majority in the typical contest.³¹ That was still somewhat more cohesive than Latinos (30 percent), whites (34 percent), and Asian Americans (44 percent) but it is a far cry from the near unanimity we see in the black vote in presidential (10 percent) and Congressional elections (14 percent).

When candidates are taken out of the equation altogether and African Americans vote directly on policy, there are signs of even more diverse preferences amongst black voters. Analysis of two decades of voting in direct democracy in California indicates that across all propositions, on average, 38 percent of black voters opposed the majority black position. Even on the topics that African Americans indicated were most important to them, fully 37 percent of black voters voted against the black majority. And on propositions that fell neatly along a liberal-conservative dimension, just over 40 percent of African American voters wound up on the

³¹ Black voters, as one might expect, tend to be most divided in contests with more than one black candidate. For example, Detroit's 2001 mayoral contest which pitted Kwame Kilpatrick against Gill Hill split the black vote 55% to 45%. But the black vote can be split in a range of circumstances. Two white candidates can lead to division among the black community as was the case in San Francisco in 1991 when Art Agnos garnered 62 percent of the black vote in his contest against Frank Jordan. Even a bi-racial contest between a black candidate and a white candidate can, on rare occasions, divide the black vote. Al Sharpton, for example, is estimated to have received only 60 percent of the black vote in the 1997 Democratic primary in New York City. The rest of the black vote was split between Ruth Messinger (28%) and Sal Albanese (12%).

conservative side of the vote (Hajnal 2007). Clearly, there are a range of divergent preferences within the black community that under certain circumstances are expressed in the ballot box.

All of these figures suggest that blacks are more divided in their electoral interests than many have suggested but they do little to tell us whether or not African Americans vote against the Democratic Party if offered a viable and attractive option. The data on this question, although limited, strongly suggest that many black voters will go so far as to abandon the Democratic Party if the exit options are appealing enough. When we limited our analysis of mayoral elections to partisan general elections, we found that black unity remained well below what we see in Presidential or Congressional elections. In these mayoral elections, fully 31 percent of black voters opposed the Democratic Party nominee. In one important but hardly noticed case (that was not in our data set) defections were even higher. Specifically, in New York City's most recent mayoral contest, roughly half of the black electorate abandoned the Democratic Party and voted for the Republican incumbent, Michael Bloomberg (Roberts 2005). Bloomberg's success with black voters was in no small part driven by his moderate policy positions and his status as the incumbent in a city with a robust economy.³² But that by no means refutes the fact that black partisan ties can be broken. Rather, Bloomberg's success in attracting African American voters seems to suggest that where the Republican Party puts forward moderate candidates, more black voters will defect.

Furthermore, Democratic defections in the black vote are not limited to mayoral contests. The recent California recall elections also seem to indicate that when the Democrat candidate is

³² Although Bloomberg's black support was quite high, 2005 was not the only election in New York in which many black voters defected from the Democratic Party. In the two previous elections, large segments of the black community also abandoned the Party. In 2001 the Republican candidate won 25 percent of the black vote and in 1997 the figure was 20 percent (Roberts 2005).

not particularly attractive and the Republican Party offers reasonable alternatives, many blacks will defect. In that contest, 21 percent of black voters voted to recall the incumbent Democratic governor, Gray Davis, and in the subsequent election 33 percent opposed the Democratic nominee, Cruz Bustamante.³³ Outside of national contests, defections from the Democratic Party are hardly rare.

African Americans appear to be even more prone to abandon the Democratic Party if they are offered an independent black option. Across our three surveys, 38 percent of African Americans said they would support a black political party. Among non-voters, a group likely disillusioned by the choices being offered by the Democratic and Republican Parties, fully 48 percent indicated that they felt their interests could best be served through a black party. And it is not just what African Americans say. It is also what they do. In the few cases where African American voters have been given the option of supporting a viable candidate from a black party, black voters have demonstrated a willingness to abandon the Democratic Party in large numbers. Chicago presents perhaps the starkest example of this phenomenon. In the last three partisan contests for Mayor in Chicago, an average of 85 percent of African Americans voters opposed the Democratic nominee in the general election and instead supported a third-party alternative from the Harold Washington Party or an Independent closely aligned with the black community (Lewis et al 1997). When African Americans are offered more diverse and more interesting options in the voting booth, the black community often becomes markedly less united.

³³ Some 26 percent of black voters favored the two Republican candidates. Arnold Schwarzenegger captured 18 percent of the black vote, and the radically conservative candidate Tom McClintock won 8 percent of the black vote. Figures are from the November 2003 Los Angeles Times Exit Poll.

It is also apparent that black Independents make up a significant part of this story. Although much of data on the black vote is not broken down along party lines, when we are able to assess the black vote by party, we find that Independents are significantly more apt than Democratic identifiers to oppose the Democratic Party. Data from the NES indicate that some 15 percent of black Independents voted against the Democratic Party in Presidential elections. A further 16 percent did so in Congressional elections. Data from Voter News Service Exit Polls between 1994 and 2002 reveal even higher levels of Democratic Party opposition in other types of electoral contests. According to these exit polls, 36 percent of black Independents abandoned the Democratic Party in gubernatorial elections. In Senate contests the figure was 37 percent. Results from the recent California recall also indicate defections were high among black Independents. According to the Los Angeles Times Exit Poll, 41 percent of all black Independents voted to oust the Democratic incumbent and a further 56 percent opposed Bustamente, the Democratic candidate, in the subsequent election. The same pattern is evident in the few partisan mayoral general elections for which we have voting preferences by race and partisanship. For example, in the New York City general election in 2001, 44 percent of black Independents (compared to 33 percent of black Democrats) opposed Mark Green, the Democratic nominee.³⁴

³⁴ Unfortunately, it is difficult to discern how much of the Independent opposition to the Democratic Party comes from black Independents who lean toward the Democratic Party. Given that Democratic leaners make up well over half of the black Independent population, the pattern that we see for black Independents as a whole is likely to reflect in part the voting patterns among Democratic leaners. Moreover, self-reported voting patterns across national elections tend to suggest that Democratic leaners do defect more regularly than other Democrats. Only 57 percent of black Democratic leaners in the NES indicated that they always vote for the same party. That was well below the 75 percent figure reported for weak black Democrats. This does, however, contrast with the two types of the

None of this is to say that blacks as a community are sharply divided or even more divided than other groups. The black community remains as cohesive or more cohesive in the electoral arena than almost any other demographic group in society. Even in direct democracy where blacks showed more signs of division, they are still as cohesive as any other racial group or demographic classification (Hajnal and Louch 2001).³⁵ Nevertheless, it seems that continued support for Democratic candidates is less a sign of continued black unity and is instead more a sign that those who would prefer a different kind of candidate are generally not offered one. When given a viable alternative to the Democratic Party, blacks will abandon the party in large numbers. This is something that both the Democratic Party and potential competitors will have to seriously consider.³⁶

elections for which we have data. According to the NES, Democratic leaners are very loyal to the Democratic Party. The defection rate among black Democratic leaners is only 8 percent in Congressional elections and 3 percent in Presidential elections. Since none of the voting data at either the city or state level break down Independents into pure Independents and partisan leaners, it is impossible to know how this pattern differs across different contexts.

³⁵ Hajnal (2007) found that on average 37 percent of Latinos, 40 percent of whites, and 40 percent of Asian Americans voted against their group's majority position.

³⁶ Both political parties should also seriously consider the history of African American third party support. Although the black community has generally been reluctant to 'waste' its vote on a candidate or party that has little chance of winning, many blacks have been willing to turn to third parties when both major parties have clearly ignored their interests. For example, in the mid 19th Century, many blacks championed the anti-slavery Liberty Party and its successor The Free Soil Party (Gurin et al 1989). In the 1890s over a million blacks joined the Colored Farmer Alliance. Later, during the Great Depression, the Communist Party won considerable support from the black community for its opposition to lynching and its advocacy efforts on behalf of the poor (Naison 1983). At the state level, blacks have also formed their own parties when denied access to the major parties. In the 1960s, blacks

Summary and Discussion

What do our findings imply for our understanding of black politics and partisan identification? First, to restate our basic conclusion, black partisan choices are not well explained by conventional non-racial factors. There is some evidence that class and conservatism do work to divide the black community. But the effects for both of these conventional factors are inconsistent and often weak. In particular, our results indicate that the relationship between liberal-conservative ideology and black party identification is anything but linear.

Instead, our analysis indicates that race remains the central factor in black partisan decision making. How African Americans view American society and the degree to which America they think their own well being is tied to the fate of the larger black community underlay much of black partisan politics. But as we have shown, the connection between group interests and the Democratic Party is not at all automatic. In fact, racial identity can and does cut both ways. Racial identity can lead to linked fate and support for the Democratic Party but it also seems to lead to support for black separatism and distance from both the Democratic and Republican Parties. This latter dimension – autonomy vs integration – is one that previous accounts of black partisanship have largely ignored.

This all leads to a second conclusion. African Americans may differ from other groups not only in terms of which factors determine partisan identification but also in the structure of the choice. For many whites, a unitary decision about where to place oneself on a linear scale

in Mississippi and Alabama abandoned the Democratic Party in large numbers to support their own third party alternatives - the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the National Democratic Party of Alabama.

ranging from liberal on the left to conservative on the right may still be appropriate. But for African Americans a multi-dimensional, unordered model more accurately depicts their partisan choices. Unless we model black partisan choices in this more complex manner, we reach a series of inaccurate conclusions and we may miss important insights.

The implications of all of this for the future of black politics are not at all clear. On one hand, there is little sign that black group consciousness is waning. In fact, in our 1996 survey, some 73 percent of African Americans indicated that they felt a sense of linked fate, a substantial increase from the 62 percent who felt similarly in 1984. Black unity in the political arena is certainly not waning because large numbers of African Americans believe that race is no longer relevant. Moreover, economic heterogeneity does not appear to be driving blacks apart in any major or consistent way. At the same time, there are other signs that blacks are divided and that they could become more divided politically in the future. Declining liberalism among the black population may be beginning to push African Americans apart politically. And younger blacks are at least by some measures less happy with the Democratic Party. In short, there are reasons to expect that we will see ongoing unity and other reasons to expect greater division in the future.

Ultimately, how these factors combine to play out is likely to be dependent on the actions of the Democratic and Republican parties. How each party is perceived to serve group interests is a critical intervening variable in black partisan decision making. If individual blacks believe the Republican Party works hard for black interests, they will support the Republican Party. The critical question is thus not whether the black class structure will continue to change or whether blacks will continue to become more conservative in their views. The critical question is how well either party can make a claim that their agenda serves black interests. The Republican Party, to this date, has not been particularly successful at making this claim, but there are already

signs that it is winning some hearts and minds and there is at least the potential that it will win even more hearts and minds in the future. The Democratic Party has been very successful at making this claim in the past but by seeking to put racial issues near the periphery of Democratic Party politics it appears to be losing ground. This is something that both parties need to seriously consider if they want to attract more black votes.

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African-American Party Identification, 1952-2000 (3-MA)

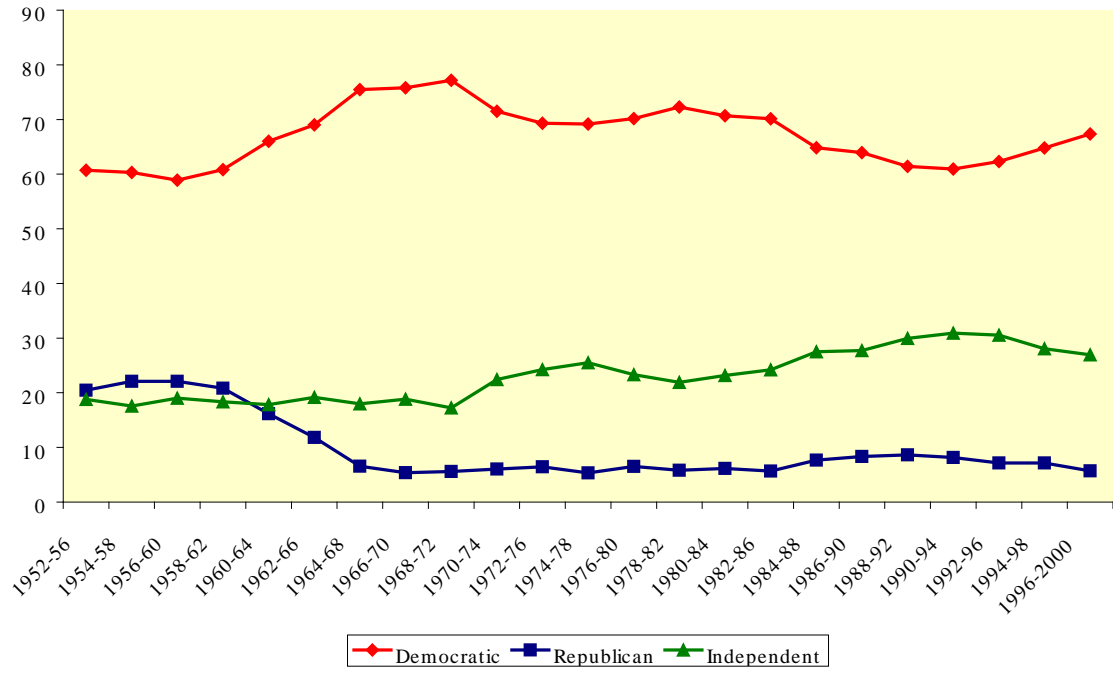


Table One. Determinants of Black Partisan Choice (Ordered Probit)			
	<i>Model One</i>	<i>Model Two</i>	<i>Model Three</i>
IDEOLOGY			
Extreme liberal	-.425 (.065)**	-.410 (.069)**	-.354 (.071)**
Moderate liberal	-.144 (.073)*	-.147 (.078)^	-.121 (.079)
Moderate conservative	-.069 (.079)	-.085 (.084)	-.072 (.086)
Extreme conservative	0.006 (.070)	0.028 (.075)	0.022 (.077)
CLASS			
Income	0.004 (.011)	0.015 (.011)	0.026 (.012)*
Education	-.012 (.016)	-.010 (.017)	-.012 (.017)
Home ownership	-.056 (.050)	-.092 (.053)^	-.104 (.055)^
Unemployed	0.414 (.090)**	0.457 (.096)**	0.462 (.098)**
BLACK GROUP INTERESTS			
Black linked fate	-.059 (.021)**	-.046 (.022)*	-.038 (.023)^
Community control	---	-.079 (.031)**	-.066 (.032)*
Racial separatism	---	0.050 (.051)	0.036 (.052)
Democrats work for blacks	---	---	-.294 (.032)**
Republicans work for blacks	---	---	0.246 (.031)**
BACKGROUND CONTROLS			
Age	-.016 (.002)**	-.016 (.002)**	-.015 (.002)**
Male	0.221 (.048)**	0.208 (.051)**	0.164 (.053)**
Black Interviewer	0.002 (.050)	0.026 (.054)	0.061 (.056)
Year 1993	0.115 (.063)^	0.112 (.070)^	0.073 (.072)^
Year 1996	0.059 (.061)	0.064 (.066)	0.057 (.068)
Cut 1	-.783 (.117)	-.821 (.147)	-1.09 (.187)
Cut 2	-.183 (.117)	-.222 (.147)	-.461 (.186)
Cut 3	0.398 (.118)	0.343 (.147)	0.146 (.186)
Cut 4	0.725 (.119)	0.676 (.148)	0.472 (.187)
Cut 5	1.088 (.122)	1.051 (.151)	0.839 (.190)
Cut 6	1.410 (.128)	1.357 (.156)	1.116 (.195)
Pseudo R squared	0.032	0.034	0.055
Chi-squared	217.19**	204.44**	314.70**
LR-test chi-squared	---	738.03**	364.36**
N	2427	2159	2086

**p<.01 * p<.05 ^ p<.10.

Table Two Determinants of Black Party Choice (Multinomial Logit)

	<i>Pr(Ind) vs. Pr(Dem)</i>		<i>Pr(Rep) vs. Pr(Dem)</i>		<i>Pr(Rep) vs. Pr(Ind)</i>	
	<i>MNL</i>	<i>RRR</i>	<i>MNL</i>	<i>RRR</i>	<i>MNL</i>	<i>RRR</i>
Extreme liberal	-.519 (.153)	0.60**	0.116 (.357)	1.12	0.634 (.370)	1.89 [^]
Moderate liberal	-.519 (.176)	0.60**	-.032 (.450)	0.97	0.487 (.465)	1.63
Moderate conservative	-.405 (.186)	0.67*	0.257 (.409)	1.29	0.661 (.426)	1.94
Extreme conservative	0.025 (.161)	1.02	0.982 (.320)	2.67**	0.958 (.331)	2.61**
Income	0.017 (.025)	1.02	0.092 (.058)	1.10	0.076 (.060)	1.08
Education	0.039 (.036)	1.04	-.131 (.094)	0.88	-.170 (.097)	0.84 [^]
Home ownership	-.162 (.116)	0.85	0.285 (.263)	1.33	0.447 (.272)	1.56 [^]
Unemployed	0.417 (.211)	1.52*	1.622 (.332)	5.06**	1.205 (.347)	3.34**
Black linked fate	-.001 (.049)	1.00	-.207 (.103)	0.81*	-.208 (.107)	0.81 [^]
Community control	-.010 (.068)	0.99	-.454 (.154)	0.65**	-.443 (.159)	0.64**
Racial separatism	-.002 (.098)	1.00	0.550 (.225)	1.73*	0.552 (.233)	1.74*
Democrats work for blacks	-.502 (.069)	0.61**	-.558 (.150)	0.57**	-.055 (.153)	0.95
Republicans work for blacks	0.349 (.066)	1.42**	0.925 (.133)	2.52**	0.576 (.137)	1.78**
Age	-.026 (.004)	0.97**	-.017 (.009)	0.98*	0.009 (.009)	1.01
Male	0.490 (.110)	1.63**	0.174 (.257)	1.19	-.316 (.263)	0.73
Constant	0.516 (.389)		-2.26 (.866)		-2.78 (.893)	
Pseudo R squared	.099					
Chi-squared (df=24)	297.98**					
N	2147					

**p<.01 * p<.05 ^ p<.10.