

WORKING PAPERS OF THE
CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Paper #42
July, 1968

Copies Available Through:

Center for Research on
Social Organization
University of Michigan
219 Perry Building
330 Packard Street
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BASES OF POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP
IN THE UNITED STATES*

David R. Segal

David Knoke

The University of Michigan

*Paper prepared for presentation at the 1969 meetings of the American Sociological Association. This research was conducted during the senior author's tenure as a Faculty Research Fellow, Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan, and was supported in part by a research grant from the Graduate School. We are indebted to John Sonquist and to Stephen Wildstrom for technical assistance. Professor James Morgan generously granted us access to the data contained herein.

ABSTRACT

Analysis of the bases of political party choice in the United States reveals that social structural factors are more important than economic factors in determining patterns of partisanship. Among economic factors, moreover, differentiation in the realms of credit and consumption is more important than differences in relation to economic production. The absence of traditional class-conflict politics, however, does not lead to a state of political consensus, because new modes of economic differentiation have emerged, cleavages based on earlier economic cleavages have persisted after the basic economic issues have been resolved, and noneconomic cleavages, particularly along racial lines, still await resolution.

THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF POLITICS

Sociology's love affair with Marxian models of society is over.¹ Despite the monistic views of political power contained in the writings of Mills and Hunter,² political sociology has moved far from economic determinist notions of political behavior.³

In a more general sense, however, the role of economic variables in political life remains undefined. Research seeking to relate economic self-interest to political involvement has failed to show significant relationships between these variables,⁴ and the argument has been put forth that in American politics, the rhetoric of economics has been adopted as a "conventional shorthand" for issues that are in reality political or moral.⁵

-
1. For a statement of Marx' impact on political sociology, see Seymour Martin Lipset, "Political Sociology," in Robert K. Merton et al., Sociology Today, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), vol. I, pp. 84 ff.
 2. See especially C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), and Floyd Hunter, Community Power Structure (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953).
 3. The major departures from the Marxian model, I believe, are reflected in Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Changing Class Structure and Contemporary European Politics," Daedalus, vol. 93 (Winter, 1964), pp. 271-303, and Morris Janowitz and David R. Segal, "Social Cleavage and Party Affiliation," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 72, no. 6 (May, 1967), pp. 601-618.
 4. Frank Lindenfeld, "Economic Interest and Political Involvement," Public Opinion Quarterly, vol. 28, no. 1 (Spring, 1964), pp. 104-111.
 5. Peter F. Drucker, "On the 'Economic Basis' of American Politics," The Public Interest, no. 10 (Winter, 1968), pp. 30-42.

This argument concludes on the note that the convention has outlived its usefulness: in part because politicians have forgotten that it is a convention and have begun to believe that economics controls politics, and more importantly, because the dominant cleavages in American society today do not lend themselves to economic analysis with the same facility that earlier issues did.

On the other hand, the relevance of Marx' economic notions of social class is still argued by some,⁶ and in more general terms, Wiley has suggested that Marxian explanations of American politics fail not because Marx' model was economic, but because Marx did not go far enough in seeking out the economic markets that serve as the bases of class conflict.⁷ Specifically, while the increased skill level and bargaining power of the working may lead to the embourgeoisement of the proletariat, and the trend from entrepreneurial to bureaucratic occupations alienates managers as well as workers from the means of production thereby diminishing the import of the labor

-
6. George Lichtheim, "Class and Hierarchy: A Critique of Marx?," European Journal of Sociology, vol. v, no. 1 (1964), pp. 101-111. Also Bertell Ollman, "Marx' Use of Use of Class," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 73, no. 5 (March, 1968), pp. 573-580.
 7. Norbert Wiley, "America's Unique Class Politics: The Interplay of the Labor, Credit and Commodity Markets," American Sociological Review, vol. 32, no. 4 (August, 1967), pp. 529-541.

market as a source of social conflict, Wiley asserts that differential placement in the credit or commodity markets may serve as bases for political conflict.

Multivariate analyses of the bases of political partisanship in the United States have never taken this range of economic variables into account. Moreover, those economic variables that have been included have not been shown to bear a strong relationship to political partisanship. A study of over 5,000 respondents, representing the American electorate from 1952 to 1964, revealed that social class, region, race, religion, urbanization, and union membership serve as the primary bases of partisan cleavage.⁸ Income, which was included in the analysis, did not emerge as an important predictor.

This set of variables, however, does not preclude partial economic explanation. Class identification is based, at least in part, on economic considerations,⁹ and it is difficult to

-
8. David R. Segal, "Classes, Strata and Parties in West Germany and the United States," Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 10, no. 1 (October, 1967) pp. 66-84.
 9. Robert W. Hodge and Donald J. Treiman, with the help of a desk calculator named Stuart, show that while ownership of stocks and bonds in private companies, savings bonds, and related property, all of which may be taken as indicative of position in the credit market, make no significant contribution to the explanation of class identification, family income, along with education, occupation, and the occupations of one's associates, makes an independent contribution to the explanation of social class. See their "Class Identification in the United States," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 73, no. 5 (March, 1968), pp. 535-547.

differentiate between the sociological and the economic import of occupation and union membership, at the very least. Moreover, Hamilton has shown, for the case of Germany, that even with income held constant, political party choice differs between working-class and middle-class as a function of life-style differences.¹⁰ While life-style and position in the commodity market are not isomorphic, the relationship is surely strong enough to warrant further consideration.

The proposition that consumer behavior is an important indicator of behavior in other spheres is not a novel idea. Schelsky, for example, suggests that the relationship between consumer roles and occupational roles is decreasing, and that the former is becoming the central determinant of behavior.¹¹ Riesman clearly subscribes to this view with regard to American society. "The spread of other-direction has brought to the political scene the attitude of the inside-dopester, originating not in the sphere of work but of consumption."¹²

-
10. Richard F. Hamilton, "Affluence and the Worker: The West German Case," American Journal of Sociology, vol. 71, no. 2 (September, 1965), pp. 144-152.
 11. Helmut Schelsky, "Gesellschaftlicher Wandel," Offene Welt, no. 41 (1956), pp. 65 ff.
 12. David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), p. 180.

RESEARCH GOALS

The present study is an attempt to evaluate the relative import of social and economic bases of political cleavage. Utilizing data from a survey of economic behavior conducted by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, in 1965, the relationships between variables reflecting position in the labor, credit, and commodity markets and political partisanship were analyzed. Similarly, the relationships between social structural factors and partisanship were studied, and, most importantly, the interrelationships among all of these variables was analyzed.

The mode of analysis was the automatic interaction detection (AID) algorithm developed by Morgan and Sonquist.¹³ The sample was progressively split into smaller units on the basis of the ability of predictor variables to explain variance in party choice. The criteria for assigning priorities to predictor variables were purely statistical.

DATA INPUTS

Political partisanship was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from strong Republican to strong Democrat. In the present analysis, intervals are assumed to be equal. Position in the labor market was indexed by employment status,

13. John A. Sonquist and James N. Morgan, The Detection of Interaction Effects (Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, 1964).

whether or not self-employed, reasons for considering job changes, and desire to go into business for oneself. Relative position in the commodity market was measured by ownership of major appliances (automatic clothes washer, clothes dryer, dishwasher), and by the number of automobiles owned by members of the household. Position in the credit market was indicated by home ownership, liquid assets, income, and automobile financing.

EXPECTATIONS

Assuming that either social or economic factors predominated, a wide range of outcomes was possible. If in fact the economic variables proved to be more important than social structural factors, we might have produced a value-added model, wherein support of the Republican Party was related to holding advantaged positions in the credit, labor, and commodity markets. The most strongly Republican, then, would be those with advantageous positions in all 3 markets. Alternatively, we might have expected an interaction model, following Wiley's reasoning, such that the stress caused by class inconsistency would lead to political preferences of the right stronger than those due to consistent economic advantages. Class consistency is defined as being either propertied or non-propertied across the three economic markets in question. Thus, the propertied employer-creditor-seller is consistent, as is the non-propertied employee-debtor buyer. All other sets are inconsistent.¹⁴

On the other hand, if social structural factors emerged as preeminent we anticipated replication of the social groups

14. Wiley, op. cit., p. 536.

defined by Segal as the components of the American electorate.¹⁵

Perfect replication was not possible, since some variables included in the earlier study were absent from the present data set, e.g., union membership, while we had data in this analysis that had not been included in the earlier study, e.g. church attendance. These differences notwithstanding if the social groupings defined by this analysis were roughly comparable to earlier results, it would attest to the reliability of those results.

Finally, our results might have produced not a "pure" sociological model or economic model, but a hybrid involving elements from each class of variables. Such data would have provided a horrendous task of interpretation. Our faith in the analytic autonomy of sociology and economics led us to believe that these sets of theoretically distinct variables would emerge as empirically distinct entities, and our proclivities as sociologists led us to believe that the emergent model would be sociological rather than economic. We hasten to point out, however, that this expectation was preferential rather than theoretical.

RESULTS

To a gratifying degree, our expectations qua preferences were borne out, with but 3 systematic differences between our own social map of the electorate and that suggested earlier by Segal. These differences modified the characteristics of the social groups produced by the analysis, but did not

15. Segal, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

substantially alter the sources of variance in partisanship.

As we anticipated, social structural and economic variables bifurcated into 2 independent sets, with the former identifying the major segments of the electorate and the latter being rejected for want of explanatory power. The sole exception to the generalization was income. In terms of family units, both the rich and the very poor expressed a preference for the Republican Party, presumably for different reasons. Income had been included in the earlier analysis and had failed to emerge as a significant predictor of party choice. The fact that high income people prefer the Republican Party, however, has often been documented.¹⁶ The Republican identification of the poor is more difficult to explain, except perhaps in terms of the authoritarianism that has been alleged to characterize segments of the working class.¹⁷

The partisanship of the Protestant middle-class also varied as a function of the relative affluence of community of residence. People living in wealthy counties were more likely to be strong Republicans than were people living in poor counties. It is difficult to judge whether partisanship in this case is a function of individual or collective properties. Previous research suggests that the middle-class is less susceptible to contextual effects on partisanship than is the working-class.¹⁸

-
16. See for example V.O. Key, Jr., Politics Parties and Pressure Groups, New York: Crowell, 1964), pp. 589-590.
 17. See for example Seymour Martin Lipset, "Democracy and Working Class Authoritarianism," American Sociological Review, Vol. 24 (1959), pp. 482-501.
 18. David R. Segal and Marshall W. Meyer, "The Social Context of Political Partisanship," in Mattei Dogan and Stein Rokkan, Quantitative Ecological Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, Forthcoming).

The second major difference from previous work is what we regard as the emergence of a socialization dimension. The effect of the family of orientation on one's political preference was reflected in Segal's earlier research by the fact that the occupation of the respondent's father was a stronger predictor of partisanship than was the respondent's own occupation. This fact, however, was noticed only in passing, since the greater part of the variance in partisanship was explained by region and, to a lesser degree, by class identification. In the present analysis, regionalism was measured both by the area in which the respondent lived, and the area in which his father had lived. The respondents own region was not represented in the final characterization of electoral groups, but father's region emerged as the strongest predictor of partisanship, with the children of Southerners and immigrants showing a marked preference for the Democrats.¹⁹

Finally, in this analysis, in addition to political differentiation between white Protestants and members of minority religions, we achieved further specification among white Protestants as a function of church attendance. Those Protestants

19. The Southern Democratic vote is mentioned in Segal, op. cit.. For a discussion of ethnic preference for the Democratic Party, see Michael Parenti, "Ethnic Politics and the Persistence of Ethnic Identification," American Political Science Review, vol. LXI, no. 3 (September, 1967), pp. 717-726. M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Neimi discuss the high intergenerational correlation of political partisanship in "The Transmission of Political Values from Parent to Child," American Political Science Review, vol. LXII, no. 1 (March, 1968), especially pp. 172-174.

who attended church with some regularity were more Republican than those who attended seldom or never. This is in full agreement with Lenski's finding that "Among white Protestants, the proportion of Republicans varied directly with degree of involvement in the churches."²⁰ As noted above, the involvement dimension was not included in the earlier study.

Table 1 presents the social groupings in the American electorate produced by this analysis. The dependent variable, \bar{Y} , is the mean partisanship score for the group, based on a 7 point scale, with Democrats at the high end. The three most strongly Democratic groups are defined by black skin, southern or immigrant origins, and membership in minority religious groups. These three sources of traditional Democratic support accounted for more than 50 per cent of the total sample.

Less strongly aligned with the major parties, but, with one exception tending to support the Democratic Party (\bar{Y} 4.0), were southern oriented, working-class oriented, and marginal middle-class respondents. On the whole, groups representing roughly 29 per cent of the sample preferred the Republican Party. This is consistent with Segal's earlier work on both the structure of the American electorate, and the alignment of party strength in the 1960's.²¹

20. Gerhard Lenski, The Religious Factor (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), p. 174.

21. See Segal op.cit., and "Partisan Realignment in the United States: The Lesson of the 1964 Election," Public Opinion Quarterly (Fall, 1967 forthcoming).

Table 1. Social Structural Cleavage in the American Population

Category	N	%	\bar{Y}
1. Negro Democratic Bloc. Father from south or foreign born; household head non-white	193	9	6.02
2. Southern and Ethnic Democrat. Father from south or foreign born; household head white; Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, non-traditional Christian	696	33	5.27
3. Minority Religion. Father native-born non-south; Catholic or Jewish	253	11	5.13
4. Working-Class Oriented. Father native-born non-south; clerk, laborer or operative; do not attend church regularly; Lutheran or minor Protestant sect.	131	6	5.02
5. Southern and Immigrant "Core" Churches. Father from south or foreign born; household head white; Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Lutheran			
5.1 Family income \$2,000-10,000	175	8	4.90
5.2 Family income <\$2,000 or >\$10,000	115	5	3.77
6. Marginal Middle Class. Father native-born non-south, Protestant; professional, technical, managers, owners, proprietors, housewives; dwell in counties of median income <\$4,000	32	2	4.75
7. Protestant Oriented. Father native-born non-south; core Protestant church; clerks; laborers, operatives			
7.1 Irregular church attendance	189	9	3.96
7.2 Regular church attendance	137	6	3.54
8. Middle-class Protestant. Father native-born non-south; Protestant; professional, technical, managers, officials, proprietors, housewives; median county income >\$4,000			
8.1 Attend church seldom or never	110	4	3.50
8.2 Attend church regularly or often	113	5	2.42
TOTAL	2,138	98*	4.72

*Per cents do not total 100 due to rounding.

DISCUSSION

These data demonstrate clearly that social structural factors are stronger predictors of political party choice than are more purely economic factors. On the other hand, there are clear differences in relationship to partisanship among the three economic markets we have considered. Of the 3, position in the credit market, in terms of having cash to dispose of, is most strongly related to party choice. Position in the labor market bears the weakest relationship to partisanship, and position in the commodity market is roughly intermediate between the other two. Thus, while economic factors are secondary, to the extent that they are important, it is differentiation in the realm of consumption rather than of production that matters. Zero-order relationships between representative social and economic factors and political partisanship are presented in Table 2.

While our data testify against the existence of political cleavage based upon economic classes in the United States, they do not support the inference, drawn by some, that cleavages in American society have lost most of their impact for most people and have been transformed into a consensual political style.²² Such theorists accept the Marxian dictum that social relations are built upon an economic substructure defined in terms of productive relationships, and see a decrease in conflict in the productive sector of the economy. Research on political cleavage in the United States points to three fallacies in this line of reasoning.

22. See Robert E. Lane, "The Politics of Consensus in an Age of Affluence," American Political Science Review, vol. LIX (December, 1965), pp. 874-895.

Table 2. Zero Order Variance Reduction in Political Partisanship
Attributable to Social and Economic Factors

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Reduction in Variance*</u>
Social Structural Factors	
Area Father Raised	5.68%
Religion	4.30%
Race	3.67%
Occupation	3.10%
Education	2.85%
Position in Credit Market	
Liquid Assets	2.58%
Disposable Income	2.14%
Position in Commodity Market	
Number of Automobiles	1.08%
Appliance Ownership	0.98%
Position in Labor Market	
Self Employment	0.24%
Employment Status	0.23%

*Expressed in terms of per cent by which the total sum of squares of political partisanship is reduced by dichomizing in terms of independent variable so as to maximize between groups sum of squares.

First, as Wiley suggests, the labor market, which governs productive relationships, is not necessarily the most important economic arena for political discourse. Like Schelsky, we find that consumption relationships are more likely than production relationships to serve as bases of political alignment.

Second, where real economic cleavages once existed and served us the bases of political differentiation, we now find residues of those cleavages that have become part of subcultural systems, and are transmitted intergenerationally even in the absence of the basic economic conflicts that generated them. The political regionalism of the South was rooted in its defense of a system of plantation agriculture dependent upon the institution of slavery, and its opposition to the national bank in the early 19th century. While the economic base of the region has been changing, dating back to a sharp increase in industrialization in the 1920's, the drift away from regional politics has been gradual, and despite short-term fluctuations, is not to be expected to approximate the national two party model in the immediate future.²³

Finally, we find non-economic cleavages that have persisted through long periods of American history cast, as Drucker suggests, in the rhetoric of economic issues. The Kerner Commission, appointed by President Johnson in 1967, caused widespread controversy through its suggestion that the problems encountered by black men in their dealings with American society are due not to the fact that the black man is poor, but to the

23. See Philip E. Converse, "On the Possibility of Major Political Realignment in the South," in Angus Campbell et. al., Elections and the Political Order (New York: Wiley, 1966), pp. 212-242.

fact that he is black. The President himself was unable to accept the conclusion that America is a racist society, but Higham has shown that as early as the turn of the 20th century, American nativism had begun to focus on the issue of race.²⁴

We posit, then, that given the decline of traditional class conflict on the United States, there are three major constraints to the development of consensual politics. First, we find the emergence of new bases of economic cleavage in the place of class conflict politics. Second, we find that political differentiation initially based on economic cleavage tends to persist even after the economic issues themselves are resolved. Third, we find persisting bases of cleavage in American society that do not lend themselves to simple solutions based upon economic rationality.

24. John Higham, Strangers in the Land (New York: Atheneum, 1965), pp. 131-157. Also, see Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp. 170-200.