

CHAPTER 1

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## Introduction

Tweedledum and Tweedledee  
Agreed to have a battle;  
For Tweedledum said Tweedledee  
Had spoiled his nice new rattle.

Just then flew down a monstrous crow,  
As black as a tar-barrel!  
Which frightened both the heroes so,  
They quite forgot their quarrel.

—Lewis Carroll

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2008: millions of Americans participate in the quadrennial political ritual of electing a president. The day was, in the elements, unexceptional. The Northwest endured wet and windy weather, a hard rain fell over Southern California, and light precipitation descended on the Northeast. Yet the sun shone in the heart of the country, with record-warm fall temperatures in the seventies, as Chicagoans reveled boisterously on a historic day. The estimated 131 million voters who constituted the American electorate that day had elected the first American of African heritage to the highest office in the land. A body politic that had, at the nation's founding, consented to counting African Americans in fractions for purposes of allocating political offices without any rights of representation; that had witnessed the effective dismantlement of the African American franchise in the Jim Crow South, following the hard-earned progress of Reconstruction and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments; that had subsequently gloried in the effective reinstatement of the African American franchise, only to suffer through the continued deployment of the "race card" in electioneering, had done what few would have thought imaginable even a year earlier.

Spokespersons across many divides—partisan, ideological, racial—came together to commemorate and cherish the moment. President-elect Obama noted in his acceptance speech, "It's been a long time coming, but tonight, because of what we did on this date in this election at this defining moment, change has come to America." His foe during the election, Republican Senator John McCain, also recognized that "this is a historic

election . . . we have come a long way from the injustices that once stained our nation's reputation." Similarly, in the editorial pages of the *Los Angeles Times* the following Wednesday, two African Americans who were usually at ideological loggerheads came to a rapprochement on the significance of the 2008 election. The progressive Michael Eric Dyson declared Obama's ascendancy a "quantum leap of racial progress. . . . Today is a benchmark that helps to fulfill—and rescue—America's democratic reputation" (Dyson 2008). Even the conservative Shelby Steele, while registering a decidedly more sober and skeptical tone, asked aloud, "Does his victory mean that America is now officially beyond racism? . . . Doesn't a black in the Oval Office put the lie to both black inferiority and white racism?"

This rosy blush of "postracial" expectations quickly wilted under the glare of finer facts about of the 2008 election. Pollsters and the punditry alike were initially flush with predictions of a record turnout, bolstered by a mobilized youth vote and a decided willingness on the part of white voters to defy the "Bradley effect" and aver their support for a black president. Yet a deeper dig into the data reveals a decidedly racial cast to the 2008 election outcome. Of the 5 million new voters in 2008 (compared with the election tallies of 2004), an estimated 2 million were African American voters, another 2 million Latino ones, and 600,000 Asian American. According to the Current Population Survey, the number of non-Hispanic white voters remained unchanged between 2004 and 2008 (U.S. Census Bureau, July 20, 2009). Moreover, while the voting rate of eighteen- to twenty-four-year-olds increased from 47 percent in 2004 to 49 percent in 2008, this increase was highest among African American youth.

Perhaps more pointedly, Obama did not emerge victorious because he won over white America. In the end, a clear majority—57 percent—of all white voters opposed his candidacy. To put a finer point on it, the first ripples of the flood of scholarly studies on the 2008 election have emphatically found continued evidence of racial bias in whites' electoral preferences (see, e.g., Jackman and Vavreck 2009; Pasek et al. 2009; Tesler and Sears 2010). Rather, Obama won in large part because the African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans who had expanded the voter rolls had supported his candidacy in overwhelming numbers. Quite apart from symbolizing our collective journey into a postracial era, the 2008 election appears to reinforce the realpolitik of the twin influences of an increasingly diverse electorate and a persistent racial divide in the hearts and minds of American voters.

The growing clout of racial-minority voters is indeed impressive. Less than fifty years ago, white voters made up 95 percent of the active elec-

torate.<sup>1</sup> One could argue that white voters operatively controlled the outcome of any national context and that in these electoral contexts, it mattered little, practically, whom minorities favored. By the time of the Obama-McCain contest, the population of whites had declined to 74 percent of the electorate. Thus, while whites may still constitute an imposing majority of voting Americans, their dominance has greatly diminished. Ever-larger numbers of black, Hispanic, and Asian American voters are filling the void and promise to continue doing so into the future.

The racial divide in the 2008 vote is equally impressive. Setting aside both public and privately viewed sentiments that Obama enjoyed his electoral success because, as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid indiscreetly put it, he was a “light-skinned” candidate of African American descent with “no Negro dialect,” the evidence of racial dissensus even in these allegedly best of circumstances is widespread. On one side, voters from the three largest racial and ethnic minority groups strongly favored Obama. He won 95 percent of the black vote, 67 percent of the Latino vote, and 62 percent of the Asian American vote.<sup>2</sup> On the other side, the clear majority of white voters favored McCain. Only 43 percent of white voters chose to support the Democratic nominee. Moreover, the first wave of studies on the 2008 election find little change in whites’ racial-policy preferences compared with the 1988 election, when the Reverend Jesse Jackson made an unsuccessful but legitimate run for the Democratic nomination for president and little change in the role of racial resentment in whites’ vote choices between 1988 and 2008 (Tesler and Sears, 2010). Despite talk of a postracial politics, the 2008 contest was as racially divided as any election in American presidential history.

To boot, there is little chance that this decidedly racial cast to American electoral politics will diminish in future contests. If anything, the continued change in the demographics of the U.S. voting population suggests that the significance of racial diversity and division will become only more important in the future. With whites predicted to lose their majority status in this nation somewhere near the middle part of this century, the balance of racial power will continue to shift and the outcomes of American democracy will increasingly hinge on the preferences and actions of racial minorities.

This has tremendous implications for anyone involved or interested in American politics, and it has more than obvious import for the nation’s two major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans. Put sim-

<sup>1</sup> This is the proportion of all voters in the 1960 presidential election who identified as white (based on the American National Election Studies).

<sup>2</sup> All figures are derived from CNN exit polls.

ply, the future success of both parties depends in no small measure on winning over this relatively new racial and ethnic minority electorate. The burden on the Republican Party is clearly more onerous at this point. With McCain garnering almost all of his support from white Americans—90 percent of all his votes in the general election came from white voters—and with the proportion of white Americans dwindling, the Republican Party will have to try to make inroads into the minority population. An electoral renaissance of the Republican Party is unlikely to present itself without a successful shift in the partisan proclivities of minority voters and without motivating greater participation among those voters of color who are already sympathetic to the Republican cause.

This may seem like a tall order. Decades of initiatives by the Democratic Party in support of the civil rights movement and other causes that are important to the African American community have created a widely held perception that the Democratic Party is the party of minority interests (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Obama's ascendancy to the presidency and his tacit role as leader of the Democratic Party could serve to further solidify a Democratic majority among the minority electorate.<sup>3</sup> Despite the gesture of nominating Michael Steele as the chair of the Republican National Committee in 2009, recent immigrant bashing by certain segments of the Republican leadership and past efforts by Republican strategists to use racialized campaigns to generate a winning white majority also do little to portend large-scale minority gains for the Republican Party in the near future (Edsall and Edsall 1992).

But one of the main storylines of this book is that the role of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans in this partisan competition is far from predetermined. Despite the fact that these communities of color voted overwhelmingly for Obama in the 2008 presidential contest, the single most important finding in our research is that the bulk of this segment of the electorate remains uncertain about its place in the partisan landscape of the nation. The best data we have indicate that the clear majority of immigrant-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans are not affiliated with either of the two major parties. Among Latinos in the 2006 Latino National Survey, only 44 percent of respondents identified as either Republican or Democratic. In the 2008 National Asian American survey, that figure was an almost identical 46 percent. Even among the most steadfastly Democratic electorate in America—the African American community—the 2004 American National Election Studies (ANES) found that 38 percent chose not to identify with a major

<sup>3</sup> It is, however, important to note that there are already signs of discontent because of the reluctance of President Obama and the Democratic Party to pursue comprehensive immigration reform or to address racial inequality in a significant way.

party, and about 40 percent will not label themselves as Democrats (even if they vote for a Democratic candidate for political office).<sup>4</sup> In fact, even among whites in the 2004 ANES, fully 39 percent chose not to identify as either Republican or Democrat.

Critically, among Latinos and Asian Americans, the bulk of those who reject partisan affiliation do not label themselves as Independents—a population that can, at times, conceal significant partisan ties. Instead, for both the Latino and Asian American population, the single largest group is what we call *nonidentifiers*, individuals who refuse to place themselves on the party-identification scale and who instead offer responses such as “don’t know,” “no preference,” or “none of the above.” These previously unrecognized nonidentifiers represent some 38 percent of the Latino population and another 36 percent of the Asian American population. Moreover, while the lack of a partisan affiliation is most pronounced within immigrant-based groups, it occurs within almost all segments of the public.

Another important plotline in this racial and partisan equation is that there is every reason to believe that this diverse, unaligned population can be mobilized and integrated into one of the two major parties. The racial and ethnic minority population, as we will see, is far from homogeneous in its political interests, social identities, and life experiences. Accompanying the nation’s demographic diversity is a multiplicity of core issue concerns and ideological orientations, a bricolage of salient social identities, and a wide range of experience with and knowledge about American democracy. This will make targeting this diverse population complex and will probably require a multipronged approach. But it will also create openings for both parties. Republicans, for example, can point to the moral conservatism of many Latinos and Asian Americans as an avenue for partisan incorporation. Likewise, Democrats can point to minorities’ widespread experiences with racial discrimination as an issue to exploit. Moreover, the evidence suggests that once a party touches on the right message, mobilization becomes possible. Experimental research indicates that contact to encourage voter participation does work and that it can be effective with members of the minority population (Ramírez and Wong 2006). Broader historical patterns also imply that if the motivation is strong enough, members of the minority population will become energized and involved in the partisan fray. In response to Proposition 187, an anti-illegal immigrant initiative that was pushed by a Republican gover-

<sup>4</sup>The reasons for equating African Americans with Democratic Party identification are clearer when partisanship is limited to the choice between identifying as a Democrat or a Republican. In the 2004 ANES, the proportion of African American Democrats exceeds that of African American Republicans by a ratio of roughly 38 to 1 (60 percent to 1.6 percent).

nor in the 1990s, naturalization rates, voter turnout, and identification with the Democratic Party increased substantially among Latinos in California (Bowler et al. 2006; Pantoja et al. 2001). The spontaneous mobilization of over three million immigrants in Los Angeles and other cities in support of immigrants' rights during the 2007 congressional debates on comprehensive immigration reform further attests to the potential of minority mobilization (Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006). The bottom line is that there is a real opportunity for both major parties. Party leaders and advocates need only act, and in response the growing number of unaligned immigrants and minorities could offer a critical electoral edge.

The focus of this book is this linkage of racial and partisan considerations that we have just outlined. Our main goal is to offer a more encompassing model of partisan choice, one that incorporates the diverse range of people and perspectives found in America today. We seek to explain why—precisely for reasons of racial and ethnic definition and immigrant experience—the pathways to partisanship or nonpartisanship vary among whites, African Americans, and immigration-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans. In the ensuing pages, we explain why an account of the attachments (or lack thereof) of racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants to the present-day political parties is important, why increased attention to nonpartisanship is warranted, and how the two are linked.

Is there a need for a new theory of partisanship? We maintain that the two dominant theories of partisanship—the Michigan School and the Downsian approach—do an excellent job of accounting for the partisan choices of the bulk of Americans whose views and experiences allow them to fit neatly along the spectrum of partisanship that defines the nation's politics. But we also believe that these two theories often fail to consider the unique experiences and concerns of different segments of our increasingly diverse public. The Michigan School, for example, contends that party identification is a strong psychological attachment that is developed early in life and largely inherited from one's parents through preadult socialization. But how can parental partisanship explain the party identification of immigrants whose parents have no obvious partisan connections in the American domain? The Downsian approach also neglects to incorporate some of the distinctive aspects of America's diverse democracy. According to the Downsian model, individuals attach to the party whose publicly declared positions on the main issues of the day come closest to their ideal point on a liberal-conservative scale. But what happens if one has little knowledge of those issues or if your core issue concerns are ignored by both parties? What are the likely partisan attachments of the Filipino who is altogether unfamiliar with the issue stances of either party? What of the African American whose main ideological

motivation involves the debate between integration and black autonomy? What of the Puerto Rican who is committed to Puerto Rican statehood?

In providing a comprehensive theory of party identification, we seek to understand not only how Americans who fit neatly into the partisan structure choose an affiliation but also how other Americans whose interests, ideologies, and identities fit less well choose to align or not align with one of the two major parties. That is, we offer an encompassing account of the partisan attachments that Americans have (or lack) and show how the pathways and patterns of partisanship vary crucially by groups defined by race and immigrant origins.

In our theoretical account, we contend that the partisan significance of America's growing demographic diversity can be accounted for largely by three factors that have generally been overlooked in accounts of party identification: (1) disparity in levels of information across the electorate, (2) the salience of distinct social identities, and (3) divergence in core issue concerns and ideological orientations. Thus, our story, which we detail in the coming pages, is one of the central role of information, identity, and ideology in shaping party identification, and the variation in the dynamic interplay of these three factors between whites, African Americans, and immigration-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans. We hope that our account will not only provide a greater understanding of the large numbers of unaligned partisan misfits who characterize America's increasingly diverse electorate but also offer both incentives and strategies to incorporate this population.

## AMERICA'S RACIAL TRANSFORMATION

To stress the importance of understanding how patterns of partisanship vary by race and immigrant origins, we need to go back roughly four decades in time. The year 1965 is often thought of as a defining moment in our nation's history of racial politics. What defines this moment for many is the juxtaposition of two formative events—the passage of the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965 and, less than a week after President Lyndon Baines Johnson's official signing ceremony, the explosion of the Los Angeles community of Watts into a racially motivated riot and conflagration.

More often overlooked—until recently—was the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965. Commonly referred to as the Hart-Celler Act, the Immigration Act of 1965 passed amendments that aimed to undo the restrictive quotas of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 and the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952. Hart-Celler was spurred by the same impulse that drove the successful passage

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965: an urgent quest to rid the United States of any appearance of unequal political standing. Vice President Hubert Humphrey drew this linkage explicitly when he declared: “We must in 1965 remove all elements in our immigration law which suggest that there are second-class people. . . . We want to bring our immigration law into line with the spirit of the Civil Rights Act of 1964” (quoted in Tichenor 2002, 215). Upon signing the Hart-Celler Act, President Johnson declared that it would “repair a deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American nation” (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 1965, 1038).

The historical significance of the Hart-Celler Act was initially somewhat understated because its legislative impact was widely viewed as anodyne. The terms of the bill were rather modest. U.S. immigration policy would no longer set quotas based on national origin; it would allow for preferences to be given to relatives of persons already in the United States and for preferences by labor skills and professional training. Eastern and southern Europeans were expected to be the chief beneficiaries of these amendments, but in relatively limited numbers. The Immigration Act of 1965 received its support largely as an important symbolic gesture in the Cold War.

In the bill-signing ceremony, President Johnson took a moment to remark that “this bill we sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power” (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 1965, 1038). Johnson was not alone in this expectation. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, in his 1964 testimony to Congress, remarked: “I would say for the Asia-Pacific Triangle . . . 5,000 immigrants would come the first year, but we do not expect that there would be any great influx after that.” Senator Edward Kennedy, in subcommittee hearings, said, “The bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society.”<sup>5</sup>

Today these conservative expectations of the Hart-Celler Act, with the full benefit of hindsight, seem almost comically off the mark. As many scholars have observed, the provisions of the Hart-Celler Act sparked a sweeping transformation in the nation’s demographic composition (e.g., Portes and Zhou 1993; Tienda 2002; Hirschman, Alba, Farley 2000; Lee and Bean 2004; Segura and Rodrigues 2006). In terms of sheer volume, we are witnessing the largest influx of immigrants since the early twenti-

<sup>5</sup>For more details on the historical background, legislative dynamics, and ideological currents leading to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, see, e.g., Reimers (1992), Tichenor (2002), and Ngai (2004).

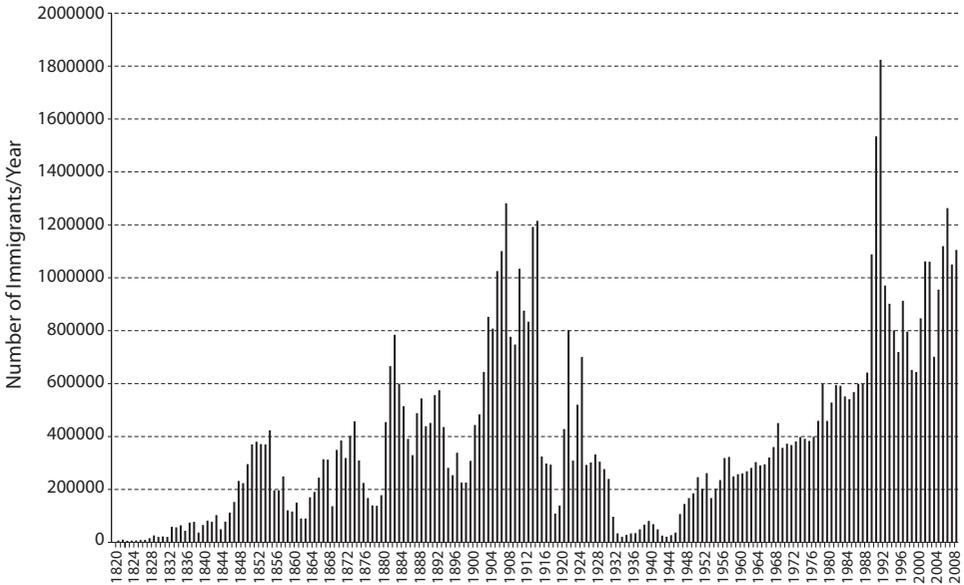


Figure 1.1. Trends in immigration, 1821–2008

eth century (see figure 1.1). In the period from 1995 to 2000, a net of more than 1.2 million people flowed into the United States per year (immigration less out-migration). To give some comparative scale to the phenomenon, we compare migration flows into the United States with those of other nations in the Group of Eight (Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and the Russian Federation). In this comparison, Russia appears as the next closest in net gains at roughly 300,000 persons per year (Gans 2006). According to Census Bureau statistics, immigrants and their children comprise close to one in four Americans today, with more than 34 million foreign-born and more than 30 million second-generation immigrants in the United States in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau 2005).

In addition to the upsurge in the foreign-born, this wave of immigration has produced a sea change in the racial and ethnic composition of this nation. Contemporary immigrants come from different shores than the earlier immigrants from Europe, arriving instead from Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. As figure 1.2 shows, until the first decade of the twentieth century, about 90 percent of new migrants to the United States set sail from European shores. By the 1980s, this proportion had dwindled to about 12 percent, with about 80 percent of new migrants coming from Asia and the Americas (U.S. Department of Homeland Se-

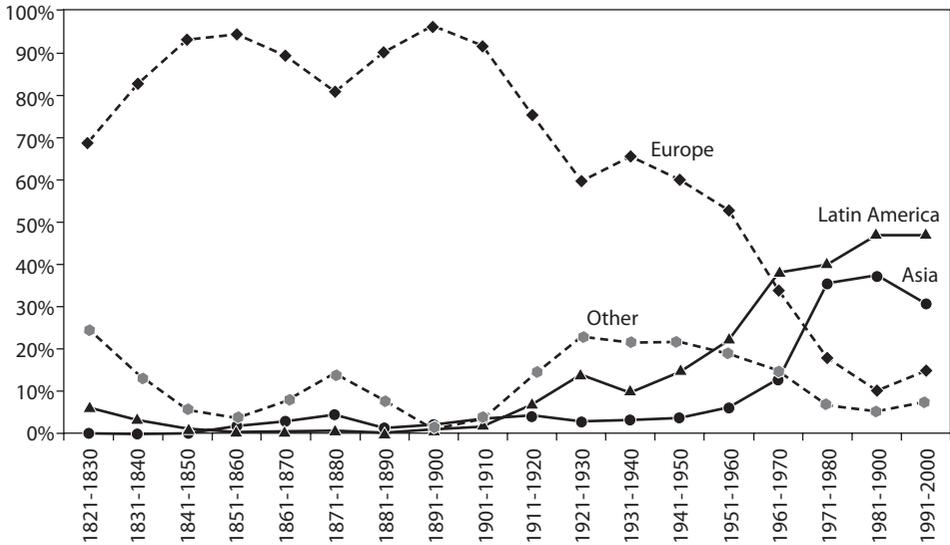


Figure 1.2. Immigration by sending region

curity 2006). The impact of this change in global emigration rates on the nation's racial/ethnic composition cannot be understated. In the 1960 census, African Americans constituted 92 percent of the nonwhite population of the United States. By the time of the 2000 census, African Americans made up only about 50 percent of the nonwhite population.<sup>6</sup> Many social and political observers tout the fact that African Americans are now no longer the largest nonwhite population in the United States.

These demographic shifts, moreover, are likely to continue in the foreseeable future, as we show in figure 1.3. According to Census Bureau projections, the U.S. Latino population will grow from 36 million today to more than 100 million by 2050; the Asian American population will grow from 11 million today to more than 33 million by 2050. Sometime in the middle of this century, African Americans will comprise only one of every three nonwhites, and white Americans will no longer be a numerical ma-

<sup>6</sup> Given the introduction of a separate Hispanic "ethnicity" question and the introduction of a multiracial identifier labeled "mark one or more" in 2000, there is no single correct representation of the proportion of African Americans in the nonwhite population. The lower bound is 48.5 percent (where the population count for African Americans excludes black Hispanics and excludes individuals who mark "African American" in combination with another racial category); the upper bound is 52.1 percent (where the population of African Americans includes both excluded groups); a middle-ground estimate is 49.5 percent (where the population of African Americans includes black Hispanics but excludes individuals who are black in combination with another racial category).

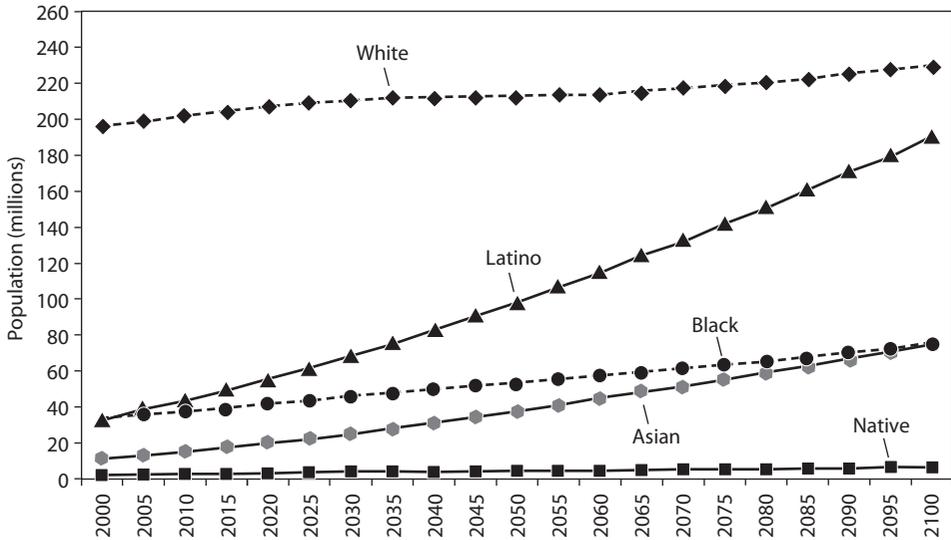


Figure 1.3. Census population projections, 2000–2100

jority in the nation. America, in short, will become a “majority-minority,” a composition that already describes the populations of New Mexico, Hawaii, and California, as well as three of the four most populous cities in the nation—New York, Los Angeles, and Houston. These wide-reaching changes tell us emphatically that a clear understanding of politics in America increasingly requires a better understanding of the attitudes, attachments, and actions of racial and ethnic minorities.

#### THE CENTRALITY OF PARTISAN ATTACHMENTS

In this book we endeavor to explain how America’s growing diversity finds its way into the nation’s partisan politics. How does the American body politic—taken as a racially and ethnically heterogeneous corpus—choose to align itself with a particular party or, as is all too often the case, fail to so align? These questions are worth asking because an individual’s relationship to parties, commonly referred to by the terms “partisanship” and “party identification,” is one of the most elemental features of American political life.

For better or for worse, the American people have hung their most deeply held political convictions and sentiments, anxieties and aspirations, with a political party for about as long as they have existed. Martin van Buren, founder of the first political machine in New York and princi-

pal architect of the first national political party (the Jacksonian Democrats), writes of “an unbroken succession. . . . Neither the influences of marriage connections, nor of sectarian prejudices, nor any of the strong motives which often determine the ordinary actions of men, have . . . been sufficient to override the bias of party organization and sympathy, devotion to which has, on both sides, as a rule, been a master-passion of their members” (Martin van Buren 1867, 7). Today, our understanding of this “master-passion” has come principally to rest on one point: the concept of party identification. Virtually every published work in political science on public opinion, voting behavior, and political participation using survey data includes some version of the party-identification scale. As Alan Gerber and Donald Green put it, “In the field of public opinion and electoral behavior, no explanatory variable is more pervasive than party identification” (Gerber and Green 1998, 794). Given this seeming ubiquity, it is also not very surprising to find that “the psychological attachment of individuals to one or the other of the major parties . . . reveals more about their political attitudes and behaviors than any other single opinion” (Keefe and Hetherington 2003, 169).

As we shall describe in more detail in chapter 2, the reasons that party identification is so central to the way Americans think and act on politics are clear. Partisan habits are something that Americans are born into, starting with the partisanship of their parents and sustained through pre-adult and early adult socialization (Campbell et al. 1960). For adults, it is a psychological attachment that serves as a critical means of navigating a political information environment that is often saturated with complex details and hortatory messages (Fiorina 1981, Popkin 1991). Voters can do without encyclopedic knowledge about each candidate’s issue positions and can navigate strategic communications by simply knowing which party and politicians they trust (and which they do not) and then using partisan cues to figure out “who is for what” (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). In effect, in the United States, “Democrat,” “Republican,” and “Independent” are the defining identities in the political realm (Green et al. 2002).

## GROWING DOUBTS ABOUT THE PARTIES OF TODAY

Two recent developments have, however, left some doubt about the ongoing effectiveness of parties in engaging different segments of the public. One potentially important limitation of the American party system is that it has remained remarkably stable in the face of the nation’s rapidly diversifying electorate. Party politics, of course, has not remained the same in the last few decades. Parties today are more national and candidate-

centered in their focus, and there has also been a growing ideological polarization between elites in the Democratic and Republican parties (Wattenberg 1996; Aldrich 1995; Hetherington 2001; Green and Herrnsen 2002; McCarty et al. 2006).<sup>7</sup> Yet at the same time, at the most basic level of the number of firms in a competitive market for party organizations, the total has remained constant at two for a remarkably long period of time. Since the onset of the post-1965 wave of immigration, there have been only nominal third-party challenges, such as George Wallace's American Independent Party in 1968 and H. Ross Perot's United We Stand and Reform parties in 1992 and 1996. As one recent comparative study of party systems in the United States, Great Britain, and India notes, "Since the early twentieth century, the United States has displayed a pattern of virtually complete two-partism—that is, two national parties compete and win seats in every major region in the nation" (Chibber and Kollman 2004).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, while the polity has grown increasingly diverse and complex, the marketplace of political ideas, ideologies, and institutions in America remains a partisan duopoly. The period prior to the civil rights movement and the Immigration Act of 1965—characterized by highly restrictionist immigration laws and highly segregationist social mores and political rights—perhaps represents the kind of stable equilibrium under which a partisan duopoly might capably canvass and coalesce the interests of the polity and serve as institutional intermediaries between the public and government. Our current era, however, begs key questions about how well Americans fit into and are represented by the party system. How can only two major parties speak to an American electorate characterized by a dizzying array of experiences, motivations, and worldviews? How well do the two parties succeed at attracting those who are in various aspects "different"? Where do Americans whose interests, identities, and ideological beliefs are not recognized and represented by the two major parties go?

The other development that has led some to question the current relevance of parties is the seeming reluctance or inability of the Democratic and Republican parties to mobilize America's newcomers. The classic view of political parties is of institutional umbrellas that capture and consolidate a diverse coalition of interests (see, e.g., Key 1964, Sorauf 1964, Eldersveld 1964; cf. Aldrich 1995). In this classic view, parties are the pivotal organizational brokers between ordinary individuals in civil

<sup>7</sup>There is an open debate as to whether this elite-level polarization has been accompanied by a similar polarization in the mass public (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Fiorina et al. 2005; Ansolabehere et al. 2006).

<sup>8</sup>See also Rosenstone, Behr, and Lazarus (1984), Gillespie (1993), Sifry (2003), Hirano and Synder (2007).

society and government. Thus, scholars write that “political parties created democracy” (Schattschneider 1942, 1) and that “political parties lie at the heart of American politics” (Aldrich 1995, 3). And as goes the ability of parties to accommodate the diversity of interests, identities, and ideological beliefs of ordinary Americans, so does America’s aspiration for a vigorous pluralist democracy.

Viewed through the focal lens we wear in this book—race and immigration—parties are the key institutional mechanisms for leveling the political playing field because they “enable the many to pool their resources to offset the advantages of the few” (Dahl 1961a, 245). Certainly, we hold dear cherished notions of the traditional role that parties played as a portal to civic engagement and the democratic inclusion of strangers to America’s shores. By these mythologized accounts, machine ward bosses met immigrants at the docks, secured for them hearth and home, and shepherded them through the trials and tribulations of acquiring citizenship (Dahl 1961a, Wolfinger 1965). Such a view, of course, overstates the fervor of old-style parties to actively incorporate the entire range of immigrant Americans. More recent scholarship suggests that the willingness of parties to incorporate new citizens was not equal across all immigrant groups (Ignatiev 1995, Jacobson 1998), all historical contexts (Mayhew 1986), or all electoral circumstances (Erie 1990). The important point, however, is that local parties more often than not incorporated immigrants out of political expediency and necessity, not out of a sense of party responsibility or civic duty.

The warrants of expediency and need in electoral competition hold today as well, as political parties are pushed to target minorities and immigrant communities in campaigns. Campaign spending on Spanish-language advertisements, for example, has grown dramatically. Between 2000 and 2008, spending on Spanish-language ads in the presidential campaigns increased from \$3 million to close to \$50 million (Segal 2006, Shoer 2008). More and more candidates are using Spanish in their speeches and creating Spanish-language Web sites. Barack Obama—taking a page from President Lyndon Johnson’s famous co-optation of the civil rights movement’s rallying cry “We shall overcome”—used, as a core theme of his campaign, the motto of the United Farm Workers and the rallying cry of the spring 2006 immigrant protest marches: “¡Sí se puede!” (Yes we can!). To foray from the sublime to the ridiculous in this regard, our current political era is one in which former president Bill Clinton touts Toni Morrison’s declaration that Clinton is the first “black President” in U.S. history and in which another former president, George W. Bush, touts his own place in history as the first and only bilingual (English and Spanish) president of the United States. Credible or credulous, these white politicians claim credit and electoral capital for their ability to “authentically” represent the interests of minority electorates.

Yet the brunt of the evidence from carefully considered scholarship finds that parties no longer function as the institutional keys to democratic inclusion for racial minorities and immigrant-based electorates. For immigrants, the balance of the scholarship on how today's political parties compare with those of yesteryear finds for the most part that today's parties lack the organizational capacity, the political incentives, the cultural literacy, and perhaps even the democratic resolve to guide new immigrants into the political process and secure their loyalties to a particular party (see, e.g., Jones-Correa 1998; Gerstle and Mollenkopf 2001; Ramírez 2002; Wong 2006). Similarly, while the origins of our party system can be attributed in no small measure to the need to create an institutional form that would subsume factional and regional conflicts (Aldrich 1995; read here: the "peculiar" institution of slavery), it has become all too easy for both political parties to ignore the interests and hopes of an "electorally captured" group such as African Americans and relegate issues of race to the periphery of their partisan policy agenda (see, e.g., Walton 1972; Walters 1988; Frymer 1999). Simply in terms of the number of partisan contacts, there is clear evidence that the parties are much less active in trying to mobilize voters today than they were in earlier periods—and even more so when these voters are racial and ethnic minorities (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Ramírez and Wong 2006).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, in the most prominent recent instance in which immigrants were politically engaged and mobilized—the protest marches that occurred across the nation from late March to early May 2006 and rallied somewhere between 3.6 million to over 5 million individuals (Bada, Fox, and Selee 2006)—both Democratic and Republican party elites, far from being at the vanguard, were clearly caught off guard. Thus, in the end, neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party has been so eager as to alter its core agenda and its party platform to actively recruit new electorates—at least, those segments of the electorate defined by race, ethnicity, and immigration.

#### CONCERNS ABOUT INCORPORATION AND REPRESENTATION

This apparent lack of effort on the part of America's partisan duopoly to engage the nation's increasingly diverse electorate raises real concerns about the political incorporation and meaningful representation of different minority communities. We have already seen that the majority of

<sup>9</sup> It is, however, important to note that even today the two major parties are the primary gateway through which Americans are mobilized to act in the political arena (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Parties may be much less active in voter mobilization than they were in the past, but they still constitute a potentially critical actor in any expansion of the mobilization process.

the Latino and Asian American population and large numbers of African Americans claim to have no allegiance to either of America's major parties. We have also revealed that the plurality of both immigrant-based communities (38 percent of Latinos and 36 percent of Asian Americans) are nonidentifiers who are not even willing to place themselves at any point along the partisan spectrum and instead proffer responses such as "not sure" or "no preference."<sup>10</sup> If parties are the main institutional force driving the political incorporation of the minority community, the widespread disconnect with today's parties implies that America's newcomers and its other minorities could be falling through the cracks.

One of the putative results of this underwhelming partisan presence in the everyday lives of America's minorities is equally disappointing rates of political participation. According to the 2004 American Community Survey, only 28 percent of Latino adults and 30 percent of Asian American adults vote. That pales in comparison with the 66 percent participation rate among whites. African Americans fall somewhere in the middle, at a participation rate of 56 percent. Much of the gap is due to a lack of citizenship among a large portion of the minority population. But even among citizens, there are clear disparities in political participation. Voter registration rates, for example, even when confined to the citizen population, reveal substantial racial inequities. Fully 75 of white adult citizens are registered. That compares with a rate of only 52 percent among Asian Americans, 58 percent among Latinos, and 69 percent among African Americans. On almost every measurable aspect of political incorporation, racial minorities trail the white majority.

This underparticipation is also reflected in gross underrepresentation among the nation's elected officials. Despite the nation's vast demographic transformation, the political leadership of the United States remains overwhelmingly white. Although the national population is now roughly 13 percent African American, blacks hold only 1.8 percent of all elected offices nationwide (JCPS 2003). Latinos are even worse off, occupying less than 1 percent of the nation's elected offices, even though they account for 15 percent of the nation's population (or 8 percent of all

<sup>10</sup>Uncertainty about the value of the two parties is not only evident in basic measures of party identification. Among Latinos, surveys also regularly reveal a prevalent sense that neither party is a clear advocate for Latino group interests. In the 2006 Latino National Politics Survey, for example, only 1 percent of Latino respondents agreed that political parties in America look out for their concerns. As one recent report on the Latino population indicated: "If anything, the survey shows that a growing number of Latinos are dissatisfied with both of the major parties" (Suro and Escobar 2006). African Americans too express this sense of political marginality. About a quarter of all African Americans, according to our analysis of recent surveys, believe that neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party works hard for black interests, and some 38 percent favor the creation of a black political party (data from the National Black Election Studies of 1996, 1992, and 1984).

adult citizens) (NALEO 2008). And Asian Americans hold a negligible fraction of all offices, despite representing about 4 percent of the national population (or 3 percent of adult citizens) (APALC 2007). The consequences of all of this could be severe. Inequities in all aspects of political incorporation are more than likely to be associated with imbalances in democratic responsiveness. American democracy may speak more to the interests of the established white majority than to the concerns of the growing and increasingly diverse minority population.

## OUR PROJECT

Fostering greater partisan mobilization and stronger ties to the two parties is not going to solve all of the problems of inequality in American democracy, but it could be an important first step. Thus, our primary goal in addressing these disparities is to develop a more comprehensive theory of partisan choice, one that identifies and highlights the general reasons why such a large group of Americans remains largely unattached to the two major parties. By offering a partisan model that explicitly considers and incorporates the diverse range of people and perspectives found in America today, we hope to provide both parties and other interested observers with the means and the motivation to more fully incorporate this currently unaligned and often unengaged population.

## EXISTING THEORIES

How then do people choose parties? As we shall see in the ensuing chapter, two accounts currently dominate our understanding of party identification. The first is a social-psychological view developed in the 1940s and 1950s by Angus Campbell and his colleagues at the University of Michigan. This Michigan School of thought, as we refer to it in this book, posits that party identification is a strong psychological attachment that is developed early in life and is either inherited from one's parents or absorbed in other arenas of preadult socialization (see, e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Beck and Jennings 1991; Niemi and Jennings 1991). Much like our religion and religiosity, our attachments to a party and the party system are something we grow up with. The key implications of this account, in its classical rendition in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960), are that partisanship is very stable over time; partisanship better predicts vote choice than one's positions on issues or one's views of the candidates running for office; partisanship is an expressive act and "extensions of the self" (Miller and Shanks 1996, 122); and partisanship is

the “unmoved mover” that puts an indelible imprint on one’s political attitudes and actions.

The main alternative to this Michigan School of thought is what we call the Downsian school of thought, following its lineal descent from Anthony Downs’s *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957). This more economic account views party identification as a rational choice defined by information, instrumental reasoning, and self-understood interests (see, e.g., Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Achen 1992, 2001; Erikson et al. 2002). In contrast to the Michigan model, here not only do issues and candidates matter, but the stability of partisanship varies as a function of where voters and candidates stand on the issues. The first clear elaboration of this Downsian model is most often attributed to Morris Fiorina’s view of party identification as “a running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance” (1981, 84), with more recent elaborations giving formal representation to this retrospective process through Bayesian learning models (Achen 1992, 2001; Green and Gerber 1998; Grynaviski 2006). Importantly, the self-understood interests that underlie this Downsian choice are typically viewed as fitting a continuum of political preference orderings—from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. In the hurly-burly of American politics, self-proclaimed liberals, more often than not, identify as Democrats, self-proclaimed conservatives ally with the Republican Party, and those with more middle-of-the-road views tend to end up as Independents.

We review both the Michigan and the Downsian model of party identification in greater, gorier detail in chapters 2 and 3. There, our focus is on how well both accounts explain nonpartisanship and the varying patterns of partisanship (and nonpartisanship) by race/ethnic group. Here our chief aim is a more general synthetic introduction. As one scholar of parties describes the difference between these two accounts, the individual under the Michigan model is “more of a *rationalizing* voter than a rational one” (Wattenberg 1996, 13). One is thus a story of psychological foundations; the other is a story in which one’s political “master-passion” is, at least in principle, constantly open to revision and updating.

Despite these major differences, both accounts share an approach to measurement. In both cases, partisanship is typically measured as a simple, linear scale, with Democrats and Republicans on the poles and Independents or nonpartisans placed squarely in the middle. The Downsian and Michigan accounts of partisan choices and this linear model of partisanship have proven to be remarkably resistant to modification. Despite a range of conceptual critiques and a host of measurement issues that we outline later in the book, virtually every work that uses or studies partisanship in America utilizes this linear scale and employs one or both of these theoretical perspectives. This basic linear scale, in particular, re-

mains almost universal in its use and dominant in its sway over how we believe Americans think and act in the political sphere.

Our own view is not that these traditional theoretical accounts or the standard linear measurement models of party identification are wrong. In highlighting the fact that the political views and orientations of a growing number of Americans do not fit comfortably with the fixed choice of identifying as a Democrat or a Republican, we do not seek to refute the reality that a lion's share of Americans continue to hold unrelenting attachments to the Democratic and Republican parties. These attachments remain the single best predictor of whether one votes, how one votes, and what political preferences underlie one's vote choice. Furthermore, the evidence is quite clear that most Americans can quite capably place themselves along the linear partisan scale highlighted in so many studies of American political behavior. In short, existing theories and measurement approaches tell us a lot about how Americans choose parties.

#### LIMITATIONS TO EXISTING THEORIES

At the same time, however, these theories and approaches do not tell us everything. A number of concerns and criticisms have been raised against these conventional accounts, which we review and discuss in some detail in the coming chapters. For the present, we note that one issue that has not drawn much attention is the relative absence of any consideration of race or immigration in the general literature on political parties and party identification. Paul Frymer, one of the few exceptions to this general rule, observes that the ability of parties to successfully include and incorporate a diversity of groups and interests is typically taken as a presumption, rather than as a topic worthy of empirical scrutiny; he notes that "scholars of African American politics make dramatically different arguments about the two-party system's impact for democratic inclusion, emphasizing its limits and exclusionary nature" (2005, 122). Many studies simply drop respondents of color from the analysis, and thus general accounts incorporate little of our understanding of how race works in America or how the immigrant experience differentiates segments of the population. This absence is understandable, given that accounts were by and large developed when America was a much less diverse place than it is today. In the mid-twentieth-century milieu out of which the study of party identification was born—a time when 90 percent of the U.S. population was white and all but a tiny fraction was native-born—ignoring or relegating to a footnote the centrality of race and the immigrant experience may have seemed analytically expedient. In today's politics, we ignore race and immigration at our peril.

We are, of course, not the first scholars to observe that the world around us has become more diverse. More recent scholarship has, accordingly, begun to try to rectify this omission. There is a welter of recent works that have focused specifically on the political choices of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos and on the political incorporation of immigrants, expanding our understanding of each individual group. This literature has also been extremely important in shifting the focus of attention away from the white majority and in beginning to identify the ways in which minorities and immigrants might be different.

Nevertheless, in our view, our understanding of the relationship between race, immigration, and partisanship remains incomplete. With a few exceptions, studies of party identification in communities of color simply reapply some version of the Michigan or Downsian model to these new groups. In so doing, such works assume that the influence of information uncertainty, a liberal-conservative ideology, and one's racial/ethnic identity is no different for Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans from what it is for whites. The converse of this last point is also a limitation of much of the existing work: most studies focus on explaining the party identification of a single group, albeit a panethnic group in the case of Latinos and Asian Americans. In so doing, they neglect to compare the underlying basis of party identification both *across* groups and *within* groups. Thus, we are left with a series of ethnically separate literatures that focus on the peculiarities of each group in isolation.

#### ALTERNATE PATHWAYS TO (NON)PARTISANSHIP: INFORMATION, IDEOLOGY, AND IDENTITY

This book thus offers an account of race and partisanship that unifies and expands upon these multiple, ethnic-specific literatures. But are racial and ethnic minorities really different? And do any of these differences alter the ways in which individuals choose parties? The nub of our story is that the partisan choices of all racial and ethnic groups share three key factors—the primary social *identities* and the *ideological* commitments that individuals bring and the *information* environments that individuals negotiate in deciding whether to affiliate with a party and which party to affiliate with—but that the particular ways in which information, ideology, and identity matter to our partisan choices varies across racial/ethnic groups. Our proposed framework of information, ideology, and identity is less an attempt to challenge and replace the existing Downsian and Michigan schools of thought than an effort to synthesize and adapt both frameworks to build a coherent and comparative explanation of party

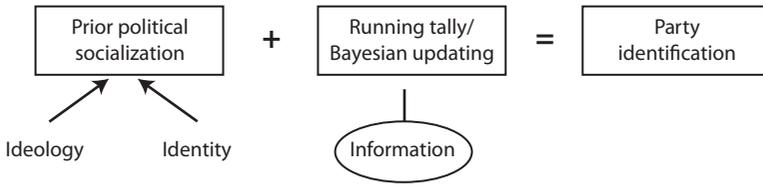


Figure 1.4. Identity, ideology, information, and party identification

identification among whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. In doing this, we hope to complement existing accounts with key alternate dimensions of partisan choice that engage and address some of the aforementioned limitations of conventional theories of party identification.

Figure 1.4 schematically presents one synthesized representation of how the Michigan and Downsian schools of thought fit with one another and with the role of information, ideology, and identity that we propound in this book. We follow Achen's effort to synthesize insights from both models by distinguishing "long-term party identification" from shorter-term factors (1992, 2001). Long-term considerations (e.g., one's prior political socialization or one's central political predispositions) are both logically and, based on the weight of the evidence, empirically prior to shorter-term considerations (e.g., one's "running tally" of retrospective evaluations or Bayesian learning). This distinction also parallels political science's prevailing view of the nature of public opinion, John Zaller and Stanley Feldman's "receive-accept-sample" model, in which opinion is an averaging function of short-term "top-of-the-head" considerations that are defined by one's level of political awareness and longer-term "core political predispositions" such as ideology, partisanship, and, we submit, race (see Zaller and Feldman 1992, Zaller 1992; on race as a core predisposition, see Lee 2002).

Both short-term and long-term factors contribute to one's partisanship, with the crux of the dispute between the Michigan and Downsian schools being which is foreground and which is background. To this core set of relationships, we layer in our emphasis on ideology, identity, and information as variants on long-term and short-term influences. As we discuss later, we expect ideology and identity to be longer-term influences on partisanship because prior political socialization is not always equal across publics defined by race/ethnicity and immigrant status. Similarly, while retrospective and Bayesian evaluations are information-based accounts of short(er)-term influences on partisanship, we argue for a more complex consideration of the role of information in which not all observations or messages are equally transmitted or similarly influential on

one's partisan evaluations and partisanship across publics defined by race/ethnicity and immigrant status.

### *Information*

Our argument for adapting and refining our specification of the long-term and short-term influences on (non)partisanship across the contexts of race and immigration begins with the easy and readily apparent insight that not all newcomers to the United States arrive with fully formed and well-aculturated views on politics. Sociologists (and some historians and political scientists) debate whether the process of coming to terms with a new society (and, by corollary, its social, economic, and political institutions) follows a linear, sequential process of assimilation (Gordon 1964, Alba and Nee 2003), results from forming a sense of racial identity and disadvantage (Glazer and Moynihan 1963), or develops in an uneven, segmented trajectory, where some groups are seamlessly integrated into the main lines of American life and other groups find those main lines only selectively open to them or blocked altogether (Portes and Zhou 1993). Yet by all accounts, immigrants do not come fully versant in politics, American-style.

The point about incomplete socialization and unequal information environments does not apply only to first-generation immigrants. The offspring of immigrants often continue to reside in ethnic enclaves, retain the language of their parents, rely principally on ethnic media for their political information, and otherwise face continued hardship and barriers to full inclusion that leave them socially isolated. Similarly, the everyday lives and information environments of many African Americans continue to be isolated by forces within and external to the community—from a “counterpublic” sphere of “barbershops, bibles, and BET,” to borrow from a recent title (Harris-Lacewell 2004; see also Dawson 2001), to the persistent hypersegregation of residential neighborhoods, the resegregation of public schools, the disproportionate sequestering of African American men in prisons, detention centers, and other penal institutions, and so on (Wilson 1987, Massey and Denton 1993, Boger and Orfield 2005, J. Miller 1996).

Such circumstances have, we argue, important consequences for one's politics and one's relationship to political parties. The choice not to identify with either of the two major parties, for instance, may not be the result of a lack of interest in politics or a sense of political alienation. Rather, under conditions of uncertainty and low information about the party system and each party individually, nonpartisanship may simply be a rationally adaptive strategy. Instead of choosing between two parties that one may be unfamiliar with or express allegiance to a party that one

does not yet trust, a more reasoned option is to opt out altogether by professing nonpartisanship.

### *Ideology*

Another readily identifiable feature of both the immigrant and racial minority communities pertinent to party identification is that attention to the liberal-conservative ideological dimension that divides the two parties and that purportedly drives partisanship is decidedly uneven. Immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities are certainly not immune to a single-minded focus on the core debates that separate Democrats from Republicans. At the same time, however, they are especially likely to have concerns that are peripheral to the national partisan discussion. For immigrants, prolonged exposure to and prior socialization in a range of different political belief systems—from communist or former communist societies such as Cuba, Russia, and Vietnam to authoritarian or former authoritarian states like Peru, Pakistan, and Nigeria to mature democracies such as India, South Korea, and Costa Rica—should bring alternate issue concerns and ideological commitments to the fore. In particular, these alternate ideological orientations that immigrants bring may cut orthogonally to the liberal-to-conservative continuum that separates the two parties. For racial and ethnic groups, there are group-specific ideologies—like the nation-building ideologies of *mestizaje* among Latinos (Anzaldúa 1987) or the multiple ideological traditions in the history of African American political thought (McCartney 1991, Dawson 2001).

The consequence, once again, is diminished attachment to both parties. For any individual, the less that her core issue concerns are addressed by the parties and the more orthogonal her ideological predispositions are to the liberal-conservative scale that divides the two parties, the greater the ambiguity that partisan choices are likely to present. Latino immigrants, for example, who wish to see more open borders may have no clearly attractive partisan option. Similarly, the 40 percent of the African American population that favors black separatist institutions may see no point in declaring allegiance to white-dominated institutions such as the Democratic and Republican parties. With little motivation for choosing either party, many of these individuals will remain nonpartisan or Independent. Once again, nonpartisanship becomes a rationally adaptive strategy for those who do not “fit.”

The potential orthogonality of ideological views is not the only way we expect our existing views of party identification to be complicated vis-à-vis ideology. For most Americans, the typical spectrum of ideology from very liberal to very conservative views is sufficiently capacious to capture both their individual orientation and their perceptions of where political

parties and their candidates stand. Some, however, may have intensely held nonnegotiable positions on issues that the two major parties and their candidates either choose to avoid taking positions on if possible (e.g., Puerto Rican statehood, environmental rights, reparations for descendants of slaves forcibly brought from Africa) or choose positions that are so ambiguous and similar to the other party/candidate that for someone with intense preferences on the matter, the two parties look no different. Others may hold crosscutting ideological views (i.e., conservative on social/moral issues but a liberal on economic policy) that make it difficult for them to comfortably ally with a major party. By mapping partisanship on a linear scale with Democrats on the liberal Left, Republicans on the conservative Right, and nonpartisans in the moderate middle, we are, in fact, presuming that the standard set of liberal-conservative ideological concerns is the only kind of ideological predisposition that matters to one's partisan identification.

### *Identity*

A final insight that is visible through the twin lenses of race and immigration is that one's primary political identity is often intimately linked to one's primary social group identity. Here there is a spectrum across racial and ethnic groups in America in the salience of identities and their significance for defining a group politics. At one end of the spectrum are African Americans, for whom blackness is so distinct and defining an identity that for many African Americans, a "black utility heuristic" (where an African American divines what is in her best interest by first considering what is in the best interest of African Americans as a group) governs one's political calculus (Dawson 1994). At the other end of the spectrum are whites, for whom whiteness is a taken-for-granted privilege that is perceived to be synonymous with "free" and "independent" and invisible as an identity to whites themselves (Roediger 1991, Feagin and Vera 1995, Lipsitz 1998). Between these antipodes are immigrant-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans, who vary in their paths toward assimilation and in their patterns of racialization (compare, e.g., Telles and Ortiz 2008; Jiménez 2008). Even for Latinos and Asian Americans—groups that are notable for the juxtaposition and paradox of externally perceived homogeneity and internally experienced heterogeneity as panethnic groups—racial and ethnic identity can be a script that, when activated, powerfully motivated their political engagement and partisanship (Padilla 1984; Lopez and Espiritu 1990; Espiritu 1992; Pantoja et al. 2001; Barreto 2007).

Racial/ethnic group identity thus represents a third key dimension in partisan choice. For some members of these communities of color, group

identity will replace liberal-conservative ideology as the core dimension of their political calculus. If the major political parties downplay their appeals to racial/ethnic minority groups or present appeals that run counter to the perceived interests of such groups, then a group-based political calculus may push one toward nonpartisanship rather than identification with a major party. The key is how neatly a group identity coexists with the political identity of Democratic or Republican partisanship. For all groups and individuals, the more their primary group identity matters and the less one of the two parties is clearly aligned with that identity, the greater the tendency to identify as Independent or nonpartisan.

These three dimensions—information uncertainty, ideological heterogeneity, and identity formation—form the foundation stones of our account of party identification. Importantly, all three dimensions have similar implications for partisan choices. In each case, immigrants, racial minorities, and whites with distinct ideological profiles will be motivated to remain neutral between the two major parties. When the choices the Democratic and Republican parties present to the American public do not match our available stock of political knowledge (information), our deeply held political beliefs (ideology), or how we think of ourselves (identity), nonpartisanship becomes a rationally adaptive strategy.

## THE STRUCTURE OF PARTISAN CHOICE

This elaboration of three alternative pathways to partisanship and nonpartisanship has a perhaps even more important implication. The fact that multiple, orthogonal dimensions affect party choice implies that partisan choices at the beginning of the twenty-first century may no longer be so neatly ordered along a single dimension with Democrats on the left, Republicans on the right, and Independents in the middle. Diversity may affect not only the degree of attachment to the parties but also how many Americans think about parties in the first place. Many Americans whom scholars might place in the middle of a party-identification continuum from strong Republicans to strong Democrats may have political commitments and hold views that are far from middling. The wide-ranging motivations that we identified in these pages imply that nonpartisans will be a heterogeneous group with potentially extreme views along some ideological dimension, deep concerns on issues not raised by the two parties, or strong identities that are poorly served by either party. In effect, many nonpartisans may be far removed from our traditional impressions of Independents, namely ideologically middle-of-the-road, apathetic, alienated, or otherwise apolitical.

## DIVERSITY, BROKEN DOWN

In the main empirical body of this book, we offer support for our empirical account of partisanship by focusing on three distinct sets of Americans: (1) African Americans, (2) Latinos and Asian Americans, two key immigrant-based groups, and (3) white Americans. This grouping of the U.S. population will strike some as excessively reductionist, flattening the rich diversity within each subpopulation. Others will object that focusing the looking glass in this way reifies groups and falls prey to a “groupist” logic that assumes these subpopulations are fundamental social units of analysis. Still others will add to this groupist objection the further protestation that there is only a single model of political reasoning and human psychology, not multiple models for each arbitrarily defined, historically contingent group.

We are quite sympathetic to each of these concerns and have written about them elsewhere (Lee 2008). In the present case, our choice of grouping the U.S. population in this way is analytically motivated. Specifically, our central claims are that (a) partisanship is defined by one’s information, ideology, and identity and that (b) these three factors interact in distinct ways for African Americans, immigration-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans, and white Americans. To put it one way, the modal nonpartisan in each of these groups arrives at her nonpartisanship via a distinct trajectory, which we summarize below. For the present, while the following pages will liberally refer to racial and ethnic groups in global and homogenizing terms, the analyses and interpretations should be read with the complexity of actual group experiences and opinions in mind. Where possible and where warranted by theoretical imperatives, we endeavor to bring a finer level of granularity to our discussion of each aggregate group.

We begin with African Americans, who, we argue, represent the archetype of a subpopulation for whom racial group identity plays a central, defining role in shaping partisan choice. If party identification is shaped by racial identity for any group, we should find it within the African American community. The long history and continued presence of racial domination and antiblack discrimination in the United States too should be a factor in bringing nonliberal/conservative ideological orientation and nonmainstream issue concerns to the fore for African Americans. In particular, adherence to black nationalism and its variants has deep roots in the African American community, and we find evidence that this specific ideological orientation has consequences for African American nonpartisanship.

Our next grouping, Latinos and Asian Americans, represents new and growing entrants to a political system. As a consequence of their recency and dynamism, these groups offer an opportunity to critically examine how partisanship is acquired when preadult political socialization into the American two-party system cannot be assumed. Here there are two key dimensions to partisanship acquisition: (1) what newcomers to the United States bring with them in terms of political information, ideology, identity, experiences, and the like; and (2) what newcomers learn about political and social relations upon coming to the United States. Thus we are both interested in knowing whether newcomers' prior socialization and continued ties to their home country shape patterns of (non)partisanship and whether and how they learn and navigate the terrain of politics and race in the United States. Underlying these dimensions, furthermore, is the central question of how immigrants adapt and become incorporated into a new political society. To the extent that our party system is fully inclusive, we might expect to find evidence of a classic process of assimilation, where Latinos and Asian Americans are more likely to be partisans the longer they are rooted in the United States and more likely to identify with a party based on their left-right ideological commitments and their parents' partisan habits. If, on the other hand, the party system is less than fully open to the interests and demands of Latinos and Asian Americans, we might find a more ethnically particularistic or segmented account of partisanship.

We end our analysis of groups with white Americans. Whites are typically, in the language of the social sciences, taken to be the "null group" against which other groups are compared. Here we want to know if the lessons that we have learned from considering race and immigration seriously shed any light on the partisan dynamics of the majority white population. We believe, as W.E.B. DuBois noted long ago, that by studying groups such as African Americans who have been marginalized by the larger society, we learn not only about the marginalized group but also about the interests and actions of a larger community that has actively sought to keep minorities on the outside. As we noted earlier, we expect a more capacious view of ideology and interests to generate some new insights into white nonpartisanship. Beyond scholarly treatises that exhort us to examine multiple ideological traditions (e.g., Hochschild 1981, Smith 1993), we can simply look on the ground to find a diverse range of issues (globalization, urban sprawl, environmentalism, women's rights, perhaps even immigration) that are central to the political worldview of many whites but that are not yet well represented by either major party. Moreover, in the post-civil rights era, the ideological beliefs of a growing proportion of whites put them at the crosshairs of traditional New Deal

partisan cleavages—for example, economically liberal but racially conservative, advocates of full civil liberties but also weak, minimal government to protect those liberties, and so on.

#### A FEW WORDS ON TERMINOLOGY

In the ensuing chapter, we give some thought to the proposition that to understand a theory we must first understand the conditions in which that theory originated. So we endeavor to situate the ontology of the concept of party identification in currents of political science as a discipline in the middle of the twentieth century. Here we give a moment to another important proposition: namely that irrespective of the conditions in which a theory originated, we must at least understand the words that are being used. Giovanni Sartori once observed that “as we are . . . prisoners of the words we pick, we had better pick them well” (1984, 60; quoted in Gerring 1999, 357). We use many words in this book and hope to be clear about why we pick them and how we use them. In particular, there are two clusters of terms that we use repeatedly and that require mention.

First are terms used to describe the relationship that ordinary individuals have or fail to have to a political party or to our party system. In most of the scholarship we have encountered on parties (and, importantly, in everyday use), the terms “party identification” and “partisanship” are used interchangeably (W. E. Miller 1991, Miller and Shanks 1996).<sup>11</sup> Our text mirrors this approach.

Second are categories employed to delineate the options that individuals choose within the realm of party identification. These options are illustrated in figure 1.5. The first major distinction we make along the partisanship scale is between “partisans”—those who profess some allegiance to either of the main parties in American politics—and “nonpartisans”—those who, at least at first blush, claim no ties to either of these partisan institutions. Within the category of nonpartisans, we further distinguish between “Independents” and “nonidentifiers.” The Independents group consists simply of individuals who when asked initially about their partisanship, claim to be Independents or profess allegiance to another party. Nonidentifiers are, by contrast, individuals who claim no place on the partisanship scale. They offer any number of uncommitted responses

<sup>11</sup>We do the same here, noting the exception of no less a scholar of partisanship than Warren Miller, who remained steadfast to the conceptual difference between one’s first-order identification with a party (i.e., simply agreeing to the root question, “Do you usually think of yourself as a Republican [or] a Democrat?”) and the secondary relationship to parties among Independents.

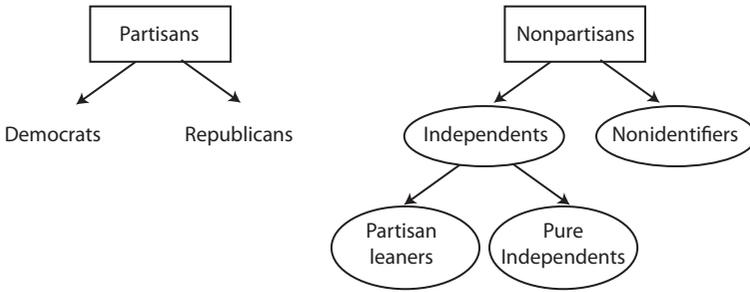


Figure 1.5. Partisanship categories

such as “don’t know,” “none of the above,” “not sure,” or “refuse.” Or they simply protest against the irrelevance or incomprehensibility of the choices (Democrat, Republican, and Independent) before them.

We believe that one of the main contributions of this book is recognizing and attempting to understand this group. Nonidentifiers have typically been viewed as a residual category that has been ignored and deleted from any ensuing academic analysis. Dropping nonidentifiers as “missing data” is, as we will see, often a reasonable approach for whites and African Americans. It is a major omission for Latinos and Asian Americans. We will demonstrate that nonidentifiers are both numerous among the Latino and Asian American populations—making up the plurality of both groups—and readily explicable. Finally, within the category of Independents, like others before us, we also consider the distinction between “Independent leaners,” who when pressed a second time, do admit some sort of leaning or attachment to one of the nation’s two major parties, and “pure Independents,” who refuse to indicate a preference for either party. In line with existing scholarship, we believe that this distinction is important and that there is sometimes a real danger in lumping Independent leaners with other nonpartisans. It is clear, as Keith and his colleagues (1992) have ably demonstrated, that large segments of the “leaning” population are, in fact, closet partisans. However, we also hope to show that the importance of the pure-versus-leaner distinction varies considerably across racial and ethnic groups. Thus, in the analysis that follows, we typically repeat our analysis in two ways. We first show our results with leaners included as nonpartisans but then replicate the analysis with leaners excluded, detailing any notable differences that emerge.

A second cluster of terms that require some choice and clarity at the outset concern the definition of populations by race, ethnicity, and national origin. First, we often use the terms “race” and “ethnicity” inter-

changeably, as well as their hybridized variants, “ethnoracial” and “race/ethnicity.” We recognize, of course, that these terms define inter-related and overlapping, but not equivalent, concepts. The similarities and dissimilarities between these terms have been well covered elsewhere (see, e.g., Omi and Winant 1994; Cornell and Hartman 1998; Hattam 2007). The most widely applied difference between the two terms is that race marks processes of external ascription and internal identification by putatively indelible (often biologically based) traits such as skin color and phenotype. Ethnicity, however, is commonly used to identify the ostensibly nonbiological processes of ascription and identification by traits such as one’s language and dialect, religion, culture, national origin, and the like. Where the terms are employed selectively to distinguish between minority groups in America, we follow a common convention of referring to African Americans as a racial group and to Latinos and Asian Americans as panethnic groups. The latter term denotes the prevailing practice of glomming multiple, heterogeneous ethnic/national origin groups under the umbrella categories of Latino and Asian American.

With the terms used to denote the specific groups we analyze in this book, we too are quite specific. We use “white” to refer, in the first instance, to survey respondents who self-identify with that racial/ethnic category and, more generally, to refer to individuals to whom the category of white is ascribed by virtue of their phenotypic appearance or European descent. Using similar criteria—self-identification in the first instance and general boundary conditions—we use both “black” and “African American” in this book. We favor the use of “Latino” over “Hispanic” for two important reasons: (1) the latter term is sometimes used to describe a language-based identity of all Spanish-speaking people, which would include individuals we do not intend to encompass, such as Americans from Spain and the Philippines; (2) the former term more precisely and exclusively refers to individuals of Latin American origin. In our data analysis (i.e., given the data sets we analyze), “Latino” denotes primarily Americans of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban origin.<sup>12</sup> Finally, we opt for the term “Asian American” rather than its alternatives “Asian Pacific American,” “Asian Pacific Islander American,” and “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” for the very practical reason that none of our data include Pacific Islanders. In our data analysis, “Asian American” denotes primarily Americans of Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese origin.

<sup>12</sup> One other point on terms here is that we follow common convention by using the masculine form of “Latino” (cf. “Latina”) in reference to both sexes of the population of Americans of Latin American origin.

## OUTLINE OF THE REMAINING CHAPTERS

Chapter 2 traces the origins of the study of party identification. We start with the midcentury debate over “responsible” party politics and show how, through the development of the Michigan and Downsian models of partisanship, the study of the “party in the electorate” has come to take a singular form. Today the concept of party identification is viewed in psychological terms and operationalized in almost every instance as a linear scale—measured in opinion surveys—of self-identification from strong Republicans on the far political right to strong Democrats on the far political left and Independents at the midpoint. While there have been ample criticisms of this linear view, they have been largely treated as technical footnotes, rather than concerns at the core of either school of thought on party identification.

In chapter 3 we reinvigorate the force behind these methodological criticisms by considering political Independents anew, through the lens of racial identity and immigrant assimilation. The chapter begins by tracing the historical evolution of Independents in the study of party identification. We theorize nonpartisanship as a multidimensional identity that interacts in important ways with one’s primary social group identities, ideological predispositions, and information constraints. The chapter concludes with our expectations for the distinct pathways toward nonpartisanship for African Americans, whites, and immigrant-based groups such as Asians and Latinos.

We begin our empirical analysis in chapter 4 with the case of African American party identification. While black partisanship is distinctive for the predominant role of a racially defined group calculus, we argue that the link between individual choice, group interests, and the coordination of collective choice in favor of the Democratic Party is neither automatic nor simple. We demonstrate that exit from the Democratic Party occurs under three conditions: when the sense of group identity is attenuated, when commitments to black autonomy are intensified, and when evaluations change as to which party best serves the interests of African Americans.

We continue to test our account of race, immigration, and nonpartisanship in chapters 5 and 6 with an examination of immigration-based groups such as Latinos and Asian Americans. Unlike the archetypal identity-based dynamics of African Americans, the partisan choices of Latinos and Asian Americans are mediated by a more pronounced ambivalence and proliferation of identities that are in formation. We argue that for Latinos and Asian Americans, partisanship should be conceived of and tested as a sequential choice: in the first instance, partisan thinking is either mean-

ingful or irrelevant; in the second step, if partisan thinking has import and pertinence, then one chooses to call oneself a Democrat, a Republican, or an Independent. The first step is one in which uncertainty and ambivalence about politics for immigrants and their offspring are dominant; in the second step, ideological orientation and identity formation become more important to choice. In chapters 5 and 6 we show important commonalities between Latinos and Asian Americans, but perhaps more striking and signal differences.

The strong test of our alternate account of partisan choice is its ability to shed new light on white Americans, the almost exclusive province of previous research. In chapter 7, we show evidence for two as-yet-unconsidered routes to Independence for whites: policy extremism (being so far to the right or left as to be at odds with both parties) and partisan ambivalence (holding irreconcilably conflicting views—e.g., racial conservatism and policy liberalism). In both cases, those who are far from the middle ideologically end up violating the assumptions of a linear model of partisanship by identifying as Independent.

Much of the focus on political Independents in the extant literature centers on whether identifying as a nonpartisan has any bearing on partisan behavior, with the best evidence weighing against the behavioral distinctiveness of Independents. In chapter 8, we argue that the lack of behavioral distinctiveness results less from the irrelevance of Independence as a political alternative and more from the lack of tangible choices in a given election and an unwavering focus on white Independents. In elections where a viable third-party option exists, Independent voters are more than willing to abandon the two major parties. Similarly, measures of a willingness to abandon weak partisan allegiances in favor of the other party, a third party, or nonparticipation vary dramatically across racial and ethnic groups. By better understanding *why* individuals identify as Independents, we argue, we can better understand *when* that nonpartisan identification will lead to nonpartisan behavior.

In the conclusion, we review the book, recasting its theoretical contribution and empirical findings vis-à-vis the history of the scholarly study of parties and their historical role in incorporating racial/ethnic minorities. We also situate our theses and findings within current debates on ideological polarization, identity politics, and the putative decline of parties. We close with some thoughts in the normative and prescriptive realms: what our findings tell us about the vigor of American democracy, viewed through the lens of partisanship and nonpartisanship, and what they suggest for party organizations that wish to bring more otherwise nonpartisan voters into their fold.