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"Shifting Party Ideologies and Values"

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Politics and political ideology are sewn into the fabric of the United States – it affects everyone. For some people, politics provides a job, whether it be with a party or any type of union, and for some people it affects them in more of a background way or acts as a blip in their day to day lives. The focus of this research paper is to analyze and describe how recent shifts in political parties, party values, and party ideologies, have affected the current political climate of America. The main research question that I am looking to answer through my analysis of data is "How have the recent shifts in political party ideology and values effected the current political climate of America?" This paper will emphasize the evolution of party radicalization by observing another notable shift in societal and political values and using it as a comparison to the current shift that I believe is occurring in American values and society.

The analysis of three main research topics regarding the demographics of parties, their historical values/stereotypes and current values/stereotypes, and evolution into sub-parties will be conducted thoroughly through the evaluation of three main research questions that compare current data to data collected during the New Deal era/ time-period surrounding the 1920s and 1930s. The sub-questions that my analysis is based upon are as follows:

1. How have party demographics of the Republican and Democratic parties changed recently as compared to the 1920s/1930s? What do they look like now?

2. How have party values and platforms changed over time?

3. How has the radicalization of ideas within the two major political parties contributed to the split or fracturing of the Democratic and Republican parties? Has this radicalization had ramifications on voter identity or voting behavior for the parties?

Through my research on the topic areas, research questions, and factors previously outlined, I am looking to demonstrate that recent shifts in political party ideology have contributed to a

more polarized political climate and have allowed for further separation between the two prominent parties.

The radicalization of political parties is a prominent topic in American news as of late, following the 2016 Presidential election, however, it is important to establish that this morphing of parties into fractural sub-parties is not a new concept. This paper will use historical data to prove that shifting and morphing of party values into their current states was gradual and an adaption of the parties to a changing political climate.

In looking at the data surround the demographics of the parties, it was apparent that currently, voters who tend to "lean"[1] towards one specific party have similar patterns of voting and political engagement behavior as people who directly identify themselves with that party (Hanson & Chen 2020). Party identification fuels a large portion of our current American political system. By definition, party identification is a presumably long-term attachment of oneself to a political party and the values the party represents (Dalton 2016). While there are certain ways to determine levels of party identification to which subsect a voter may identify as, the most important point I found through my research was that, although voters may be reluctant to label themselves as identifying with a party, those who "lean" towards a specific party or sub-sect of a party are engaging in the same types of political support behavior as those who identify with a party do (Hanson & Chen 2020). This is especially important to note when discussing the demographics of the two major political parties as the demographics of political parties are gathered from data surrounding who voted for a party or candidate in major elections – it is not dependent upon party identification specifically.

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[1] Identify with a party's values and morals but may not directly support the party in voting or donation activity.

Shifts and changes in party demographics help to shape the way political platforms and parties interact. To best analyze the shifts in demographics, this paper will analyze the current demographics regarding age, race, income, and education in conjunction with data collected on voting demographics in the lates 1920s/1930s. The data regarding current party demographics was very straightforward and consistent with reports in mainstream media and news outlets. It was found that in the current climate, people who identify and/or vote for the Democratic party (and any of the sub-parties that fall under the umbrella of "Democrat") are more likely to have obtained a degree through the means of a higher education institution than Republicans (Hanson & Chen 2020). To be more specific, about 36% of Democrats hold a degree from a higher education institution, whereas 28% of Republicans hold a degree from a higher education institution (Hanson & Chen 2020). This data insists that currently Democrats are more highly educated as a whole demographic than that of people who vote for and/or identify with the Republican party.

Despite the data revealing that the Democratic party is more educated on a college level, it also revealed that Democrats, as a demographic group, may have a lower income than that of the Republican party (Hanson & Chen 2020). In comparing the income of the demographic groups of each party, researchers found that approximately 26% of Republicans made above $100,000, and 13% of Republicans made under $25,000 annually (Hanson & Chen 2020). In comparison, 20% of the demographic group associated with the Democratic party had an annual income above $100,000, and approximately 29% had an income of below $25,000 (Hanson & Chen 2020). The data gathered and analyzed regarding income and education demographics point to the assumption that the Republican party may have a lower percentage of their voters

attending higher education institutions yet have a higher percentage of their voters making a higher annual income – the variables in the assumption for the Democratic party are flipped.

The demographics regarding race and ability to pull votes from minority groups was interesting. Researchers report that the data collected concerning race of voters pointed to the Democratic party having a more racially heterogenous demographic than the Republican party (Hanson & Chen 2020). According to information sequestered by researchers, about 46% of voters that voted for and/or identify with the Democratic party identified themselves as members of a racial minority group, whereas only 29% of Republican voters and/or people who identify with the Republican party reported identifying as a member of a minority group (Hanson & Chen 2020). This current demographic data regarding race is very important when discussing the historical and current party value systems of both the Democratic and Republican parties.

In terms of age groups and age's factor in the demographics and value systems of the Republican and Democratic parties that tend to vote or lean towards a specific party – the results gathered by researchers pinpointed two main age sectors for both parties. Researchers concluded that the Democratic party appeared to have the largest pull on the youngest ages and some older aged voters – voters in their 20s (or slightly younger) and voters in their 50-60s all lean heavily as an age group towards the Democratic party (Newport 2014). The Republican party's age demographics look very different as they pull mostly voters in their mid-life range and the oldest category of voters – individuals in their 30s and 40s, and individuals older than 70 tend to identify most with the Republican party (Newport 2014). Overall, however, the Democratic party has a higher number of voters who "lean" towards their party platform/ideology than any other political party.

These current voting demographics are a result of a change that started in the late 1920s, a period that is commonly called the "New Deal Era"[2]. This era is characterized as a boom in political activity and support for the Democratic party. It was the first time ever that the federal government was held fully responsible for the nation's economic welfare - when the great depression hit, people saw it as more of the government's duty to provide for the citizens and create programs that allowed for the welfare of all peoples under the government (Prindle 1979). This era saw a major change in the support for the parties, many new voters and existing voters switched parties to align with the platform of the Democratic party – which reached a peak in the 1940s when the Democratic candidate had the highest percent of the popular vote recorded for the party at that time (Prindle 1979). While the basis of this shift is not fully clear, it is reasonable to assume that a change in voter beliefs and change in demographics of each party lead to the result.

The data studied by Prindle in his essay proves this theory as he cites that the outpouring of older voters in elections and introduction of younger voters into the party system helped to account for some of the major shifts in participation and party support. It is also important to note that the introduction of women voters and the increased participation of African American voters in the 1930s. The introduction and participation of these two groups helped to prolong and facilitate the success of the Democratic party in the 1930s. Before running for President in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was known as an ally to the women's suffrage movement and supported it publicly as apart of his political platform in 1912 (Gardner et al., 2016). This support shown by FDR combined with the economic hardship of the Great Depression led to a greater number of women voting for the Democratic party during the New Deal Era, effectively

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[2] Period around the 1930s in which the federal government created social welfare programs as a response to the Great Depression.

changing the demographics of the party (Gardner et al., 2016). FDR managed to win over a large part of the African American vote for the Democratic party following his election as President of the United States – many of the black American vote prior to FDR's election win was registered to the Republican party (Daniel 2012). However, the addition of FDR's social welfare programs that benefitted black Americans in both city and rural settings shifted a large portion of the black vote from the Republican party to the Democratic party (Daniel 2012). The influx of new voters in the 1930s and the outpouring of mass political participation both played a large part in shaping the two parties and the major elections in the 1930s (Prindle 1979). The inclusion and support from women and black male voters in America in conjunction with a massive exodus of older voters in the 1920s and 1930s helped to create the Democratic party (in terms of demographics) that we see today and ultimately influenced the voter demographics of the current Republican party.

Voter demographics and the inclusion of previously ostracized groups in the political environment was one of many factors that has seemingly influenced the "shift" and splitting of the Democratic and Republican parties. Another main factor in the current shift is the changing party values and ideology of both the Democratic and Republican parties. During the New Deal Era, historians observed a change on a federal government level from a more financially conservative model under the Republican party (and Herbert Hoover) to a model that focused on investment in infrastructure and social welfare programs under the Democratic party (University of Michigan). This radical change in focus from administration to administration during the 1930s signifies that party platform and ideology combined with extenuating circumstances heavily influenced the change in political direction in the United States during this time.

Prior to the stock market crash and the start of the Great Depression, Herbert Hoover held a very strong Republican platform and was increasingly conservative with national spending – this became problematic in 1929 and beyond in his term as President. Hoover's run for reelection in 1932 called for a more balanced national budget, an increase on tariffs, and a repeal of prohibition – there was no stance notated on trade, prosperity, or growth in technology and industry (Hamilton 2017). Moreover, the Republican party model prior to 1929 encouraged voluntary labor unions and trade unions with access to shared materials within their industries – this became highly problematic for the party when they refused to acknowledge a need to use government resources to continue these unions and organizations after the stock market crash (Weed 1989). This form of associationism[3] established by the Republican party in the 1920s had introduced the business sector of the economy to a type of cooperative and strategic planning that forced them away from the Republican party when a crisis time hit in the 1930s (Weed 1989). The inability of the Republican party to update and shift their values to center on the needs of the American voters that identified with the Republican party in the 1930s led to Hoover's (and the Republican party's) eventual loss in the 1932 presidential election.

However, the Democratic party in the early 1930s had undergone various ideological and value changes. Presidential candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt introduced social welfare programs that benefitted many minority groups, some of which included social security, statutory minimum wage, and increased infrastructure spending (Britannica 2020). The Democratic party encouraged the blue-collar workers and businesses by providing public goods that benefitted the individual and collective within society – which was what the Republican party at the time failed to do. The Democratic party re-emerged their platform with FDR citing a focus on economic

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[3] The development and widespread support of voluntary institutions to promote better cooperation within industries.

governmental policies that would allow for the creation of stricter anti-trust laws, substantial

planning for infrastructure work, and the creation of unemployment pensions and other public

goods – the Democratic party under FDR became a party that encompassed "everyone" (Peters

& Woolley). This platform created by FDR led him to be the president with the most terms in

office (four terms) and allowed the Democratic party to stay in power into the 1950s.

The realignment and shift in values of voters due to the Great Depression forced a re-

evaluation of ideology and values of the two major political parties – resulting in an eventual

party shift. A similar type of shift is occurring currently within the Democratic and Republican

parties. Most notably, the current mainstream Republican party has reverted to traditional

southern values and ideological standpoints – the party has reclaimed its role as the "rural party"

(Lewis 2017). The Republican party as we know it now bases its platform upon traditional

Catholic and Christian religious values, fiscal conservatism, and the support of big business –

America saw each of these values present themselves during President Trump's campaign and

eventual presidency (Lewis 2017). President Donald Trump had transcended and formed his own

faction of the Republican party through his disengagement with free trade deals and imposition

of tariffs to move outsourced US Industry back into the United States (Gonyea, 2020). Free trade

and a lack of tariffs to promote a better economy was historically a pivotal aspect of Republican

party's platform before Trump – this platform is no longer a reality as Trump's success in 2016

has successfully molded the Republican party to fit Trump's ideals. Another major ideological

shift from the historical values of the Republican party because of Trump lies in the GOP's

immigration policy.

Under the Bush administration, the Republican party branded themselves as a party that

pressed for immigration reform by stressing the humanity aspect of those crossing the border

illegally – the party effectively nudged the general public into wanting immigration reform by showing voters the humanity and needs behind those coming to America (Gonyea, 2020). Trump, however, capitalized on existing anti-immigrant attitudes and ideals from the far-right spectrum of the Republican party to push for deportation and stricter reforms on immigration – he effectively dehumanized immigrants and spread an attitude that perpetrated fearmongering and mistreatment of many immigrants at the US-Mexico border (Gonyea, 2020). Despite the Republican party's rebranding into a party that accepts (and endorses) candidates who propagate negatively charged ideology, polls still reflect high approval ratings for Trump among many Republicans (Gonyea, 2020). The changes in values, presentation, and priorities for the mainstream Republican party has allowed it to revert into a party whose values align most closely with traditional southern values and the radicalized southern Christian conservatives – some researchers point out that this shift in values may have been rooted in a dire need to gain support from the more rural areas of the nation to promote wider-spread party growth (Fisher 2012).

The Democratic party faced a need for reinvention following the loss of the 2016 election to Republican candidate Donald Trump. The changes in party values and standpoints regarding hot-button issues is increasingly less visible via media sources than that of the Republican party. The Democratic party has shifted increasingly towards a model of the party that emphasizes progressive ideals and inclusion of all people (Kurtzleben, 2021). The evolution of the Democratic party has steered the party towards a focus on social programs and benefits that are funded by the government/ government agencies (Kenworthy 2019). The Democratic party was branded the party for "everyone" during the New Deal and as of 2021, it appears that it is still the

case via the mixed ranges of racial, age, and education demographics that make up the voters of

the Democratic party.

While the shifting in party values is an important factor in how the parties fit after

realignment, the factor that is pivotal to the actual notion of the shift and realignment of the two

major parties in the two-party system relies on one main factor to characterize the entire political

climate of the United States – polarization. Realignment theorists and notable historians have

observed that increased polarization in party ideology and values has been a major contributor to

the shifting and eventual realignment of political parties throughout history (Weed 1989). The

Pew Research Center conducted research of how partisan antipathy and ideological uniformity

effect voters in their everyday lives and found that Republicans and Democrats are more divided

from an ideological standpoint right now than ever before.

Data claims Democratic attitudes about the Republican party and vice versa view the

other major party as a "threat to the nation's wellbeing" – the extremists of the Democratic and

Republican parties seemingly disagree on ideological aspects of the other party on every political

front (Pew Research Center, 2014). In fact, researchers at the Pew Research center have linked

higher amounts of political participation in recent times to increasingly polarized political views

– the more active an individual is in the political sphere, the more extremist or unwilling to see

the other side's point of view one will become. Polarization is becoming an increasingly difficult

problem to deal with as uniformity in ideological beliefs of each respective party has continued

to grow tremendously over the past 20 years - resulting in a more extremist but unified platform

for both sides of the political spectrum (Pew Research Center, 2014). However, the current state

of polarization within the Republican and Democratic parties has forced many people to begin to

loosely identify with a political party or gravitate more towards the middle of the spectrum in

terms of political beliefs – alienating key members of each political party from the heart of the party ideals (Pew Research Center, 2014).

This polarization does not only affect American voters, but also the general public and the autonomy of Congress. The movement towards widespread expression of polarized and extremist beliefs in the American political realm has led to a widening gap between the aisles of the Republican and Democratic parties in Congress – there is now no overlap or shared consensus between parties in the legislative branch of government (Pew Research Center, 2014). This is alarming primarily because bodies like Congress rely on the collaboration and consideration of different political views to come to a consensus on bill passage or other legislative enactments.

Researchers at Brown University and Stanford University found that the rate of polarization in the United States as compared to any other country was "exceptional". These researchers point out the United State's political history with aligning with certain ideological views, alignment with race issues, and historical alignment with different religious identities as a possible main cause of the rapid polarization we are seeing now (Shapiro et al., 2020). Another possible cause outlined by researchers for the outstanding increase in party polarization in the United States specifically is the rise of partisan cable news stations. While other countries in comparison with the United States also saw an increase in polarization as a result of news media, researchers found that other countries who have publicly funded news media saw slight decreases in political polarization over the last few decades (Shapiro et al., 2020). The argument presented by the researchers at Brown University adds a chillingly human effect to polarization, such extremist attitudes can be manufactured by partisan sources if exposed to the propaganda

often enough or it can be prevented by the regulation of ideological sentiments in mass media services.

This widespread polarization of a group of people via consumption of political content directly connects to a psychological effect called "groupthink". In the format of large-scale political parties, groupthink is especially dangerous as it creates a "with us or against us" attitude that targets not only the opposite political party, but also individuals that are within the same party (Alvernia University 2018). The creation of that mental state in politics leads to the fracturing and dividing of one party into smaller sub-parties that may have different value systems or belief systems but still operate under the original umbrella of that specific political party. This is the crux of the issues pertaining to the American political environment currently.

In his essay *Polarised and Fractured Us Political Parties and the Challenges of Governing*, John Fortier agrees with arguments by other scholars and organizations mentioned above that the framework of the two-party political system is fracturing and allowing for the emergence of more sub-parties and viewpoints to be addressed under the guise of a major party platform. With this research comes the assumption that there is no longer one sound party ideological view on a topic, nor is there a definitive definition of what it means to be a part of either majority party. Fortier claims that the fracturing caused by widespread polarization within the parties has made it harder for political parties and institutions to gain funding and a consistent following due to ever-changing ideological bases. Not only does a fractured system cause problems on a political identity level, it also strengthens the notion mentioned before that polarization hinders the overall legislative processes of the United States.

The party that is most referenced in mainstream media as a fracturing or splitting party is the current Republican Party or the GOP. Currently, there are five factions or "sub-parties" under

the umbrella of the "Republican Party" – the Old Guard, the Adapters, the Searchers, the

Reformers, and the Prophets (Olsen 2021). Each of these factions differs in small ways from one

to the next, encompassing different values that makeup the generalized Republican party view.

The Old Guard are the faction of Republican lawmakers and voters who do not want to see any

change to the party platform – they do not believe that anything within the last decade of

American history validates changing the Republican party's stance on or approach to domestic

policy (Olsen 2021). In contrast with the Old Guard ideals, the Adapters are a group of

Republican party identifiers who tend to acknowledge that times have changed, but often

propose very minimal changes in party doctrine or ideology to reflect those changes (Olsen

2021). The spectrum of polarization within the republican party is at its farthest-out point when

discussing the Old Guard, but slowly moves inward towards active reform and change with the

Adapters. However, the group known as the Searchers are reformed Republicans who know that

the party needs to change in order to survive in modern times but are still actively trying to

decipher what the needed changes will be depicted as in society – these are the Republican party

identifiers who want to move away from the unrelenting support of big business and towards the

support for the US working class (Olsen 2021). The faction of the Reformers is the group of

Republican party members who have been demanding a rebrand and rethink of the GOP platform

for years – this group is pushing the GOP towards more modernization and asking for reform

that allows the Republican party to reposition themselves in the interest of the working-class

Americans (Olsen 2021). The Prophets are a more radicalized version of the Reformers – this

small group is calling for more severe changes to the party platform. Most notably, candidates

aligning with the Prophet sub-party are demanding a tax hike on companies that outsource jobs

into other countries and itching to reposition the Republican party into something more opposite

and radical than any other ideological stance taken by the party (Olsen 2021).

The emergence of these sub-parties comes seemingly as a result of the internal struggles

within the Republican party around the time of the 2016 election. However, the Democratic party

is also seeing factions emerge from their recent win of the Presidency. In order from most

extremist to least, here are the current sub-parties hiding under the umbrella term of "Democrat"

– the Super Progressives, Very Progressives, Progressive New Guard, Progressive Old Guard,

Moderates, and Conservative Democrats (Bacon 2019). The Super Progressive faction of the

Democratic party is characterized by a very liberal stance on economic issues and

identity/cultural issues – this faction is also increasingly "anti-establishment", meaning that their

role in the political realm is to point out the shortcomings of both the Republican and Democratic

parties (Bacon 2019). The Very Progressives are also very liberal on economic issues but differ

from the Super Progressive in their degree of liberal views on identity issues and their degree of

cynicism towards Democratic establishment (Bacon 2019). The Progressive New Guard faction

of the Democratic party is characterized by a liberal attitude on economic and identity issues –

but highlights the concern of "electability" of candidates to office and the appeal of party ideas to

more moderate voters (Bacon 2019). The only difference between Progressive New Guard and

Progressive Old Guard factions is that the Old Guard is seemingly more center-left focused on

economic and identity issues – the Old Guard is still very concerned about the electability of

candidates (Bacon 2019). This is the first true "moderate" classification of the Democratic party

that still encompasses more liberalized ideas. The group labelled the Moderates are slightly more

conservative than any previously mentioned Democratic group with their platform focusing

specifically on the more business-friendly aspect of the Democratic party in terms of economic

policies (Bacon 2019). Lastly, the Conservative Democrats are a true middle in terms of radicalization of the democratic party. Conservative Democrats are characterized by their skeptical liberal views on economic and cultural issues and typically yield from more conservative-leaning geographic areas (Bacon 2019).

It is immensely important to recognize that both major political parties have undergone fracturing and morphing into smaller ideological facets of their larger parties – each facet being a different degree of radicalization because of ideological and values-based friction within the parties. To tie all these concepts discussed in this paper together, data analyzation from the Pew Research Center that was conducted in June of 2014 sheds light on what exactly this push towards polarization and gradual shift in party values means in terms of voting and party support.

Researchers at Pew Research Center conducted data analysis that addressed the role of polarization in voting, donation, and other political processes to better understand the role that partisanship and polarization in American politics. From this data, researchers concluded that an individual who holds consistently polarized views and views the opposite party in a negative light, is most likely to participate in political processes (including voting) than another voter with a less extremist view (Pew Research Center 2014). Of those who do not identify with an extremist sub-party or faction of a political party, only 39% of respondents described themselves as regular voters or participants within political processes (Pew Research Center 2014).

In theory, the most recent shift of party demographics, change in party values, and widespread polarization of the political parties has led to a group of more moderate voters being ostracized from the political realm. The analyzation of the New Deal Era and the factors that allowed the parties to aggressively morph into new platforms allowed for the uncovering of similar patterns within the current shift in party platforms that America is experiencing right

now. My research allowed me to conclude that the recent shifts in political party ideology have

contributed to a more polarized political climate and further separation between the two

prominent parties. This separation has left a larger underrepresented group of moderate voters

feeling unmotivated, while boosting the participation rate of those who view politics through the

lens of an extremist.

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