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*I'd Rather Switch than Fight: Lifelong Democrats and Converts to Republicanism among Campaign Activists**

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Analysis of a survey of 1988 presidential campaign activists revealed that one-third of the Republican activists at one time thought of themselves as Democrats. Drawing on the mass realignment literature, the duration, movement, and motivation of this elite realignment were examined. A multivariate probit model was developed to analyze party switching that combines demographic, political, and attitudinal motivations. Ideology, parents' political activity, and age were found to be statistically significant influences on the decision to switch parties. We then explored patterns of Republican-to-Democrat switching using bivariate analysis. The article concludes by discussing some implications of party switching for the American party system.

Introduction

Recent years have witnessed much speculation as to whether a realignment is reshaping U.S. political parties. Voters have increasingly favored Republicans, especially at the presidential level. At the same time, a noticeable number of political leaders have been switching sides. In this study we examine realignment among campaign activists.

Realignments are characterized by at least three features: duration, movement, and motivation. Duration refers to the length of the realigning period; movement may be from one partisan category to another, or from an inert status to active participation; motivation for the change may come from a single dominant stimulus (an event, some personal characteristic, or an attitude) or multiple stimuli.

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Duration

Questions about the duration of the realignment period were first posed by V. O. Key. In a pair of seminal articles, Key (1955, 1959) called attention to “critical elections” and “secular realignments.” Critical elections occur when “voters are, at least from impressionistic evidence, unusually deeply concerned, in which the extent of electoral involvement is relatively quite high, and in which the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate. Moreover, and perhaps this is the truly differentiating characteristic of this sort of election, the realignment made manifest in the voting in such elections seems to persist for several succeeding elections” (1955, 4). The old party system fails to address the problems of a substantial portion of the electorate. The critical election acts to bring the party system into line with the cleavage among voters. Key’s examples included the elections of 1896 and 1928 that created new patterns in New England voting.

Secular realignments, on the other hand, “may to some degree be the consequence of trends that perhaps persist over decades and elections may mark only steps in a more or less continuous creation of new loyalties and decay of old. . . . [These] processes operate inexorably, and almost imperceptibly, election after election, to form new party alignments and to build new party groupings” (1959, 198–99). The analyses Key offers of secular realignment rely on voting trends across decades. Obviously, critical elections and secular realignments are distinguished by more than duration. Key sketched out two different processes that lead to enduring electoral change, but duration is one of the essential features and one we want to keep in mind.

Movement

One type of movement involved in a realignment is straight conversion. Persons who heretofore regard themselves as members of party *A* come to think of themselves as members of party *B*. Simultaneously, some members of party *B* will come to think of themselves as members of party *A*. James Sundquist (1973) argues that such conversion is likely to take place when a new issue comes along. What happens to voters who agree with their party’s position on the established issues, but not the new issue? “They find themselves torn between conflicting pressures. Do they stick with their party on the old issues, or do they realign with the party that expresses their convictions on the new issue? Some remain loyal. Others make the switch” (1973, 18). The voters who switch are, of course, converting, the first type of movement associated with realignment.

Kristi Andersen (1979), however, maintains that conversion is not the only movement that can be associated with realignment. She argues that previously inactive voters can be mobilized. “The United States is,” she points out, “and

has been during most of the twentieth century, a system with an enormous number of habitual nonvoters" (1979, 15). Sufficiently dramatic events provide an opportunity for a party to mobilize some of these habitual nonvoters. Movement of newly mobilized participants into the electorate can also be associated with a realignment.

A very different kind of movement results from young voters who enter the electorate as older voters depart through normal population replacement. If a majority of the new voters identify with party *B* while a majority of those who no longer vote because of death or infirmity had identified with party *A*, party *B*'s electoral fortunes are enhanced. Normal population replacement is identified by Key as the movement behind secular realignment.

Finally, these movements are not mutually exclusive. Philip Converse (1975), for example, has argued that growth of the Democratic party between 1928 and 1952 can be explained by a combination of conversion and normal population replacement: "True conversions may indeed have been more limited than meets the eye, since large-scale defections coupled with steady turnover in the composition of the electorate do not fall far short of reconstructing the known change between . . . the 1920s and . . . the early 1950s" (1975, 141–42).

Motivation

Carmines and Stimson's (1989) analysis of realignment rests on a single motivation. They present a model called "dynamic evolution." "The model is dynamic because it presumes that at some point the system moves from a fairly stationary steady-state period to a fairly dramatic change; the change is manifested by a 'critical moment' in the time series. Significantly, however, the change—the dynamic growth—does not end with the critical moment. Instead it continues over an extended period, albeit at a much slower pace. This continued growth after the initial shock defines the evolutionary character of the model" (1989, 143).

The critical moment beginning their realignment was the 1964 Goldwater campaign. The single stimulus that initiated realignment was race. While race is central to their argument, the reasons that Carmines and Stimson (1981) give for its importance are more revealing with respect to the general case. A mass electorate is normally inattentive. For an issue to have enough impact to stimulate a realignment, therefore, certain conditions are necessary: "(1) Issue preferences must be deeply felt. (2) Parties and candidates must take up visibly different positions on the issue. (3) The issue must be long on the political agenda" (1981, 109). It is rare that any issue meets these conditions and penetrates the normal inattentiveness of the electorate. By extension, it would be even more unusual for multiple issues to do this at the same time. Almost in passing, though, Carmines and Stimson make reference to a multiple stimuli realignment: "No single issue portrays the New Deal realignment; it was a complex brew of

issues, symbols, personalities, and coalitions” (1989, 146). By focusing on their three conditions, we can be alert to situations in which multiple stimuli might be involved.

Expectations

Existing models of realignment—and the three aspects we single out—are based on the mass electorate.¹ They bring into play certain assumptions about the general public. We encounter such phrases as “slow processes,” “normally inattentive,” and “not too involved.” These words describe the modal political stratum. What happens if we apply these realignment models to activists who are fully engaged in politics and quite attentive to political cues? What should our expectations be about party switching among activists?

Our knowledge of activists leads to differing expectations about duration. Because they are alert to political cues, we might expect rapid reactions to changes in politics. At the same time, a stake in their current party would likely lead to slower change. These two considerations suggest opposite conclusions about the duration of the realigning period.

When we turn to movement and motivation, though, there is a clear basis for expectations. If activists are not already politically engaged, they at least have levels of interest to make the move over the psychological threshold to full participation an easy one. Since they do not have to be mobilized, we should expect to observe only conversion.² With respect to motivation, Carmines and Stimson (1981, 1989) reason that the parties must take visibly different positions over a long time period in order to penetrate normal inattentiveness. The reverse logic applies to activists. Activists at least notice, and in many cases shape, multiple issue positions. Therefore, we should expect multiple stimuli rather than a single dominant stimulus.

In this paper we shall deal with party switching among presidential activists. After a description of our study, we shall look at the duration and the movement involved in the rather substantial Democratic-to-Republican switching. Next we shall explore these switchers’ motivations, using a variety of demographic, socialization, and attitudinal measures. After a brief look at the more limited Republican-to-Democratic switching, we speculate on the impact elite realignment has had and will continue to have on the party system.

¹ We do not maintain that the three aspects are sufficient for an exhaustive discussion of realignment models. However, they do capture many important features. For example, a critical election is characterized by short duration; the movement may be either conversion or mobilization; the motivation comes from events that have an impact on an unusually large proportion of the electorate.

² Since they are involved over long time periods, we should also expect some normal population replacement to occur.

Description of the Study

Our data were drawn from a multipurpose survey of county-level leaders in the Bush and Dukakis organizations in the 1988 general election campaign. Among other things, we wished to investigate their attitudes on public policy questions, their views about political parties, the activities in which their organizations were engaged, and the extent to which these had changed since 1972. To these ends, we repeated a number of questions asked on these topics in a 1972 study conducted by Richard Hofstetter (Hofstetter 1976; Kessel 1980, 58–59). We included the same counties in our sampling frame. We also wanted to determine the extent to which these party leaders were representative of their own counties and whether they could accurately perceive their constituents' opinions. Therefore, we included all the issue items on the preelection National Election Study (NES) questionnaire and interviewed Bush and Dukakis leaders in the counties in which the NES primary sampling units were located.

The Hofstetter study had revealed a fair amount of party switching.³ Consequently, we included questions on the respondents' parents' party identifications and political involvement, whether the respondents had ever worked for opposition party candidates or had ever thought of themselves as belonging to the opposite party, and (if so) when and why they had changed to their present parties. In addition, we asked a lengthy series of questions about the respondents' involvement with their present parties. With these data we could provide direct answers about the duration and the movement of possible elite realignment. The demographic, socialization, and attitudinal items gave us the capacity to test different explanations about motivations for party switching.

Presidential activists are understudied as political elites. They are, after all, the people running the presidential campaigns. But even with the active assistance of both national campaign organizations, it was very difficult to obtain names of potential respondents. The basic problem was a lack of lists of county campaign leaders. The organizations themselves were still being created at the time the names were being sought. If directors have not yet been appointed in certain counties, respondents cannot be identified no matter how cooperative campaign officials may be. And amid the hubbub of a campaign, the interests of outside scholars have a relatively low priority.⁴

In most cases we identified potential respondents by getting the names of

³This was apparent from reading the responses in the protocols themselves. Unfortunately, the questionnaires were destroyed before the party-switching data were recorded, so the topic was never analyzed or reported in the literature.

⁴An aide to a national field director who was trying to identify leaders for us said, "It was like pulling teeth to get those names from the regional directors." If it was this hard to obtain names inside the organization, you can imagine the difficulties faced by outside scholars.

state directors from the national organizations and then contacted them to identify leaders in the counties we had selected.⁵ Our sampling frame consisted of 187 counties from the 1988 National Election Study and the 1972 Hofstetter study. We were able to identify 287 Bush leaders and 183 Dukakis leaders.⁶ Three hundred and seventy campaign leaders were interviewed. The 230 Bush activists and 140 Dukakis activists represent response rates of 80% and 77%, respectively. No region of the country was over- or underrepresented, and we could not detect sample bias along any other dimension.

Duration and Nature of the Movement

As we expected there was clear evidence of conversion. The activists in our sample were divided into four groups: constant Democrats, Democrat-to-Republican switchers, constant Republicans, and Republican-to-Democrat switchers.⁷ The proportion of former Republicans active in the Dukakis campaign was not negligible. Nine percent of the Dukakis/Bentsen Committee leaders were former Republicans. But the number of former Democrats who were working for the Bush campaign was striking. Thirty-two percent of the county leaders in the Bush-Quayle Committee once thought of themselves as Democrats. This percentage is consistent with Mary Grisez Kweit's (1986) estimate that 23% of 1980 Republican state party convention delegates were former Democrats, and 13% of Democratic delegates were once Republicans. The two estimates are not the same, but they tend to confirm the relative magnitude of the switches. Since the Democratic-to-Republican conversion was so extensive, the comparisons between lifelong Democrats and converts to Republicanism will make up the principal focus of our paper.⁸

The conversion of activists to the Republican party is a long-term phenomenon; the individual choices span nearly half a century. The first switch in our sample took place in 1945. More than 10% of the conversions occurred before Dwight Eisenhower entered the White House, and party switching was still taking place in the 1980s. Altogether, just under a third of the new Republicans had

⁵In New England, towns are used instead of counties as the normal units of political organization. Towns therefore replaced counties as the sampling units in this region.

⁶The principal reason for the smaller Dukakis number is that the Dukakis organization was less extensive. In many states active Dukakis offices were maintained only in the major cities. If the sample included some less populous counties (as ours did), there were often no Dukakis leaders to interview.

⁷Switchers are those who answered in the affirmative when asked, "Was there ever a time you thought of yourself as a (member of the other party)?" We assume that we can rely on retrospective statements about the respondents' prior party identifications. Unlike members of the general public, politics is sufficiently salient to these activists that we can expect their recall to be accurate.

⁸A comparison between lifelong Republicans and those who had switched from the Democratic party was not particularly revealing. In most respects, party switchers in both parties look remarkably like other activists in their new party (cf. Kweit 1986; Nesbit 1988).

switched before 1964; over half changed parties between 1964 and 1979; only 14% became Republicans during the Reagan era.

The change in partisanship does have an age focus. It is most likely to take place when respondents are in their twenties. There is, of course, some spread: the youngest reported conversion took place at 16; the oldest at 53. But the majority switched parties when they first became aware of politics as adults. Fifty-seven percent left the Democratic party in their twenties. By the time they were forty, 90% of those who were going to change parties had done so.

Since this party switching is of such long duration, it is not a collective response to a particular set of events or an especially attractive candidate. For example, the conversion to the Republican party cannot be attributed to Ronald Reagan, even though he has loomed large over the political landscape during the past decade. Neither should it be tied to any other leader. The best explanation of this gradual process is to be found in the tides of national politics as they lap against the individual lives of young adults. Hence, we must explore their motivations.

Demographic and Political Motivations

Our first attempt to explain elite party switching incorporates a variety of demographic, socialization, and political variables. Demographic explanations, particularly those relating to ethnicity, are a staple of the realignment literature (Key 1955, 1959; Andersen 1979; Petrocik 1981, 1989). Implicit in a demographic explanation is the notion that parties appeal to certain common characteristics within groups or population categories. Parental transmission of partisanship, especially when weighted according to interest in politics, has been a widely acknowledged source of stability in the party system (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Beck 1974; Beck and Jennings 1975). Finally, the structure of political opportunities may increase the incentives for switching among political elites.

Our sample of campaign activists included 126 respondents who are lifelong Democrats and 74 Republicans who consider themselves to have been Democrats in the past. The switchers of this group are more likely to be older, male, and have higher household incomes than nonswitchers.⁹ They are also more likely to describe themselves as "born-again" Christians than their counterparts who remained Democrats, a testimony to the introduction of the Religious Right into Republican politics.

Among the demographic variables that do not seem to be related to party switching is region. While it is frequently assumed that realignment is concentrated primarily in the South, only one-fourth of the former Democrats in our sample currently reside in southern states.

⁹All items included in the multivariate analysis were statistically significant in the bivariate case (Tau-*b* or Tau-*c*, as appropriate).

Table 1. A Demographic-Political Model of Democrat-to-Republican Switching

	MLE	SE	MLE*	MLE/SE
Constant	-3.323	0.879		-3.78
Gender	-0.209	0.283	-0.193	-0.74
Born-again	0.808	0.365	0.587	2.21
Age	0.048	0.012	1.137	3.90
Income	0.235	0.124	0.572	1.90
Party competition	0.127	0.104	0.326	1.22
Parents' activity	-0.637	0.270	-0.637	-2.36
Estimated $R^2 = 0.44$				
Correctly predicted = 73%				
$N = 125$				

Notes: MLE* is computed by multiplying the MLE by the standard deviation of the independent variable and dividing by the standard deviation of the dependent variable. MLE* can be interpreted as a measure of the relative impact of the independent variables.

MLE/SE can be interpreted as a test of significance using a *T*-distribution.

Several political variables appear to distinguish switchers from nonswitchers. Respondents whose parents were active in politics are more likely to remain Democrats than those whose parents were politically inactive. In other words, activists who were socialized into (presumably) Democratic politics are more likely to retain those ties in adulthood than those without similar socializing forces. Party switching among activists is thought to occur more readily in areas where the level of party competition is shifting in the direction of the new party. We do not have observations on the level of competition in the county at previous time points. Our 1988 data do show that switchers are more likely to come from localities where, by their own estimation, the Republican party is at least competitive with the Democrats.

Probit analysis was utilized to assess the independent relationships between each of these variables and the propensity to switch parties. As Table 1 shows, one political and two demographic variables demonstrated significant effects when controlling for the other independent variables. Age was the strongest single indicator of a change in party allegiances. Parents' political activity and born-again status were also significant at the 0.05 level. Household income, gender, and party competition in the county were not statistically significant and will be dropped from the remainder of the analysis.¹⁰

¹⁰Missing data reduce the number of cases available for the multivariate explanation. Listwise deletion, which is required by the probit routine made available to us by Richard McKelvey, leaves 125 cases for analysis (72 constant Democrats, 53 switchers).

Attitudinal Motivations

An alternative explanation uses issue positions and political attitudes to explain elite realignment. Issues frequently appear in studies of mass realignment. For example, Sundquist (1973) identifies cleavages created by new issues as the cause of critical elections. Recent work by Luskin, McIver, and Carmines (1989) provides a useful guide to the role that issues can play in party switching. Easy moves, such as those from partisanship to independence, take relatively little cognitive effort. Switching parties is a more difficult move, and "should involve issues of all sorts" (1989, 442). We believe that political elites are quite capable of the greater cognitive effort that this would require.

Thus, a second explanation of activist party switching has attitudinal variables as the motivating force. All but one of the issues asked in our survey are significant predictors of party switching at the bivariate level (Table 2). We used

Table 2. Attitudes of Lifelong Democrats and Democrat-to-Republican Switchers

Attitude	Lifelong Democrats	D-to-R Switchers	Kendall's Tau-c	<i>p</i>
Liberal-conservative (M)	5.3	2.8	-.84	.0000
Defense spending (M)	5.5	3.5	-.71	.0000
USSR cooperation (M)	5.2	3.8	-.46	.0000
Central America (M)	5.2	2.6	-.46	.0000
Help all over world	4.4	4.1	-.07	.18
Services & spending (M)	5.4	3.0	-.84	.0000
Jobs & living std. (M)	5.5	3.1	-.71	.0000
Tax increase	4.9	2.1	-.68	.0000
Health insurance (M)	5.7	3.1	-.73	.0000
Social Security	5.0	3.5	-.41	.0000
Minority aid (M)	5.7	3.9	-.60	.0000
Women's role (M)	6.7	5.8	-.35	.0000
Police authority	4.9	3.3	-.47	.0000
Federal power	4.8	2.8	-.54	.0000
Environment	6.8	6.4	-.34	.0000
Farm income	4.6	2.7	-.55	.0000

Lifelong Democrats: *N* = 117-26

D-to-R switchers: *N* = 69-74

Notes: The entries are mean scores on seven-point scales. The scales have been reversed (where necessary) so one always represents the most conservative answer and seven always represents the most liberal answer.

The items marked (M) are University of Michigan items used in the National Election Study. The other items are all single stimulus items such as, "The police ought to be given more authority" or "Farmers should be given a good income." Respondents are given seven answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Table 3. An Attitudinal Model of Democrat-to-Republican Switching

	MLE	SE	MLE*	MLE/SE
Constant	11.845	2.714		4.37
Liberal-conservative	-1.002	0.380	-3.051	-2.64
Social welfare	-1.248	0.360	-3.692	-3.46
International involvement	-0.626	0.285	-1.668	-2.20
Estimated $R^2 = 0.93$				
Correctly predicted = 94%				
$N = 125$				

Notes: MLE* is computed by multiplying the MLE by the standard deviation of the independent variable and dividing by the standard deviation of the dependent variable. MLE* can be interpreted as a measure of the relative impact of the independent variables.

MLE/SE can be interpreted as a test of significance using a *T*-distribution.

factor analysis to identify scalable subsets of issues among campaign activists. Two dimensions were found for both switchers and nonswitchers.¹¹ Issue scales representing a social-welfare dimension and an international involvement dimension were constructed. Other items were not located on the same factor across groups.

The issue scales we employ provide a stronger explanation of party switching than the demographic and political variables. Table 3 shows that liberal-conservative self-placement and the social welfare and international involvement scales correctly predict 94% of the cases. The inclusion of additional issues increases the accuracy of the model only slightly from this already high level.

A General Explanation

We have just presented two alternative explanations for Democrat-to-Republican switching. We offered a rather attractive solution combining both demographic and political factors. We also developed an attitudinal solution that shows impressive strength. Can these two solutions be merged into a single, general explanation of why some Democrats have switched to the Republican party?

The most straightforward manner of combining the two models is simply to make one model, using all variables that were significant in the first two equations. However, this approach yielded an unstable solution in the probit analysis. Our probit results were especially sensitive to model specification, more so than when using OLS. Such problems can arise if some combination of the indepen-

¹¹The two subgroups were analyzed separately to preserve differences within each subgroup. A dominant partisan factor emerged when both groups were analyzed together.

dent variables predicts almost all the cases of the dependent variable. Under this condition the solution may be rendered unstable as it struggles to explain the few remaining cases. Each of the three attitudinal variables is an exceptionally strong predictor in its own right. They could all be included in a very satisfactory attitudinal model, but when we attempted to add more variables to this already strong combination, the solution became too volatile to interpret. In order to avoid this problem with no loss of data, we combined the three attitudinal measures into a single scale.¹² We felt that the use of this single item would capture the essence of the attitudinal variables, while allowing a number of possible statistical problems to be averted or minimized.

At this point in our analysis, we have, on the basis of significance in earlier equations, reduced the number of demographic and political variables being considered. Among the demographic variables, only the respondent's age and born-again Christian status are left in the general equation. Similarly, only parents' political activity remains among the political variables.

The probit results of our general solution are presented in Table 4. The contents of this table merit some detailed discussion. The first item of note is that the variable that concerns the respondent's status as a born-again Christian clearly is not significant. The impact of being born-again lessens when the attitudinal measure is entered into the equation. That is, born-again Christians are likely to hold more conservative views (Kellstedt 1989). When attitudes are controlled for, the explanatory power of being a born-again basically disappears.

A scan of the unstandardized MLE's shows that the older the respondent, the more likely he or she is to be predicted as a party switcher.¹³ On the other hand, the signs of both the remaining variables, parents' political activity and ideology, are negative. If the respondent's parents were politically active, the activist will be less inclined to leave the Democratic party. Increasing liberalism on the ideological scale will also act to reduce the likelihood of party switching.

We also present standardized MLE's. These values represent the change in standard deviations in the hypothetical, interval-level scale underlying the dichotomous dependent variable, for a one standard deviation change in the independent variable (McKelvey and Zavoina 1975). It is clear that the ideological variable has by far the greatest strength in the determination of the dependent variable. Parents' political activity ranks second; and age, third in level of impact.

¹²All three of the measures (liberal-conservative self-placement, the social welfare scale, and the international involvement scale) loaded on a single factor. The lowest loading was 0.89, and the factor accounted for 81% of the variance. We were aware of the possibility of a multicollinearity problem among the three attitudinal variables (average $r = 0.72$). The creation of a single scale eliminates this threat.

¹³This result could be an artifact of party differences among the activists that we surveyed. Republican respondents tended to be older than their Democratic counterparts.

Table 4. A General Model of Democrat-to-Republican Switching

	MLE	SE	MLE*	MLE/SE
Constant	22.248	8.386		2.653
Age	0.114	0.060	2.688	1.901
Born-again	-0.717	1.279	-0.521	-0.560
Parents' activity	-4.795	1.918	-4.795	-2.50
Attitudinal scale	-5.991	2.256	-15.614	-2.66
Estimated $R^2 = 0.986$				
Correctly predicted = 97%				
$N = 125$				

Notes: MLE* is computed by multiplying the MLE by the standard deviation of the independent variable and dividing by the standard deviation of the dependent variable. MLE* can be interpreted as a measure of the relative impact of the independent variables.

MLE/SE can be interpreted as a test of significance using a *T*-distribution.

The solution in Table 4 has an estimated *R*-square value of 0.987.¹⁴ This value refers to the variance explained in the interval-level scale that is assumed to exist for the dependent variable. Thus, our general probit model combines demographic, political, and attitudinal variables in a manner that permits a strong description of the differences between constant Democrats and those who moved to the Republican party. The results for this solution confirm what was seen in the earlier analysis. We found some evidence of socialization; respondents raised in politically active homes are more likely to retain the partisanship of their parents (Democratic in this case). We also found that attitudes are the strongest predictor of whether an individual will switch from the Democratic party.

While we are pleased with the strength of our attitudinal and general models, we must recognize the limits of the data we have in hand. From the outset

¹⁴While the estimated *R*-square may be used as an aid in evaluating the fit of the model, one should be aware of the theoretical differences between this and the *R*-square value reported with most least squares regression techniques. No single manner of estimating the *R*-square value is accepted for probit. The value we report here was calculated with the McKelvey and Zavoina formula. One appealing alternative is presented by Mitchell (1988). He suggests a *P*-square value, which represents the improvement of the prediction power of the model over random guessing. *P*-square is found by subtracting the probability of correctly predicting with a random guess from the probability of correctly predicting with the model, and then dividing this value by one minus the probability of success by random guess. The result is bounded plus or minus one, and values approaching positive one represent stronger models. Our model achieves a *P*-square value of 0.92. See Aldrich and Nelson (1984) for further discussion of various pseudo *R*-square values in maximum likelihood estimation. For a good discussion of the application of probit to individual-level observations, see McKelvey and Zavoina (1975).

we have analyzed a longitudinal process with cross-sectional data collected at the end of the process. We have 1988 reports of conversions that took place as long as four decades ago. Moreover, when we introduce attitudinal variables, we add the real possibility of reciprocal causation. On the one hand, having more conservative attitudes may increase the likelihood that a Democrat will switch to the Republican party. On the other hand, socialization processes within the Republican party may also lead a convert to adopt increasingly conservative attitudes. Attitudes can cause party switching, but party switching can also cause modification of the attitudes. Thus, our fundamental analytical problem is how to deal with the possibility of reciprocal causation when we have only cross-sectional data.

Ultimately, we must recognize the limits that our data place on any analysis. There are, however, two pieces of evidence that can be examined, and both emphasize the path from attitudes to party switching rather than the reciprocal path from party switching to attitudes. The strongest evidence, because it only requires accepting the statements of the respondents without any further inference, comes from the open-ended replies of the respondents about their reasons for switching parties. Nearly 44% of the Republican converts named either a specific issue or group of issues, or made some ideological reference. No other class of responses (i.e., candidates, personal reasons, or general comments) was mentioned by more than 22%.¹⁵ Second, when we examined the switchers by era, we found that those switching in the latest era were still a very considerable distance from the Democratic activists. On the liberal-conservative scale, for example, the mean score for lifelong Democrats was 5.3, whereas that for Democrats who had converted to the GOP before 1964 was 2.6 and that for the post-1980 party switchers was 3.3. It is quite plausible that enough socialization may have taken place in more than two dozen years to have modified the attitudes of the earlier switchers, but the difference between the mean scores in the recent period is more difficult to interpret as a product of changes in the short time since the switch.¹⁶ We would stop short of claiming that we have proof that attitudes cause party switching. But both of these related observations support our belief that attitudes have a greater impact on party switching than the reciprocal effect.

Movement from the Republicans to the Democrats

Movement from the Republican to the Democratic party was more difficult to study because we had so few cases of newly minted Democrats. Multivariate

¹⁵Naturally, some responses fell into multiple categories. In one colorful example, a switcher reported, "I examined the issues; I dated a Republican."

¹⁶A third piece of evidence involves a two-stage least squares estimation of the reciprocal link between attitudes and switching. While the trend in the data was in the direction expected, our results suffered from severe estimation problems. Specifically, we were unable to estimate the first stage of the two-stage least squares process to our satisfaction. The interpretation of the second-stage results therefore should be viewed as very tentative.

analysis was out of the question with only 13 erstwhile Republicans.¹⁷ Even with bivariate analysis, we needed to be very careful about the conclusions we drew. Within these limits, though, the same general pattern of duration, movement, and motivation can be recognized.

Conversions from the Republican to the Democratic party took place in the last quarter century. Eighty-five percent of the conversions took place during the 1970s and 1980s; over half, while Ronald Reagan was in the White House. As with those switching to the Republican party, most of the changes took place while the individuals were in their twenties. Seven out of 10 Republican-to-Democratic switches took place during the first adult decade, with a scattering before and after.

Age was the one demographic variable significantly related to movement in both directions. However, whereas departed Democrats are older than those staying with the party of Jefferson, persons who left the GOP tend to be younger than those who remain Republican. With converts to the Democratic party, we also found a regional effect. The new Democrats were concentrated in the East North Central and Mid-Atlantic states. No relationships were found with gender, income, or any other demographic variables.

Among this population of switchers, the effect of political socialization shows up in mother's party identification. If the respondent's mother was a Democrat, there is a larger chance of a change in a Democratic direction. Earlier we saw that parents' political activity had the effect of holding Democrats in that party. Here socialization makes the Democratic party attractive enough to tempt some Republicans to switch. (Neither parents' political activity or father's party identification had any effect on these conversions.)

If the demographic and political variables are a little different in the Republican-to-Democratic case, the attitudinal explanation is repeated almost across the board. The data on this are arrayed in Table 5. We measured the respondents' views on 16 policy items and found significant differences between the party switchers and their one-time colleagues on 13 of these.¹⁸ With cross-sectional data gathered in 1988, it is difficult to say whether the new Democrats had pro-Democratic attitudes before they switched parties, whether they came to think more like Democrats after they switched, or whether they were affected by some combination of these two processes. We can say that in 1988 they did not think at all like Republicans and were largely indistinguishable from other Democrats.

The conversion of Republicans into Democratic campaigners is less interesting, and more interesting, than the movement of one-time Democrats into the Republican camp. It is less interesting because of its modest scale. At present

¹⁷Remember there was a smaller proportion of Republican-to-Democratic switchers, combined with a smaller number of Democrats to begin with.

¹⁸The much higher values for Kendall's Tau-*c* for the comparison between lifelong Democrats and Democratic-to-Republican switchers are due to the larger number of cases.

Table 5. Attitudes of Lifelong Republicans and Republican-to-Democrat Switchers

Attitude	Lifelong Republicans	R-to-D Switchers	Kendall's Tau-c	<i>p</i>
Liberal-conservative (M)	2.6	4.7	.19	.0000
Defense spending (M)	3.5	5.6	.20	.0000
USSR cooperation (M)	3.7	5.5	.18	.0001
Central America (M)	2.7	4.5	.18	.0001
Help all over world	3.8	4.3	.04	.21
Services & spending (M)	2.8	5.2	.23	.0000
Jobs & living std. (M)	3.1	5.3	.20	.0000
Tax increase	2.2	5.2	.23	.0000
Health insurance (M)	2.7	5.4	.22	.0000
Social Security	3.2	4.8	.13	.003
Minority aid (M)	3.8	5.6	.18	.0000
Women's role (M)	5.9	6.1	.05	.11
Police authority	3.2	4.1	.07	.06
Federal power	2.4	4.7	.20	.0000
Environment	6.0	6.6	.10	.01
Farm income	2.7	4.5	.17	.0001

Lifelong Republicans: *N* = 148–55
R-to-D switchers: *N* = 12 or 13

Notes: The entries are mean scores on seven-point scales. The scales have been reversed (where necessary) so one represents the most conservative answer and seven always represents the most liberal answer.

The items marked (M) are University of Michigan items used in the National Election Study. The other items are all single stimulus items such as, "The police ought to be given more authority" or "Farmers should be given a good income." Respondents are given seven answers ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

the new Democrats are a few mountain flowers that could not be seen at all until the snow pack melted and that may not survive because of the short growing season. The Republicans have a mass of former Democratic blooms arrayed in a garden that they have been tending for decades. We cannot blink at this real difference. But the Republican-to-Democratic switchers bear watching. They are younger and *may* be the forerunners of a larger group of converts.

The new Democratic activists also have potential Electoral College impact because of their geographic concentration. The Republicans are proud of their relatively new southern-western base. But to convert this southern-western base into an Electoral College majority, the campaign strategies of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan called for carrying some of the vote-rich Great Lakes states.

The loss of a few activists—and that is all we have evidence for here—does not threaten this strategy yet, but Republican weakness in the Great Lakes states could undercut this conservative strategy.

Summary and Conclusions

Let us briefly recapitulate our main points. This elite realignment has been going on for a long time. The first Democratic-to-Republican switch among our respondents took place about the time Harry Truman entered the White House, and the median conversion to the GOP occurred during Richard Nixon's first year as president. The Republican-to-Democratic switching is of more recent origin; it began when John Kennedy was in the middle of his brief administration. The median move to the Democratic party was during Ronald Reagan's first year in office. There was no unusual concentration of party switching in any segment of these time periods. Certainly, this process is of long duration.

There is equally strong evidence of conversion. We have the respondents' statements that they once thought of themselves as members of the opposite party, and these statements are supported by other data. Since 32% of the Republican leaders say they were once Democrats, and only 9% of the Democratic leaders say they were once Republicans, there is a net gain for the GOP.

Along with conversion, there is evidence of secular realignment. This type of realignment results from normal population replacement in which one party gains a net advantage. The evidence for normal population replacement, in turn, consists of three elements: entry into the population at an early age, participation over a long period of time, and departure at an advanced age. We do not have data on departure, but there is evidence that campaign activists begin early and remain involved for a long time. The median age of entry into active politics was 21 for the Democrats in our study and 27 for Republicans. The median age of party switching was not very different. It was 24 for newly minted Democrats and 26 for those moving to the Republicans.

Many of those drawn into politics stay active for a long time. The earliest Republican to become active supported Herbert Hoover and had been taking part in campaigns for 58 years. The first Democrat reported working to help Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940 and had been an activist for 48 years.¹⁹ The median length of political activity was 20 years for Republicans and 16 years for Democrats. When early entry and sustained involvement are combined with the foregoing evidence for conversion, we would argue that the movement we have uncovered is a combination of conversion and normal population replacement.

Next, how do our findings about motivation compare with those from similar studies? While there is an abundant literature on realignment and an equally

¹⁹The comparable figures from the 1972 study were 56 years for the senior Republican activist and 47 years for the longest active Democrat.

large literature on activists, there have been very few studies of realignment among activists. Mary Grisez Kweit (1986) analyzed data gathered from those attending 1980 state party conventions in 11 states that use the caucus-convention process to select delegates to national conventions. Dorothy Davidson Nesbit (1988) had data from delegates attending 1984 state party conventions in 13 southern states.²⁰

Many other investigators (e.g., Nesbit 1988, 324; Petrocik 1987, 1989) have found the South playing a prominent role in party switching. We did not. In fact, we did not find any regional effect in the Democratic-to-Republican conversions. The only regional concentration in our data was a disproportionate number of Republican-to-Democratic converts in the Great Lakes and Mid-Atlantic states.

We found, along with Kweit and Nesbit, that there were multiple stimuli and that issues were significantly related to party switching.²¹ Recall the Carmines and Stimson (1981, 1989) conditions, quoted in the introductory section, that for issues to have an impact on realignment the issues must be deeply felt, there should be distance between the parties and candidates' positions, and the issue should be discussed over a considerable period of time. Almost by definition, activists feel deeply about many political issues. A comparison of the mean scores in Tables 2 and 5 shows that Republicans and Democrats had quite different positions on 13 of the 16 issue items.²² And many of these issues are hardy perennials that have been staples of campaign debate in election after election. Since the conditions are satisfied with a large set of issues, it follows that multiple issue attitudes ought to be involved in party switching among activists.²³

Some years ago Arthur Goldberg (1969) pointed to sociologically deviant party identifiers (e.g., white, middle-class, Protestant, northern, rural *Demo-*

²⁰Carmines and Stimson (1989) use data on occasional activists in the electorate (defined by answers to NES items) to discuss the role of activists in bringing about mass realignment but do not analyze realignment among the activists themselves.

²¹That our issue scales are different from Kweit's or Nesbit's, we regard as a trivial distinction. We had different items to begin with, so the factor analyses that we all used to identify scalable subsets of items produced somewhat different scales. As it happens, our international involvement scale does resemble Nesbit's American nationalism scale because both have military components.

²²The only items on which the 1988 parties were not clearly differentiated were two agree-disagree items, "The United States should help countries all over the world" and "The federal government should act to protect the environment" and the National Election Study item on women's role in society.

²³While our major dissent from the Carmines and Stimson thesis is that we found multiple motivations, there is an additional puzzle that results from their emphasis on race. The NES minority aid item is an unusually weak postdictor of switching. It is related to party switching at the bivariate level but not in a multivariate analysis in the presence of other issue attitudes. The best explanation may be that minority aid "appears to have dubious validity as [a measure] of racial liberalism" (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 125). The item is not strongly related to attitudes about either segregation or racial liberalism.

crats). He showed that those most likely to switch parties in the next generation were well-educated offspring of fathers with sociologically deviant party identifications (1969, 14). The well-educated, he argued, were most likely to be aware of the incongruence between their inherited party identifications and the circumstances of their lives. We believe that we have identified persons with *ideologically* deviant party identifications. When their views were tested by adult political experience, they were likely to sense the incongruence between their issue preferences and their parties and switch to the opposition.

Now what are the possible consequences of this realignment for the U.S. party system? Our answers are necessarily speculative, but some analysis is possible. We can also draw on the debate between Schattschneider and Herring and their successors about the probable consequences of more conflictual and more consensual party systems. One way of estimating the consequences of realignment is to "compare" the present parties with the parties that would have existed if no party shifting had taken place. Table 6 displays the mean scores and variances for liberalism-conservatism and the two issue scales. The scores are shown for the present parties and for "former" parties reconstructed by grouping all converts with their original parties. The party shifting has a clear result: it increases the between-party variance and decreases the within-party variance.

The estimates of interparty variance in Table 6 imply a more polarized politics, and this implication is supported by additional analyses of our own (Kessel, forthcoming) and others (Miller and Jennings 1986; Miller 1988; Stone, Rapoport, and Abramowitz 1989). The numbers vary slightly from one analysis to another,²⁴ but all the results point in the same direction. There has been a modest, but significant, increase in interparty issue distance.²⁵ By no stretch of the imagination have we moved to a polarized politics, but we have moved into an era of more distinctive political parties. As long as both political parties tended toward the center, voters could choose between them on the basis of performance in office without marked changes in policy. This is no longer as true. The voters are now given a clearer choice of policies because of the greater issue distance between parties.

The intraparty consequences are also worth discussing. While the shift in mean positions affected the Democrats much more than the Republicans, the within-party variance has been sharply reduced in both parties. Hence, both par-

²⁴For example, a simple issue index was composed from five items asked of campaign leaders in both 1972 and 1988. The mean estimate of the reconstructed "former" Republican party was 3.2 and that for the "former" Democratic party was 4.2. The mean score of the Republican leaders in 1972 was 3.7 and that for the Democratic leaders was 4.7.

²⁵We are not saying that party switching was the sole cause of increased political polarization, only that it contributed to that end. Obviously, there were other factors. Those who were continuously active in both parties could have changed some of their attitudes; new cohorts of activists were recruited by both parties, and so forth.

Table 6. Comparison of Present and "Former" Parties

	Present Democrats		"Former" Democrats	
	Mean	Var.	Mean	Var.
Liberal-conservative	5.2	1.3	4.3	2.5
International involvement	5.3	1.1	4.6	1.4
Social welfare	5.5	0.9	4.6	1.5
	Present Republicans		"Former" Republicans	
Liberal-conservative	2.7	0.8	2.8	1.2
International involvement	3.3	0.9	3.4	1.3
Social welfare	3.0	1.0	3.1	1.5

ties are more ideologically cohesive, and party leaders find it easier to persuade their troops to march in the same direction. But it also means that neither party has as much of a minority capable of raising questions about policy. The "former" parties included the full spectrum of positions on the liberal-conservative scale and both issue scales. A truncated distribution means that there are fewer Republicans to ask about the eventual costs of not having adequate welfare programs and fewer Democrats to ask if government has the talent to initiate several major programs at the same time.

Greater issue distance between parties and greater agreement within parties points to conflict rather than consensus. It reminds us of the Verba and Nie (1972) finding that campaigners "are heavily involved in conflict and cleavage, less concerned with the civic problems of the community than with the ongoing social policy debate and the electoral process" (1972, 94). Interparty conflict has its uses. Leaders can hold their own parties together by convincing members that criticism is coming from opponents. When Lee Atwater said, "Every Democrat in the country was after my hide," the implication was that he was entitled to Republican support, not that his campaign tactics were overly sharp. And as long as former Speaker Jim Wright could convince House Democrats that questions about his business dealings came from Republicans, he had a majority behind him. But the purpose of political institutions is to provide means of dealing with social conflict while at the same time maintaining an underlying consensus. This is especially true in the United States where we have, in Neustadt's nice phrase, "separate institutions sharing power," and it is especially true in the second half of the twentieth century when most presidents have found that the opposition party controls at least one branch of Congress. In these circumstances consensus is indispensable to the maintenance of a constructive political dialogue across institutional and partisan boundaries.

As we said, our discussion of the consequences of realignment is more speculative than our analysis of the duration, movement, and motivation that led to it. But V. O. Key himself was speculating when he wrote, "Doubtless secular changes affecting major segments of American society now in process will in due course profoundly affect the party system" (1959, 209). Thirty years later we can see evidence of changes in our party system. All of us need to remain mindful of the importance of gradual, often unnoticed, microchanges that will ultimately affect our political life.

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