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Partisan Mobilization, Cognitive Mobilization and the Changing American Electorate

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One can arguably claim that party identification is the most important concept in modern electoral behavior research.¹ The early analyses of the Michigan election studies demonstrated how partisanship was a core element in political identities and behavior (Campbell et al. 1960, 1966). Since then, party identification is routinely a predictor in a wide array of analyses, ranging from voting to participation to predicting issue positions. Indeed, the developers of the concept stressed its functional importance:

The present analysis of party identification is based on the assumption that the ... parties serve as standard-setting groups for a significant proportion of the people in this country. In other words, it is assumed that many people associate themselves psychologically with one or the other of the parties, and that this identification has predictable relationships with their perceptions, evaluations, and actions. (Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954: 90)

But just as the authors of The American Voter were demonstrating the analytic and predictive power of partisan identification as a concept, these ties began to weaken. At first, researchers asked if this was a temporary response to the political controversies of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Converse 1976; Abramson 1979). But now, a quarter century later, partisan attachments remain weaker than during the “stable state” period of The American Voter studies. Indeed, partisanship reached a new low point in the 2000 American National Election Study (ANES); only 41 percent of respondents claimed to be independents in 2000, compared to barely 25 percent in the 1950s.

These trends of weakening partisanship are well documented in American electoral research, but their meaning and interpretation remain widely debated. Some analysts discount the significance of these trends, or even the reality of partisan dealignment (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Bartels 2000; Keith et al. 1992). Others discuss weakening partisanship as due to the depoliticization of the electoral politics (Dimock 1998; Milner 2002), consistent with Putnam’s thesis of Americans’ decreasing social engagement (Putnam 2000).

This research tests an alternative explanation that begins with the functional theory of partisanship that underlies The American Voter model, and then asks how the socioeconomic transformation of American society during the later half of the 20th century may have altered this logic. Using the long data series from the American National Election Studies (ANES), we

¹ The data in this research were provided by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research; only the author is responsible for the analyses presented here. I want to thank Martin Wattenberg for his suggestions on this research.

demonstrate that social change has reshaped the nature of partisanship and independence among the contemporary electorate, with fundamental implications for our understanding of contemporary political behavior. We then illustrate the impact of these changes on citizen evaluations and behavior.

A Functional Theory of Party Identification

Although not initially framed in terms of cognitive theory and heuristics, from the start the concept of partisan identification was built upon a functional model. At the time of The American Voter, most evidence pointed to the limited political skills and resources of the average citizen. Politics was remote to many individuals, and even access to political information was limited. Newspapers and radio were the predominate sources of political information, and the quantity and quality of political information available to the public—and the knowledgeable absorption of this information—was limited. Indeed, these constraints were one reason why early electoral scholars were so critical about the conceptual abilities of the electorate at large (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960: 543; Converse 1964).

The concept of party identification offered one explanation of how the average individual managed the complexities of democratic politics. Without using the term, researchers described partisanship as a heuristic for organizing political information, evaluations and behaviors. The authors of The American Voter described partisanship as a "perceptual screen"—through which individuals interpret and evaluate political experiences. Borre and Katz (1973: 79-85) spoke quite directly about the functional value of partisanship as a political guide (also Wattenberg 1998: ch. 2; Miller 1976). This cue-giving function of partisanship is strongest for voting behavior, because it is here that citizens make explicit partisan choices. Moreover, party attachments are relevant to a much broader range of political phenomena than social group cues or other heuristics, because parties are so central to the political process. Issues and events frequently are presented to the public in partisan terms, and nearly all politicians are affiliated with a political party. As researchers focused attention on the information shortcuts that voters use to orient themselves to politics, partisanship emerged as a valuable cost-saving device (Fiorina 1990; Rahn 1993). Partisan ties also affect political participation. Just like sports loyalties, attachment to a political party draws an individual into the electoral process to support his or her side. Participation in campaign activities are generally higher among strong partisan identifiers. In summary, partisan cues are an efficient heuristic because they enable citizens to use their partisan identities to decide what policies and candidates “people like themselves” support and then to translate this into political action.

Embedded in this functional explanation of partisanship, however, is the possibility that the functional need for party cues may change. Although many individuals continue to rely on the cues emanating from partisan ties, W. Phillips Shively (1979) was one of the first to stress that the need for such cues should decline as the political skills of the public increase and information costs decrease. Thus, the tremendous socio-economic changes in American society over the past half century may have lessened the need for party cues by some citizens. For example, at the time of the 1952 election, over two-fifths of the American electorate had a primary education or less, and only a tenth had at least some college education. By 2000, the proportion of the

electorate with some college education outnumbers voters with only primary education by a ten-to-one ratio, and those with some college-education make up almost two-thirds of the electorate. While there is not a one-to-one relationship between education and political sophistication, this tremendous increase in the educational skills of the average citizen should affect the functional logic of party identification. Similarly, access to information resources and other prerequisites for informed democratic citizenship have grown by equal measure as the United States has become a more cosmopolitan, advanced industrial, information-based society. We are all aware of these changes in social conditions, but since they have evolved slowly over the past fifty years we have not taken stock of the implications of these cumulative trends for a functional model of partisanship.

One approach maintains that these social trends lead to the *cognitive mobilization* of some voters as an alternative to partisan mobilization (Dalton 1984; Inglehart 1990). Cognitive mobilization involves two separate developments. First, the public's ability to process political information has increased, as through the higher levels of education and political sophistication among the electorate. Second, the cost of acquiring political information has decreased, such as through the expansion of the mass media. Cognitive mobilization thus means that more citizens now possess the political resources and skills that better prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics and reach their own political decisions without reliance of affective, habitual party cues or other surrogates. Consequently, the long-term dealignment of American electoral politics may be linked to a parallel process of cognitive mobilization.

The literature on electoral behavior is divided on the relationship between partisan mobilization and this process of cognitive mobilization. Dalton (1984) presented initial cross-national evidence that the cognitive mobilization process creates a new group of sophisticated independents, and the proportion of the public that qualifies as these new independents is increasing in Western democracies. Other research indicated that the growth of nonpartisans in the U.S. is concentrated among the young, the better educated and the politically sophisticated (Beck 1984; Dalton 2000). Similarly, Inglehart (1990: 366) found that the percentage of sophisticated nonpartisans has increased significantly in Europe over time,¹ and Wolf (2002) demonstrated a longitudinal growth in cognitively mobilized nonpartisans within the American, German and British electorates. Thus, this perspective argues that the development of a more sophisticated public possessing the skills and resources to follow the complexities of politics and make political decisions on their own, decreasing the need for habitual party ties.

In contrast, Dimock (1998) claimed that the growth of independents in the American electorate is disproportionately concentrated among the less sophisticated sectors of the public. Delli Carpini and Keeter's (1986) also argued that the public's political sophistication has not grown over time. Similarly, Milner (2002: ch. 3) suggested that the erosion of social capital documented by Putnam (2000) should demobilize partisans who are less engaged and less interested in politics. Indeed, Putnam's (2000) thesis about declining political engagement apparently contradicts the cognitive mobilization thesis. Thus, this perspective implies that weakening partisanship is a sign of political disengagement within the American public.

This paper tests these rival hypotheses as a two step process. First, we measure both the partisan mobilization and cognitive mobilization of the American electorate, and track the relationship between these two traits and the changing distribution of mobilization patterns over

time. Second, we examine the correlates of these different sources of political mobilization on electoral attitudes and behaviors. The results provide a more accurate assessment about whether the social transformation of American society over the past half-century has altered the bases of political mobilization.

Measuring Party Mobilization and Cognitive Mobilization

Although conceptually distinct, party mobilization and cognitive mobilization are often correlated in the real world. Indeed, the logic of party mobilization is that strong party ties stimulate political interest and involvement, and some causal flow works in the opposite direction (Campbell et al. 1960: 142-45, 250-256).

From our perspective, however, we need to separate these two dimensions to understand the changing characteristics of the American electorate. Figure 1 presents a mobilization typology based on the cross-classification of both measures (derived from Peterson (1978) and Dalton (1984)). This typology yields four ideal groups that represent distinct mobilization patterns and define the basis of our analyses.

“Apoliticals” are neither attached to a political party nor cognitively involved in politics. This group conforms to the independent voter originally described by Campbell and his colleagues (1960: 143-45). That is, Apoliticals are located at the boundary of politics—they should be less involved in politics, politically less sophisticated, and less concerned about political issues and the candidates of the day.

“Ritual Partisans” represent a functional model of partisanship as a guiding political identity in the absence of cognitive sophistication. Ritual Partisans should support their preferred party and participate in party-related activities such as voting or campaigns. However, their party support should be almost a habitual activity, and political involvement or understanding is less likely to extend to areas where party cues are lacking.

Figure 1 The Mobilization Typology

		Party Mobilization	
		Independents	Weak/strong PID
Cognitive Mobilization	High	<i>Apartisans</i>	<i>Cognitive Partisans</i>
	Low	<i>Apoliticals</i>	<i>Ritual Partisans</i>

“Cognitive Partisans” score highly on both mobilization dimensions. Their strong party attachments should stimulate involvement in party-related activities and the use of party as a heuristic. At the same time, this group is psychologically involved in politics even when party cues are lacking. Since the partisan and cognitive dimensions overlap, both influence their perceptions and behaviors.

The “Apartisan” group is the focus of this study. Apartisans are not attached to a political

party. Nevertheless, they generally possess the skills and resources necessary to orient themselves to politics without depending on party labels. Apartisans may also be involved in elections and other party-related activities, although they may be less supportive of party-based politics, and their political involvement may extend beyond the partisan sphere. They are political independents—but they are independents of a much different sort than the Apoliticals.

The important feature of this typology is that it distinguishes between different types of citizens who are normally combined when either mobilization dimension is considered separately. For example, studies of party mobilization normally combine the Apolitical and Apartisan groups—even though one group is at the periphery of politics and the other is comprised of politically sophisticated citizens. Similarly, Ritual Partisans and Cognitive Partisans often are combined, although we propose that each group approaches politics in a substantially different manner. Therefore, distinguishing between these four distinct groups should clarify our understanding of contemporary electoral behavior.

To study the groups described in this typology, we sought measures of party mobilization and cognitive mobilization. The partisanship dimension is best represented by the strength of an individual's partisan identification using the standard ANES question. The cognitive dimension is somewhat more difficult to operationalize with existing survey data. Cognitive mobilization implies that citizens possess the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged with less dependence on external cues. In addition, cognitive mobilization implies a psychological involvement in politics so that latent abilities are applied to political decision making. In other words, following the lead of Dalton (1984), Inglehart (1990: ch. 11) and others (e.g., Inglehart and Klingemann 1976: 261-64; Peterson 1978), we constructed a cognitive mobilization index by combining education (to represent the skills component) with interest in public affairs (to represent the political involvement component).²

These two variables are modestly correlated (the tau-b is .22 across all time points), but we combine the two items because both make an independent contribution to the underlying concept (also see Dalager 1996). The cognitively mobilized are those who possess both the skills and motivation to grapple with the complexities of politics on their own. A partial validation of this cognitive mobilization measure is available with a political knowledge battery from the 2000 ANES. Political knowledge is related to both education and political engagement; and in a multivariate model predicting knowledge, both have substantial and equivalent independent impact, and their total impact is greater than either taken alone.³

It is not clear how the expansion of education and political interest should have affected the distribution of these four groups over time. Because party mobilization and cognitive mobilization were positively related during the “stable state” period of the *American Voter* study, one might presume that the growth of cognitive mobilization over the past several decades should have strengthened partisan ties. But partisanship has obviously weakened, and thus the question is whether these new independents are located primarily among the Apartisans or the Apoliticals.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of mobilization types over time. During the stable state period of 1964-66, when our series begins, the distribution of groups reflects the patterns that Campbell et al. had previously described.⁴ Ritual Partisans—those with party identifications and low cognitive mobilization—are the modal type (47%). These are the voters who depend on

party heuristics to manage the complex world of politics—if one could push the series back to the 1952 and 1956 elections of The American Voter study, this group would be even larger.⁵ In contrast, cognitively sophisticated partisans comprise a much smaller proportion of the public (23%) in the early 1960s. Among independents, most are the traditional Apoliticals (17%) who lack party cues or cognitive skills to deal with politics, and thus remain at the boundary of electoral activity. The proportion of sophisticated Apartisans is much smaller (7%)—the smallest of the four groups in the early 1960s.

The fifth column in Table 1 describes the distribution of types in the 2000 elections. The last survey in our series displays the general increase in cognitive mobilization over time, which reconstitutes the characteristics of partisans and nonpartisans. For example, the percent of Ritual Partisans decreases by nearly half (to 27%), while the number of Cognitive Partisans grows to become the largest group (33%). Equally important, while independents were once predominately composed of Apoliticals, the growth of independents over time has occurred primarily among the sophisticated Apartisans, who account for a fifth of the public in 2000. It is also important to note that this time trend is not simply the consequence of expanding educational levels in the American electorate (although we consider expanding education one basis of cognitive mobilization). If the initial relationship between party mobilization and cognitive mobilization from the early 1960s had held constant over time, rising educational levels would have stimulated an increase in partisanship. Instead, these new cognitively mobilized citizens have disproportionately turned into Apartisans.

Table 1. The Distribution of Mobilization Types over Time, 1964-2000

Mobilization Type	1964-1966	1968-1978	1980-1990	1992-1998	2000	Change
Ritual partisan	47.1	37.4	35.6	29.9	26.8	-20%
Cognitive partisan	27.1	26.2	29.1	34.1	32.8	+6%
Apartisan	10.0	16.3	14.2	16.5	20.1	+10%
Apolitical	<u>16.0</u>	<u>20.1</u>	<u>21.2</u>	<u>19.6</u>	<u>19.8</u>	+4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Source: American National Election Studies, 1964-2000. For the construction of the mobilization typology see footnote 2.

Thus, the contemporary American electorate is much different than that studied in The American Voter—they are less partisan, but also more likely to possess the cognitive skills and resources to independently manage the complexities of politics. Growing sophistication has expanded the pool of Cognitive Partisans and especially Apartisans. And the proportion of voters who approach each election based on ritual dependence on party cues has decreased most

dramatically. The mobilization patterns of the electorate have been transformed.

The Implications of Changing Mobilization Patterns

The ultimate value of the mobilization typology is derived from its ability to discriminate between different patterns of electoral behavior. Our discussion of the party and cognitive mobilization theories has alluded to several consequences of mobilization patterns. For example, public images of parties and candidates should vary across mobilization types; Ritual Partisans may focus on party ties as a basis of candidate evaluation, while Apartisans are more likely to be sensitive to issue stances; Apoliticals may struggle to articulate a basis for their images because of their limited political sophistication and engagement.

Moreover, recent scholarship points to other differences in political behavior as a function of mobilization patterns. Dalton (1984) found that cognitive partisans tended to possess higher levels of political sophistication and use different modes of political action. Paul Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock (1991) demonstrated that the better educated and the politically sophisticated place more weight on issues as a basis of their electoral decision making; less sophisticated voters rely more on partisanship and social cues. Wolf (2002) examined the impact of mobilization patterns on voting, ideology and political support.

Indeed, the mobilization typology should have a wide range of potential consequences on citizen political behavior. To give some focus to our analyses here, we concentrate on three areas that derive from Campbell and his colleagues (1960: ch. 6) initial discussion of the functional value of partisanship. We first examine differences in the basis of political evaluations as a function of mobilization patterns. Then we consider differences in the correlates of electoral choice. Finally, we examine the consequences of mobilization patterns on electoral volatility.

Political Evaluations

As noted earlier, Campbell and his colleagues stressed the importance of party identification as a perceptual screen that helps individuals understand and evaluate political phenomena. Using partisanship as a guide, citizens had a basis for judging candidates and determining their positions on the issues of the day. The commonality of such party links made party identification the ultimate heuristic for voters who lacked the ability to make such judgements on their own. In contrast, the cognitive mobilization thesis maintains that sophisticated individuals should have a richer basis of political evaluations, going beyond party affiliations to consider policy positions and other substantive factors.⁶

We chose to test for these contrasting patterns of party and cognitive mobilization by examining candidate images. Presidential candidates are the de facto leaders of their respective parties, and thus party identification provides a potent guide on which candidate to support. But the impact of mobilization patterns should also run deeper, touching the factors that individuals cite in evaluating candidates and judging their worthiness for office.

We expect Apoliticals to have the shallowest basis of evaluation, since they lack either party cues or cognitive traits that could provide bases of evaluation. Ritual Partisans should have more content to their candidate evaluations, but these should be more dependent on party cues,

and less tied to policy criteria or ideological factors. Apartisans should be a mirror image; they should place less weight on party cues as a basis of candidate evaluation and instead give more weight to policy criteria. Moreover, because of their higher level of sophistication, we would expect Apartisans to have more content to their political evaluations when compared to either Apoliticals or Ritual partisans. Finally, Cognitive Partisans benefit from the cues provided by their party ties and their cognitive level. Like Ritual Partisans, they may judge candidates in terms of their party affiliations; and like Apartisans, policy should also be an important basis of evaluation.

We tested these expectations with the open-ended questions on what respondents liked and disliked about the presidential candidates in 2000. The responses to the likes and dislikes questions were coded into a set of standard categories, and these are displayed in Table 2 for Gore and Bush. Certainly Americans should have had an extensive store of information on which to judge Al Gore, since he had served as vice president for eight years and then ran for president. But the first obvious pattern in Table 2 is the variation in the richness of political evaluations across mobilization types. Out of a possible total of ten possible likes or dislikes, on average Apoliticals gave a mere 1.32 responses; 38% gave no meaningful answer on what they liked or disliked about Gore. At the other pole, both Apartisans and Cognitive Partisans possess a richer belief structure, mentioning 2.93 and 2.90 items respectively.

Even more illuminating are the criteria that different mobilization types cite in evaluating Al Gore. Ritual Partisans are most likely to use party-related criteria, cited by 31% of this group; in contrast, they cite policy criteria nearly as infrequently as Apoliticals. The personal qualities of candidates also loom large in the images of Ritual Partisans. Apartisans provide the contrasting pattern of mobilization: the majority of Apartisans cite at least one policy factor as a basis of their evaluations of Gore, as well as candidate characteristics such as ability and personal qualities. Apartisans also cite party criteria as frequently as Ritual Partisans. Cognitive Partisans are very similar to Apartisans, they cite a diverse array of criteria in judging Gore, including partisan and non-partisan factors.

The lower panel of the table displays the comparable data for evaluations of George W. Bush, and the overall patterns are similar to Gore's image. Many Apoliticals (39%) lack any substantive evaluations of Bush; and they are least likely to cite policy as a criteria. Party criteria are most often used by Ritual partisans. Apartisans and Cognitive Partisans most frequently cite policy criteria in evaluating Bush.

In summary, two important patterns emerge from these data. First, nonpartisans now includes two strikingly different groups that are nearly equal in size but polar opposites in their characteristics. Apoliticals conform to the traditional notion of independents as lacking political sophistication and/or engagement, which is displayed in the large number who express no substantive comments about the major party presidential candidates. Apartisans, in contrast, have extensive views about the candidates, especially evaluating them in policy terms—much as we would expect of a rational independent voter. Second, the patterns of partisan and cognitive mobilization generally shape both the extensiveness of the information that citizens have about political actors—such as presidential candidates—and also the content of this information. Moreover, presidential candidates are extremely visible political actors, where interested citizens have easy access to a wide array of information. In lower salience offices or on matters where

information is not so accessible, we would expect even larger variations across mobilization types.

Table 2. Sources of Likes/Dislikes about Gore and Bush

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>Apolitical</u>	<u>Ritual Partisan</u>	<u>Cognitive Partisan</u>	<u>Apartisan</u>
<u>Gore</u>				
Candidate abilities	21	24	33	34
Personal qualities	23	30	44	43
Group ties	4	8	9	11
Government management	4	6	11	9
Party factors	16	31	27	30
Policy factors	25	27	57	56
No content	38	23	11	14
Total	131%	149%	192%	197%
Mean responses	1.32	1.99	2.90	2.93
<u>Bush</u>				
Candidate abilities	18	18	34	37
Personal qualities	26	34	44	44
Group ties	4	8	13	15
Government management	4	4	8	8
Party factors	12	26	23	19
Policy factors	29	37	58	54
No content	39	28	9	13
Total	132%	155%	189%	190%
Mean responses	1.38	1.78	2.85	2.80

Source: 2000 American National Election Study.

Note: Table entries are the percentage of each group that use each criterion at least once in discussing their likes and/or dislikes of the two presidential candidates. Totals exceed 100 percent because multiple responses were possible.

From Evaluations to Preferences

The next step in our analysis considers how mobilization patterns affect the decision making processes of the public. To what extent do different types of voters rely on the evaluations we have just described in choosing between candidates, as one example of how evaluative criteria are translated into electoral and policy preferences.

The core of our theoretical expectation are a direct extension of our prior discussion about the nature of party and cognitive mobilization. We expect, for instance, that Ritual Partisans are more likely to rely on party criteria in making their electoral decisions because their stable party identities provide a decisional guide—and these voters are less likely to have sophisticated information about the issues or candidates of a campaign. This leads Ritual Partisans to habitually support “their party” and to begin each campaign with these predispositions. Conversely, by definition Apartisans are likely to discount the importance of party cues. Their higher level of cognitive mobilization should lead to greater attention to policy criteria and candidate characteristics as a basis of their electoral preferences. This is consistent with the Sniderman et al. (1991) finding that better educated citizens place a greater weight on issues when making their voting decisions. This reliance on short-term issues and candidates of the election thus creates more volatility and fluidity of voting choices as Apartisans are more likely to react to the ebbs and flows of the campaign.

Expectations for the other two mobilization types are more ambiguous. Apoliticals are not likely to have well-structured political choices since politics is a distant activity—they neither feel strongly attached to the parties competing in the election nor have the sophistication to effectively monitor the details of the choices to be made. Indeed, we are suggesting that it is difficult for Apoliticals to have sophisticated knowledge about the candidates or the issues; to the extent these are cited as criteria of evaluations, the content may be a quixotic mix of information. Cognitive Partisans should represent the contrasting pattern. They can use their party identities as a decision making cue, but they also are more likely to link these party ties to meaningful information on the issues and candidates of the campaign. Cognitive Partisans have the richest information field from which to make their eventual electoral choices.

The criteria used in making electoral choices are complicated, and the modeling of voting choice can yield extremely complex statistical models. But our goal is much simpler than building a model to explain the maximum variance in voting choice. Instead, we want to see if the relative weight of the factors related to electoral preferences differ by the nature of political mobilization. Thus we rely on a very simple model that we believe captures the essence of voter decision making. We used the candidate like/dislike questions analyzed above to create measures of three core factors that might influence electoral choice: partisan cues, candidate images, and policy preferences.⁷ We then used these statements about the candidates from the pre-election wave of the 2000 ANES to predict Gore-Bush preferences in the post-election wave.⁸ This is a basic model, but it reflects the core of our research interests.

Table 3 presents the regression models using these three predictors of candidate preferences in 2000. The first analyses are based on the total sample, the next four models are separately run for each mobilization type. The total sample model indicates that these three

predictors are fairly effective in predicting Gore/Bush preferences, explaining 50 percent of the variance. Each of the three potential predictors—partisan cues, candidate images, and policy preferences—carries a substantial weight. The relative impact of each predictor is less central to our research, however, because this depends on how one attributes meaning to the responses to the likes/dislike questions.⁹ Instead, we want to focus our discussion on how the weight of these three factors varies across our four control groups.

Our clearest expectations involve the relative weight of party cues between Ritual Partisans and Apartisans. As we expected, the weight that Ritual Partisans give to party cues ($b=13.84$) is nearly twice as great as Apartisans ($b=7.51$). Cognitive Partisans also give considerable weight to party cues ($b=11.96$), although this factor does not dominate their decision making as it tends to do for Ritual Partisans. Also as expected, Cognitive Partisans have the richest source of political cues and thus the most structured behavior—the model explains nearly two-thirds of the variance for Cognitive Partisans, compared to under half for Ritual Partisans and Apartisans.

The obvious anomaly, however, is the model for Apoliticals. On the one hand, the three predictors are less effective in predicting candidate preferences, explaining only a third of the total variance. On the other hand, the slopes for partisan cues ($b=19.25$) and policy preferences ($b=11.57$) are stronger than for any other group. One might claim that without much political knowledge, Apoliticals have to turn to something as a basis of their candidate choices (at least for the minority who do vote)—and partisan cues are the most accessible source of information about Gore and Bush. But we also previously demonstrated that Apoliticals are least likely to cite partisan criteria in evaluating either candidate (Table 2). Similarly, while policy preferences are strongly related to candidate preferences for Apoliticals, we also found that Apoliticals are least likely to make policy references about either candidate (and we suspect these policy references have less substantive content).

Table 3. The Correlates of Candidate Preferences

Predictor	Total Sample		Apolitical	Ritual Partisan	Cognitive	
	β	b			Partisan	Apartisan
Partisan cues	.23	12.65	19.25	13.84	11.96	7.51
Candidate images	.35	8.43	5.56	9.70	8.83	8.06
Policy preferences	.40	9.16	11.57	8.83	9.36	8.52
R Square		.50	.33	.45	.62	.46

Source: 2000 American National Election Study.

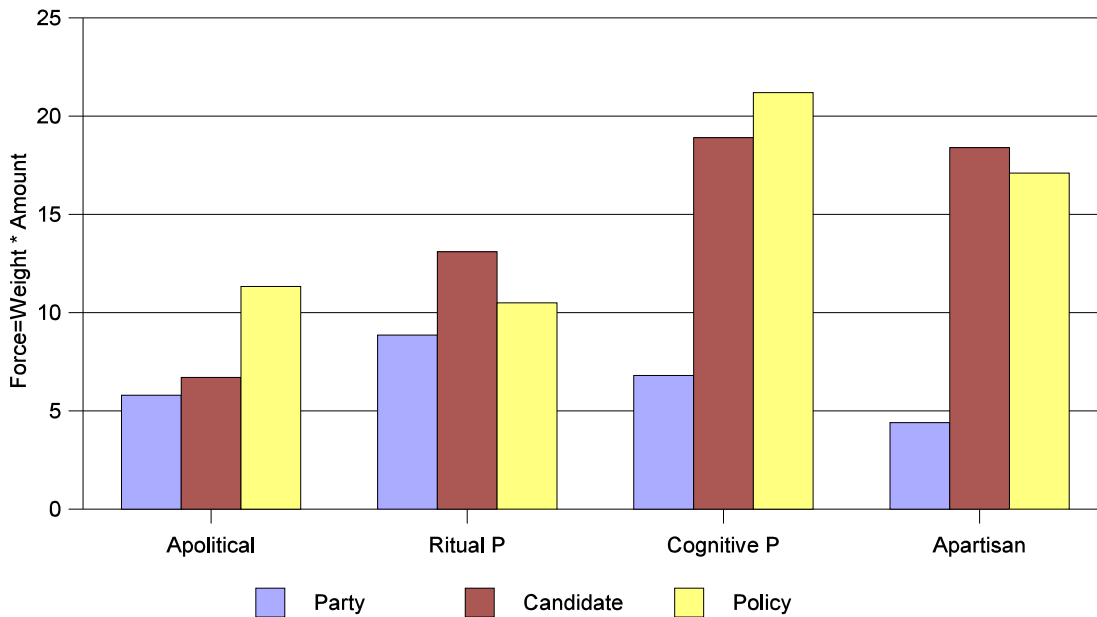
Note: Table entries are the unstandardized regression coefficients using the responses from the likes/dislike questions to predict differences in the Gore minus Bush thermometer scores. For the total sample we also present the standardized coefficients (β).

The pattern for Apoliticals led us to reconsider how one judges the weight of each

predictor in explaining candidate preferences. Measuring the impact of a variable in the context of our research is like measuring force in physics. Force is a function of the mass of the object and the velocity it is traveling. The “mass” of each predictor can be represented by the amount of information existing in each of our three categories, which we measure by the total number of likes and dislikes for both candidates on the criteria. That is, the “mass” of party cues is the total number of party references given in the questions about likes/dislikes of Gore and Bush. The “velocity” of a predictor is its strength as estimated by our regression models in Table 3. Thus, the total impact of party as a basis of decision making is the product of “mass” times “velocity”.¹⁰ This is analogous to Donald’s Stokes (1966) method in calculating the components of electoral decision making, except we count the total number of mentions of a criteria rather than the partisan balance of these mentions.

Figure 2 presents our estimates of the causal force of the three criteria—party cues, candidate image, and policy preferences—for each of the four mobilization types. Now, the information deficit of Apoliticals is apparent. Even if a cue has a strong weight, there is little mass to exert much force. Thus all three predictors exert relatively little impact on the candidate preferences of Apoliticals. At the same time, the contrasting bases of evaluation for Ritual

Figure 2 Information Base for Candidate Evaluations



Source: 2000 American National Election Study.

Note: Figure entries are the product of the unstandardized regression coefficients from Table 2 times the number of items mentioned in each category for the likes/dislikes of Gore and Bush.

Partisans and Apartisans is now even more clearly apparent. Party cues exert more than twice as much force for Ritual Partisans than for Apartisans. Conversely, the impact of candidate image

and policy preferences is substantially greater among Apartisans (which reflects a comparable causal weight but a much greater mass of such references among Apartisans). Finally, Cognitive Partisans present a pattern that straddles the two previous groups; the force of party cues nearly matches Ritual Partisans, and the force of issues and candidate images nearly matches that of Apartisans. This suggests that Cognitive Partisans may come closest to Fiorina's (1981) model of partisanship as a rational summation of political positions, where a high volume of issue preferences and strong candidate images may alter partisan identities. Lacking such political content, the partisan identities of Ritual Partisans may be less mutable.

Mobilization Patterns and Electoral Change

Since the correlates of candidate preferences differ across mobilization types, this has implications for electoral change in America. For example, other research has demonstrated that voters are making decisions later in the electoral cycle and that electoral volatility is increasing over time (Wattenberg 1998; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000: ch. 3). This may partially reflect changes in the bases of political mobilization. The decrease in the number of Ritual Partisans and the increase in Cognitive Partisans and Apartisans should shift the sources of voting choice from long-term habitual party ties toward more weight for short-term factors such as the issues and candidates of the campaign. In other words, the shifting bases of mobilization should contribute to the patterns of dealignment that have been observed over the past several decades.

We can test the impact of mobilization patterns on dealignment trends with three examples: when voting decisions are made, party vote switching between elections, and split ticket voting. The first panel of Table 4 describes the percentage of each group that says they decided their presidential voting preference after the nominating conventions. These data demonstrate that citizens mobilized by partisan forces routinely enter the campaign with their preferences already decided. In the 1964-66 surveys, for instance, only 31% of Ritual Partisans said they decided after the conventions; most Ritual Partisans are the "yellow dog Democrats" (and their Republican equivalents) who decide who to vote for before the campaign even begins. Conversely, the majority of Apoliticals and Apartisans say they decide during the campaign—though we have previously seen that these two groups vary greatly in the information they use in deciding their preferences.

A second indicator of growing electoral volatility is the percentage of voters who say they switch their votes between elections. While recall data are subject to error, the percentage of the public who report switching their party choices between elections has been increasing (Wattenberg 1998). The second panel of Table 4 reports the percentage of each group who report switching their two-party presidential vote in adjacent elections. Again, Ritual Partisans and Cognitive Partisans are the most stable across the four time periods in the table. Apartisans and Apoliticals display somewhat higher levels of vote switching, but it is worthwhile to consider the contrasting processes of these two non-partisan groups. Apartisans possess more information and more conceptual tools for judging the candidates at each election, thus vote switching is more likely to evolve from a deliberative decision making process. Apoliticals, in contrast, have a limited store of political knowledge and limited information about each campaign; indeed, the majority of Apoliticals do not vote in both elections. Rather than reasoned choice, voting

switching among Apoliticals may reflect their lack of political grounding.

Table 4. The Relationship between Mobilization Types and Electoral Change

Mobilization Type and Voting Behavior	1964- 1966	1968- 1978	1980- 1990	1992- 2000
Decide during campaign				
Ritual partisan	31	38	36	41
Cognitive partisan	31	36	30	31
Apartisan	49	49	54	54
Apolitical	45	54	48	61
Switched 2 party presidential vote between elections				
Ritual partisan	16	22	17	14
Cognitive partisan	18	16	12	9
Apartisan	22	26	22	20
Apolitical	25	31	24	27
Split Pres/Congress vote				
Ritual partisan	12	21	24	17
Cognitive partisan	18	24	21	17
Apartisan	23	32	34	25
Apolitical	11	29	33	29

Source: American National Election Studies, 1964-2000. For the construction of the mobilization typology see footnote 2.

The third panel in Table 4 displays the percentages who report split-ticket voting between their presidential and congressional voting choices. These data display the now familiar contrast as a function of party mobilization. Ritual and Cognitive Partisans both report relatively low levels of split-ticket voting; for the former because of their need to rely on party cues as a base of choice, for the latter because their partisanship is reinforced by more extensive political information. In contrast, Apartisans and Apoliticals are both more likely to divide their party support between presidential and congressional offices.

The various indicators of electoral change in Table 4 are generally consistent across mobilization groups. By and large, these differences also seem to be fairly stable over this four decade period. Thus, the evidence of weakening party voting over time—later decisions during the campaign, more volatility between elections, and more split-ticket voting—can at least partially be traced to the changing distribution of mobilization patterns within the American electorate. The decrease in Ritual Partisans over time, and the concomitant increase in Apartisans, shifts the basis of electoral choice to short term factors, such as issue preferences and candidate image, and leads more voters basing their choices on the content of the campaign. The

inevitable result is the evidence of spreading partisan dealignment during the last several decades.

Conclusion

The American Voter was truly a seminal study in providing empirical evidence on the nature of American political behavior, and a theoretical framework for understanding that evidence. The concept of party identification was a central part of that framework, and a potent factor in shaping citizen behavior and the macro-level electoral process. Party identification remains a key element in our understanding of electoral behavior (Miller 1991; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002: ch. 8).

The evidence presented here, however, argues that the electorate described by Campbell and his colleagues no longer exists. They described a reality that existed fifty years ago, but a process of cognitive mobilization has gradually changed the composition of the American electorate and their patterns of electoral behavior. These trends are quite apparent in the changing patterns of partisanship. At mid-century, the majority of the public was what we describe as Ritual Partisans: possessing limited political skills or resources to manage the complexities of politics, and thus relying on habitual party loyalties as a guide for their behavior. Party identification was more than a party preference for these Ritual Partisans, it was a cue that enabled them to manage a complex political world that might otherwise be beyond their conceptual abilities or interests.

But the modernization of American society over the past five decades has transformed the public.¹¹ Expanding educational levels, increased access to political information through the media, and even the growing role of government have produced a process of cognitive mobilization that expands the political skills and resources of the average citizen. Consequently, fewer individuals must rely on party loyalties passed down from their parents and reinforced by habitual support for the same party. Instead, an increasing share of the public approaches politics with a greater ability to judge the candidates and issues independent of habitual party loyalties. This has led to the expansion of a group of new independents, Apartisans, who have a high level of cognitive mobilization but who lack partisan ties—a group that now comprises a fifth of the public. These Apartisans are nearly the polar opposite of the traditional image of non-partisans presented in The American Voter. They are better educated, knowledgeable about politics, and politically engaged, even if they remain someone distant from political parties.

This shifting balance between Ritual Partisans and Apartisans encapsulates a fundamental change in the characteristics of the American electorate during the later half of the 20th century. The basis of political mobilization is shifting from long-term, habitual party cues that were used as a heuristic by an unsophisticated public, to a more evaluative and sophisticated electorate that makes their electoral choices on the issues and candidates of the campaign, only partially based on their partisan affiliations. Concomitantly, this contributes to the growing volatility and fluidity of electoral politics in America. As we have shown, the rise in split-ticket voting, inter-election volatility, and decision making later during the campaign can at least partially be traced to the shifting sources of political mobilization within the electorate. Cognitive mobilization has produced a significant proportion of the American public that differs from our classic images of

non-partisans derived from The American Voter and more Cognitive Partisans who can see beyond partisanship as a habit. Such trends contribute to the on-going partisan dealignment of the American electorate.

The process of cognitive mobilization has produced an electorate that is divided in their basis of mobilization, and our findings thus strongly argue for a disaggregated view of the American public. Compared to the 1950s when Ritual Partisans accounted for a large majority of the electorate, all four mobilization types described in Figure 1 are roughly comparable in size in 2000 (only the Cognitive Partisans account for a disproportionately larger share of the public). These different types of citizens bring much different decision making criteria into their electoral choices, and this should carry over to other aspects of political behavior. For instance, the remaining Ritual Partisans may still place heavy reliance on habitual party cues, but this behavioral pattern is now less applicable to other sectors of the public. Similarly, the force of candidate image on Gore/Bush preferences in 2000 is nearly three times stronger among Apartisans than among Apoliticals; and the weight of policy preferences are twice as strong among Apartisans. We also expect that participation patterns and evaluations of issues reflect similar variation across mobilization groups (Dalton 1984; Wolf 2002).

Such group differences or interaction effects need to be integrated into models of electoral and political behavior, and a homogenized model of citizen choice appears to violate the reality of how citizens think and act. Apoliticals and Apartisans have different political images of the world and decision making processes—even though both are political independents--just as there are basic differences in how Ritual Partisans and Cognitive Partisans relate to the political world. Such heterogeneity within the electorate, and the need for differentiated campaigns that recognize these differences, should be an element of American elections for a considerable period.

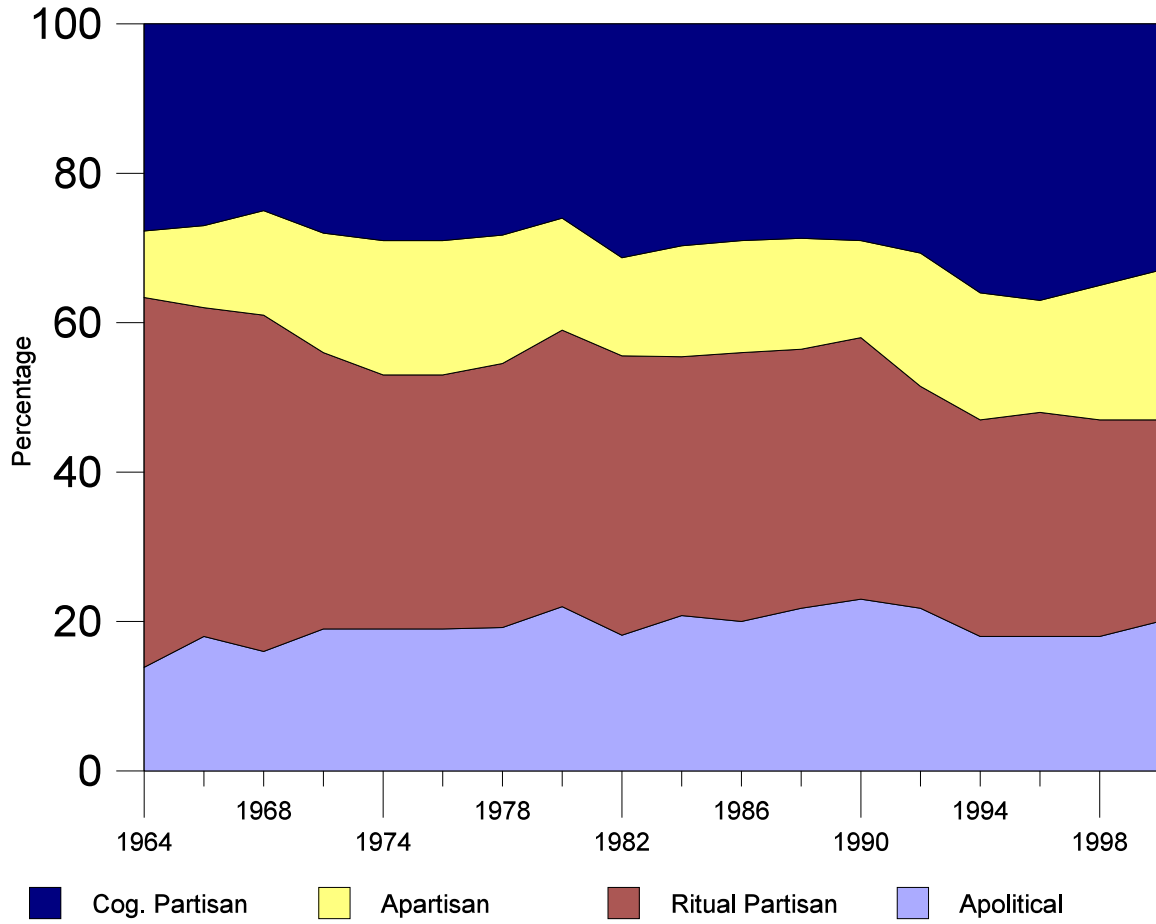
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Appendix

Figure A. The Distribution of Mobilization Types over Time



Source: 1964-2000 American National Election Studies.

Endnotes

1. Inglehart finds sharp generational differences in the patterns of partisan and cognitive mobilization for Europeans, which suggest the distribution of mobilization types will continue to shift as a consequence of generational change. Sören Holmberg's (1994) longitudinal analyses of Swedish partisanship yields similar findings.

2. Ideally, we prefer a measure that more directly taps political cognition, such as Converse's levels of conceptualization (1964). Thus, we reply on an indirect measure of political cognition.

The cognitive mobilization index is based on a simple additive combination of education and general interest in public affairs. The respondent's educational level was coded: 1) primary or less, 2) high school diploma or less, 3) some college education, or 4) college degree or more. Interest in public affairs was coded: 1) hardly at all, 2) only now and then, 3) some of the time, and 4) most of the time. These two questions were added together to yield a seven point index (2-8). Values of 6 or greater were treated as high cognitive mobilization in these analyses.

The distribution of education is essentially stable for individuals during their adult lifespan, though it has increased dramatically over time for the electorate as a whole. The ANES data do not show a marked trend, either upward or downward, in the level of political interest over this time period on the measure we use.

3. The measure of political knowledge is drawn from Wattenberg (2002: 94). A regression model predicting knowledge yielded the following results:

Variable	Betaweight
Education	.387
Interest	.391
Multiple R	.621

4. The interest in public affairs question was first asked in 1960, but the response categories changed in 1964 and so we begin the series in that year.

5. For instance, in 1952 a full 62% of the respondents had less than a high school education, this drops to 45% by 1964. Political sophistication measured by Converse's levels of conceptualization also grew between the 1950s and 1960s (Knight 1992). The full data series for the mobilization typology is presented in Figure A in the appendix.

6. These contrasting bases of political behavior between partisans and cognitively mobilized independents were recognized by The American Voter:

Presumably, among people of relatively impoverished attitude who yet have a sense of partisan loyalty, party identification has a more direct influence on behavior than it has among people with a well-elaborated view of what their choice concerns...the voter who knows simply that he is a Republican or Democrat responds directly to his stable allegiance without the mediating influence of perceptions he has formed of the objects he must choose between (1960: 136).

However, The American Voter stressed the low number of sophisticated citizens, and argued that these levels would not change dramatically.

7. For each of these three areas we followed a very direct measurement strategy. For instance, for party cues we counted the number of times the respondent mentioned party criteria as something they liked about a candidate or disliked about their opponent. Then the difference between the Gore and Bush

party criteria gave an overall measure of whether party cues leaned more toward one candidate or the other. This procedure was replicated for the policy responses, and the candidate abilities and qualities criteria. In principle, each scale is a count of the relative candidate advantage on each dimension, with a theoretical maximum of +10 (pro Gore) and a theoretical minimum of -10 (pro Bush).

8. Instead of predicting voting choice, we measured candidate preferences as the difference between Gore and Bush ratings on the thermometer scale. The thermometer difference is closely related to vote choice, but it has the additional advantage that it is available for non-voters, which are a large proportion of our Apolitical category. It would be problematic to include this group in an analysis based on vote. In addition, the thermometer difference scale has the advantage of a continuous metric for our dependent variable, ranging from +100 (pro Gore) to -100 (pro Bush).

9. See, for example, Rahn (1993). Even this simple model illustrates the complexity of modeling political preferences. For instance, the simple statement of a policy like or dislike is not sufficient evidence that this is an informed statement about the candidate's actual policy stance. And policy preferences may be a projection of party preferences for some voters. Thus, we do not make claims about the relatively weight of the three predictors for the total electorate based on this model.

10. We first counted the total number of times each criterion was used in evaluating either the likes or dislikes of both Gore and Bush; the resulting scales thus run from zero to a theoretical maximum of 20 (five possible mentions of likes and dislikes for two candidates). We then multiplied the mean on each of these scales times the unstandardized regression coefficient in Table 3. For instance, the total force of candidate images for Apartisans is 7.51 (the regression weight from Table 3) times 0.56 (the mean number of mentions of partisan cues by Apartisans); this equals 4.43 which is plotted in Figure 2.

11. Studies of partisan trends in the United States typically focus on this single national experience, which tends to encourage nation-specific explanations of these trends. The cognitive mobilization thesis presented here, however, involves broad factors of social change that are generally affecting advanced industrial democracies. Thus additional support for this cognitive mobilization thesis comes from the recent comparative research demonstrating similar longitudinal trends in other advanced industrial democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Wolf 2002; Holmberg 1994; Inglehart 1990: ch. 10).