

Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Partisan Realignment

- These articles offer differing views as to when realignments occurred and whether they were sudden or gradual
- What are the characteristics of classic realignment theory (Burnham, Key, Sundquist)?
 - enduring change in party ID
 - caused by cataclysmic event (b/c otherwise PID stable)
 - war
 - Depression
 - Or new issue cleavage (slavery)
 - Foreshadowed often (1928 > 1932)
 - Can only know it happened after the effect
 - Critical elections in which change happens
 - Normal elections
 - Deviant elections
 - Might happen as old party system ages
 - 1860, 1896, 1932 widely agreed upon
 - Different types:
 - Replacement of one party by another (1860)
 - Absorption of one party into another (1896)
 - Shift of key groups from one party to other (1932)
 - How happen:
 - Conversion of party loyalties in response to issue context or social/ec environment
 - Or mobilization of new or previously disenfranchised voters
 - Voters don't change positions on issues; but cleavage dividing parties has changed, so might now ID with a different party than before
- How does "issue evolution" differ? (Carmines and Stimson)
 - not sudden earthquake, not single critical election
 - but gradual process – parties realign over issue, voters eventually follow and resort themselves
 - parties resort over race; Dems become party of racial liberalism
 - conservatives, esp in South, resort toward Rep party
 - 1964 has point when parties start issue change in earnest, but happening since 1948 (Truman integrating armed forces). Finally in 1992, Reps get PID advantage in South.
- Questions for the different theories:
 - have there been realignments since 1932?
 - What are their natures? Sudden, gradual? Issue based? Ideology based?
 - When did they occur?
 - How do you know – data?
 - Conversion or mobilization of new voters?
 - Is "realignment" the right term for changes that have happened since 1932 or 1964?
 - Always a top-down process? Parties change first and voters subsequently re-sort?

- What is underlying theory of PID? Unchanging partisan loyalty that changes only b/c of big shock, or possibility for short-term forces to alter PID?