

Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 23: The Racial Divide

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MIT

1. Readings

Dawson, “Behind the Mule”

Tesler, “Post-Racial or Most Racial?”

White and Laird, “Steadfast Democrats”

Readings

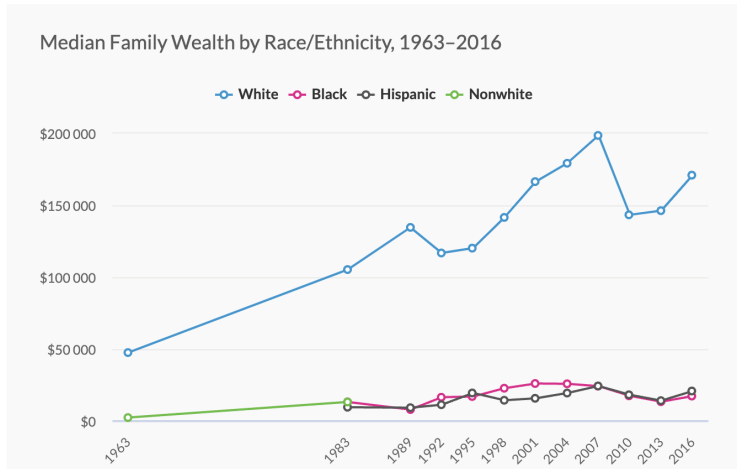
Readings

Dawson, “Behind the Mule”

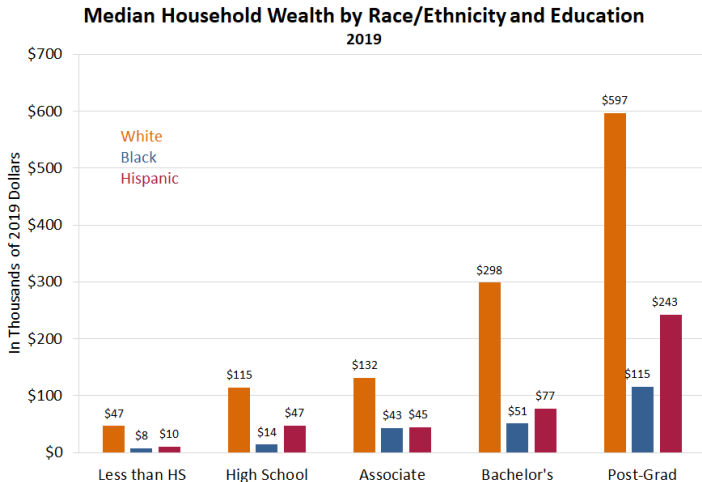
Questions

1. Why have African Americans remained politically homogeneous even while becoming economically polarized?
2. Is greater political diversity likely in the near future?

Wealth has been stagnant among nonwhite Americans



Wealth gap remains even controlling for education



SOURCES: Federal Reserve Board's Survey of Consumer Finances and authors' calculations.

Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis


Nonetheless, inequality is growing *within* racial groups

Income inequality in the U.S. is highest among Asian Americans

Ratio of income at the 90th percentile to income at the 10th percentile (90/10 ratio), by race and ethnicity, 2016



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2016 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

Pew Research Center 

But partisanship among Black Americans holds steady

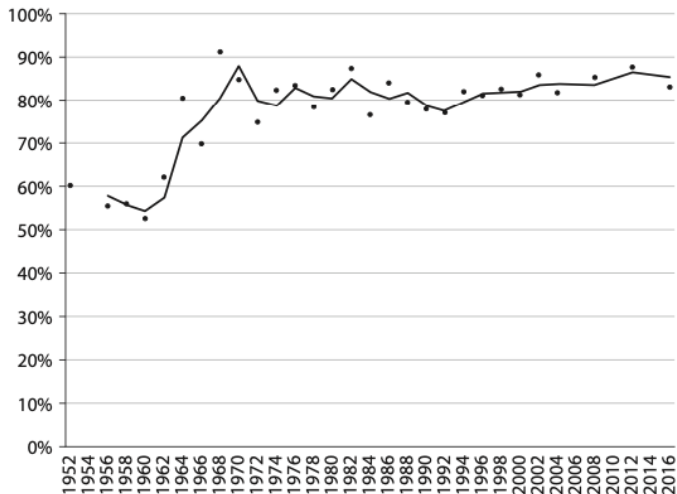


FIGURE 0.1. Percentage of self-identified black Democrats (including leaners), 1952–2016

Why?

Two assumptions:

1. **Group utility heuristic**

- Assessing individual utility based on group utility
- Informational shortcuts, sharing benefits of political action

2. Identification with a group is a function of:

- Salience/accessibility
- Fit with social reality

Linked Fate

Linked Fate: The degree to which members of a group believe their own interests to be linked with other members of that group

Measurement: *“Do you think that what happens generally to Black people in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?”*

- Low linked fate → class drives vote choice; high linked fate → race drives vote choice
- Urban residency and exposure to mainstream media weaken belief in linked fate
- Regular churchgoing slightly strengthens belief in linked fate
- Higher education → belief in Black economic subordination → belief in linked fate (thus, opposite of prediction that ties to Black community weaken as one gets wealthier)

If these findings about linked fate are correct, under what conditions do we expect rising income inequality to lead to greater partisan diversity?

Under what conditions will rising income inequality have no effect on partisan diversity?

Readings

Tesler, “Post-Racial or Most Racial?”

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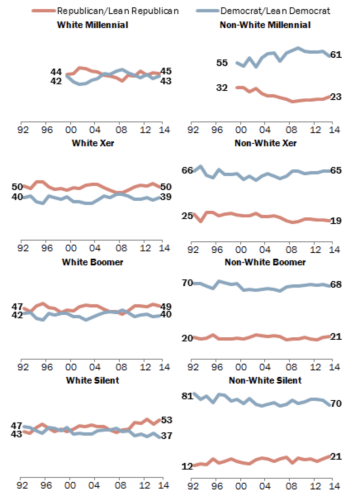
Deepening racialization of politics under Obama:

- > 50% racial gap in presidential approval for Obama: 92% of black respondents and 40% of whites
- Contrast to Clinton: high approval among Black respondents, but would move in concert with white respondents—and smaller gap
- Departure of white people from Democratic party
- Immigration → sorting of Hispanics into Democratic party
- Asian Americans: strong Democratic allegiance despite economic motives

→ Increasing identification of Republican partisanship with whiteness.

White Millennials Are Divided in Partisan Leanings; Older Generations of Whites Lean Republican

% who identify as/lean toward ...



Data points represent annual totals based on monthly political surveys conducted by Pew Research in each calendar year. Whites include only those who are not Hispanic; non-whites include Hispanics.

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Can linked fate explain these changes over time? Economic explanations? Other explanations?

Readings

White and Laird, “Steadfast Democrats”

A study of Black political agency: “how to **maintain** group unity in political choices seen by most as helping the group in the face of individual incentives to behave otherwise.”

- “in-group connectedness provides not just a salient racial self-concept or informational cues but also **social accountability** as a constraint on black political behavior.”

Why constraint?

Why not simply that the Democratic party delivered civil rights gains in the 1960s?

1. Uptick in Black Democratic support predates the 1960s
2. Black Americans have grown more economically *and* politically diverse
 - Black-owned businesses: increased by 60.5% from 2002 to 2007
 - Inequality has grown among Black Americans
 - Conservatism has also grown among Black voters

Uptick in Black Democratic support predates the 1960s

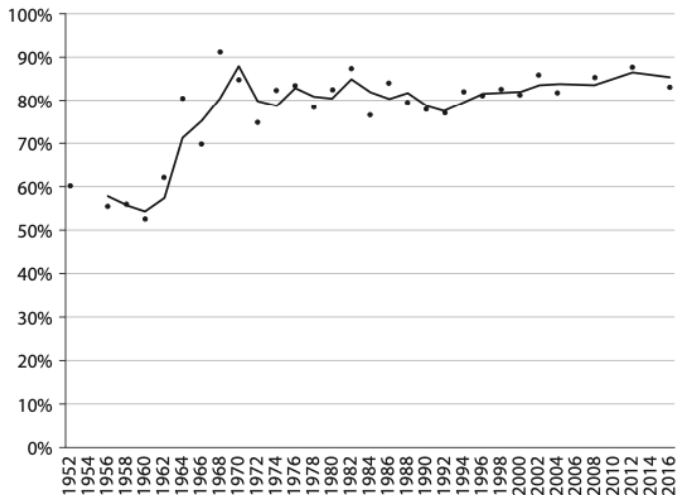


FIGURE 0.1. Percentage of self-identified black Democrats (including leaners), 1952–2016

Inequality is growing *among* Black Americans

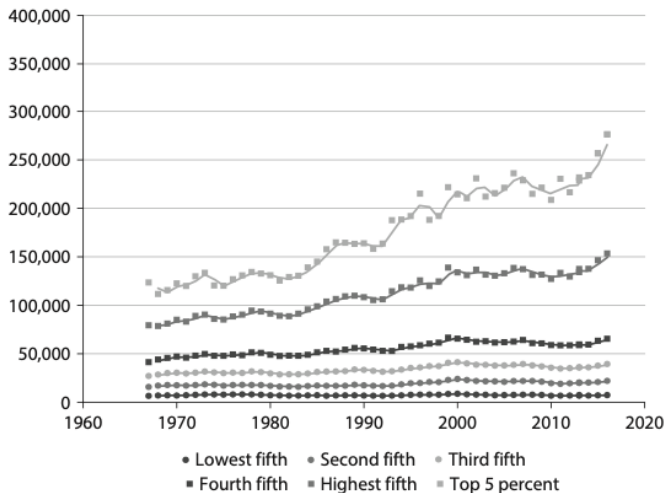


FIGURE 0.2. Mean black household income in 2016 dollars. *Source:* U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

Conservatism among Black voters is (generally) on the rise



Conservatism \neq Republicanism for Black voters

TABLE 0.1. Percentage of Democratic Identification by Conservative Issue Position and Race, 2012 ANES

	Black	White	Asian	Hispanic
Govt. should let each person get ahead on own	77.4	21.6	35.7	45.5
No regulation of businesses to protect environment	74.1	15.9	10.0	37.9
Oppose increasing taxes on millionaires	82.2	10.0	8.3	43.6
Govt. should provide many fewer services	68.9	17.6	36.4	35.9
Govt. should make it easier for people to buy a gun	75.0	17.8	0.0	35.2
By law, abortion should never be permitted	72.8	21.8	18.2	51.3
Favor death penalty	85.2	37.1	46.8	57.2
Oppose laws to protect gays and lesbians	91.3	19.5	18.7	40.0
Oppose university affirmative action	87.9	32.3	41.5	52.1
Oppose workplace affirmative action	87.7	33.1	45.4	51.0
Blacks should help themselves (and not receive govt. assistance)	78.8	29.1	40.8	49.1

Solidarity Politics

This is a puzzle! Neither economic self-interest nor policy preferences move partisan identification.

The answer lies in **solidarity politics**: a group has the greatest political power when it acts in unison

- *“The concept of Black Power rests on a fundamental premise: **Before a group can enter open society, it must first close ranks.** By this we mean that group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength in a pluralist society.”*
(Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967)

Defection is a threat to group interests that must be managed

- *“When we have our march, you need to be there. If it means leaving work, if it means leaving school—be there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.”* (MLK’s final speech)

Racialized Social Constraint

We argue that black Americans' capacity to resolve the defection conundrum is born of the same phenomenon that has created their need for political unity: the American experience of racial apartheid. The efforts of white Americans to segregate black Americans from larger American society have made black Americans uniquely socially integrated with and reliant on each other.

- Black institutions: schools, colleges, churches, fraternal organizations
- Kinship and social networks with high degree of racial homophily

This allows for **racialized social constraint**: maintenance of a solid Black voting bloc through social pressure

Evidence 1: Interviewer Effects

TABLE 4.2. Percentage of Self-Identified Black Democrats (Including Leaners) by Race of Interviewer, ANES and GSS Cumulative Files

A. ANES

	Non-black interviewer	Black interviewer	Difference
Unadjusted			
95% CI	80.5 [78.4, 82.5]	93.3 [91.1, 95.5]	12.8*
Adjusted			
Logistic regression	81.2	91.9	10.7*
95% CI	[79.1, 83.2]	[89.2, 94.7]	
Propensity score matching (ATE)			7.3*

Notes: Pretreatment adjustments for year of survey, age, sex, South, married, and interviewer gender. The 95% CI is in brackets.

Evidence 2: Experiment

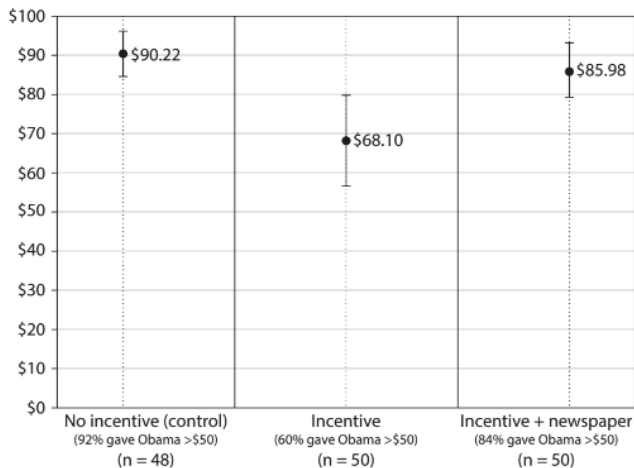


FIGURE 6.3. Obama contribution by experimental condition (95% CIs)

Discussion

1. How does White and Laird's account differ from Dawson's account? What is the role of rationality in each theory? Group and individual agency?
2. Can we generate empirically testable predictions under each theory?
 - If Dawson is right, in what settings would you expect to see the most consistent Black Democratic identification, and where would you expect to see more diversity?
 - What about if White and Laird are right?
3. Can we extend White and Laird's theory to other groups? What conditions are required?