

## CLASS, PARTY, AND SOUTH/NON-SOUTH DIFFERENCES

### An Update

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This article examines the past 50 years to update an analysis of the relationship between income and partisanship. Earlier, Nadeau and Stanley noted that there was a change in partisanship in the South from inverse class polarization, in which higher income individuals more often identified with the Democratic Party, to normal class polarization, but the permanence of the shift was open to question. Now, with a longer time perspective and even greater partisan change, it can be concluded that class-based partisanship is not only a reality in the South but that it is now considerably stronger than in the rest of the country. Moreover, the South has not simply surged past a stable non-Southern level; greater polarization in the South has occurred in the context of growing class polarization in the non-South.

*Keywords:* party; South; income; class; voting; partisanship

**Ten years ago, Nadeau and Stanley described** the change in partisanship in the South from inverse class polarization, in which higher income individuals more often identified with the Democratic Party, to normal class polarization, in which higher income individuals tend toward the Republican Party. They wrote that “by the mid-1970s,

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[normal] class-based partisanship was an emerging reality for native Southern Whites” but that “the permanency of this reality is still an open question” (Nadeau & Stanley, 1993, p. 915). Now, with a longer time perspective along with greater partisan change, we can confidently assert that class-based partisanship is not only a reality among Whites in the South but that it has strengthened further and is now considerably stronger than in the rest of the country.

Significantly, the South has not simply surged past a stable non-Southern level. Rather, greater polarization in the South has occurred in the context of growing class polarization outside the South. These twin developments have meant that class polarization, as measured by income, is now greater nationwide than at any time in the past 50 years and is led by the previously one-party Democratic South.<sup>1</sup>

### CLASS POLARIZATION BY REGION, 1950 TO 2000

As in Nadeau and Stanley (1993), we focus on party identification as a more enduring indicator of partisan tendencies, although we shall make note later of the relationship between class and voting. We also continue their look at native Southern Whites, although we shall also consider results for all White Southerners. As in the original analysis, we measure partisanship by counting independents who lean toward a party as partisans.

We begin with simple bivariate results showing the percentage of Democrats among all party identifiers. To avoid the perils of small numbers of cases as well as idiosyncratic movements, we collapse the years into decades (Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

In the 1950s, variations in income made only a small difference in the party loyalties of White Americans. In the nation as a whole, the difference was, in fact, nonmonotonic, but it was (at the extremes) in the direction we typically regard as normal—that is, low-income individuals were more often Democratic than high-income individuals by 6 percentage points.<sup>3</sup> Among Southern Whites, the difference was similar in magnitude, but it was in the opposite direction. This inverse relationship between income and partisanship was particularly pronounced among those native to the region, being both monotonic and larger in magnitude.<sup>4</sup> Presumably, native Southern Whites with higher

**TABLE 1**  
**Income and Democratic Partisanship by Decade, 1950-2000,**  
**Whites, United States, Non-South, & South**

	<i>Family Income, by Thirds</i>			<i>Difference</i>
	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Highest</i>	
All Whites				
1950s <sup>a</sup>	62	62	56	6
1960s	63	63	56	7
1970s	63	60	50	13
1980s	59	51	44	15
1990s	61	52	42	19
Non-Southern Whites				
1950s	55	56	51	4
1960s	59	60	54	5
1970s	60	58	48	12
1980s	57	50	44	13
1990s	62	53	44	17
Southern Whites				
1950s	77	85	80	-3
1960s	74	72	63	11
1970s	70	67	56	14
1980s	65	53	45	20
1990s	59	44	33	25
Native Southern Whites				
1950s	79	87	90	-11
1960s	78	77	70	8
1970s	76	71	61	15
1980s	66	56	47	19
1990s <sup>b</sup>	59	43	31	29

SOURCE: American National Election Studies, 1948-2000, Cumulative File.

NOTE: Entries are Democrats (strong, weak, leaning) as a percentage of Democrats plus Republicans. Independents (nonleaners) and apolitical respondents are excluded. Differences are calculated before rounding.

a. Decades are 1952 to 1960, etc. Values within each decade are pooled, not averaged. Either method produces similar results.

b. Uses imputed values for 1998. See Footnote 4.

incomes were more keenly aware of the significance of race for party politics—an awareness that more than counterbalanced whatever grounds there might have been for them to favor the Republicans. The fact that the connection between income and partisanship ran counter to our expectations—exaggeratedly so among Southern natives—was striking.

As early as the 1960s, the relationship between income and partisanship among Southern Whites reverted to the expected direction (although the results for the decade are strongly influenced by the unusually large polarization in 1964). The difference in the South was already larger than that outside the region. Among native Southerners, the relationship had reversed itself, but the size of the difference was still smaller than among all Southern Whites. Outside the South, and in the nation as a whole, the difference remained about the same size as in the 1950s.

By the 1970s, the relationship was monotonic in both regions, and the difference between extreme income groups more than doubled among non-Southern Whites to indicate a growing polarization between those who were relatively well-off and those who were not. As in the 1950s, native Southern Whites again showed the largest gap, but in the 1970s, the relationship between income and partisanship was in the expected direction.

Over the next 2 decades, the income gap in partisanship grew still larger. By the 1990s, the less affluent among non-Southern Whites were 17 percentage points more Democratic than the more affluent. But the change was greatest in the South. Indeed, among those who grew up in the region, lower income Whites were 29 percentage points more likely to identify with the Democrats than were higher income Whites.

The increasing gap came about somewhat differently in the two regions. Outside the South, lower and higher income Whites changed relatively little but in opposite directions, the former becoming slightly more Democratic and the latter less so. In the South, all groups lost their overwhelmingly Democratic identification. But in the lowest income group, the change brought them almost exactly in line with their non-Southern counterparts. Among the middle and highest income groups, in contrast, by the 1990s, the decline left them less Democratic than comparable groups outside the South. The change at the highest income level can only be described as dramatic. Among native Southern Whites, fully 90% had been Democratic in the 1950s; in the 1990s, this figure had dropped nearly 60 points to stand at 31%.

The reversal in the relationship between income and partisanship among Southern Whites was pervasive. It was not limited to men or

women, Protestants or Catholics, educated or uneducated, young or old.<sup>5</sup> Table 2 shows income comparisons in the 1950s and 1990s between groups of non-Southern and Southern Whites. The contrary-to-normal relationship characterized almost all White groups in the South in the 1950s and uniformly disappeared by the 1990s. In the most recent decade, the gap is smaller in some instances than in others, but in all cases, it is higher among White Southerners than in comparable groups outside the South. In groups, as with the South as a whole, the change came about because of dramatic movement among high-income Southerners toward the Republican party.<sup>6</sup>

That similar patterns characterize so many groups suggests that we are seeing a genuine growth in the connection between income and partisanship and not simply an artifact of compositional or other changes. To be certain, however, we estimated a series of multivariate models, one for each year, in which we regressed Democratic partisanship on income using the various groups in Table 2 as controls. As it turned out, this model also uncovered a reversal in the relationship of education to partisanship. The coefficients for both income and education are shown in Table 3.

The results show reversals similar to those shown earlier, although they suggest that income (and education) differences in the South overtook those outside the South only very recently. In the South in the 1950s, the inverse relationship between income and partisanship was apparent even with other factors controlled. The relationship was monotonic and significantly so among natives of the region. Similarly, education was inversely related to partisanship among native White Southerners, meaning that individuals with higher levels of education were more Democratic. Over the decades, these patterns changed to more typical ones in which greater income or more education was associated with fewer Democratic identifiers. White Southerners, especially native White Southerners, became more polarized along income and education lines than Whites outside the South. With the multivariate results, however, the change is more recent than the results in Tables 1 and 2 suggest. In the 1970s, the coefficients are still greatest outside the South; this remains uniformly true for native White Southerners in the 1980s. Only in the 1990s has the relationship

(text continues on page 61)

TABLE 2  
Income and Democratic Partisanship Among Groups, 1950s & 1990s, Whites, Non-South, & South

Group/Decade	Non-South			South			Difference
	Lowest Third	Middle Third	Highest Third	Lowest Third	Middle Third	Highest Third	
Males							
1950s	57	59	52	81	94	81	0
1990s	61	47	41	52	38	30	22
Females							
1950s	54	54	50	75	77	80	-5
1990s	61	58	49	62	49	37	25
Protestants							
1950s	46	47	36	78	86	81	-3
1990s	52	44	35	55	42	26	29
Catholics							
1950s	77	72	72	<sup>a</sup>	—	—	—
1990s	70	60	46	—	—	—	—
Union							
1950s	68	67	67	90	93	97	-7
1990s	67	68	59	71	45	52	19

(continued)

TABLE 2 Continued

Group/Decade	Non-South			South		
	Lowest Third	Middle Third	Highest Third	Lowest Third	Middle Third	Highest Third
Grade school						
1950s	59	59	62	75	84	95
1990s	65	56	60	72	65	50
			Difference			Difference
			-3			-20
			5			22
High school						
1950s	46	58	55	83	82	75
1990s	61	57	48	60	43	40
			Difference			Difference
			-9			8
			13			20
College						
1950s	41	45	35	87	91	75
1990s	59	50	43	48	41	31
			Difference			Difference
			6			12
			16			18
Age 18-44						
1950s	61	59	55	77	86	83
1990s	59	52	45	50	42	34
			Difference			Difference
			6			-6
			14			16
Age 45+						
1950s	52	52	45	78	83	75
1990s	62	54	44	65	47	32
			Difference			Difference
			7			3
			18			33

SOURCE: American National Election Studies, 1948-2000, Cumulative File.

NOTE: Thirds refer to family income. Entries are Democrats (strong, weak, leaning) as a percentage of Democrats plus Republicans. Differences are calculated before rounding.

a. Too few cases for reliable estimation.

TABLE 3  
Logistic Regression of Democratic Partisanship on Income and Education by Decade,  
1950-2000, Whites, United States, Non-South, & South

	Coefficients						Change in Probability <sup>a</sup>					
	Family Income			Education			Family Income			Education		
	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	Highest Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	College <sup>c</sup>	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	Highest Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	College <sup>c</sup>
All Whites												
1950s	-.13	-.27**	-.23**	-.59**	-.23**	-.59**	-.04	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.07	-.15
1960s	-.25**	-.40**	-.53**	-.85**	-.53**	-.85**	-.07	-.10	-.14	-.14	-.14	-.21
1970s	-.25**	-.66**	-.33**	-.65**	-.33**	-.65**	-.06	-.16	-.08	-.16	-.08	-.16
1980s	-.36**	-.63**	-.14	-.34**	-.14	-.34**	-.08	-.15	-.03	-.15	-.03	-.08
1990s	-.37**	-.74**	-.35**	-.58**	-.35**	-.58**	-.09	-.18	-.08	-.18	-.08	-.14
Non-Southern Whites												
1950s	-.26**	-.36**	-.26**	-.77**	-.26**	-.77**	-.06	-.09	-.06	-.09	-.06	-.11
1960s	-.34**	-.43**	-.59**	-.95**	-.59**	-.95**	-.09	-.11	-.14	-.11	-.14	-.23
1970s	-.33**	-.74**	-.37**	-.67**	-.37**	-.67**	-.08	-.18	-.09	-.18	-.09	-.17
1980s	-.36**	-.62**	-.13	-.33**	-.13	-.33**	-.09	-.15	-.03	-.15	-.03	-.07
1990s	-.38**	-.75**	-.19	-.39*	-.19	-.39*	-.10	-.19	-.05	-.19	-.05	-.10

(continued)

TABLE 3 Continued

	Coefficients						Change in Probability <sup>a</sup>					
	Family Income			Education			Family Income			Education		
	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	Highest Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	College <sup>c</sup>	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	Highest Third <sup>b</sup>	High School <sup>c</sup>	Middle Third <sup>b</sup>	Highest Third <sup>b</sup>	College <sup>c</sup>
Southern Whites												
1950s	.40*	.19*	-.09	-.00			.08	.04	-.01			.00
1960s	.05	-.31	-.28	-.57**			.02	-.07	-.06			-.13
1970s	-.02	-.41**	-.21	-.64**			.00	-.10	-.04			-.15
1980s	-.33**	-.68**	-.11	-.31**			-.08	-.17	-.03			-.08
1990s	-.40**	-.75**	-.70**	-.100**			-.09	-.17	-.17			-.24
Native Southern Whites												
1950s	.41	.60*	.30	.91**			.04	.06	.03			.07
1960s	.18	-.06	-.06	-.41*			.03	.00	-.01			-.06
1970s	-.04	-.50**	.10	-.21			-.01	-.11	.02			-.05
1980s	-.17	-.54**	-.14	-.34*			-.04	-.13	-.03			-.08
1990s	-.44	-.86*	-.82	-.111**			-.11	-.20	-.20			-.26

SOURCE: American National Election Studies, 1948-2000, Cumulative File.

NOTE: The dependent variable is 1 = Democrat, 0 = non-Democrat. Negative coefficients indicate a greater likelihood of Republican identification. Other variables in the equations are age, female, Catholic, Jewish, and union household. All except age are dummy variables.

a. Change in the probability of Democratic identification when other variables are assumed to be male, Protestant, a nonunion household, age 40, high school education (when calculating the change for income), and middle third of income (when calculating the change for education).

b. The baseline is the lowest third on family income.

c. The baseline is grade-school education.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

completely reversed itself with all Southern Whites more polarized than non-Southerners and native Southern Whites the most polarized of all.

The difference income and education made in partisan patterns can best be seen in the probability estimates shown on the right side of Table 3. In the 1950s and 1960s, education polarized all Whites to a greater degree than did income; in the 1980s and 1990s, income polarized Whites more than did education. The monotonic, inverse class polarization of native Southern Whites of the 1950s is apparent in Table 3 with both income and education: Compared to being in the bottom third of family income or having only a grade-school education, native Southern Whites in the middle or top third of family income or having a high school or college education had a 3 to 7 percentage point boost in the probability of Democratic identification. By the 1980s, native Southern Whites were consistently displaying, both with income and education, the partisan class patterns typical of the non-South. By the 1990s, native Southern Whites again led in the strength of those relationships. Contrary to non-Southern Whites, native (and all) Southern Whites had stronger party polarization on education than on income. For example, by the 1990s, college-educated, native Southern Whites were 26 percentage points more likely to identify with the Republicans than were those with only a grade-school education; native Southern Whites in the top third of income were 20 percentage points more likely to so identify than those in the bottom third. This vivid class polarization contrasts sharply with the inverse class polarization in the 1950s.

The reversal in and growth of class polarization in the South signify the increasing importance of income, religion, and other factors and the movement away from race as the sole issue of importance to Southern voters (Black & Black, 2002, p. 242). In the 1950s and for much of the previous century, race was the dominant issue in the South, and Southern Whites overwhelmingly supported the Democratic party because Democrats allowed the states to pursue independent policies on that issue. As a result of the civil rights movement and the political transformation of the South, race lost its sole position as the basis of political discourse. About the same time, the parties shifted their relative positions on racial matters (Carmines & Stimson, 1989). The ideology favoring states' rights now pushed Southerners

toward the Republican Party—and it was the wealthiest and best educated who were especially likely to take up this new alignment. In addition, during the 1980s, as other issues were coming to the fore, ideological differences between the parties grew in clarity to result in greater consistency between issue positions and partisanship (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998). Wealthier and more educated individuals were most likely to shift their allegiances to align their partisanship with their attitudes. These reinforcing developments resulted in the extraordinary declines in Democratic partisanship that we observed among the well-off to lead to the exaggerated income and education polarization that now exists.

The significance of class divisions is now the subject of considerable debate. Black and Black (2002), despite emphasizing the significance of multiple cleavages, concluded that “race and ethnicity overshadow economic class once the association between partisanship and income is examined separately for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics” (p. 246). Brewer and Stonecash (2001), in contrast, argued that, although race issues still matter, class divisions have become more important and that, in the end, “income has come to have a relatively greater effect on partisan support than race issues” (p. 131). Determining causal attributions is always difficult, and our results cannot settle this larger debate. They do, however, show clearly that the South, for whatever reason, now leads the nation in the extent to which income and education divide the self-expressed partisan attachments of Whites.

It is worth noting that these changes also mean that the percentage of Southern Whites identifying with the Republican Party has surpassed the percentage identifying with the Democratic Party—probably the first time this has been true in the life of the Republican Party. Table 1 confirms this extraordinary phenomenon for two of the three income groups during the 1990s. The results also indicate that native Southern Whites are, if anything, leading the way. Examining individual years suggests that the overall crossover point occurred in the mid- to late-1990s. A spike in 1994 meant that there were substantially more Republican than Democratic identifiers among Southerners in that year and more again by a small margin in 1998 and by a larger margin in 2000. Likewise, incremental probabilities derived from multivariate logit analyses show that the marginal impact of being a

**TABLE 4**  
**Income and Voting Behavior, 1950s & 1990s,**  
**Whites, United States, Non-South, & South**

	<i>Presidential Elections</i>				<i>House Elections</i>			
	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>Lowest</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Highest</i>	<i>Difference</i>
	<i>Third</i>	<i>Third</i>	<i>Third</i>		<i>Third</i>	<i>Third</i>	<i>Third</i>	
All Whites								
1950s	43	45	40	3	55	57	48	7
1990s	58	53	44	14	57	47	40	17
Non-Southern Whites								
1950s	39	44	39	0	48	52	42	6
1990s	61	56	49	12	60	50	44	16
Southern Whites								
1950s	57	53	48	9	82	85	85	-3
1990s	51	42	33	18	51	35	29	22
Native Southern Whites								
1950s	59	56	52	7	84	88	90	-6
1990s	50	38	28	22	53	34	28	25

SOURCE: American National Election Studies, 1948-2000, Cumulative File.

NOTE: Entries are the percentage voting Democratic of those voting. Differences are calculated before rounding.

native White Southerner was uniformly toward the Democrats (though of steadily diminishing size) and away from the Republicans until 1998 or 2000 (Stanley & Niemi, 2004).

Finally, although our focus has been on partisanship, many of the same patterns characterize voting behavior. Table 4 shows presidential and congressional voting by family income for the 1950s and 1990s. In the 1950s, the differences between lowest and highest income groups are all in the single digits. Among Southerners, the inverse pattern appears in House voting but not in presidential voting. In the 1990s, the differences are large among non-Southerners and largest among native Southern Whites for both levels of voting. The changes are necessarily more complicated than those for partisanship reflecting, as they do, systematically different reactions in presidential and congressional elections. Affluent Southern Whites, in particular, “have long voted their economic interests in presidential elections” (Black & Black, 2002, p. 257).<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the largest

changes still came about because of dramatic drops in Democratic support among high-income Southerners.

### CONCLUSION

Class-based partisanship, with less affluent individuals more Democratic than high-income ones, did not typify the one-party Democratic South. An inverse relationship prevailed with more affluent Southern Whites having greater Democratic ties. Reviewing 5 decades of partisan change reveals that normal, class-based partisanship has come to characterize Southern Whites. Indeed, measuring class by income, or even education, discloses that the class basis of partisanship among Southern Whites is now considerably stronger than among non-Southern Whites<sup>8</sup>—an intriguing situation that remains to be explained. The South has undergone substantial partisan change over the past several decades as the formerly one-party Democratic South has given way to a more competitive party system. The data analyzed here reveal a South not marked by White partisan solidarity but by White partisanship structured by economic class divisions (cf. Black & Black, 2002, p. 247).

We have not tried to sort out what caused the patterns detected here, recognizing that these class patterns themselves have major substantive significance whether because of an awakening of class consciousness, the changing role of race, or these two forces in combination. Previously, as Key (1949) described it in *Southern Politics*, the Black-belt Whites and their upper class allies convinced the whole White South to link the cause of White supremacy to a solid attachment to the Democratic Party. Over the decades analyzed here, Southern Whites moved away from such unity and divided along income lines with more affluent Whites embracing Republicans and the less well-off aligning with Democrats.

The distinct rise of class-based partisanship among Southern Whites is all the more notable, because the class basis of partisanship has intensified in the non-South, as well. Moreover, class polarization in the South and non-South is broad in range in that it is not confined to particular groups. Throughout the country and across demographic categories, issue and ideological evolutions clarified party positions

to result in frequent Democratic decline among the well-off and leading to the observed income polarization.

From a long-term perspective, the greater polarization of the 1990s is a return to the high levels that marked the country as a whole in the New Deal period (Ladd & Hadley, 1978, pp. 239-249). In the aftermath of recent partisan change, it is striking to note that, as the political hold of the New Deal coalition was weakening (Stanley & Niemi, 2004), the class polarization characteristic of the New Deal coalition grew stronger. This unexpected evolution suggests that class-based politics will perhaps play a greater role than anticipated in American politics in the years to come (Teixira & Rogers, 2000).

### NOTES

1. The measurement of social class has been debated at least since the advent of widespread survey-based analyses in the 1950s. Here, we largely equate class with income, although we control for education, as well, in our multivariate analysis. For an excellent discussion of measurement questions, especially of the use of income versus self-reported class, see Stonecash (2000, pp. 141-158). See also Brewer and Stonecash (2001, pp. 137-138).

2. Rather than follow Nadeau and Stanley's (1993) periodization (1952 to 1960, 1964, 1966 to 1972, 1974, 1976 to 1990), we group elections by decade: 1952 to 1960, 1962 to 1970, and so on. Any grouping by decades classifies three elections in 1 decade and two in the next. Our grouping avoids combining 1960 with the more tumultuous (and in some ways critical) elections of 1964 and 1968. In addition, grouping by decade inevitably obscures some peculiarities such as the high level of class polarization among native White Southerners in 1964.

3. Income in the American National Election Study Cumulative File is given in five categories, which we collapsed into thirds. Besides avoiding small cell sizes, this facilitates comparison with education levels later on. (Use of the original categories to approximate an interval scale would require using the original surveys; besides that, it would be problematic because the categories used in the various years—especially the end codes—vary in number and width making them noncomparable, especially if there are nonlinearities.)

4. In 1998, respondents were not asked where they grew up—the variable used to identify Southern natives. Rather than discard that year, we imputed the missing values using Schafer's (1997, 1999) NORM software. NORM uses an expectation maximization algorithm and a data augmentation procedure (using an iterative simulation) to create multiple imputations of missing values (in this case, five such values). These values were then combined using Rubin's (1987) method to estimate the values for native Southerners in that year.

5. The age break used in Table 2 approximates commonly used generational distinctions. Those aged 45 and older in the 1950s could be considered the pre-New Deal generation (coming of age before 1928). Those younger than 45 in the 1950s and 45 and older in the 1990s were the New Deal generation (coming of age between 1929 and 1960 and before 1968, respectively). And those younger than 45 in the 1990s were the post-New Deal generation (coming of age after 1968). For similar generational definitions, see Miller and Shanks (1996, p. 47).

6. The fact that the pattern persists when we control for age is especially significant. Throughout the country, changes in party identification have been driven, in part, by generational replacement (Miller & Shanks 1996, pp. 182-183). Our results show that the relationship between income and partisanship changed dramatically *within* the New Deal generation, not simply because of earlier generations being replaced by later ones.

7. Shafer and Johnston (2002) also emphasized the role of racial context—that is, the extent of the Black population in a given area.

8. These income and education comparisons contrast sharply with the declining relationships between self-reported class and partisanship or voting (Dalton, 2002, pp. 147-154; Stonecash, 2000, pp. 142-144).

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