

Memo on Conceptual Problems Regarding "Party Identification"

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I have some thoughts on two of the questions you raise in your letter: the cross-national validity of party identification, and the problem of "leaning independents".

1. Cross-national validity.

I deliberately describe this as a "cross-national" rather than "cross-cultural" problem. Except for the admittedly tough linguistic problem of coming up with words which mean the same thing, I think the problems of comparing partisanship in Europe and the United States stem largely from the different political positions of parties in the different settings. In a paper at this fall's APSA meetings, (Shively, 1977), I presented a functional model for the development of partisanship which is based on the assumption that people develop and hold a party identification in order to handle the difficult problem of deciding how to vote under conditions of confusion. (I don't claim this as a very original insight.) One implication of this is that where other strategies are available to handle the problem, it will not be necessary for people to develop identification with a party as such. I think that this has generally been the case in Europe, where non-majoritarian parties can operate effectively in most countries, and where people can accordingly let their vote be guided by class, linguistic group, religion or whatever, and simply vote in the way appropriate to their group. This may lead them to vote regularly for a given party, but their choice of that party will be instrumental to their group identification, rather than expressing an identification with the party as such. I have tested this theory, specifically the theory that class-consciousness in the presence of class parties obviates the need for direct party identification, and have presented some confirmation of it (Shively, 1976).

In an earlier paper (Shively, 1972), I pointed out some implications of this interpretation of partisanship, assuming that European party choice is generally instrumental to class or religion. Among other things, it should be the case that European electoral change will be relatively fluid, reflecting social processes rather than explosive "critical electoral eras." There could also, however, be rapid and easy electoral changes of a special sort, in which one party replaced another as the appropriate party for a particular group; I argued that the replacement of the Independent Socialists by the Communists in the early days of Weimar, and the later replacement of the "middle class parties" by the Nazis, were changes of this sort. Finally, with the decreased opportunities for non-majority parties

to operate in France with its quasi-presidential government, and under "Chancellor Democracy" in Germany, I argued that we might expect to see direct party identification develop in at least those countries. This last prediction has been tested for the German case in a paper by Kendall Baker (1978).

So, this interpretation of partisanship has interesting implications for comparative theory. The measurement problems are immense, however. Short of asking obvious questions of the sort: "I know you say you identify with Party X, but does that mean more than that you intend to vote for it," I think the most promising way to separate instrumental partisanship from direct partisanship is to look for patterns of change across panel designs. Some sorts of change are typical of one sort of partisanship rather than other. For example, instrumental partisanship (since it is only another sort of "vote choice" in any case) should change with a changed vote in a way that American partisanship does not, but British and Dutch partisanship do. (Butler and Stokes, 1969; Thomassen, 1975; but, see Cain and Ferejohn, 1977). The first task in identifying these paths is one of developing a theory of instrumental partisanship. If I am invited to your conference and there is interest in this, I will be happy to address it further.

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2. The "leaning independents" problem.

The question of whether leaning independents ought to be considered partisans or independents is a difficult one. Petrocik seems to see them as unusually alert and informed independents, since he finds "intransitivities" in all but his partisan dimensions. But Table 1 demonstrates at least one "partisan" intransitivity.

Table 1

Percent voting consistently with party identification, 1952-1972*

	Democrats	Republicans
strong identifiers	86%	96%
weak identifiers	66	84
leaning independents	71	87

*Calculated from Herbert Asher, Presidential Elections and American Politics (Homewood, Illinois, 1976: Dorsey), pp. 82-83.

Such "partisan" behavior by leaning independents may be interpreted in various ways. Contrary to Petrocik's interpretation, Table 3 raises the possibility that the leaners are really partisans in disguise. Certainly, Dick Brody and others have speculated recently that leaners should be considered partisans rather than independents.

However, a second interpretation of the leaning independents is also reasonable. It could be that they are true independents who had already decided how to vote at the time of the survey. It would not be odd if such voters, having already identified themselves as independents, interpreted the follow-up question ("Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?") as asking them how they intended to vote. Under this interpretation, "leaning independents" would be true independents, but would be more politically involved and alert than "pure" independents, since they are able to express a voting choice. We might expect them to show the various characteristics Petrocik describes, and we would also expect to see the relationship shown in table 1. (Since leaners had defined the direction of their "lean" in terms of their intended vote, it would not be surprising to find that their actual vote reflected their leaning fairly accurately.)

The anomaly in the juxtaposition of Table 3 and Petrocik's findings adds plausibility to the second interpretation of the leaners. Petrocik found that on "partisan" dimensions of behavior (changeability of their vote, and ratings of the two parties) leaners were indeed less partisan than were weak partisans. It was only on dimensions of behavior that were not directly partisan that intransitivities appeared. However, vote choice is certainly a partisan dimension of behavior. It is hard to think of any explanation of this anomaly except that independents of the sort Petrocik described have treated the CPS follow-up question as asking for their intended vote, thus producing the relationship seen in the table.

It is difficult to test which interpretation of the leaning independents is more appropriate, but at least one critical test suggests itself. If leaners are in fact partisans who call themselves independent, then they should act like other partisans when they decide to vote for the opposite party — they should generally retain the same party loyalty, while deviating from their expected vote. On the other hand, if their reported "leaning" is simply another statement of how they intend to vote, then a change in the party for which they intend to vote should bring a corresponding change in the party to which they lean.

The results of such a test are shown in table 2; they support the interpretation of leaners as true independents. From 1956 to 1958 and from 1958 to 1960, (I use the CPS panel here) "identification" appears to have moved with the vote for leaners in a way quite unlike the behavior of partisans. However, the number of cases available is small. Also, the second interpretation of leaners would predict not that half the leaners who changed their vote would shift their identification, but that all would. Even granted the usual problems of measurement error, we should have expected a somewhat stronger relationship than that in table 2, if all leaners fit the second interpretation. My reading of the test is that, based on still scant evidence, it appears that most "leaners" should be

considered independents who have used the follow-up question to indicate their intended vote. However a minority of leaners may fit the "disguised partisan" or other interpretations.

Table 2

Probability that Direction of Party Identification Changed,
from First Election to Second*

	Vote ₂ = Vote ₁		Vote ₂ ≠ Vote ₁		Difference
1956-1958:					
Strong	0.0	(234)	.182	(11)	.182
Weak	.008	(131)	.125	(32)	.117
Lean	.045	(66)	.500	(12)	.455
1958-1960:					
Strong	.003	(296)	.065	(31)	.062
Weak	.006	(173)	.116	(43)	.110
Lean	.065	(46)	.444	(9)	.379

*N's are in parentheses. For 1956-1958, all members of the 1956-1958 panel are used who identified with a party at both elections and reported a vote for both elections. For 1958-1960, all members of the 1958-1960 panel are used who identified with a party at both elections and who reported a vote at both elections. By Fisher's exact calculation of the χ^2 , the chance probability of as great a difference as is observed among vote-changers between leaners on one hand, and merged strong and weak partisans on the other, is .015 for the 1956-58 panel and .016 for the 1958-60 panel.

As with my ideas on the comparative theory of partisanship, I'm not sure I see direct measurement issues here. It might be useful, however, to assess the CPS follow-up question through an open-ended question asked of a small subset of the next CPS sample, asking them how they interpreted the two party ID questions. The results of this might help us in our use of those two questions.

References (other than those that will be obvious to everyone)

- Baker, Kendall L., "Generational Differences in the Role of Party Identification in German Political Behavior," forthcoming in Feb., 1978, AJPS
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