A descriptive analysis of partisanship and political attitudes among young Black Americans

Donnice M. Turner
Clark Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations
Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation
The growth of political conservatism and the decline in partisan loyalty among the general American population in the 1980's lead to this study of political attitudes and partisanship among this country's young black population. There has been a great deal of speculation regarding whether the growth in conservatism and dealignment with the Democratic Party was also occurring among young black Americans. Utilizing data from the 1984 and 1988 National Black Election Study (NBES), it was found that while well over three-fourths of those between 17 and 24 identified with the Democratic Party, less than a third strongly identified with the party. Conversely, in the oldest age cohort (55-91), 85 percent identified with the party, and 58 percent were strongly identified. This indicates that while the direction of partisan loyalty does not vary significantly, the intensity of that loyalty is quite evident across generations. In terms of political ideology, over half of the young respondents tend to identify with conservatism, while in the older age groups less than a third identify with conservative ideology. Critical variables identified in the model that predicted detachment from Democratic partisanship and the growth of conservatism were education and income.
A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF PARTISANSHIP
AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES
AMONG YOUNG BLACK AMERICANS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

BY
DONNICE M. TURNER

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1999
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my parents, Dennis and Janet; my sisters, Dennise Mickelle, Dawn Monique, Dorian Monet, and Deidre Monteil; my grandparents, J.B. and Dixie and Dennis and Doris; and the rest of my family and friends for all of their love, support, and guidance during the writing of this thesis.
A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; ... have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good

James Madison, *Federalist, No. 10*
CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................... ii

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................. v

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................... vi

Chapter

I. PARTISAN VOTING IN THE UNITED STATES .................................................. 1

   The Emergence of the Party System and
   African-American Participation

   Contemporary African-American Participation

   Generational Bias in Voting Studies

   The Revolution: Shifting Attitudes Toward Partisanship

   The Salience of Party Among Young
   African-Americans

II. YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTERS AND
    THE DECLINE IN PARTISAN LOYALTY ...................................................... 14

III. ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF PARTISAN LOYALTY ............................... 34

IV. PARTISAN LOYALTY AMONG YOUNG
    AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTERS ................................................................. 45

    Party Identification

    Political Issues

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 53
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Diagram of the Research Model</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Partisan Identification of Respondents in 1988</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Candidate Preference of Respondents in 1988</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Economic Position of Respondents in 1988</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

PARTISAN VOTING IN THE UNITED STATES

In The Federalist Papers, James Madison denounced factions and political groups as undesired consequences of American democracy, but he praised them as necessary protectors of minority interests in the United States political system. Factions and political groups have always elicited strong responses from scholars and observers of American government. As the nation developed, political parties established themselves as serious organizations dedicated to serving the needs of the voting electorate. Voters looked to political parties for information on election candidates, clarification of complex issues, and assistance with government agencies, to name just a few of the services relied upon by communities across the country. However, voters grew less dependent upon the services provided by the party system and began to focus more on the candidates themselves and the specific issues surrounding elections. Following a national trend toward independence from partisan loyalty that began in the 1960s and continued throughout the 1980's, African-American voters did not overly concern themselves with party labels, but instead focused on the solutions, programs, and services proposed by candidates during election campaigns. As a minority this group considers candidates' views on the issues more important than party labels that are often difficult to comprehend. Thus, due to this decline in partisan loyalty over the decades, candidates, rather than political parties, have become the center of the election. These candidates present issue-oriented messages to African-Americans, a growing sector of the American electorate. The research objective of this study is to determine the impact of the decline
in partisan loyalty and the rise of issue-focused and candidate-centered voting on the electoral behavior of young African-American voters in the 1988 presidential election.

The Emergence of the Party System and African-American Participation

In America's early days “minority interests” specifically referred to those of the rich white male landowner who wanted protection against foreign imports, international restrictions, increasing taxation, and slave insurrections. Though the founding settlers advocated political freedom, personal liberty, and economic opportunity the colonists applied those democratic principles to a select few. Those few included only those white men who owned substantial amounts of property in an attempt to “protect” their interests as landowners, slave holders, and businessmen. The majority of Americans lacked both the financial resources and political expertise of their wealthy neighbors and thus, political parties grew out of a need to represent the interests of a large segment of the population.

According to James Madison and the Federalist Papers, the specific concerns of a few developed into political groups due to “... the influence of [the possession of different degrees and kinds of property] on the sentiments and views of the respective proprietors [that] ensue[d] a division of the society into different interests and parties” which served specific interests instead of ones that benefit the country as a whole. Madison also claimed that political groups isolate and segregate people, keeping them from interacting with others who, having different political perspectives, may still offer valuable insight on an issue. Various political parties educated the voting public about electoral politics, represented the interests of party supporters, and sponsored candidates who were ideological proponents of the party's platform.

It is a well known fact that since Africans were forcibly brought to the United States large numbers of African-Americans have not participated in the country's political
institutions or, more specifically, engaged in electoral behavior. African-Americans were denied adequate political representation as well as basic civil rights despite the eloquent liberties guaranteed in the United States Constitution. James Madison and other convention representatives excluded people of color from voicing their opinions, casting election ballots, joining political parties or factions, and otherwise reaping the benefits from democratic government. Slaves or free persons of African descent were also prevented from enjoying equal protection of the laws, making or enforcing any laws, and they had no influence regulating the laws. In fact, a majority of the country's inhabitants who most needed the protection of representation promised by the United States Constitution could not register to vote, could not vote, nor did they possess the ability to make the political parties or “their” elected officials accountable to them, until the 1960s when, at the insistence of the Supreme Court, political parties, candidates, and public officials began to seriously respond to the specific concerns of racial minorities.6

Following the 1960s, federal legislation facilitated electoral participation by African-Americans through the 1960 and 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and subsequent United States Supreme Court rulings. Progress during this period meant electing officials who not only understood the unique concerns and needs of African-Americans but, who also worked hard to enact the policies supported by these communities.7 In addition, elected officials were expected to reflect African-American values and morals and thus, serve as official representatives of the communities they served.8 According to Lawrence Bobo and Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. elected officials have been judged on their political interests, voting performance, and their ability to influence policy making rather than on accomplishments perceived to be beneficial by minority communities.9 In other words, African-American voters determined the impact of their elected officials on both their “symbolic” as well as their “substantive” representation since the early days of mass African-American voting.10
Contemporary African-American Electoral Participation

In 1988, African-Americans registered to vote and actually participated in record numbers as voters during the presidential election. Since the 1940s, African-Americans have voted overwhelmingly Democratic and among older voters especially, the organization remains the party of choice for a majority of African-Americans. Just as past studies have examined the post-1964 generation as the era of universal electoral participation, this one will analyze the post-Reagan years as the era of party accountability as voters demanded more from political parties than just candidate endorsements.

Today, the Democrats and the Republicans, barely able to maintain their party identifiers, confront a hostile American electorate that is increasingly independent, decreasingly partisan, and presently very unhappy with the current political process. This sentiment is popular among voters due to the dissatisfaction and alienation of a majority of American citizens responding to the political parties' failure to provide practical solutions to the nation's problems. Compounding the effect are the complaints by African-Americans that political parties ignore their demands for political empowerment beyond electoral participation. Issues such as financial prosperity, job training, and day care are especially critical to young African-American voters who consider them as important, confront them as problems, and then seek to solve them as participants in America's democratic process.

In terms of political experience, most voters are more sophisticated, knowledgeable, and individualistic than in the past and they expect more from elected officials, government leaders, and political parties. So much more in fact, that groups that promote specific interests, candidates who represent the concerns of local communities, and minor party organizations that attract young voters are drawing critical...
support away from the Democratic and Republican parties.\textsuperscript{16} The future of the two major political party organizations depends on the support of these politically active voters, young ones in particular. In addition, the rise in the number of African-American voters has also had a long term impact on the decline in partisan loyalty since as a group they have always had various political agendas that were naturally different from those of other Americans.\textsuperscript{17} It is important to restate here that partisan identity is distinct from partisan loyalty in that the former is an ideological label and the latter is more of a voting preference.

For the newest generation of American voters - “Generation Xers” or “Baby Busters” between the ages of 18 and 25 - the United States presidential election of 1988 was a momentous occasion for the expression of their opinions on public policy, their response to election issues, and their views on the effectiveness of their elected officials. The year also represented a rite of passage for quite a number of them as they participated in a national general election for the first time in their lives. An election different from most others in the past, 1988 signified the arrival of a new generation of voters who favorably responded to the presentation of election issues and personable candidates instead of the traditional reliance on party affiliations and partisan loyalties.\textsuperscript{18} As in 1948 when Henry Lee Moon stated that:

\begin{quote}
The ballot, while no longer conceived of as a magic key, [was] recognized as the indispensable weapon in a persistent fight for full citizenship, equal economic opportunity, unrestricted enjoyment of civil rights, freedom of residence, access to quality and unsegregated educational, health and recreational facilities.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

1988 is also a year in which young Americans once again vote according to promises by candidates for future success and prosperity. Finally, 1988 solidifies the significance of campaign issues and candidates as factors that impact upon the decision making process
of young African-American voters as the influence of political parties continually wanes in the minds of American voters.

**Generational Bias in Voting Studies**

This study of partisan loyalty among young African-American voters is relevant to the field of political science for several reasons. The research presented in this thesis measures the impact of partisan loyalty on the voting behavior of a particular segment of the American electorate. This study on young African-American voters is a valuable contribution on a topic that has rarely been addressed in the literature on voting behavior. For instance, Robert C. Smith's 1990 article explores the continuity of the ideals expressed during the 1960's civil rights movement and Katherine Tate's study analyzes voting behavior of African-Americans in the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections; yet neither author discusses the political contributions made by today's young voters.20 Furthermore, there is limited research on young African-Americans and their participation in electoral politics since the Carter/Reagan period and this study will help to rectify the dearth of information on this distinctive group and their voting behavior in the 1988 election. Finally, the lack of studies on the impact of young voters in general and African-Americans in particular in the arena of national politics further illuminates the need for studies of this kind. It seems that 18 to 25 year olds are not only ignored in their daily lives, but also in the studies that are supposed to analyze all sectors of the American electorate.21

This study illuminates the decline in salience of the major political parties for a growing number of voters. Americans no longer feel that they have to identify with a particular party in order to express their support of various issues, concerns, or problems important to the welfare of this country.22 Young voters, especially, seem to feel no obligation to support political parties. According to Campbell, "Young people, just
entering the electorate, are more likely than any of the older age groups to call themselves independent."\(^{23}\) Furthermore, electoral politics is no longer this mystical foreign entity accessible only to the rich and powerful elite class. For the common American, especially the average African-American, it is imperative to keep abreast of political and government leaders, election and referendum dates, and most importantly, issues and policies that affect their lives on a daily basis. In the voters' minds, "The parties are losing their association with the candidates and the issues which the candidates claim to stand for," so voters are disassociating themselves from the parties. \(^{24}\)

**The Revolution: Shifting Attitudes Toward Partisanship**

Due to the changing attitudes during the 1960s and 1970s, there was less partisan identification among voters according to Nie, Verba, and Petrocik. They state that young voters of subsequent generations do not have enough exposure to partisan loyalty in order to develop strong affiliations with a political party.\(^{25}\) This finding is important to this study because older voters usually adopted the partisan affiliation of their parents, but as fewer and fewer Americans expressed partisan loyalty, younger voters were left to form their own political identity.\(^{26}\) Nie suggests that the 1960s and 1970s caused the trend of higher expectations and voter disfranchisement with the parties as the country witnessed an unpopular war in Vietnam, a rise in the crime rate, the struggle for civil rights, and the resignation of a President.\(^{27}\) Nie further argues that "between the 1960 and 1964 elections a shift occurred: an increase in consistency among attitudes, the increased relationship between attitudes and the vote, and the decreased relationship between party identification and the vote."\(^{28}\) This is relevant because Matthews and Prothro argue that the pressures and problems present during the 1960s contributed to the loss of faith in the effectiveness of political parties as problem solvers, but instead of just leaving the
parties, like the majority of dissatisfied voters, African-Americans stopped voting almost as soon as they began to enjoy the franchise.29

Similar to the black youth of the 1960s and 1970s, young African-Americans are politically conscious and intellectually aware. Indeed, almost 30 years ago, Matthews and Prothro wrote that “... college students are very interested in politics and public affairs” and they have a high “... record of political activity and identify] with other African-Americans .... ”30 Furthermore, they state that 18-25 year old African-Americans attending college in the 1960s were the elite leaders of their generation and their education and college experiences propelled them toward electoral participation.31 This emphasized the importance of education in levels of voting participation.32 Those young people, without college training were not as likely to vote. Young African-Americans are pulled between the two major parties: the Democratic party for its historical support of civil rights programs, financial assistance for education, and support for civic and social services or the Republican party which promises individual freedom, less government interference (lower taxes), and economic development (more jobs).33

Even before the Matthew and Prothro study in the 1960s, there was empirical verification of blacks being issue voters. Specifically in his study titled the Balance of Power: The Negro Vote Henry Lee Moon, in 1948, confirmed that despite the obstacles, African-American voters are as intelligent and rational in their electoral decision making as other voters.34 Specifically, he maintained that they respond to the political parties on an election - by - election basis; meaning that depending on the circumstances in their lives such as emancipation from slavery or financial destruction due to the Great Depression, African-Americans vote more according to the issues and candidates than according to partisan loyalty.35 Moon debunked the myth that as a minority group, African-Americans merely follow the rest of the country in its political leanings and
affiliations. He stated that previous generations were independent in terms of partisan loyalty. Moon's study guided the research of this study because it predicted sweeping change in the political environment due to the growing influence of the African-American vote; a theory that predates the 1960s civil rights struggle but can be applied to the emerging influence of young voters in 1988.

The Salience of Party Among Young African-Americans

The critical research questions in this study revolve around how young African-Americans respond to their new responsibilities as voters in an era when voter apathy is high and voter participation is low. Among the questions to be addressed in this study are 1. Are political parties less salient for the newest generation of African-American voters? 2. Is there an increase in independence among young African-American voters as a result of the decline in importance of partisan loyalty? 3. Is this lack of partisan loyalty part of a national trend, consistent with other generations entering the national electorate for the first time, or unique to this particular generation of voters? 4. Do the issues and concerns addressed by the political parties and the political elite alienate rather than embrace the newest generation of African-American voters?

Crucial to this study are definitions of the terms “issue-focused” and “candidate-centered.” An issue-focused campaign or election is one in which the issues are the focus of the campaign rather than the political parties. Voters elect candidates based on their position on the issues rather than their standing in the political party.

Candidate-centered elections are similar in that the candidate is the center of the election rather than the political party. The electorate is concerned with the moral character, personality, and leadership skills possessed by the candidate instead of his position with the political party. These terms and meanings are important to this thesis because they
can explain the electorate's behavior in past presidential elections and serve as guidelines for this study of young African-American voters in the 1988 general election.

This study will be conducted utilizing a cross-sectional analysis of young African-American voting records in the 1988 general presidential election in an attempt to measure various factors that contribute to partisan loyalty such as party realignment, alienation from political participation, and the decline in partisan affiliation among young voters. The relationship between the decline in partisan loyalty and the rise in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections and its impact on the voting behavior of young African-American voters will be evaluated utilizing data from the 1988 National Black Election Studies. The data will consist of the responses of the study participants and I will study the attitudes, ideology, and the perceptions of young African-American voters in the 1988 general presidential election.
NOTES

Chapter I


10. Ibid.


18. Ibid.


21. Ibid.


28. Ibid., 166.


30. Ibid., 445, 446.

31. Ibid., 446.


33. Moon, Balance of Power, 11.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 213.

36. Ibid.


38. Salmore and Salmore, Candidates, Parties, and Campaigns, 226.

39. Ibid., 243.
CHAPTER II
YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTERS AND THE DECLINE IN PARTISAN LOYALTY

Partisan loyalty among the newest generation of African-American voters and its relationship to the rise in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections was informed by the previous research of several other political and social scientists. *The American Voter*, by Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes is the landmark authority on American voting behavior. *The American Voter* argues that political behavior is habitual conduct and thus, a voter's loyalty toward a particular political party develops after many years of voting experience. The study supports the theory that political parties are less important for younger voters than for older ones. In fact, Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes argue that “... the individual develops a characteristic degree of interest and involvement in political affairs, which varies widely among individuals but which exhibits a good deal of stability for the same person through successive election campaigns.”

There is plenty of support for this argument, including Matthews and Prothro who agree that “political activity is habit forming ...” and William Crotty who states that party affiliation is “...strongly resistant to change and highly predictive of political behavior....” The belief that partisan loyalty is similar to other convictions such as religion is not unique among political observers. In fact, this aspect is useful to this thesis because it explains the highly subjective nature of partisan loyalty. Some young adults are very loyal to one party or another while others may be just at the point of being barely able to differentiate between them. From the interpretation of *The American*
Voter it is only a matter of time before voters develop a sense of partisan loyalty so, concluding that the lack of partisan loyalty among young voters means the demise of the American party system is an invalid assumption and is definitely not the intent or the message of this thesis.

Although a weakness of the book is that it fails to mention young African-Americans specifically, the authors' position on partisan loyalty as habit forming is a strength. That is, it expounds upon the theory that the decline in partisan voting among older voters has contributed to the rise in independent voting among younger ones. Nie, Verba, and Petrocik in *The Changing American Voter* strengthen the argument presented by Campbell by endorsing the idea that "... party identification is a long-term commitment, established early in life and usually maintained after that." In other words, once a voter establishes loyalty toward one party he or she is likely to maintain that loyalty over a substantial amount of time.

*The American Voter* also states that "... persons who identify with one of the parties typically have held the same partisan tie for all or almost all of their adult lives." Since young voters have little electoral experience they have little opportunity to develop that habit and, therefore, respond to other political indicators during an election, such as election issues and/or candidates. This is a significant realization by the authors and is important to the theories of this thesis because of the growing utilization of political consultants who understand the lack of partisan loyalty among young (and old) voters and therefore, devise other methods by which to differentiate their candidate from others in the field. For instance, instead of relying on party labels or partisan affiliation that label or describe a candidate the campaign may center around specific issues that are important to various sectors of the community. Therefore, voters, independent of partisan influence, react to the issues and the candidate's position on those issues and only later do voters associate their support or dislike of a candidate to partisan affiliation.
and then, they may become loyal to one party. After acquiring political experiences young voters make more decisions based upon partisan loyalty thus, strengthening the usefulness of this book as a resource on the electoral behavior of young African-Americans during the 1988 presidential election.

Charles H. Franklin disagrees with The American Voter because he says that the book's theory regarding habitual conduct does not incorporate all of the factors that influence political behavior. This source supports an hypothesis of this thesis that several factors influence the newest generation of voters in order to make political parties less salient in the 1988 presidential election. According to Charles H. Franklin, "The traditional view is that party identification develops at an early age, largely through the influence of parents, is remarkably stable throughout life, is relatively unaffected by short-term forces, and acts as a central organizing force for other political perceptions and preferences." Charles H. Franklin contends that The American Voter's theory that "[i]dentification was characterized as the effective orientation of the individual toward the political party" does not adequately incorporate all of the factors that influence electoral participation. Franklin argues that "... party identification appears to play little role in determining the issue preferences of... young adults." This argument strengthens the theory of this thesis because it enforces the idea that young voters may identify with issues without displaying loyalty toward a particular political party. In fact, issues have become more important to voters as the differences between political parties diminishes in the minds of the electorate.

According to "Issue Preferences, Socialization, and the Evolution of Party Identification," much more important influences on electoral participation are the measures of education, religion, ethnicity, social position, and unemployment. This argument regarding the development of partisan loyalty is different from The Changing American Voter in that identification with a particular political party depends not only on
time and electoral experience but, more on personal and socio-economic factors. This is useful to this thesis because it adds yet another dimension to the issue of partisan loyalty among young voters and how it is obtained.

Franklin adds that "parent socioeconomic status, parent participation, youth high school activity, and parent civic orientations all make distinct contributions to young adult political participation." He continues by stating that "... issue preferences are based more on the circumstances in which the young adult finds himself or herself and less on current partisanship." This point of Franklin's is exactly what this thesis is examining. If the partisan loyalty of young African-American voters is based upon the backgrounds of their families, the environment in which they grew up, and their activities and that of their families then, everyone with the same profile should identify with the same political party and vote in a similar manner.

Another view that is different from Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes in The American Voter is that of Matthews and Prothro who contend that there is a "generational effect" which is "... a result produced not by aging as such but by the experiences peculiar to a given age level." Matthews and Prothro are more in agreement with Franklin due to their belief in other influences on political behavior besides the young voter's lack of experience. This argument theorizes that there are several factors that influence the voting behavior of African-Americans. Furthermore, Franklin argues that partisanship is not as stable as was previously believed by political scientists in the past. In fact he states that "... party identification is not fixed in childhood, and further that it changes in response to policy preferences." This is particularly useful to this thesis because it may explain why some young adults do not express loyalty toward a particular political party but rather toward specific issues that they consider important. In other words, while older voters based their electoral decision making upon factors such as partisan loyalty or affiliation younger voters tend to vote
more according to the personalities of the candidates and their position on election issues. Other sources seem to support this assumption especially, Henry Lee Moon who applies this theory to African-American voters.

Henry Lee Moon's *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* advocates the theory that African-Americans vote according to the issues and the candidates' position on them rather than according to partisan loyalty. This is an excellent source for this thesis because it is useful in analyzing the voting behavior of African-Americans prior to 1960. The strength of *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote* is its emphasis on the emergence of African-American voters as a significant sector of the voting electorate. The detriment of utilizing Moon's book is the fact that the research material is dated and has to be carefully applied to the 1988 presidential election.

Utilizing this book as a source augments this thesis in that the declining influence of political parties is measured vis-a-vis the increasing numbers of African-American voters, a subject that is not found in many current sources. This lack of research on other voters besides white men and women underscores the need for studies such as this one that focuses on not just African-American voters but, young African-American voters. The decline in partisan loyalty may be caused by the direct neglect of candidates and party leaders to integrate minority voters who comprise a large segment of the electorate or it may be because of legal procedures or administrative practices that preclude African-Americans from affiliating with political parties in such great numbers. Whether this neglect is deliberate or not is really not within the scope of this thesis although, it is an interesting aspect of partisan politics.

In his article, "Issue Preferences, Socialization, and the Evolution of Party Identification," Charles Franklin agrees with Henry Lee Moon because he states that despite the fact that political parties need young voters for future survival, the parties continue to alienate the African-American electorate. Both political scholars are
important because they strengthen the argument that political parties ignore the needs of minorities among their constituency, which is relative to the amount of loyalty felt by African-Americans toward a particular political party.

Another aspect of Balance of Power: The Negro Vote that influences this thesis is the almost spiritual belief of African-Americans in hope for the future. This hope is the foundation on which support for candidates, issues, and parties is expressed in electoral participation. Therefore, the more satisfied African-American voters feel about their effect upon the political process, their financial well-being, and their social standing, the more they may participate in elections and express loyalty toward a particular party.

Another aspect that sparked an interest in the role of political parties in national politics was the fact that Balance of Power argued that after the 1940s, African-Americans reevaluated their partisan affiliation in terms of the benefits gained and the losses assessed at each election. This is similar to the behavior witnessed in subsequent elections which explains the support it lends to the research on the 1988 presidential election studied in this thesis. Henry Lee Moon states that since the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the blind partisan loyalty of older African-American voters passed on to younger voters. Nevertheless, it seems that the wide-sweeping changes of the 1960s and 1970s disrupted the transfer of partisan loyalty to the newer generations of voters that was found by Moon, and a change in values and ideals increased the incidence of independent voting. Therefore, this thesis examines the relationship between political parties and young African-American voters as they participate in the 1988 presidential election in response to changing attitudes among voters in modern America.

An Economic Theory of Democracy by Anthony Downs supports the hypothesis that the political parties fail to address the issues considered important to minority groups
because of his theory that democracy is a form of rule that is based on rule by the majority. In fact, he argues that “rational men are not interested in politics per se but in utility income.”20 In other words, rational voters participate in elections because they reap some benefit from doing so. In terms of this thesis, which looked to Anthony Downs for an explanation for why people behave as they do, African-Americans may feel loyalty toward a particular party if they believe that they will receive some benefit. This is useful to this thesis because it explores the idea that no matter what political parties do for voters, voters themselves determine the value of any association with them.

An Economic Theory of Democracy further argues that “... acquaintance with each party's view of the good society - its ideology - helps [the individual] make his voting decision without knowing about every policy specifically.”21 African-Americans usually vote according to the candidate's position on the issues important to them, which is the reason this thesis is studying the decline in partisan loyalty among young voters who do not have an affiliation with a particular party or party ideology. Other scholars of political science support the theory that voters do not have to know a lot about the political party system in order to identify enough with it that they become loyal to a political party.

According to the article, “Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory” written by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, “... the individual voter may not have a great deal of detailed information, but he usually has picked up the crucial general information as part of his social learning ....”22 This is relative to this thesis because if young people know the issues then they can identify with the position of the candidate and the political party on that issue. The strength of this source is its support of the theory that political participation is habitual and is based upon the information and experiences gained through young adulthood which refers back to The American Voter and the articles written by Charles Franklin.
“Democratic Practice and Democratic Theory” continues by stating that the voter:

Cannot live in an American community without knowing broadly where the parties stand. He has learned that the Republicans are more conservative and the Democrats more liberal - and he can locate his own sentiments and cast his vote accordingly. After all, he must vote for one or the other party, and, if he knows the big thing about the parties, he does not need to know all the little things. The basic role a party plays as an institution in American life is more important to his voting than a particular stand on a particular issue.23

This thesis will determine if young African-American voters continue to consider the issues and the candidates' position on those issues more important to their electoral decision making than their loyalty toward any particular political party despite what the previous article states about the role parties play during elections. In fact, Anthony Downs supports the belief that “… uncertainty forces rational governments to regard some voters as more important than others. By doing so it modifies the equality of influence which universal suffrage was designed to insure.”24 By recruiting support from specific sectors of the American electorate political parties alienate others and this action influences the partisan loyalty of young African-American voters.

The theory that young African-American voters feel alienated from political parties is elaborated upon in a significant article by Michael Dawson of The University of Chicago. In “Blacks Pessimistic About the Future” Dawson writes that African-Americans are pessimistic about their opportunities in the future.25 His findings that African-Americans believe that “… the prospects for achieving racial and economic equality are dubious at best …” signify the poignancy of this thesis as it attempts to argue that American political parties have lost their importance as effective political institutions in African-American communities.26 This is an important source although Dawson fails to address the changing expectations of young voters. In fact, “Blacks
Pessimistic About the Future” is contrary to the hopeful view of the future expressed by African-Americans described by Henry Lee Moon in his book.

Furthermore, according to Michael Dawson African-Americans are isolated from most political activity by their race and class divisions. In other words, positive exposure to party politics and reinforcing electoral experiences tend to place a favorable light upon political party affiliation and loyalty toward one party in particular. According to Katherine Tate, who seems to agree with Dawson in her book From Protest to Politics, “Current national problems and political issues have caused a shift in priorities for African-American voters” as they attempt to find support among political parties whose interests usually run counter to theirs. Therefore, this thesis finds Tate and Dawson as strong sources on the viability of political parties as organizations that attract the loyalty of young African-American voters after 1988. On the other hand, other scholars have concluded that African-Americans have unique interests and that today's political parties are unable to adequately address them, but without other alternatives, African-American voters are forced to work within the major parties in hopes of inspiring change. The research of this study will determine whether young adults feel the same, or if they really are becoming more independent of the party system altogether.

“Over the years, it has become more important to citizens to vote according to a candidate's position on the issues rather than according to party affiliation” and this pattern of electoral behavior has passed to the newest generation of voters - young African-Americans. This is the central theme of this thesis and various sources are important to validate it. According to Carmines and Stimson in “The Two Faces of Issue Voting,” “... issue voting, the decision calculus used by voters to link their policy concerns to voting choices” is increasing as partisan loyalties decline in importance which proves the theory of this thesis. African-Americans already vote according to the issues but, could they be persuaded to feel loyalty toward the political party whose
ideology is most similar to their own - this is the focus of this study. Not to say that partisan influence does not exist, but more often than not "... the parties today are thought to be less relevant than in the past ... [and ] this development has contributed to an increase in nonpartisan identification and behavior among the American public."

As mentioned before, the decline in partisan loyalty has sparked an increase in the number of independent voters which is an important correlation for political scientists to study.

According to Charles H. Franklin, "... it is clear that by the age of 25 young adults are quite actively adjusting their partisanship to accord with the party they prefer on those policy issues about which they care." Young adults feel alienated by the political parties because they fail to adequately address their particular concerns regarding important issues, such as federal assistance for higher education, protection of the environment, and lowering the federal deficit. It is quite apparent that "citizens, especially young adults seem quite capable of adjusting their party preferences in order to bring them into line with their preferred policies." In addition, "... party identification is the result of citizens' judgments of which party is most agreeable with their own preferences." Party identification also allowed individuals to 'know' more about persons and policies associated with the parties than was possible on the basis of their direct contact with issue positions and candidate characteristics." Partisan identification of a candidate gives the voter a base from which to analyze the candidate's position on the issues in order to begin the decision process. Younger voters are more likely to vote for a candidate based on the candidate's personal characteristics and his or her position on the issues than to rely solely on party affiliation. These arguments correlate the theory that political parties are less salient for younger voters, and in this case can be applied to African-American voters due to their tendency to vote
independently of partisan loyalty. The literature provides excellent perspective but, once again the information on African-American voting behavior is quite limited in scope.

There are also claims that the decline in partisan loyalty is due to the particular independence of young African-American voters in regard to their choices in the 1988 presidential election. “The decline in party identification largely results from generational replacement, and given the very low levels of partisan loyalties among young adults, party loyalties are likely to remain weak for the remainder of this century” proposes Abramson in “The Decline of Electoral Participation in America.” Also, older voters are being replaced by younger voters who have more avenues for political expression and thus do not rely so heavily upon the political parties for information, etc. In “Issue Preferences,” Franklin further proves that “if citizens are responsive to the positions of the parties and the preferences they hold on issues, then ... the burden of maintaining support, or gaining it, [is] on party leaders.” This is a strong statement that puts the burden of party membership and loyalty upon the party leaders which is a crucial element of this study. Furthermore, scholars argue that “at each presidential election about 8% of the electorate is new” which increases the probability that voters will develop new patterns of voting. This is relevant to this thesis because a good segment of 18 to 25 year olds who participated in the 1988 presidential election were new voters who may not have had enough time in order to establish ties to a particular party.

Matthews and Prothro also agree with Key in that voting/participation must be considered important enough to the voter so as to expend time and effort to do so which is similar to the argument that commitment to voting is present only until it is superseded by daily rituals. This strengthens the theory that voting is a habit and therefore, loyalty toward a particular party is developed after time. Furthermore, voters will continue in that voting pattern until something - a candidate, an issue, or the attraction of a political party - distracts them. Otherwise, according to Nie, “If no new stimuli push them in a
new direction, they will replicate the partisanship of the existing electorate” which in
1988 was in decline as more voters declared themselves independent. In fact, “Fewer
citizens identify with one party or the other ... and most Americans have negative views
of the party.” Therefore, as partisan loyalty declines among older voters, it is sure to
continue among younger voters when they participate in national elections.

Stephen A. Salmore and Barbara G. Salmore successfully argue in Candidates,
Parties, and Campaigns: Electoral Politics in America that political parties are less
“...salient political objects” for today’s voters. This argument supports the hypothesis
in this thesis that young African-Americans do not consider the parties viable political
institutions in 1988. According to Salmore and Salmore young voters are not the only
ones dissatisfied with the role of political parties. They state that “[n]ot only were fewer
voters partisan identifiers at all, but those who were reported increasingly weaker
attachments, as shown by their growing propensity to split their tickets.” In other
words, voters no longer cared about the different “categories” on the ballot, voters
crossed party lines to vote for people who would best serve them and their communities.
Furthermore, as political parties decreased in importance on the ballot, they also
decreased in relevance in policy making. Salmore and Salmore state that:

Officeholders who appealed to an increasingly nonpartisan
electorate to gain victory, and often achieved it without any
significant reliance on the party for assistance during the
campaign, had no compelling reason to vote their party; for
them, as for voters, the parties were simply becoming irrelevant.

In other words, the decline in partisan loyalty is due to the increased significance placed
upon the character and personality of candidates and the increase in the use of issues as
central components of the 1988 presidential election. As voters expected more solutions
to the problems that concerned them - crime, inflation, unfair trade practices, inadequate
health care, to name just a few - and as political parties failed to address those concerns,
voters turned to the candidates themselves. This in turn increased the voters' reliance on issues and candidates and decreased their loyalty to the political parties. This source is excellent in all aspects except in that there is little focus on young African-American voting behavior.

Another great source that prompted this study on electoral politics is *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections*, introduced earlier and written by Morris P. Fiorina in 1981. This book is useful because it contradicts the theory proposed in this thesis that young African-American voters evaluate election issues and candidates based on current circumstances and life experiences surrounding them. Fiorina argues instead that "... people vote according to past events and experiences [and they] react to incumbent administrations by voting for or against them." Retrospective Voting is a celebrated source on electoral behavior especially, in terms of African-Americans who participated in previous elections. Fiorina has even created a name for people who vote according to past experiences. This type of voting is called "retrospective voting" and is a popularly accepted explanation of electoral behavior.

There is much to support this theory but, this scholar argues that Fiorina's theory only applies to voters with past voting experience which does not apply to the behavior of first time voters in 1988. In regard to this study of young African-American voters in the 1988 presidential election this segment of the electorate did not vote as a group in 1984 or 1980 and therefore, have no real experience at "retrospective voting." Furthermore, being relatively young these voters do not really have a recollection of past issues or policies or party platforms or anything to contribute to future voting, as of yet. In addition, the focus of this generation has yet to really be defined so they are lacking a substantial pattern of behavior.

Salmore and Salmore further prove this argument to be true because they argue
that campaign managers and political consultants contributed to the demise of partisan loyalty. This strengthens the argument that candidates and issues have replaced political parties as the focus of presidential elections. Salmore and Salmore state that due to the rise in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections, voters responded differently to political parties and therefore, to partisan loyalty. *Candidates, Parties, and Campaigns* argues that:

Campaigns that presented candidates to the public as individuals rather than as partisans hastened the decline of party identification as a means of structuring voters' choice: “the voters did not decide all of a sudden that parties were bankrupt political institutions and mandate their decline. Rather, voters reacted gradually over the last quarter of a century to the way in which politics was presented to them.”

As further support for this thesis, Goldman and Mathews examined the 1988 campaigns of several candidates from each party and concluded that George Bush won the American presidency because his personal advisors devised an elaborate package, media campaign, and issue platform. The voters identified more with the candidates and the campaign issues than with the parties in 1988 and thus, the decline of partisan loyalty continued as voters split their ballots or failed to admit loyalty toward a particular political party. So, even though Michael Dukakis had a strong chance of beating Vice-President George Bush and his incumbency record, Democratic party officials failed to convince the electorate to support their party candidate. This is important because Goldman and Mathews proved that despite party support and financial assistance strong candidates can still fail to make it to the general election based on lack of character, personality and/or acceptable position on the issues. As older voters responded favorably to these types of campaigns, issue-focused and candidate-centered campaigns “... emphasized electoral considerations in their decision making calculus”
which explains the decline in partisan loyalty among young African-American voters. Young voters only responded to the attitude expressed to them by their older role models and therefore, candidate-run campaigns have surfaced in larger numbers since 1988.

Contrary to the studies of other political scientists, Martin P. Wattenberg argues that "...there is no evidence ... to suggest that the rise in cynicism towards the government has been responsible for the decline of partisanship." His belief is opposite of that of this thesis, which provides an excellent opportunity to study another viewpoint. Wattenberg continues by stating that "...citizens simply see the parties as less relevant than in the past and hence their feelings toward them are more neutral than negative." Young African-American voters have no real experience with political parties and thus, their loyalty toward them is not that strong. With the growth of mass media and candidate-centered campaigns, the importance of parties in the presidential selection process and government in general has been weakened. Wattenberg argues that "as candidates have come to assume a much larger share of the spotlight on domestic and foreign policy the parties have seen much of their base of support erode." He continues, "...citizens simply see the parties as less relevant than in the past and hence their feelings toward them are more neutral than negative." Wattenberg helps support the theory that the political parties are less salient for the newest generation of young African-American voters and "...the problem which the parties must face is that they are considered less relevant in solving the most important domestic and foreign policy issues of the day." According to Candidates, Parties, and Campaigns, "Voters, responding to candidates’ messages, have exhibited increasing psychological independence from the parties and willingness to split their tickets, thereby diminishing the traditional role of the party in the electorate". This is strong affirmation for the central theme of this thesis. According to Arthur H. Miller and Martin P. Wattenberg who agree with Salmore and
Salmore, "The two major parties have increasingly been losing their ability to integrate people into the political system, especially those with only a marginal interest in or knowledge of politics."63 African-Americans are particularly vulnerable to independent voting since they have historically been excluded from the political process.

Since voters in general have rejected the political parties Piven and Cloward also argue that “as things now stand, the parties have adapted to low turnout; they have a vested interest in maintaining a skewed and limited electorate.”64 As previously mentioned, the reasons for the behavior of the political parties is not within the scope of this study but, being recognized by political scientist certainly adds credibility to the issue. Furthermore, the political parties have failed to adapt to “...the rising generation's ... slightly to moderately more liberal political views, greater independence of partisanship, and higher Democratic voting behavior than current older voters.”65 Young voters respond to the political environment around them and these sources prove that when older adults turn away from political parties then, younger ones do also. In regard to young African-American voters, “Except for civil rights, [college students] tend to be highly conservative on social and economic questions” which may be different from the general electorate.66 This argument is important and useful to this thesis because it supports the theory that candidates and issues have replaced the parties as influential factors on the decision making of young African-American voters.
NOTES

Chapter II


2. Ibid., 144.

3. Ibid., 103.


6. Ibid.


8. Ibid., 460.

9. Ibid., 472

10. Ibid.


17. Ibid., 9.

18. Ibid., 200.


21. Ibid., 113.


23. Ibid.


26. Ibid.

27. Tate, *From Protest to Politics*, 22.

28. Ibid., 23.


34. Ibid., 475.
35. Ibid.


38. Ibid., 346.


41. Franklin, "Issue Preferences," 475.


45. Ibid., 364.


47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., 227-228.


50. Ibid.

51. Ibid., 228.


53. Ibid., 333, 357.

54. Ibid., 359.
55. Ibid.


57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 944.

59. Ibid., 947.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.


63. Ibid., 120.


Chapter III
ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF PARTISAN LOYALTY

Past examinations of voting behavior have utilized case studies which study a particular community and analyze the impact of election preferences on policy decision making by elected officials. Other political scientists compare different aspects of voting behavior such as split-ticket voting, low voter turnout, or voting along racial, ideological, or party lines and determine trends or patterns in voting. However, most studies on electoral behavior utilize election results that have either been collected and compiled by a research organization or by an independent researcher. In the case of this study, the National Black Election Study is the source of the data used, which allows me to focus my research on the young African-American voters often overlooked in other data banks.

As African-Americans vote in larger numbers they will be the subject of numerous studies and their voting behavior will be analyzed utilizing the various methods described. This study in particular will focus on elections that are centered on the issues and candidates rather than on partisan loyalty utilizing cross-sectional generalizations that compare variables and the relationship that they have on the political behavior of young African-American voters. By examining partisan loyalty, one can determine if the expectations of a specific segment of the electorate fit the patterns of past voters in other elections. In addition, one can find whether the new generation of young voters considers either the issues and candidates or the political parties more important in their own electoral decision making.

This is a study of the relationship between the decline in partisan loyalty and the
rise in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections, concentrating on the 1988 presidential election. The type of research plan utilized in this study is a cross-sectional analysis of the 1988 voting records of young African-Americans between the ages of 18 and 25. This analysis of voting behavior will determine if there is an increase in independence among young African-American voters as a result of the decline in importance of partisan loyalty in the 1988 presidential election. This study will also examine if political parties are less salient for the newest generation of African-American voters in terms of the attitudes and beliefs expressed in the election study. Finally, this study will examine whether or not the issues and concerns currently addressed by the political parties alienate rather than embrace young African-American voters.

One research question is whether political parties are as viable today as they were during the 1970s, for example as evidenced by the electoral behavior of African-Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 during the 1988 presidential election. This question is important because it explores vast differences between generations of voters in terms of issues, types of candidates, and demographics that are unique to each. For instance, during the 1970s crime was a problem but, on a smaller scale and mostly in the larger cities. In 1988, crime is a big concern in even the smallest communities and there are more guns, illegal drugs, and street gangs that complicate the efforts of law enforcement agencies. Another example is the country's budget deficit that was once reasonable but, now is out of control and adversely affects young adults and their ability to earn a decent salary, live comfortably while saving money, and otherwise plan for their future. This thesis will determine whether the issues and candidates of the 1988 presidential election are more important than political parties since the newest generation of voters have different concerns and problems than in the past.
A second research question is whether the rise in the number of independent voters threatens the political parties' ability to influence voters as a result of the decline in partisan loyalty during the 1988 presidential election. This is important because partisan loyalty is usually passed down from parents to children but, if today's young adults do not identify strongly enough with a political party in order to vote along party lines or support a party's platform then, future generations may not express partisan loyalty either. This thesis will explore the possibility that this decline in partisan loyalty may be consistent with the electoral behavior of other generations first entering the national electorate and whether this is a national trend that is reacting to various stimuli such as, demographic changes or shifts in the socioeconomic status of constituents.

Finally, this thesis will determine whether the issues and concerns of young African-American voters are being addressed by the political parties and if the decline in partisan loyalty is in response to alienation felt by 18 to 25 year olds. It is important to discover the rationale behind the electoral behavior of voters in order to measure the impact that the behavior has on the outcome of the presidential election and on the continuing decline in partisan loyalty. Young voters respond to candidates and political parties that reflect their interests and concerns and this thesis will determine if all has been done to incorporate this new generation of voters into the party structure or if more could be done that could give political parties new life and purpose.

A cross-sectional analysis will be used to measure the relationship between the independent variable: the decline in partisan loyalty due to the rise in candidate-centered and issued-focused elections and the dependent variable: voting behavior among African-American voters between the ages of 18 and 25. The analysis will also permit a systematic evaluation of various categories of electoral behavior. There are advantages and disadvantages in using any method of data collection and cross-sectional analysis has a few, also. A diagram of the research model is presented in Figure 1.
Figure 1

DIAGRAM OF THE RESEARCH MODEL

ISSUE
SALIENCE
INCREASE

PARTISAN
LOYALTY
DECLINE

VOTING
BEHAVIOR
OF YOUNG
AFRICAN-
AMERICANS

CANDIDATE-
CENTERED
CAMPAIGNS
According to Alan C. Isaak in *Scope and Methods in Political Science*, cross-sectional generalization is a useful method for comparing two variables because it allows the researcher to study a relationship that may or may not be a causal one. In other words, the dependent variable may or may not be caused by the independent variable or vice versa but, the fact that there is some relationship between the two is enough to link them together. In this case, the decline in partisan loyalty in voting due to the rise in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections is related to the voting behavior of young African-American voters. This thesis will determine the extent of that relationship and the impact of the relationship upon the 1988 presidential election.

To be specific, responses given during the 1988 National Black Election Study will be examined in order to determine the participant's identification with a particular political party, his or her affiliation with a particular political party, and/or the partisan loyalty of the individual respondent. In addition, I will examine the participant's interest in the issues and candidates so that a reasonable analysis may be made as to their impact on electoral decision making. The intent of this study is to provide a tool that illuminates the relationship between the decline in partisan loyalty and the rise in candidate-centered and issue-focused elections for young African-American voters.

According to Henry Lee Moon in his book *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote*, African-Americans vote on the issues and candidates and not always on the basis of partisan loyalty. For instance, even though Republican party leaders took their election victories and the support of African-Americans for granted in the 1940s, African-Americans did not really consider their vote guaranteed to the Republicans. Instead, according to Mr. Moon, “... the Negro vote is tied to no political party” and supports the candidate that will serve on behalf of the African-American community. Moon’s book reinforces the theory that the decline in partisan loyalty is due to an
increase in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections sparked by older voters who had earlier abandoned political parties. The examination of this variable will help explain the rise in popularity of independent voters who are young and African-American.

Literary sources also help explain the decline in the salience of political parties for young African-American voters. Party loyalty is often the result of strong party identification and this proves that voters who have not formed a party image based on individual attitudes and beliefs can not adopt loyalty toward a particular party. Therefore, "people with strong attitudes vote according to those attitudes, regardless of that individual’s party allegiance” which explains the decline in partisan loyalty and the rise in independent voting. Furthermore, “the individual who has a strong and continuing involvement in politics is more likely to develop a commitment to one or the other of the major parties”; an argument that answers the question regarding the probability that as younger voters mature politically they develop stronger political alliances.

Another reason why the dependent variable is chosen for this study on African-American electoral behavior is that it explains the motives behind the groups’ voting patterns. As parties compete for the support of constituents only during elections, “... more citizens now believe that parties are more interested in votes than in people’s opinions.” Young voters, especially must feel as if they have an impact upon decision making or they feel alienated from the political process and thus, this thesis seeks to determine if the issues and concerns addressed by political parties are meant to embrace the newest generation of African-American voters.

Finally, the dependent variable is indicated in the 1988 National Black Election Study by the respondents’ answers to questions about their political party identification
and affiliation, the socio-economic levels of their family, and their attitudes on various issues and concerns. For instance, the question asking participants to state their political party affiliation attests to that individual’s loyalty toward a particular political party and its ideological platform. This response, in addition to ones made by participants who have opinions on issues or policies, candidates or elected officials, and the presidential campaign or election suggests that the individual’s loyalty toward a political party may be affected by the growing number of Americans who vote independently of partisan affiliation.

By examining these various factors and the relationship that they may have to each other, this thesis seeks to thoroughly analyze the partisan loyalty of African-Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The concepts of issue-focused and candidate-centered elections are complex and encompass the changing attitudes, ideologies, and beliefs of young adults with little political experience, economic resources, and practical knowledge. Utilizing the National Black Election Study to study the dependent variable I can determine the extent that young voters are loyal to a particular political party or whether the parties have alienated African-Americans due to the number of questions and the type of responses given by the participants of the study. Respondents who answer several questions consistently support the hypothesis that various factors influence loyalty toward a particular political party and therefore, it is beneficial to correlate responses in order to accurately determine the impact of partisan loyalty on election behavior.

The young African-American voters are an independent variable because of their impact upon electoral success for both the political parties and the candidates. Young people are the future and without them as loyal supporters the parties have little chance of surviving. Examining the electoral behavior of young African-Americans in the 1988
presidential election provides answers regarding their attitudes and beliefs toward political institutions and their hopes for their role in the future.

In order to study young African-American voters and their views regarding political parties, partisan loyalty, candidate-centered and issue-focused elections, and the 1988 presidential election, the National Black Election Study, a secondary study, will be utilized since I did not have the financial resources to conduct my own independent research. This secondary study is a survey of responses by African-Americans who participated in the 1988 presidential election and certain questions that relate to this particular study on young voters and partisan loyalty will be pulled for analysis. Responses to questions that determine party identification, parents' party identification, current partisan affiliation, partisan loyalty in the 1988 presidential election, and attitudes on political parties will be analyzed in order to measure if the increase in issue-focused and candidate-centered elections had an impact upon the decline in partisan loyalty among young African-American voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.

The general advantages of utilizing a cross-sectional analysis of voting records are many. One, election data is already computed and compiled for analysis by other scholars conducting various studies in order to prove or explain hypotheses and theories. Another advantage of cross-sectional analysis is the usage and availability of large studies, such as those that provide election data. Also, data on American voting behavior is important and appreciated because time that could be spent gathering the data is wisely spent on the analysis of it instead.

The disadvantages of using the cross-sectional research methodology are few, but significant in that they may limit the type of analysis possible from the data. One particular disadvantage is that the researcher is unable to place the responses in the various detailed political contexts. It is, also difficult to develop a method of systematic
examination based on previously compiled data in a cross-sectional analysis. Finally, a cross-sectional research method involves a large sample that has to be narrowed to fit the specific subjects and particular research questions studied.

There are distinct disadvantages specific to this study on partisan loyalty and issue-focused and candidate-centered elections. First, the scholar of African-American voting patterns is totally dependent on the data provided in the National Black Election Study and the format in which it is presented. Another disadvantage is that this researcher is unable to place the survey responses on young African-American election behavior in the various detailed political contexts.

There are also advantages to using the cross-sectional method in this study of African-American voters between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. It is advantageous because the selection procedure has already been conducted for the statistical data. Therefore, this scholar's research on the voting behavior of African-Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 does not have to be gathered, then computed, and finally, compiled in a study that might take years to analyze, not to mention the enormous expense that such a study entails. Finally, it is helpful that this data is available and accessible to students which increases the number of studies on African-American voters in electoral politics.

Throughout the decades since James Madison wrote his *Federalist* articles, fears materialized into the worst kinds of discrimination as the white elite establishment isolated Native Americans, ostracized European immigrants, and alienated African-Americans from the political empowerment, economic success, and social favoritism enjoyed by elites. Thus, political parties have certainly influenced the American electorate as candidates competed for office, programs and policies were enacted, and voters were recruited as supporters. This thesis, in particular, offers a
unique perspective on the role of political parties in that it seeks to determine the impact of the decline in partisan loyalty and the rise of issue-focused and candidate-centered voting on the electoral behavior of young African-American voters in the 1988 presidential election.
NOTES

Chapter III

1. Isaak, *Scope and Methods of Political Science*, 125.


3. Ibid., 11.


5. Ibid., 141.

6. Ibid., 144.

CHAPTER IV
PARTISAN LOYALTY OF YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTERS

This study of partisan loyalty during the 1988 presidential election utilized data from the 1988 National Black Election Study (NBES). In 1984 the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan received funding to interview African-Americans on their opinions, attitudes, and feelings about candidates, issues, and political parties in a study of voting behavior during the 1984 election. The panel study continued in 1988.

There are several advantages to utilizing data from the National Black Election Study. For example, the data has already been collected so much more time can be spent studying the responses and analyzing the statistical results. Secondly, this thesis focuses exclusively on African-Americans and thus, the NBES is an excellent source of information on the voting patterns of a group that is often buried among larger research projects. Thirdly, as a graduate student with limited financial resources, utilizing this data allows me to spend my time focusing upon analysis rather than upon fundraising and data compilation. Finally, the NBES data is computerized making it easier to interpret the responses, compute the statistical relationships, and then, analyze the results.

The disadvantages to using this particular research data are that in secondary analysis one has to rely on questions and methods used by the primary investigators. Therefore, there is no control over the survey instrument and its implementation.

Cross-sectional generalizations compared variables and the relationship that they had with the political behavior of young African-American voters. Variables such as, the economic position of the respondents, the amount of federal dollars spent on foreign aid,
and the state of the national economy were examined in order to determine whether young adults supported individual candidates or expressed loyalty toward a particular political party. In addition, the party identification of the respondents was analyzed to determine whether the voters voted according to party affiliation or according to the candidates' position on the issues.

The survey participants responded to various questions about themselves, the level of media coverage, the candidates, the political parties, and the state of the nation in 1988. 41 respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25 and their opinions on the election is the focus of this thesis. The young voters expressed strong views on the national economy, funding for foreign aid, and the candidates running for President.

**Party Identification**

The data in Table 1 indicate that 78% of the respondents listed affiliation with the Democratic party. Specifically, 49% identified themselves as “strong Democrats” while the other 29% listed themselves as a “weak Democrat” or an “Independent Democrat”. 2% of the respondents identified themselves as an “Independent Independent” while 10% stated that they were either “Apolitical” or gave no answer to the question. Not included in the table are the few respondents that listed their political identification as “Strong Republican” (2%) and “Independent Republican” (7%). The expression of political party identification is significant because it shows that young voters can identify with a particular party. However, this thesis examines the possibility that partisan affiliation among young African-Americans does not necessarily lead to partisan loyalty in the 1988 presidential election. In fact, when asked to state whether they supported specific candidates or political parties in the 1988 presidential election African-American voters
between the ages of 18 and 25 overwhelmingly identified with candidates than with the Democratic party.

TABLE 1
PARTISAN IDENTIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS IN 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Young Adults 18-25</th>
<th>Middle Age Adults 26-49</th>
<th>Senior Adults 50 and Over</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Row Pct</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Col Pct</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Pct</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tot Pct</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In support of the premise that young African-Americans vote according to the issues and the candidates based upon name recognition rather than partisan loyalty and ideological party labels, the results in Table 2 show that 46.3% of the 18 to 25 year olds
TABLE 2
CANDIDATE PREFERENCE OF RESPONDENTS IN 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNT</th>
<th>YOUNG ADULTS 18-25</th>
<th>MIDDLE AGE ADULTS 26-49</th>
<th>SENIOR ADULTS 50 AND OVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ROW PCT</td>
<td></td>
<td>ROW PCT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COL PCT</td>
<td>MICHAEL DUKAKIS</td>
<td>GEORGE BUSH</td>
<td>JESSE JACKSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT PCT</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

stated that they supported Michael Dukakis and 4.9% of them supported Jesse Jackson, both Democratic candidates, while only 17.1% of the respondents stated support for the Democratic Party as a whole. Specifically, of those who identified themselves as “Independent Democrats”, 86% expressed an overwhelming preference for Michael Dukakis over just any Democratic presidential candidate despite the partisan affiliation of 14% of the respondents. “Weak Democrats”, while not as strong in their support for
Dukakis, still supported his candidacy 20% more than the “Democratic Party” candidate when asked to state a preference between the two. In fact, 50% of the young voters who identified themselves as “Strong Democrats” stated support for Dukakis or Jackson compared with only 25% of the other “Strong Democrats” who stated support for the Democratic party. It is quite clear that young African-American voters distinguish partisan affiliation or party label from the presidential candidates because they identify with the candidates more than they support the political parties. Differentiating between support for candidates and partisan loyalty is also important because it is not unique to young voters. Middle age and senior voters also indicate a preference toward voting for Dukakis rather than for the Democratic Party and its ideological platform.

**Political Issues**

In regard to the respondents' attitude on the issue of their own economic position, the young African-American voters once again expressed support for individual candidates rather than support for the Democratic party in Table 3. For those respondents who stated that their economic position was the “same” or “somewhat better” in 1988 as it was in 1984 Michael Dukakis, the Democratic candidate, won their support over the Republican candidate, George Bush, 48% to 4% despite the apparent success of Ronald Reagan as president. Apparently, young African-American voters between the ages of 18 and 25 were not impressed with the past performance of the Republican president as they seemed to look forward to an even better economic future with a candidate like Michael Dukakis as president. Furthermore, for those who responded that their economic position was “somewhat better” or “much better” in 1988 than it was in 1984 the Democratic Party was the choice for only 21% of the respondents. Finally, it is clear once again that 18 to 25 year olds not only distinguish their party
TABLE 3
ECONOMIC POSITION OF RESPONDENTS IN 1988

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNT ROW PCT</th>
<th>YOUNG ADULTS 18-25</th>
<th>MIDDLE AGE ADULTS 26-49</th>
<th>SENIOR ADULTS 50 AND OVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MUCH BETTER</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETTER</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOME-WHAT BETTER</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAME</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOME-WHAT WORSE</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORSE</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUCH WORSE</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORSE</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.1%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

identification from the voting choices that they make but, they also differentiate between loyalty toward a particular political party and blind support of a presidential candidate just because of partisan affiliation.
This data is important because it reinforces the role that the candidates have in the electoral decision making process of young African-American voters. As they identify the issues that are important to them, 18 to 25 year olds determine whether the election of a candidate to the presidency will benefit their interests rather than whether that candidate is a member of a particular political party or not. It is really clear by the results of this thesis that young African-American voters between the ages of 18 and 25 rely less on partisan loyalty in their decision making than older voters like their parents.

This thesis sought to show that not only did young African-American voters fail to adopt the partisan loyalty of their parents but, they responded to the issue-focused and candidate-centered campaigns that dominated the 1988 presidential election. They overwhelmingly chose to support Michael Dukakis over the Democratic party despite identification with the political parties. In fact, young voters were able to differentiate their affiliation with a particular political party and support for candidates at the time of electoral decision making.

According to this study, young African-American voters are not loyal to a particular political party in terms of electoral support in the 1988 presidential election. In fact, it seems that the new generation of young African-Americans are independent thinkers as well as voters because they distinguish between their own political party identification and the candidate that would best serve their interests. The research data affirms the theory that endorsing a presidential candidate does not necessarily mean supporting a particular political party in 1988. The difference in the number of voters between the ages of 18 and 25 who supported Michael Dukakis verses those who supported the Democratic party is once again evidence of a continuing trend away from partisan loyalty. Even middle age and senior adults lack partisan loyalty toward a particular political party when asked to choose between candidates and parties during an election. As these young voters mature and become experienced electoral participants,
their choices for president and political party affiliation may change. However, in this case voters favored candidates and issues rather than political parties signifying a continuing decline in partisan loyalty among the newest voters between the ages of 18 and 25.
REFERENCES


Smith, Robert C. "Recent Elections and Black Politics: The Maturation or Death of Black Politics?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* (June 1990): 160-162.


