# ETHOS, IDEOLOGY, AND PARTISANSHIP: EXPLORING THE PARADOX OF CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS*

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Despite the increasingly liberal cast of the national Democratic Party, self-identified conservatives continue to represent a significant segment of the party. At least 25 percent of Democratic identifiers considered themselves to be conservatives during the 1972–1988 period. This paper explores the puzzle of why significant numbers of political conservatives continue to identify with the Democratic Party. We argue that conservative Democrats relate to their party not because of political ideology, as do Republicans and to a lesser extent, liberal/moderate Democrats, but because of the symbolic values associated with the main groups in the party—what we refer to as "party ethos." This proposition is examined by analyzing a new set of open-ended questions included in the 1988 American National Election Study probing citizens' images and assessments of the Republican and Democratic parties.

Conservative Democrats represent an anomaly in contemporary American politics. If their policy preferences are truly conservative, why do they continue to identify with an increasingly liberal national Democratic Party? Conversely, if they are genuine Democrats, what sustains their conservative ideology?

There was a time, of course, when the self-designation, conservative Democrat, went comfortably together, as did the opposite designation, liberal Republican. During the 1950s and early 1960s, when both parties were more ideologically heterogeneous, there was no inconsistency between being a conservative and a Democrat or being a liberal and a Republican.

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Indeed, in the South of this period a majority of white Democrats were probably conservatives and many northeastern Republicans were liberals.

Both parties, however, have become more ideologically homogeneous since that time, especially at elite and activist levels. Studies of convention delegates from 1972 onward, for example, show that Democrats have become more liberal and Republicans have become increasingly more conservative (Miller and Jennings, 1986; Miller, 1988). This elite ideological polarization makes it more difficult for ordinary partisans to retain inconsistent party identifications and political ideologies. As Polsby and Wildavsky (1991, p. 184) argue, "The growing liberalism of Democratic activists and the corresponding conservatism of Republican activists may make that self-designation [conservative Democrat] seem increasingly out of place. . . . If there continue to be large issue differences between elite Democrats and Republicans, it then becomes harder to maintain discrepant party identifications and ideologies."

Panel A of Figure 1 indicates that this party-ideology discrepancy has been largely resolved on the Republican side of the partisan ledger. Employing the American National Election Studies' (ANES) seven-point scale on liberal/conservative ideology, the panel shows that only in 1972 have liberals constituted more than 10 percent of Republican identifiers (11.2%).[1] In contrast, conservatives have clearly been the largest ideological group within the Republican Party; and indeed, in 1988, they constituted 70 percent of Republicans, more than twice as many as liberals and moderates combined. The Republican Party has truly become a conservative party at the mass as well as elite and activist levels.

The situation is fundamentally different among Democratic identifiers. As shown in Panel B of Figure 1, moderates and liberals have been the two largest ideological groups among rank and file Democrats, but conservatives have represented *at least* 25 percent of Democrats throughout this period. In short, not only are Democrats more ideologically divided and heterogeneous than Republicans but conservatives represent a significant segment of the party, unlike liberals within the Republican Party.

Thus, the question—How can citizens continue to think of themselves both as Democrats and conservatives? We argue that this seemingly inconsistent self-designation is possible because conservative Democrats are bound to their party not because of ideology and issues, as are Republicans and to a lesser extent, liberal/moderate Democrats, but because of the symbolic values associated with the main groups in the party—what we refer to as "party ethos." Because conservative Democrats identify with their party not because of ideology but because of the groups it represents, there is no necessary contradiction between their party identifications and political ideologies. This proposition is examined by analyzing a new set of

**Republicans**                                              **Democrats**
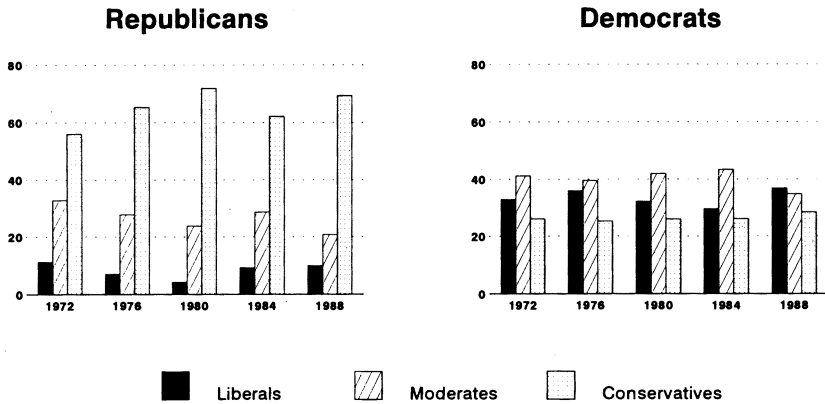


Source: American National Election Surveys, 1972-1988

**FIG. 1.** Ideological makeup of Democratic and Republican parties: 1972–1988

open-ended questions included in the 1988 American National Election Study probing respondents' images and assessments of the Republican and Democratic parties.

## CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS: JUST A SOUTHERN PHENOMENON?

Before examining this proposition directly, we must first consider an alternative explanation of conservative Democrats, namely that they are merely a regional phenomenon representing the historical legacy of the southern Democracy. The South has long been considered the home of political conservatism, and by historical circumstance and political tradition, it has also been—until recently—the heart of the Democratic Party. Thus, it has seemed to many that conservative Democrats are a peculiar southern creation. Table 1 indicates that although the highest proportion of conservative Democrats do reside in the South (43.2%), a majority live in other regions, including 28 percent in the Midwest. Conservative Democrats, in short, are too diffuse geographically to be viewed strictly as a southern phenomenon.

## THE ISSUE POSITIONS OF CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS

Do conservative Democrats have conservative positions on specific political issues or do they simply adopt the description "conservative" because of its positive connotation? Table 2 compares the issue preferences of con-

**TABLE 1. Region of Residence of Conservative Democrats, Liberal and Moderate Democrats, and Republicans**

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Northeast | 14.4% | 22.5% | 16.0% |
| Midwest | 28.0% | 23.4% | 33.9% |
| South | 43.2% | 32.4% | 25.3% |
| West | 14.4% | 21.6% | 24.8% |
|  | (132) | (333) | (443) |

Number of respondents in parentheses.
*Source:* American National Election Study, 1988.

**TABLE 2. Selected Issue Positions of Conservative Democrats and Liberal/Moderate Democrats**

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats |
|---|---|---|
| Percent think civil rights is "moving too fast" | 26.9%* | 16.2% |
|  | (108) | (296) |
| Percent think women should always be able to obtain an abortion | 24.2%** | 46.5% |
|  | (132) | (333) |
| Mean Score: Gov't. should provide services (1 = fewer; 7 = more) | 4.1** | 4.7 |
|  | (111) | (298) |
| Mean Score: Defense spending (1 = decrease; 7 = increase) | 4.0** | 3.3 |
|  | (113) | (299) |
| Mean Score: Gov't. should provide jobs (1 = should; 7 = should not) | 4.0* | 3.7 |
|  | (118) | (295) |
| Mean Score: Gov't. should help minorities (1 = should; 7 = should not) | 4.3** | 3.7 |
|  | (64) | (151) |

*Difference between conservative Democrats and liberal/moderate Democrats is significant at $P < .05$.
**Difference between conservative Democrats and liberal/moderate Democrats is significant at $P < .01$.
$P$ values are differences in proportion test results or differences in means test results.
Number of respondents in parentheses.
*Source:* American National Election Study, 1988.

servative Democrats with those of liberal and moderate Democrats across a variety of political issues. The issues are from the domains of social welfare, race, defense, and lifestyle. The table indicates that conservative Democrats are consistently and significantly more conservative in their issue stands than liberal/moderate Democrats. For example, 27 percent of con-

servative Democrats but only 16 percent of liberal and moderate Demo-
crats think that civil rights is "moving too fast." Similarly, almost twice as
many liberal and moderate Democrats as conservative Democrats believe
women should always be able to obtain an abortion. On every issue conser-
vative Democrats are significantly more rightward than their liberal/moder-
ate coidentifiers. In sum, the ideological stance of conservative Democrats
is directly associated with conservative preferences on a wide variety of
specific political issues.

## THE HETERODOX PERCEPTIONS OF CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRATS

By far the most compelling explanation of conservative Democrats is that
provided by Levitin and Miller (1979). They show that conservative Demo-
crats (and liberal Republicans) have a heterodox structure in their percep-
tions of political phenomena. For example, while virtually all liberal Demo-
crats and a great majority of conservative Republicans perceived Ford as
more conservative than Carter in 1976, this was the case among only a
small minority of conservative Democrats. Instead, most conservative
Democrats viewed Carter as more conservative than Ford—a perception,
of course, that tends to eliminate or greatly reduce the possibility of con-
flict between their party loyalties and ideological commitments. In short,
according to Levitin and Miller, most conservative Democrats view the
political world in a way compatible with both their partisan and ideological
identifications. As a consequence, they conclude, "Only the minority [of
conservative Democrats] who share the dominant perceptions of the liberal
Democrats and conservative Republicans . . . are likely candidates for a
change in partisanship that might produce some degree of party realign-
ment" (Levitin and Miller, 1979, p. 766).

Table 3 indicates that the same pattern is evident in 1988.[2] For example,
while only 16 percent of moderate and liberal Democrats and 9 percent of
Republicans perceive the Democratic Party as being more conservative
than the Republican Party, this is true of 42 percent of conservative Demo-
crats. Similarly, 38 percent of conservative Democrats view Dukakis as
more conservative than Bush, in contrast to 12 percent of moderate and
liberal Democrats and 8 percent of Republicans, respectively. Finally, in
what must be the most heterodox of heterodoxical perceptions, fully one-
third of conservative Democrats perceive Jesse Jackson as being more con-
servative than Bush (and Reagan), while this is true of less than 10 percent
of both moderate and liberal Democrats and Republicans.

In sum, as Levitin and Miller argue, the fact that conservative Demo-
crats have consistently unorthodox views of parties and candidates allows
them to simultaneously maintain discrepant partisan and ideological identi-
fications. They do not necessarily experience tension between these diver-

TABLE 3. Ideological Perceptions of Conservative Democrats, Liberal and
         Moderate Democrats, and Republicans

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Democrats more conservative than Republicans | 41.7%** (120) | 15.7% (293) | 9.0% (412) |
| Dukakis more conservative than Bush | 38.5%** (109) | 12.3% (285) | 8.4% (391) |
| Dukakis more conservative than Reagan | 38.3%** (107) | 12.5% (287) | 8.2% (391) |
| Jackson more conservative than Bush | 32.7%** (110) | 7.5% (279) | 8.9% (384) |
| Jackson more conservative than Reagan | 34.8%** (112) | 9.1% (286) | 7.8% (387) |

**Difference between conservative Democrats and both liberal/moderate Democrats is significant at $P < .01$.
$P$ values are differences in proportion test results.
Number of respondents in parentheses.
*Source:* American National Election Study, 1988.

gent identifications because they perceive political phenomena in a way that makes them largely compatible.

The heterodoxical structure of their political perceptions certainly helps explain why conservative Democrats have not switched to the Republican Party. But do conservative Democrats also have a positive attachment to their party? Beyond heterodoxical perceptions, are there any reasons that conservative Democrats continue to identify with the Democratic Party? It is to this central question that we now turn.

## PARTY ETHOS AND THE NATURE OF PARTISANSHIP

In order to understand the possible positive attachment that conservative Democrats may have toward their party, it is helpful to distinguish between two bases of a party's appeal, which are somewhat similar to those discussed in Henry Drucker's *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party* (1979). Drucker's main purpose is to explain the attraction of the British Labour Party to its supporters and political activists. In so doing, Drucker differentiates between two bases of support for a political party. In the first place, support for a political party, according to Drucker, may derive from belief in the party's *doctrine*, defined as "a more or less elaborated set of ideas about the character of social, economic, and political reality which is

accepted by a considerable group of people" and which "leads to a program of action, often by being expressed in a series of policies" (p. 8). As Drucker notes, the British Labour Party is associated with a number of ideas of this sort having to do with social and economic equality, socialism, the role of the state, and so forth.

Beyond doctrine, however, Drucker points to a second basis of party identification. This is a party's ethos—the symbolic values that grow out of the past experience of the dominant group or groups in the party. In the case of the Labour Party, these values spring from the experience of the British working class. According to Drucker, there are four main practices of the Labour Party that are traceable to its working-class origins: its reluctance to sack its leaders; its expectations of personal sacrifice from its leaders and employees; its peculiar attitude to money, especially the hoarding of party funds; and its belief in formal explicit rules. These distinctive practices of the Labour Party, according to Drucker, all derive from its working-class ethos. As Drucker (p. 10) puts it, "The centre of gravity in the Labour Party is located in working-class institutions" and it is "Labour's distinctive background that gives rise to these distinctive practices and institutions."

## THE ETHOS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Drucker's analysis is extremely useful because it highlights the fact that even in the highly charged ideological world of the British Labour Party, political ideology or doctrine does not provide the sole basis of party support. On the contrary, according to Drucker, Labour's ethos is crucial in understanding the working class's attachment to the party. If this is the case with regard to the British Labour Party, it would seem *per force* that symbolic, nonideological bases of support would be even more important in the case of the essentially nondoctrinal American political parties. And this would seem to be doubly true when—as in the case of conservative Democrats—political ideology provides a *negative* referent in terms of identification with the party. In short, Drucker's analysis suggests that the Democratic Party's distinctive political ethos may lie at the very heart of conservative Democrats' partisanship.

This impression is reinforced by Conover and Feldman's (1981) examination of the origins and meanings of liberal/conservative self-identifications among the American electorate. They show that ideological self-identifications have largely symbolic, nonissue-oriented meanings to the mass public. In other words, even ideology has primarily symbolic rather than cognitive sources of meaning for most Americans. But this should be truer still with regard to more affect-laden partisan identifications. After all, by its

very nature, an ideological identification is likely to possess cognitive un-
derpinnings that might well be absent from identifications with a political
party. Hence, if citizens' ideological identifications are largely based on
symbolic referents, this is likely to be even more true of their party identi-
fications.

As we have noted, Drucker locates Labour's distinctive political ethos in
its working-class institutions and practices. But what serves as a compara-
ble experience for the Democratic Party? Undoubtedly, the most crucial
event in the evolution of the modern Democratic Party was the Great De-
pression of the 1930s. During this time, the Democratic Party, in effect,
became the institutional representative of those groups most severely af-
fected by the economic disaster. The dislocated, the dispossessed, the un-
employed—all of the victims of the depression looked to Roosevelt and his
Democratic Party for a measure of economic relief. But Roosevelt's Demo-
cratic Party gave them more than temporary economic relief; it also gave
them a sense of their own self-worth and importance. Not only did the
experience of the Great Depression forge a close link between the Demo-
cratic Party and socially and economically disadvantaged groups but it also
created a distinct and lasting image of the party to its identifiers and activ-
ists alike. The political ethos of the modern Democratic Party, in other
words, should have its roots in the experiences of those groups who were
the main victims of the Great Depression and who came together to form
Roosevelt's Democratic coalition.

There is, moreover, a reverse side to the Democratic Party's ethos that
should affect perceptions of the Republican Party. Just as the Democratic
Party became identified with disadvantaged groups in society—the casu-
alties of the Great Depression—the Republicans came to represent socially
and economically advantaged groups. Not for them the weak and down-
trodden, the Republicans instead were seen as the party of big business,
Wall Street, wealth, and the upper classes. To the extent that conservative
Democrats endorse these group images of the two parties, they should
provide a powerful incentive for them to maintain their Democratic identi-
fications.

As a first step toward determining whether the partisanship of conserva-
tive Democrats is rooted in the Democratic Party's group composition, Ta-
ble 4 shows the demographic makeup of conservative Democrats, com-
pared to moderate and liberal Democrats on the one hand and Republicans
on the other hand. What is striking about the table is the similarity be-
tween conservative Democrats and moderate and liberal Democrats and
the dissimilarity between both groups of Democrats and Republicans.
None of the differences between conservative Democrats and liberal and
moderate Democrats is statistically or substantively significant.

TABLE 4. Demographic Composition of Conservative Democrats, Liberal and Moderate Democrats, and Republicans

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Percent black | 23.7%** | 20.2% | 2.5% |
|  | (131) | (332) | (442) |
| Percent identify with "working class" | 50.8%** | 45.9% | 24.4% |
|  | (128) | (329) | (421) |
| Percent labor union member | 24.4%* | 25.6% | 14.2% |
|  | (133) | (332) | (438) |
| Percent less than high school education | 22.5%* | 18.3% | 11.1% |
|  | (129) | (327) | (433) |
| Percent earning below $20,000 in annual income | 44.5** | 43.7% | 29.7% |
|  | (119) | (309) | (418) |

*Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .05$.
**Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .01$.
$P$ values are differences in proportion test results.
Number of respondents in parentheses.
Source: American National Election Study, 1988.

In contrast, all of the differences between conservative Democrats and Republicans are significant. For example, a quarter of conservative Democrats but only 14 percent of Republicans have a union member in the household. And more than twice as many conservative Democrats as Republicans have less than a high school education. Republicans are also significantly more affluent than conservative Democrats. And perhaps most revealing of all, 50 percent of conservative Democrats identify with the working class, more than twice the proportion of Republicans. Table 4, in sum, provides an important clue as to why conservative Democrats are Democrats rather than Republicans: in their demographic composition they are quite similar to other Democrats but fundamentally unlike Republicans.

The 1988 ANES contains a set of questions that ask respondents whether they feel "close" to various groups.[3] These questions provide a useful indication of the degree of affect that our three party groupings (conservative Democrats, moderate and liberal Democrats, and Republicans) have toward various social, economic, and political groups. If our hypothesis about the group nature of their partisanship is correct, then conservative Democrats ought to feel close to the same groups that liberal and moderate Democrats do but not Republicans. This is exactly what we observe in Table 5.

There is a very close resemblance between the group affinities of conser-

TABLE 5. Conservative Democrats, Liberal and Moderate Democrats, and
Republicans Saying That They Feel "Close to" Various Groups

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Middle-class people | 57.1%* | 66.3% | 74.1% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Working people | 77.7%* | 73.3% | 64.3% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Women | 45.5%* | 49.0% | 36.2% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Labor unions | 18.8%* | 23.3% | 5.0% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Blacks | 22.3%** | 29.7% | 4.3% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Poor people | 46.4%** | 42.3% | 15.3% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Liberals | 7.1% | 33.0% | 3.3% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Businesspeople | 19.6%** | 17.3% | 45.5% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Conservatives | 18.8%** | 6.7% | 52.0% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |
| Elderly | 50.9%* | 50.7% | 40.2% |
|  | (112) | (300) | (398) |

*Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .05$.
**Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .01$.
$P$ values are differences in proportion test results.
Number of respondents in parentheses.
Source: American National Election Study, 1988.

vative Democrats and moderate and liberal Democrats, but both Demo-
cratic groups differ sharply from Republicans. Only with regard to their
closeness to liberals, not surprisingly, do conservative Democrats resemble
Republicans—less than 10 percent of each group feels close to liberals,
compared to one-third of moderate and liberal Democrats. But compared
to Republicans, conservative Democrats feel significantly closer to working
people, the elderly, women, labor unions, blacks, and poor people, and
less close to middle-class people and business. Interestingly, while conser-
vative Democrats feel closer to conservatives than liberal and moderate
Democrats, they feel much less close to them than Republicans.

All in all, the evidence in Tables 4 and 5 shows the extent to which
conservative Democrats not only strongly relate to the main social groups
within the Democratic Party but are composed of those groups themselves.

TABLE 6. Conservative Democrats', Liberal and Moderate Democrats', and
          Republicans' "Likes" and "Dislikes" about Republican and
          Democratic Parties

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Like about their own party: | | | |
| Management | 18.7%** | 10.9% | 52.5% |
| Philosophy | 6.6%** | 20.6% | 26.8% |
| Groups | 48.4%** | 52.1% | 5.6% |
|  | (91) | (267) | (358) |
| Dislike about the other party: | | | |
| Management | 30.9%** | 41.4% | 47.1% |
| Philosophy | 4.4%** | 1.7% | 35.0% |
| Groups | 50.0%** | 36.8% | 4.2% |
|  | (68) | (239) | (306) |

**Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .01$.
$P$ values are differences in proportion test results.
Number of respondents in parentheses.
*Source:* American National Election Study, 1988.

On both counts conservative Democrats are very similar to liberal/moder-
ate Democrats but very distinct from Republicans—suggesting why they
have maintained their Democratic identifications.

Table 6 takes the analysis a step further by examining the reasons that
these three party groupings cite for liking and disliking the parties. The
first-mentioned response to the open-ended question:

I would like to ask you what you think are the good and bad points about the two
national parties. Is there anything in particular that you like/dislike about the
Democratic/Republican Party? What is it?

is placed into three broad categories: government management, political
philosophy, and group connections.[4] Again our expectation is that conserva-
tive Democrats would be much more likely to cite group-related points in
their evaluations of the parties and less likely to specify philosophical con-
cerns than Republicans. Table 6 indicates that this is clearly the case. The
top half of the table shows that among conservative Democrats philosophy
(6.6 percent) is cited least frequently and group connections (48.4 percent)
most frequently as the reason for liking their party. Republicans, by con-
trast, focus on management (52.5 percent) and philosophy (26.8 percent),
with only 6 percent mentioning groups as a reason for liking their party.

Moderate and liberal Democrats, like conservative Democrats, frequently mention the Democratic Party's group connections (52.1 percent) as a reason for liking their party. But unlike conservative Democrats, they also specify philosophy (20.6 percent) to a substantial extent.

A very similar pattern emerges in terms of the reasons cited for disliking the opposition party, as shown in the bottom half of Table 6. Conservative Democrats dislike the Republican Party *not* because of its philosophy (4.4 percent) but because of group-related reasons (50 percent). Conversely, Republicans most frequently refer to management (47.1 percent) and philosophy (35 percent) as reasons for disliking Democrats, while only 4.2 percent cite group connections.

The evidence clearly suggests that conservative Democrats—unlike Republicans—relate to the two major parties primarily through group connections, not ideology. Both in terms of what they like about their party and dislike about the Republicans, conservative Democrats overwhelmingly cite group-related reasons, not the parties' political ideologies. It appears that the partisanship of conservative Democrats is not grounded in political philosophy or ideology but reflects instead their affect toward the main groups represented in the parties' coalitions.

A final piece of evidence is provided in Table 7, which shows the most important differences between the parties cited by conservative Demo-

**TABLE 7. Differences Between the Democratic and Republican Parties Cited by Conservative Democrats, Liberal and Moderate Democrats, and Republicans**

|  | Conservative Democrats | Liberal and Moderate Democrats | Republicans |
|---|---|---|---|
| Democratic Party: |  |  |  |
| Philosophy | 18.9%** | 16.1% | 42.1% |
| Groups | 51.4%** | 66.7% | 14.0% |
| Policy | 29.7%* | 17.2% | 43.0% |
|  | (88) | (258) | (342) |
| Republican Party: |  |  |  |
| Philosophy | 15.4%** | 12.2% | 36.3% |
| Groups | 69.2%** | 69.6% | 21.0% |
| Policy | 15.4%** | 17.4% | 42.7% |
|  | (89) | (251) | (339) |

*Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .05$.
**Difference between conservative Democrats and Republicans is significant at $P < .01$.
$P$ values are differences in proportion test results.
Number of respondents in parentheses.
*Source:* American National Election Study, 1988.

crats, moderate and liberal Democrats, and Republicans.[5] We expect that conservative Democrats will emphasize group-related differences between the parties whereas Republicans ought to focus on philosophical and policy differences. The top half of the table focuses on the Democratic Party, and indicates that the preponderance of Republican responses relate to philosophy (42.1 percent) and policy (43.0 percent) while only 14 percent of responses are group-related. Conversely, conservative Democrats focus most frequently on group-related concerns (51.4 percent) and less frequently on philosophy and policy (18.9 percent and 29.7 percent). The same pattern is found in the bottom half of the table, which relates to the Republican Party. Again, Republicans focus mainly on philosophy and policy (36.3 percent and 42.7 percent) while conservative Democrats refer overwhelmingly to group-related reasons (69.2 percent) in accounting for the difference between Republicans and the opposition. Thus, conservative Democrats, like liberal/moderate Democrats but in sharp contrast to Republicans, see the primary differences between the parties as well as the main reasons for liking and disliking them in group-oriented terms. And unlike Republicans, conservative Democrats only infrequently see the differences between the parties in philosophical or policy terms.

## CONCLUSION

Ideologically, the Republican and Democratic parties have evolved very differently over the last two decades. Conservatives have increased their strength within the Republican Party, and now hold a commanding position, overwhelming both moderates and liberals. Conversely, liberals, moderates, and conservatives can all be found in significant proportions among Democratic identifiers, with self-identified conservatives making up approximately a quarter of the total. Moreover, conservative Democrats, as we have seen, are well to the right of moderate and liberal Democrats on a variety of political issues.

Given their ideological distinctiveness, what sustains their partisanship? Why do some political conservatives continue to identify with the increasingly liberal Democratic Party? Identification with a political party, we argue, may spring from two distinct sources: ideology and ethos. In the former, citizens identify with a party because it reflects and represents their basic political beliefs and policy preferences. This relatively straightforward, primarily cognitive link between citizens' ideologies and their partisan attachments seems to describe quite well the underlying partisanship of Republicans, and to a lesser extent, liberal and moderate Democrats.

By their very nature, however, the partisan identifications of conservative Democrats cannot be understood as a result of such an ideologically

driven process. Indeed, based on ideology alone, conservative Democrats would more likely be Republicans than Democrats. However, we have seen that conservative Democrats relate to the party system primarily on the basis of its group foundations—what we refer to as party ethos. In other words, their basic evaluations of the Democratic and Republican parties are grounded not in ideology but in the group images they have of the parties. Like moderate and liberal Democrats, conservative Democrats identify their party with the working class and economically and socially underprivileged and disadvantaged groups, while they identify Republicans with big business, Wall Street, and the well-to-do. It is precisely such symbolic, nonideological group referents that reinforce the partisan preferences of conservative Democrats. In the end their continued attachment to the Democratic Party must be understood mainly in terms of party ethos, not political ideology.

What are the implications of this analysis for competition between the Democratic and Republican parties? As we have seen, what unites the diverse ideological factions of the Democratic Party is their belief that their party represents less privileged groups like the less-well-off, working people, and the common man (and woman) as opposed to Republicans' core groups of business, the wealthy, and Wall Street. Given this situation, Democrats should pursue an electoral strategy that emphasizes class-based issues and populist themes while picturing Republicans as economic elitists from privileged backgrounds. This is essentially the advice given to Democrats by Lee Atwater, the 1988 Republican campaign manager, in a post-election analysis of Bush's come-from-behind victory. "The way to win a presidential race against Republicans," Atwater stated, "is to develop the class warfare issue, as Dukakis did at the end [of the campaign]. To divide up the haves and have-nots and to try to reinvigorate the New Deal Coalition and to attack" (as quoted in Phillips, 1991, p. 30).

Conversely, the Republican strategy should be to find ways to appeal to conservative Democrats, many of whom are lower-status whites. The race issue has served Republicans extremely well in this regard, driving a wedge directly into the heart of the Democrats' New Deal coalition (Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Edsall, with Edsall, 1991). In addition to race, Republican presidential candidates have also exploited social and cultural issues like capital punishment, school prayer, and gun control to reach out to conservative Democrats. Carmines and Stanley (1990) have documented Republicans' success in pursuing this strategy in the South, showing that southern conservative Democrats have moved heavily into the Republican Party during the last two decades. If conservatives in other regions follow the lead of their southern counterparts, then conservative Democrats may end up being as rare—and as impotent—as liberal Republicans.

## NOTES

1. Ideological identification is measured by the seven-point, self-placement scale used in the NES surveys beginning in 1972. We treat conservatives (or liberals) as respondents who fit any one of the following three designations: "extremely conservative" (or "extremely liberal"), "conservative" (or "liberal") and "slightly conservative" (or "slightly liberal"). The absolute middle category is "moderate." Partisanship is measured by the standard party identification question employed by the NES Surveys. Democrats are strong and weak Democrats while Republicans are strong and weak Republicans. Leaners are treated as Independents. We employ this categorization to ensure that conservative Democrats actually identify with the Democratic Party rather than simply lean toward it. However, treating leaners as partisans does not alter the findings in any significant way.

2. It should be noted that Levitin and Miller's measure of liberal/conservative ideology is more complex than the one we employ here. They combine the seven-point self-placement scale with a question that asks whether respondents feel close to liberals and conservatives and the feeling thermometer rating of liberals and conservatives. These latter questions were not included in the 1988 ANES.

3. The specific set of questions is as follows: "Here is a list of groups. Please read over the list and tell me the letters for those groups you feel particularly close to—people who are most like you in their ideas and interests and feelings about things" (Miller and the National Election Studies, 1989, p. 544).

4. We use the master codes provided by the National Election Studies to classify the responses. Management refers to "Government Management" (codes 0601–0697); Philosophy refers to "Government Activity/Philosophy" (codes 0801–0897); and Groups refers to "Group Connections" (codes 1201–1297). Responses do not add to 100 percent in the table because we do not use all of the master codes. See Miller and the National Election Studies, 1989, pp. 649–671, for more information about the master codes.

5. The specific question is as follows: "Do you think there are any important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for? What are those differences?" We use the master codes provided by the National Election Studies to classify the responses. Philosophy refers to "Broad Philosophy" (codes 001–190); Groups refers to "Group References" (codes 200–390); and Policy refers to "Domestic Policy References" and "Foreign Policy References" (codes 400–891). Responses may not add to 100 percent in the table because of a few miscellaneous responses. See Miller and the National Election Studies, 1989, pp. 795–803, for more information about the master codes.

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