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## Explaining Partisan Change Among Catholics In The American Electorate

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EXPLAINING PARTISAN CHANGE AMONG CATHOLICS  
IN THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE

by

CHRISTOPHER VINCENT MURO  
B.A. Christendom College, 1998

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Political Science  
in the College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2004

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines data from the National Election Studies in order to assess the significant determinants of the political behavior of Catholics in the American electorate. A complex array of variables including religious commitment, generational differences, social status, and policy attitudes account for limited change in partisan alignment among American Catholics. The analyses expose the long-term, durable nature of partisan attachment, as older generation Catholics who register as actively committed to their religion also remain committed Democrats. Therefore, older Catholics have not been part of the broader ideological realignment which has taken place among other religious adherents, namely evangelical and mainline Protestants.

Younger Catholics are significantly more apt to become Republican in their partisan identification than were their parents. Comparing the effects of an array of policy attitudes and socio-demographic variables between Catholic and Protestants illuminates the differences and similarities among these religious groups. What emerges is a consistent pattern demonstrating an ideological realignment within the American electorate. This research adds to the ideological realignment thesis by showing how religious commitment is the driving force behind this realignment. In addition, this thesis presents evidence illustrating that younger Catholics and committed Catholics will continue to move toward Republican partisan identification and that the traditional allegiance of Catholic voters to the Democratic party will continue to decline.

To Mel Gibson; may his passion for Our Lord's Passion also become our passion.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Dr. Jonathan O. Knuckey; it was your patience, commitment, and steadfastness which made this project possible. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There has developed, according to David Legee, “a veritable cottage industry of scholars who have studied religion and politics among American Catholics, but a single theory that explains the dynamics of Catholic political behavior has eluded their grasp” (Dionne 2000). Developing a single theory for explaining the electoral behavior of any group is a rather complicated endeavor. However, as religion and religiosity continue to gain prominence in politics and political science, it is essential that scholars of realignment, partisanship, and political behavior continue to advance our understanding of the dynamics of the Catholic voter. Consider that since 1980, according to American National Election Survey (NES) data, 28 percent of the electorate has identified itself as Roman Catholic. Evangelical and mainline Protestants have self-identified, during the same time-frame, as 32 and 29 percent of the electorate respectively. Geographic concentration of Catholic identifiers serves to enhance the electoral importance of Catholic voters in presidential politics, as key states including Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Illinois, Florida, Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico all contain large pluralities of Catholic voters (Mockabee 2004; Wagner 1998).

In addition, Catholic religious affiliation constitutes the largest plurality among elected members of the United States Congress. For example, in the 107<sup>th</sup> U.S. Congress, 150 of the 535 members registered their religious affiliation as Catholic, with Baptist affiliation in a distant second place with 72 adherents. Catholic affiliation has been dominant among members of Congress since 1964, and the expectation is that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future. The significance of the Catholic vote is also enhanced by its distinction as a crucial

“swing vote” in presidential elections (Wagner 1998; Wald 1997). For example, in 1980 and 1984, Catholic voters supported the Republican presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, as did their Protestant counterparts. Evangelical and mainline Protestants have continued to consistently support Republican presidential candidates, even in the 1992 and 1996 elections, when the significant third party candidacy of H. Ross Perot also appeared on the ballot (Kellstedt 1993). Catholics, on the other hand, have behaved quite differently. In 1988, the Catholic vote for the Republican nominee, Vice President George H.W. Bush, fell dramatically as Catholics split their support between the two major party candidates. This is peculiar considering that the Republican party, in 1984, registered receiving its largest percentage of the Catholic vote in American history (Wagner 1998). In 1992, 49 percent of Catholics voted for the Democratic presidential nominee, Bill Clinton, who received 43 percent of the national popular vote. In 1996, 53 percent of Catholic voters again chose the Democratic candidate, while 38 percent voted for the Republican contender Robert Dole. In the 2000 presidential election, Catholic voters were once again evenly split in their support for the two major party candidates (Mockabee 2004). These factors warrant and compel the pursuit of a more vivid explanation of Catholic political behavior within the American electorate.

The prominence of Catholics in American politics is clear. What then, has made discernment of the dynamics of the Catholic vote so elusive to scholars of religion and politics? The answer to this seems to lie in the puzzle of Catholic partisanship when compared to the partisan affiliation of other religious adherents. Evangelical and mainline Protestant groups, in every geographic region, have moved toward the Republican party, particularly since the election of 1980 (Carmines and Stanley 1992; Kellstedt 1993; Layman 1997; Wald 1997). As Campbell

has noted, with the exceptions of blacks and Jews, the “proposition holds that—generally speaking—religious dedication corresponds with Republican Party ID” (p.217, 2002). This general pattern, however, has *not* emerged among Catholic voters, despite a plurality self-identifying as conservative on the three-point ideological scale (Kellstedt 1993).

To further illustrate the dissimilarity of Catholic partisanship, consider NES data from the 1992 election. NES survey data reports that 44 percent of evangelical and mainline Protestants are self-described as ideologically conservative, while at the same time 35 and 37 percent report identifying as Republicans, with 30 and 27 percent reporting that they are registered as Democrats. Among Catholics, 41 percent are self-described as ideologically conservative; however, only 20 percent report being affiliated with the Republican party, while 41 percent claim to be Democrats (Kellstedt 1993). Although there has been a dramatic movement of Protestant adherents toward the Republican party, Catholic voters seem to be rather resistant to the ongoing realignment which has taken place among other religious groups. Perhaps New Deal allegiances have remained durable among voters who self-identify as Catholic; however, scholars have expected a more vigorous partisan shift among Catholics (Prendergast 1999).

Based upon the evidence presented, Catholic ideological identification, partisanship, and presidential vote choice do not demonstrate the kind of congruity which has been illustrated by the other prominent groups of Christian identifiers: evangelical and mainline Protestants. Explaining the counterintuitive nature of Catholic partisanship will then be a primary focus of this thesis. As the ideological and religious divide continues to expand, committed Protestant voters are continuing to move toward the Republican party (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Layman and Carmines 1997; Layman 1997). Therefore, as religious denominationalism has

declined, a much more brisk and vigorous movement of Catholic identifiers in the same direction has been expected. Catholic movement toward the Republican party, however, has been quite modest. Comparing the policy differences among these groups, as well as the effect of socio-demographic variables between and among Catholic and Protestant voters, should begin to expand our understanding of religiosity and partisanship among religious identifiers, particularly Catholics, in the American electorate.

### **Synopsis**

The introductory portion of this work outlines some general principles regarding the importance of the “Catholic vote,” the puzzle of Catholic partisanship, and the elements of this constituency which have remained elusive to researchers of religion and politics in the American electorate.

Chapter 2 establishes some of the important concepts related to political behavior in general and to the behavior of religious sub-groups, most notably Catholic voters, in particular. These concepts include the salience of religion and its effect upon electoral behavior, ideological realignment, enhanced party polarization, and religion as the basis of cultural conflict and societal cleaving. The second chapter also reviews the established literature on the subject of the religious factor in American politics. The review will include an examination of the recognized strategies for measurement of religious commitment and its effects upon party identification.

Chapter 3 will establish the data and methods to be used to conduct an empirical analysis of religiosity and how it affects Catholic voters. Several hypotheses regarding Catholic political behavior will be posited, and a research model for testing these hypotheses will be introduced.

Both socio-demographic variables and policy attitudes between and among Catholic and Protestant voters will be compared and contrasted in order to illuminate possible social status and policy differences which may account for the variance in partisanship among these groups of religious identifiers. Socio-demographic variables include gender, income, ideology, union households, and age cohorts.

Chapter 4 will detail and explain the results of the empirical analysis pursued in the previous chapter. The goal is to provide a greater understanding of the dynamics of the Catholic voter. Chapter 5 will be the concluding chapter, in which a review of the previously enumerated concepts and the evidence amassed will be outlined and summarized.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Salience of Religion in American Politics**

The study of religion in politics is justified for numerous reasons. Firstly, most American adults—between three-fifths and three-fourths—are willing to utilize a religious designation such as Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or other (Leege 1993). More Americans report belonging to religious communities than to any other voluntary organization including unions, lodges, or professional associations. Religion has always played a significant role in American life, and contemporary events demonstrate that religion continues to shape our political life as well. This is evidenced by the 1996 National Election Survey in which 45 percent of conservative Republican voters in the southern United States identified as being part of the religious right movement, displaying how mightily religious voters have contributed to Republican realignment and subsequent electoral success in the South (Black and Black 2002).

When compared to other industrialized nations, research data confirms a high level of religiosity among the American people. Americans consistently report that they are more likely to believe in God, attend church services regularly, and testify that religion is salient in their daily lives than citizens in other Western democracies such as Great Britain or Germany. Seymour Lipset has reported that

One comparative survey shows 94 percent of Americans expressing faith in God, as compared with 70 percent of Britons and 67 percent of West Germans. In addition, 86 percent of Americans surveyed believe in heaven; 43 percent say they attend church services weekly. The corresponding numbers of British respondents are 54 percent accepting the existence of heaven and only 14 percent indicating they attend church weekly. For West Germans, the numbers are distinctly lower than for Americans, at 43 percent and 21 percent respectively . . . And it should be noted that the historical evidence indicates that religious

affiliation and belief in America are much higher in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth, and have not decreased in the post-World War II era (Lipset 1996).

The comparative perspective confirms what observers have called American religious exceptionalism. The practical consequence of this exceptionalism is that religious commitment in the United States plays a much more dramatic role in politics and partisanship than in other Western democracies which were born out of the Christian tradition.

Religion has not merely been a distinguished footnote in American life; Religion also matters politically. Indeed, people engage in religious activities with more frequency and duration than they do political activities (Kellstedt 1993). In fact, when studying group identification that affects political behavior, political scientists have traditionally used four main group categories: race and ethnicity, income levels, geographic region, and religious affiliation (Shafer 1993). While all of these variables are important to the study of political attitudes and behavior, it seems that religion has been an elusive, if not neglected, variable in explaining electoral phenomena. This is peculiar considering the influence of religion upon the lives of individual Americans. As Kellstedt has noted:

Religion matters, it seems, regardless of how it is conceptualized: whether in terms of social group affiliation, religious group identification, ritualistic or private devotional practices, doctrinal beliefs, salience, or religious world-views. Despite multivariate controls, each of these variables has an independent impact on political attitudes and behaviors. And this is the case even though the measures are often methodologically flawed (1993).

Shafer states that churches have served as “intermediary organizations for politics, that array of organizations which stand between the individual citizen and the institutions of government” (1993). It seems rather intuitive; given the pervasive nature of

religion in American life, religiosity should be a noteworthy force in influencing individual and group political behavior.

When establishing the weight of religiosity upon political behavior, it is essential to discuss the effect of economic factors upon voting given their predominance in the literature on electoral behavior (Lewis-Beck 1986; Kellstedt 1993). Conclusive evidence has been assembled demonstrating that religious commitment can rival economic considerations in relation to vote choice and partisanship (Kellstedt 1993). Economic considerations, including income and a prospective evaluation of economic performance, are matched against religious commitment and affiliation. Interestingly, the religious measures surpass economic measures on partisanship. On vote choice, religious variables challenge the economic variables as predictors among all whites. In addition, among evangelicals, religious commitment is an even stronger predictor for partisanship and vote choice (Kellstedt 1993). The evidence is rather robust with regard to religiosity and religious commitment and its influence upon vote choice and partisanship. The evidence does not suggest that religiosity should supplant economic considerations as an explanatory variable. On the contrary, the data implies that religion can serve as a complimentary variable for furthering our understanding of political behavior as religious commitment can rival the effects of other potential predictors of partisanship.

The 2000 presidential election, in which the incumbent Vice President Al Gore was defeated even when all economic measures predicted that the incumbent party would retain the White House, demonstrates that people do not vote on “bread issues” alone. In other words, “it’s not *just* the economy, stupid!” Indeed, additional explanatory variables such as religiosity are required in order to provide an adequate explanation for this kind of electoral phenomenon.

## **Religion as a Social Cleavage**

One of the major developments in the study of religion and politics in recent scholarship has been the rise of religious traditionalism as a societal cleavage base and the diminishing role of religious denominationalism as a source of social division. Consider the presidential election of 1960, in which 83% of Catholics voted for their co-religionist, John F. Kennedy (Wagner 1998). By contrast, a majority of Protestant voters chose to cast their ballots for Richard M. Nixon, the Republican candidate for president. By 1976, religious denominationalism had lost much of its value as a force for political division (Layman 1997; Layman and Carmines 1997). Recent scholarship convincingly suggests that the old allegiance of denominationalism has given way to a new cleaving of the electorate based upon ideology, as conservative religionists, regardless of denomination, are aligning politically with the Republican party while liberal religionists and secular identifiers are considerably more Democratic (Fowler and Hertzke 1995; Layman 1997). This new cleavage sets committed believers against those who have adopted liberal views on religion or have identified as secular, and it is becoming an ever increasingly relevant factor in explaining partisanship in contemporary American politics (Layman 1997).

The conceptualization of a societal cleavage in politics has been utilized by political scientists to describe enduring cultural conflicts within the electorate (Layman and Carmines 1997; Manza and Brooks 1999). More than merely ideological tensions, the concept of a social cleavage is something much more durable, culminating in shifting political associations which have developed due to divisions within the construct of civil society (Dalton 1988; Manza and Brooks 1999). The key distinction between basic social rifts and a societal chasm is that the latter will have a long-term effect upon political behavior.

When it comes to determining the social bases of partisanship and vote choice, the literature has been dominated by societal factors other than religion or religiosity, namely, class, gender, and race. Indeed, many scholars have noted that the central tendency of specific racial or ethnic groups is to participate in politics as a monolithic voting bloc (Leege 2000; Manza and Brooks 1999; Wald 1997). In addition to race, other socio-demographic characteristics are considered to have a tremendous effect upon partisanship and vote choice, and also serve as the social base of party support as well as an impetus for societal and political cleavage. Economic class or social position has generally been considered to be the primary force behind these divisions (Dalton 1988; Layman and Carmines 1997; Zuckerman 1975). A person's social status has been determined to be a significant variable in explaining an individual's partisanship and political beliefs. In addition, social factors also indicate what kind of political cues an individual will receive (Dalton 1988). However, at least since 1980, social class and economic cleavages have considerably diminished, as values-based cleavages have replaced them as the dominant source of political division in the United States, as well as in some Western European democracies (Dalton 1988; Carmines and Stanley 1992; Layman and Carmines 1997).

This new fault line between religiously active and secular voters seems to be the basis for the ideological realignment which has been occurring since the election of 1980 (Carmines and Stanley 1992; Dionne and DiIulio 2000; Fowler and Hertzke 1995). The effect of orthodoxy upon political behavior should be a significant increase in the tendency for doctrinal conservatives to move in the direction of the Republican party. These new tensions between those who register as highly religious and more secular individuals are the impetus for

contemporary political divisions and the adjustment of party identification which has taken place in the American electorate (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Layman and Carmines 1997). This latest cleavage is exemplified by diminishing denominational conflicts which were heavily pronounced before 1980:

That split has been restructured across denominations today. Thus pious Catholics in the 1970s and 1980s found themselves increasingly aligned with conservative evangelicals on social and political issues. Both groups opposed abortion, supported public expressions of faith, criticized secular public schools, and decried the effects of the sexual revolution. Theological and cultural differences remain between orthodox Catholics and evangelical Protestants, to be sure, but politically they are forging increasing alliances . . . In the same way, liberal Protestants find they often have more in common with liberal Catholics, Jews, and secular elites than they do with conservatives in their own denominations (Fowler and Hertzke 1995).

Scholarship thus suggests that this new religious divide between orthodox and liberal religious adherents transcends gender, class, and even race, making the religious cleavage a powerful explanatory factor in American politics (Fowler and Hertzke 1995; Wald 1997).

Other scholars, however, maintain that religious affiliation still has a potent effect upon political behavior. More specifically, it has been posited that *certain* denominational differences are becoming more important over time, while others are diminishing. For example, divisions among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews may be on the decline, while a chasm among denominations within Protestantism may be growing (Layman 1997). A substantial number of researchers who study religion and politics insist that denominational affiliation continues to have a considerable influence upon political expression. Nevertheless, it remains to be determined if the advent of this religious doctrinal cleavage is sufficient to explain the complex puzzle of Catholic partisan identification. One fact is clear, however, from the rise of this cleavage based upon religious traditionalism: Karl Marx and Max Weber's insistence that

modernization, industrialization, and urbanization would produce secularization, thus eliminating the influence of religion in modern culture and politics has proved to be inaccurate. Instead, religion's influence upon our political system seems to be greater now than at any point in our history (Craig 1996; Inglehart 1977; Kellstedt 1993; Fowler and Hertzke 1995; Wald 1997).

### **Realignment**

The strength and durability of party identification is one of the axioms of political science. Since the publication of V.O. Key's "Theory of Critical Elections" (1955) and "Secular Realignment and the Party System" (1959), as well as *The American Voter* (1960), partisanship has been recognized as a "standing decision," a psychological attachment to political parties which has been confirmed to be extremely stable when compared to other political attitudes (Abramson and Ostrom 1991; Fiorina, 1981; Miller and Shanks 1996). This stability means that partisanship is a long-term factor in voting behavior and does not change due to short-term influences like economic conditions, foreign policy situations, or candidate magnetism. The practical implication of partisan durability is that it remains a potent force in determining election outcomes. There have been instances, however, in American history, of major shifts in partisan alliances. These adjustments can be abrupt, brought about expeditiously by colossal political events. The elections which begin these processes of party adjustment are called critical elections, as they are forerunners of significant partisan change (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Kamieniecki 1985; Key 1955). Other shifts in party coalitions can also happen gradually over time, as Key argued in his theory on secular partisan change (Key 1959; Petrocik 1987). This

significant and enduring partisan change is what political scientists refer to as realignment. One of the defining characteristics of realignment is the shift in allegiance of the group bases of party coalitions, resulting in an increase in the relative size of a political party's vote share (Dalton 1988). As Abramowitz and Saunders have noted:

Since 1980, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of Republican identifiers and a corresponding decrease in the proportion of Democratic identifiers in the electorate . . . Republican gains have been very uneven among different groups of voters. The largest gains have occurred among groups with conservative policy preferences . . . There has been a substantial intergenerational shift in party identification in favor of the GOP—today's voters are considerably more Republican and less Democratic than were their parents (1998).

Abramowitz and Saunders have confirmed that the greater the tendency to identify as an ideological conservative, the greater an accompanying tendency to identify with the Republican Party. This is what has happened with evangelical and mainline Protestants, thus many observers have also expected this to happen among Catholic voters as well, although the latter expectation has not come to fruition (Prendergast 1999).

Political Scientists usually refer to two different conceptions of realignment theory. First, there is an adjustment in party support which is electorate-wide, during which the overall support given to one major party increases among the electorate on an aggregate level. The other realignment conception-- the one which will be utilized in this study-- refers to adjustments among specific groups of voters who constitute a segment of an electoral coalition (Dalton 1988; Manza and Brooks 1999; Nardulli 1995). Despite the different conceptualizations in the realignment literature, both theories share a common element: that an enduring interruption in long-term electoral behavior occurs followed by stabilization thereafter (Brady and Hurley 1985; Lawrence and Fleisher 1987; Nardulli 1995).

Despite the absence of national trauma, the U.S. electorate has been engaged in a secular, long-term realignment (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). In 1980, the Democratic party had a distinct partisan identification advantage over the Republicans, 54% to 32%. In 1992, overall Republican identifiers had increased to 41%, while those who identified as Democrats had decreased to 48%. By the 2000 election, the gap in party identification continued to close (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). Explaining this secular realignment in the absence of serious political disturbance will be central to elucidating Catholic partisan ties. Testing Catholic partisanship against religious commitment provides an excellent opportunity to discern the existence of a cleavage among Catholics based upon ideology. The realignment beginning in 1980, in the electorate as a whole, is based upon the ideological polarization of the two parties (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Fiorina 1995; Niemi and Weisberg 2001). An increasingly liberal Democratic party and an increasingly conservative Republican party has caused liberals and conservatives to move toward the respective political parties. In addition, the electorate as a whole has become more aware of the ideological differences between the Democratic and Republican parties (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). Hence, conservative ideology and religious commitment have a direct and strong relationship upon partisan identification (Kellstedt 1993; Layman and Carsey 1998; Wald 1997). This is an insightful finding, as it illustrates the importance of religious voters for the Republican party and explains the causes of the partisan realignment since 1980. It also enhances the puzzle of the Catholic resistance to realignment. Has the expected shift among religious and conservative voters since the election of Ronald Reagan “trickled-down” among Catholic voters as well?

## Measuring Religious Commitment

In their seminal work on religiosity, *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics*, some of the nation's most well-known scholars collaborated in their efforts to clarify measurement questions of religiosity, and to examine the salience of religious commitment upon electoral behavior. Legee et al. are among the scholars who have contributed to the creation of this atlas for the study of religion in our political system. What is most useful in this tome of religion and politics is perhaps the strategies to conceptualize and operationalize and measure religious commitment, salience, and the connection between religious beliefs and political philosophies.

Before 1980, there was scant information for social scientists to utilize in order to study the effects of religiosity upon political behavior. Up to that year, only basic information about attendance and affiliation were collected by NES researchers. With the rise of the Christian Right (Black and Black 2002; Layman 1997; Wald 1997), and a desire for political scientists and politicians to understand the dynamics of this movement, NES researchers began to collect more data about religiosity. As Wald and Smidt state:

Like their colleagues in other social science disciplines, political scientists who study religion have embraced the empirical research methods associated with the 'behavioral' revolution. Though researchers have not abandoned the philosophical, legal, and historical approaches dominant in the prebehavioral era, the political relevance of religion is increasingly appraised 'scientifically.' In practice, this means analyzing quantitative data obtained through sample surveys. Since the 1980s, when the resurgence of fundamentalist political concern virtually forced the topic of 'religion and politics' onto the mainstream research agenda, academic journals and presses have increasingly published survey-based studies of religious influences on mass political behavior (1993).

Despite the relative growth industry in the literature on religion and politics that developed during the 1980s, an effective measurement strategy to gauge religiosity and its effect upon partisanship has been elusive. Wald and Smidt (1993) added inestimably to the study of religion and politics by establishing guidelines for measurement strategies for religiosity or religious commitment. Wald and Smidt state that “the first responsibility is to think systematically about how religious variables may influence political thinking and behavior” (1993). These scholars reject the basic unidimensional approach to gauging religiosity or religious commitment. Church attendance alone as a measure of religious commitment is inadequate when used as an isolated measurement. The broad conceptualization of attendance as the sole marker of religiosity is flawed because it is not elastic enough to incorporate private devotion or religious activities outside of a church building. In addition, the attendance measure is susceptible to social desirability effects, or what is also known as preference falsification. Respondents may be motivated to inflate their frequency of going to church, as religion is generally valued as a positive social behavior. Wald and Smidt (1993) advocate measurement strategies which approach religiosity from two perspectives, believing and belonging. These two concepts will measure, according to these scholars, both personal and social aspects of religiosity and grant a more complete view of the influence of religion upon social behavior, in particular, electoral decision-making.

Scholars have recognized the inadequacy of church attendance, the belonging aspect, as the sole variable in measuring religious commitment. To remedy this, the believing aspect, salience of religion in one’s life, has been added to supplement the gauge of religiosity. The efficacy of this two-pronged approach is noted by Campbell who states that “In the absence of

more detailed measures . . . these items capture two of the most relevant dimensions of religiosity” (2002, p. 213). This is especially important given the decline of the old cleavage of denominationalism, and the rise of the new values-based orthodoxy cleavage (Dalton 1988; Manza and Brooks 1998). As denominationalism has become less relevant:

The advantage of these two questions is that they are less idiosyncratic to particular religious traditions than many measures of religious commitment, such as Protestant-oriented questions about biblical inerrancy and being “born again.” Testing the claim that religious dedication trumps denomination as an influence on party ID requires measures of religiosity that carry across religious traditions (Campbell 2002, p. 213).

Clearly, the belonging-believing approach enhances our gauging of commitment, controls the limiting aspect of denominationalism, and effectively augments our ability to analyze the array of diverse religious groups within the American electorate.

It has been noted that since 1980 there has been a rather dramatic shift in partisanship within the electorate despite the absence of any significant national trauma (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Kellstedt 1993). This partisan adjustment has been classified as an ideological realignment, and has been discussed in the first chapter of this work. This is an essential point to consider and develop when discussing the possibility of religious identifiers realigning due to ideological classification. First, the strength of ideological identification as an influence on vote choice and partisanship is significant because it explains electoral behavior which has hitherto not been explained sufficiently by variables such as economic evaluations. Second, ideological identification can also help explain the partisan realignment which has occurred since 1980, with evidence demonstrating that committed religious identifiers who claim a conservative ideology have moved into the Republican party (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Kellstedt 1993; Miller and Wattenberg 1984; Layman 1997; Wald 1997; Wagner 1998). Therefore, it is crucial to the

study of religiosity and partisanship to establish the importance of ideological preference in the electorate as a whole and among religious identifiers in particular.

### **Population Replacement and Generational Change**

As recent research has suggested, the Democratic and Republican parties have increasingly divided along religious and ideological lines, especially since the presidential election of 1980 (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Layman and Carmines 1998; Wald 1997). Voters with higher levels of religious commitment and conservative ideology tend to identify with Republicans, while secular and liberal identifiers typically associate with the Democrats (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Layman 1997). As previously noted, this religious and ideological polarization has contributed to the development of a new values-based cleavage within the electorate, replacing the previous religious affiliation-based cleavages of the early and mid-twentieth century (Dalton 1988; Manza and Brooks 1998). Therefore, the electorate has entered a realigning period since 1980 (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998). As Beck has stated, during an era of adjusting partisan levels within the electorate, the new cleavage within the voting population is most likely to be found at its highest levels among the earliest generation which has entered the electorate. Younger voters are more likely, according to Beck, to sever the partisan continuity which is the hallmark of a non-realigning era (Beck 1974; Campbell 2002).

The advent of a realigning period within American politics presents an excellent opportunity to test the validity of the premise that electoral change occurs most dramatically among younger voters. Key has posited that the gradual nature of a secular realignment is due, in part, to generational shifts in party allegiance (1959). This agrees nicely with the Michigan

model of party identification which states that party ID, like religious affiliation, is largely static and rigid, not easily moved by extrinsic variables (Campbell 2002; Converse 1976). Of course, the implications of party identification are also well known, for it has been demonstrated that its link with vote choice has proven to be resilient and durable (Converse 1976; Miller and Shanks 1996). Niemi and Weisberg state that

After being under attack for decades, the view that partisanship is a major determinant of the vote received a significant boost . . . ‘partisan voting’- the relationship between self-reported partisanship and vote choice-declined in the 1970s but underwent a strong revival in presidential elections in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, while there might be turbulent times, such as in the 1960s and 1970s, in which the partisan division of the electorate is less important and the predictability of elections is reduced, they are the exception and party identification remains a potent variable for explaining individual voting decisions and election outcomes (p.182, 2001).

Clearly, the nearly indissoluble link between partisanship and vote choice makes understanding partisan allegiance indispensable. In addition, the concept of static party ID elicits numerous questions with regard to Catholic voters in the American electorate: Are the youngest generation of Catholic voters realigning toward the Republican party? Are generational differences causing a partisan cleavage among Catholic voters? Does a generational cleavage account for the “swing vote” status of Catholics? (Guth and Green 1991; Jelen 1993; Wagner 1998). The current period of ideological realignment allows for a test of these questions of generational change (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998).

Even scholars who have been critical of realignment theory have attributed the gradual nature of partisan adjustment to population replacement and generational change within the electorate in general. (Carmines and Stimson 1981). A division of Catholics into three generational cohorts will allow me to test for and determine whether this change is occurring

among Catholic voters in particular. Scholars have classified three generations of Catholic voters into the following categories: the pre-Vatican II/New Deal generation which entered the electorate between 1940 and 1960; the Vatican II/JFK generation which came into the electorate between 1960 and 1980; and the post-Vatican II/Ronald Reagan generation which has become part of the electorate since 1980 (Mockabee 2004; Leege 2000; Wagner 1998). Testing the age cohorts for partisanship and religious commitment levels should advance our understanding of the Catholic voter in American politics.

### **Partisanship**

One of the most significant alterations in partisanship during the past forty years has been the movement of ideologically conservative Christians from the ranks of the Democratic party into the Republican party. This change has been most noteworthy among evangelical and mainline Protestants; however, the partial change in Catholic partisanship has not gone unnoticed. As E.J. Dionne wrote in his June 18, 2000 *Washington Post* column, “Republicans would not now control Congress—and would not have a chance in presidential elections—if they hadn’t succeeded in roughly doubling the 20-or-so percent share of the Catholic vote they got in JFK’s election” (Dionne 2000). Clearly, continued movement of Catholic voters into the Republican Party would cause dramatic changes in the outcome of elections at the presidential and sub-presidential levels. Explaining why Catholics have been much slower than their Protestant brethren in realigning with the Republican party and determining *which* Catholics have realigned will be the central focus of this thesis.

## Vote Choice

Catholic voting behavior has been divided, defying the expected pattern of ideological realignment. In 1980, both Catholics and Protestants- mainline and evangelicals-voted for Reagan. In 1984, greater percentages of these voters *all* increased their support for Reagan's re-election. In 1988, Protestants continued to vote for the Republican Presidential candidate; whereas a majority of Catholics supported the Democratic nominee, Michael Dukakis. In both 1992 and 1996, Protestant support for the Republican presidential nominee continued to expand, as did increased Republican Party identification. Catholics, conversely, although their identification as Democrats had fallen to 41 percent by 1992, down from 49 percent in 1980, were now reverting to supporting Democratic presidential candidates. Unlike Protestant identifiers whose partisanship *and* voting behavior moved in a predictable way as the parties became more ideologically polarized, Catholics seem to have only become more divided, *decreasing* in their identification with the Democrats while *increasing* support for their presidential candidates. The importance of vote choice rests on the notion that it is a primary indicator of partisan change (Kamieniecki 1985; Key 1955). As Key has stated, elections and voting are formal acts of collective decision-making which are connected in a stream of antecedent and subsequent behavior (1955). The evidence presented displays the challenge of understanding Catholic voting behavior, as these voters seem to demonstrate, with their "swing vote" status, a much more feeble relationship between partisanship and vote choice than is traditionally recognized (Erickson and Romero 1989; Wagner 1998).

Commentators, pundits, and political scientists alike have all been anticipating a more energetic realignment within the Catholic electorate. The reason for this is twofold. First, Catholic voters are generally considered to be predominately ideologically conservative (Mockabee 2004; Prendergast 1998; Wald 1997). In addition, the Catholic Church has traditionally been recognized as extremely ideologically conservative, both institutionally and doctrinally. These facts make explaining the modest shift in Catholic partisanship toward the conservative party, the Republicans, even more extraordinary.

As 29 percent of those who voted in the 1996 presidential election identified as Catholic, compared to 22 and 28 percent mainline and evangelical Protestant respectively, these “swing voters” will continue to be an important segment of the voting population. Because Catholic voters have not behaved in a monolithic fashion, this group will continue to grow in significance, perhaps determining the winners and losers in American politics. Establishing which Catholics have realigned, and determining whether partisan realignment will continue will add to our understanding of the religious factor in politics and perhaps to the electoral fortunes of the major political parties for decades to come.

### CHAPTER 3: DATA AND METHODS

Data for this thesis will be taken from the American National Election Studies (NES), from 1980 through 2000. Since NES data first included measurements and indicators of religiosity and religious salience beginning in 1980, that year marks a necessary starting point for analysis. The election of 1980 is also an excellent point to begin investigation of Catholic political behavior as this was the first year in which a majority of Catholics had voted for the Republican candidate for president at a higher percentage than the general population (Wagner 1998). In addition, the Republican and Democratic parties have become increasingly polarized along religious and ideological lines since 1980 (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Layman 1997). Therefore, the study of the effect of the religious factor upon partisanship in general, and its effect upon Catholic voters in particular, necessarily begins with the presidential election of 1980.

Data will be pooled into two distinct time-periods: 1980 through 1990, the Reagan-Bush era, and 1992 through 2000, the Clinton era. This strategy of periodization serves two main purposes. First, it will eliminate any potential numerical deficiency which may occur when measuring specific groups. The pooling of data ensures a respectable sample size for analysis. In addition, periodization is useful as it allows for the testing of independent variables during the presidencies of conservative Republicans, and the presidency of Bill Clinton who was increasingly viewed as a “New Deal” liberal and is now considered an impetus for the ever increasing ideological realignment within the electorate. The Clinton presidency also featured

extended ideological conflict with the conservative Republican leadership in Congress (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Black and Black 2002).

The literature on religion and political behavior has established that group-level analysis must focus upon white, non-Latino religious identifiers. Comparing the party identification of religious blacks, whether Protestant or Catholic, with non-religious or secular blacks, provides no great distinction as black voters have remained overwhelmingly loyal to the Democratic Party (Campbell 2002; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Leege 2000). Therefore, to include blacks in the analysis would suppress any relationship between independent variables that effect party identification (Leege 2000; Wald 1997).

In addition, the political behavior of Hispanics is also difficult to study. Although Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the United States, they remain ethnically diverse and numerically small for a separate racial or ethnic category, even with data pooled over several years (Leege 2000; Mockabee 2004). As the Hispanic population continues to expand, scholars will, in the future, be able to gather the necessary data to analyze this growing constituency. For now, data analyzed to study the effects of religiosity upon political behavior must be restricted to white, non-Latino comparison groups (Leege 2000).

In explaining political behavior, the most significant, influential, and durable variable that affects vote choice is party identification (Bartels 2000; Converse 1976; Niemi and Weisberg 2001; Miller and Shanks 1996). Therefore, the logical dependent variable in the study of Catholic electoral behavior is partisanship as it is the most accurate indicator of long-term, secular change. Although there has been steady erosion in Catholic affiliation with the Democratic Party since the election of 1960, a plurality of white Catholic voters still have an

attachment to the Democrats (Prendergast 1998). As the political parties become more ideologically polarized and white religious evangelical and mainline Protestants continue to move toward the Republican Party, an explanation for the continued allegiance of white Catholics to the Democratic Party remains elusive (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Carmines and Stanley 1992; Layman 1997). Partisanship is the dependent variable which I seek to explain and will be operationalized using the standard seven-point scale (1 will represent strong Democrat, 2 will be for those who are weak Democrat, while 3 indicates independent Democrat status. 4 will code those voters who consider themselves “independents,” while 5 indicates the independent Republican. 6 and 7 will denote weak and strong Republicans respectively). This scale gives a more detailed picture of the strength of partisan attachment (Mockabee 2004).

To explain the variation in partisanship among Catholics, I will test an array of independent variables in order to determine the relationship between these variables and party identification. The independent variables utilized are those which have been recognized as influencing political behavior (Layman 1997; Wald 1997). These variables include socio-demographic attributes and policy or issue attitudes. Testing these variables among Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant voters will allow me to determine if Catholic partisanship is being affected by these variables in a manner similar to their Protestant counterparts. If indeed denominational differences have been declining since the 1970s, similar effects among Catholic and Protestant voters would be expected.

Socio-demographic variables include levels of educational achievement, income levels, gender, age cohort, urbanism, household union membership, and religious commitment. As was noted in the previous chapter, generational categories will be defined by three distinct cohorts.

These cohorts are divided into the following groups: The World War II/New Deal generation, born before 1940, the JFK/Vatican II generation Catholics born between 1941 and 1960, and the Reagan/John Paul II Catholic, those born after 1960, entering the electorate in 1980. These years are logical demarcations as they delineate notable events in the history of American Catholicism and have been deemed by scholars as an effective measurement strategy (Leege 2000; Mockabee 2004). In addition, these generational cohorts are also an effective way to measure Protestant voters as well. The New Deal/ World War II, JFK/Baby boomer, and Ronald Reagan generation divisions also categorize Protestants in logical generation groups (Campbell 2002).

Religious commitment or religiosity is an important independent variable, as it has been viewed by many scholars as one factor in the polarization of the political parties, ideological realignment, and the basis of societal and political cleavage (Layman 1997; Layman and Carmines 1997; Mockabee 2004; Wald 1997). Commitment will be measured using the belonging/believing strategy of attendance at church services and salience of religion in one's daily life. For attendance, respondents are asked "if they attend religious services . . . every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?" A five-point scale will be used to code these responses (1 signifies attendance every week, 2 almost every week, 3 represents once or twice per month, 4 a few times per year, 5 signifies no church attendance).

For salience, respondents are asked if "religion provides no guidance in your day-to-day life, some guidance, quite a bit of guidance, or a great deal of guidance in your day-to-day life?" A four-point scale will code these responses (1 representing no guidance, 2 some, 3 quite a bit of guidance, 4 will represent a great deal of guidance). These items included in the commitment

measurement strategy model have been demonstrated to be effective indicators of religiosity for Catholics and Protestants (Kellstedt 1993; Layman 1997; Mockabee 2004).

A religious commitment scale will then allow for the separation of religious identifiers into two distinct categories: high and low commitment levels. Those who register as highly committed on the salience measure will state that religion provides quite a bit of guidance or a great deal of guidance in their daily lives. Those who register as highly committed on the attendance measure will state that they attend church services every week, almost every week, or once or twice per month. Meeting these criteria will classify an individual as highly committed on the religiosity index.

Conversely, those who state that religion provides no guidance or just some guidance in their daily lives, and those who only attend church services a few times per year or never will be coded as having a low commitment level. This structure has been utilized by scholars as an effective means for classifying individual religiosity. As Kellstedt has noted:

It is not surprising to find that the practice dimension and the salience dimension are so highly correlated . . . [T]he least religious category is combined and compared with the highest category of religious commitment. The findings are robust: the most religious whites differ from the least religious on all ten (policy) variables. Demographic variables are controlled for and, hence are not having an impact here, but religious commitment is (p.295;1993).

Scholars (Kellstedt 1993; Leege 1993; Layman 1997; Wald 1997) agree that the salience and attendance measurement scale for religious commitment has internal consistency and is thus an effective way to gauge how religion affects political behavior. This measure will be used for Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant identifiers. Socio-demographic variables,

policy attitudes, and partisan identification will then be regressed against each group. The coefficients will then be analyzed to determine statistical significance.

Education achievement levels will be coded on a five-point scale (1 representing 12<sup>th</sup> grade or less, no diploma, 2 will represent high school graduates, 3 will reflect respondents with some college, but no degree, 4 will represent B.A. level degrees, 5 reflects persons with advanced degrees).

For gender, number 1 will reflect males, while number 2 will represent females. The urbanism variables will be coded on a three-point scale (1 designating metropolitan areas, 2 represents suburbs, 3 reflects small towns and rural areas). Union households will be coded as number 1, while non-union households will be coded number 2. A five-point scale will be utilized also to reflect income levels (1 will reflect the 0-16<sup>th</sup> percentile; 2 the 17<sup>th</sup>-33<sup>d</sup> percentile, 3 the 34-67<sup>th</sup> percentile, 4 represents the 68-95<sup>th</sup> percentile, and 5 reflecting the top 1% of wage earners, 96-100<sup>th</sup> percentile)

Attitudes on contemporary issues and ideological identification have also been shown to affect partisanship (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Carmines and Stimson 1981; Green and Gunth 1993). Ideology will be measured using the standard seven-point self-identification scale, with higher values indicating more conservative views (1 will signify extremely conservative, 2 conservative, 3 represents slightly conservative, 4 will signify moderates on the ideological scale, 5 represents slightly liberal, 6 liberal, while 7 signifies extreme liberalism). This is the ideological scale utilized in the NES surveys since 1972.

Racial attitudes are measured using a question about government aid to blacks. Respondents are asked to place themselves on this seven-point scale with regard to the

following scenario: “Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. Where would place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought about it?”

A seven-point scale will be utilized. All scales utilized in this thesis will designate higher values on the scale as representative of the most conservative positions.

Other variables used to measure policy attitudes include a question asking respondents views on government guarantee of jobs and the standard of living scale, and the government services, spending tradeoff scale. On government guarantee of jobs and the standard of living variable, respondents are asked to place themselves on a seven-point scale, with seven representing the most conservative position and one representing the liberal. The question to measure this variable is as follows: “Some people feel that the government should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think that the government should just let each person get ahead on his/her own. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven’t you thought much about this?”

Another question which measures economic policy attitudes refers to government services and spending. Respondents are asked to place themselves on the seven-point scale, with seven representing the most conservative position. The question is designed to measure individual attitudes toward the size and scope of government involvement in our daily lives: “Some people think that the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel that it is important for the

government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?"

On social issues, two variables are included as indicators of attitudes: abortion and the role of women in society. The abortion question will measure respondent's views on a four-point scale, with higher values indicating the most pro-life position. For women's role in politics and society, a four-point scale will be used with a "women's place is in the home" representing the most conservative position. Finally, a question measuring attitudes on national defense will be captured using a seven-point scale on military spending, with higher values indicating support for increased funding. The questions used measure economic and cultural policy positions and were chosen because they were consistently used by researchers between 1980 and 2000. A multivariate analysis will be invoked to aid in determining the weight of each independent variable while holding the other variables constant. The Ordinary Least Squares regression model will allow me to compare the beta coefficients, establishing which independent variables are the most significant with regard to their effect upon partisanship (Mockabee 2004).

As Legee (2000) has noted, the dynamics of the modest shift in partisan allegiance by Catholic voters has remained elusive to scholars of religion and politics. The model will seek to measure these socio-demographic and policy variables in order to detect any significant change among Catholic identifiers. Only considerable changes in variables over-time can account for changing partisan allegiance among Catholic voters.

Although scholars have recognized that differences in religious affiliation have a less dramatic effect upon predicting vote choice, the astounding multiplicity of religious

traditions in the United States requires scholars to create a framework of manageable groups of religious identifiers for the purpose of empirical analysis (Layman 1997; Miller and Wattenberg 1984; Wald 1997). There has been a rather large and convincing amount of evidence which demonstrates that highly committed religious identifiers tend to be drawn to the Republican Party, while those who tend not to be committed to religious orthodoxy and traditionalism along with secular identifiers, tend to support the Democratic party (Layman 1997; Miller and Wattenberg 1984; Wald 1997). Despite this fact, researchers have established a model to separate and isolate members of different religious traditions for the purpose of analysis, which is central to the phenomenon I seek to explain here. Even though affiliation has, in a general sense, diminished as a factor in cleaving groups in their political behavior, there are clearly substantial differences between Protestant and Catholic identifiers and their respective partisan affiliation, as Protestants have been substantially more Republican than Catholics.

Scholars have attempted to create a framework that accounts for differences in religious traditions while also classifying identifiers into logical groups for analysis. The success claimed by political scientists who study religion and politics has also been accompanied by some limitations (Layman 1997; Wald 1997). The NES data collected each election cycle usually consists of some 2,000 or fewer interviews. Members of religious traditions outside the conventional Christian traditions—Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and other religious minorities—cannot be included in analysis due to the small numbers of these religious identifiers. Even certain sub-groups of Christians, those who depart from traditional doctrine—Mormons, Christian Scientists, and Unitarians—are excluded because too few turn up in survey data to

give us an accurate impression of the religious traditions in the general population (Layman 1997; Wald 1997).

Despite this limitation, these groups, Protestant and Catholic, constitute almost 90 percent of the adult voting population in the United States, and give us insight into the religious beliefs and faiths of an overwhelming majority of Americans (Kellstedt 1993; Layman 1997; Wald 1997). Excluding these religious minorities from data analysis still leaves scholars with the task of dividing dozens of Christian denominations into manageable groups of religious traditions. For the purpose of analysis here, the model to examine socio-demographic variables and policy attitudes will be applied to Roman Catholics as well as evangelical and mainline Protestants. These divisions serve a two-fold purpose; they create a set of groups with a consistent religious tradition, and they allow researchers to compare and contrast the differences between these major religious traditions in order to assess the effect of religious commitment, policy attitudes, and socio-demographic variables upon political behavior (Wald 1997). Separating these religious traditions, comparing and contrasting their views on policy questions, analyzing their socio-demographic qualities, as well as their partisan and ideological identification should illustrate any differences or similarities in party affiliation between and among these religious identifiers (Campbell 2002; Jelen 1993; Wald 1997).

Examining Roman Catholics as a group is much simpler than studying Protestants, for there are no formal denominational divisions within Catholicism. In addition, Catholicism has an extended historical tradition and a central teaching authority, the Pope, which minimizes theological differences or controversies. Also, Catholic respondents are easily recognized in NES data collection. Separating and analyzing Protestants, however, has proven to be rather

problematic (Campbell 2002; Layman 1997; Wald 1997). Within Protestantism there are dozens of denominations with significant theological differences (Wald 1997). Therefore, a framework to distinguish mainline and evangelical Protestants has been developed by scholars (Green and Guth 1993; Kellstedt 1993).

As Kellstedt (1993) has noted there are serious doctrinal differences between mainline and evangelical Protestants. The former are from Reformation-era traditions, e.g. Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ, Congregationalist Christian, and Disciples of Christ which are ritualistic and sacramentally based and politically are characterized by economic conservatism and social justice concerns (Layman 1997). Mainline Protestant churches have hierarchical structures and their members register on the higher end of the socio-economic scale.

Evangelicals are considered post-Reformation sects, typified by the profession of biblical inerrancy and personal salvation; with emphasis upon conversion, missions, and evangelism. Evangelical churches lack a hierarchical organization and their members usually register lower on the socio-economic scale than do mainline Protestants or Catholics (Wald 1997). The denominations described as evangelical include Seventh-day Adventists, Church of the Brethren, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Church of the Nazarene, Salvation Army, Wesleyan Church, Fundamentalist Adventist, Missouri Synod, American Baptist Churches USA, Southern Baptist Convention, National Association of Free Will Baptists, Pentecostal, Assembly of God, and the Church of God (Layman 1997). In contemporary American politics, evangelicals usually register as highly committed to their religion and hold conservative policy positions (Kellstedt 1993; Layman 1997; Wald 1997)

These distinctions require researchers, for purpose of analysis, to categorize these adherents into two distinct religious groupings. For this thesis, analyzing the effects of the independent variables upon partisanship, both mainline and evangelical, as well as Roman Catholic, should confirm the continued religious and ideological cleaving of the American electorate.

In addition, the inter-religious comparison will allow me to demonstrate the differences in the weight of independent variables between and among these groups of religious identifiers. This research model, by incorporating a cross comparison, will allow me to more readily observe and analyze the strength and direction these variables are having on Catholic partisanship.

In comparing Catholic identifiers with evangelical and mainline Protestants, I hypothesize that ideological identification has replaced religious affiliation as a prime mover of partisan identification. Among these religious groups, conservatives are highly committed and have identified as Republicans, while liberal, non-committed identifiers have become more affiliated with the Democratic Party. Although younger members of each religious tradition are more likely than previous generations to become Republican, lower numbers of highly committed religious identifiers among Catholics, coupled with the static nature of Democratic partisanship among older generation Catholics, help explain the lower aggregate level of Republican affiliation among Catholic voters.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As a first step in providing an explanation for the partisan identification of Catholic voters in the American electorate, it is useful to present and analyze partisan identification between 1980 and 2000. Again, measuring partisanship is important when studying electoral behavior as it is the most effective indicator of change within the electorate as well as a most reliable indicator of vote choice. Therefore, establishing the partisan trends among Catholics over this time-period is a necessary starting point for my analysis. In addition, a comparison of partisan trends among evangelical and mainline Protestants with Catholic voters will augment any similarities or differences which may exist among these religious identifiers. Comparing and contrasting partisan trends among these groups will help determine whether there has been a decline in denominationalism and a rise in religiosity as the base of political cleavage within the American electorate.

In order to effectively assess partisan tendencies, frequency distributions are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The frequency output was conducted between committed and non-committed identifiers, in all three religious traditions, in order to determine if levels of religiosity are producing significant differences in partisan identification. In addition, an illustration of partisan identification also amplifies the puzzle of Catholic political behavior. As Table 1 indicates, for most of the period between 1980 and 2000, partisan identification between committed and non-committed Catholics was not dramatically different. Not until the mid-to-late 1990s does the committed/non-committed cleavage become evident among Catholic voters.

**Table 1 Catholic Partisan Identification, 1980-2000.**

Year	Committed %				Non-committed %			
	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>N</u>
1980	53.8	12.3	33.8	130	54.3	14.2	31.2	141
1984	52.5	10.0	37.5	200	46.8	11.6	41.0	173
1986	53.6	8.2	37.1	97	51.0	9.8	36.3	102
1988	50.4	6.6	41.6	137	42.5	9.8	46.6	174
1990	59.3	8.1	32.0	172	53.8	5.4	40.2	174
1992	50.7	13.0	36.2	207	54.1	10.6	35.3	207
1994	50.0	13.9	36.1	166	49.2	9.8	41.0	183
1996	52.8	7.4	38.7	163	51.2	7.8	40.4	166
1998	43.8	10.5	44.8	105	49.7	9.7	39.4	155
2000	43.5	7.1	48.2	170	48.4	11.3	39.2	186

Source: NES Data, 1980-2000. 1982 is not presented as measure of religiosity was not used for that year.

**Table 2 Evangelical Partisan Identification, 1980-2000.**

Year	Committed %				Non-Committed %			
	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>N</u>
1980	52.2	10.1	34.1	138	48.4	13.0	38.2	123
1984	30.5	8.6	58.4	197	43.0	15.2	39.4	165
1986	37.6	11.1	49.6	117	45.9	25.9	27.1	85
1988	38.6	9.7	51.7	207	41.2	11.8	44.4	153
1990	38.6	10.8	48.9	223	45.5	15.9	33.8	145
1992	35.9	8.0	33.6	276	44.4	13.9	39.1	151
1994	33.6	9.3	55.1	214	36.2	11.2	52.6	116
1996	35.9	3.6	59.5	195	52.9	10.8	34.3	102
1998	39.8	9.3	50.0	118	41.4	15.7	42.9	70
2000	29.5	10.2	59.1	176	47.6	10.5	41.9	107

Source: NES Data, 1980-2000. 1982 is not presented in table as measure of religiosity was not used for that year.

**Table 3 Mainline Partisan Identification, 1980-2000.**

Year	Committed%				Non-committed%			
	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Dem.</u>	<u>Ind.</u>	<u>Rep.</u>	<u>N</u>
1980	34.9	10.9	54.3	175	41.1	13.0	43.9	253
1984	34.1	3.6	60.6	249	38.8	8.6	51.8	313
1986	32.1	10.4	55.2	134	40.0	13.3	43.6	165
1988	36.6	8.5	54.5	213	35.2	10.5	53.3	287
1990	41.3	7.4	50.3	189	37.4	11.8	50.0	262
1992	36.2	6.5	57.3	232	35.9	13.1	49.7	312
1994	28.6	7.0	63.8	185	35.8	6.9	57.4	204
1996	34.8	8.3	56.9	181	41.2	7.6	44.5	211
1998	36.6	9.2	51.1	131	44.5	10.2	41.6	137
2000	31.8	8.9	59.4	192	51.6	12.2	34.6	188

Source: NES Data, 1980-2000. 1982 is not presented in table as measure of religiosity was not used for that year.

As Table 1 demonstrates, Catholic partisan identification, for committed and non-committed identifiers, was predominantly Democratic from 1980 through 1996. For example, in 1980, Democratic partisan identification for committed Catholics was 53.8 percent, while the percentage of Democratic identification among non-committed Catholics was 54.3. Even in the election of 1984, with the massive Reagan landslide victory, a majority of committed Catholics, 52.5 percent, and non-committed Catholics, 46.8 percent, still identified as Democratic. It seems that the force of the ideological realignment that has taken place since 1980 did not permeate the ranks of Catholic voters, committed and non-committed alike. Not until 1998, during the second term of Bill Clinton, do we see a substantial shift in Catholic partisan allegiance. In 1998 and 2000, a majority of Catholic voters who register as committed religious adherents began to identify as Republican.

Concomitantly, non-committed Catholics remained loyal Democrats with 48.4 percent identifying with the party in 2000. Non-committed Catholics identifying with the Republican Party sank to its lowest level since 1992, with 39.2 percent self-described as Republican. Catholic partisan affiliation, then, is beginning to correspond with the expected trend of ideological realignment and religious commitment as the base of social and political cleavage. Although it was not realized until the mid 1990s, religiosity seems to be a driving force dividing Catholics into the Democratic and Republican parties albeit at a much more modest level than evangelical and mainline Protestants.

Table 2 shows partisan allegiances among committed and non-committed evangelical Protestants. Interestingly, this group of religious identifiers, committed and

non-committed, traditionally have been solid Democrats. In 1980, for example 50.2 percent of committed evangelicals and 48.0 of non-committed evangelicals were identifying as Democrats. By 1984 there was a dramatic change in partisan affiliation. In that year, only 30.5 percent of committed evangelicals identified with the Democrats, while an astonishing 58.4 percent identified with the Republicans, a 24 point increase from 1980. This trend among committed evangelicals has accelerated, as they continue to affiliate overwhelmingly with the Republican Party. By the 2000 election, only 29.5 percent of this group of religious identifiers was affiliated with the Democratic party. Conversely, the general tendency for a majority of non-committed evangelicals has been to remain Democratic, as a slight Republican advantage was only evident in 1988 and 1994. Again, religiosity seems to be fueling a partisan divide among evangelicals as well.

Table 3 shows mainline Protestants having a solidly Republican tradition in the 1980s and early 1990s. Both religiously committed and non-committed mainline identifiers were identifying as Republican. For example, 54.3 percent of committed mainline Protestants and 43.9 percent of non-committed identified as Republican in 1980. In 1990, 50.3 percent of committed members and 50.0 percent of non-committed members identified as Republican. NES data reveals that since the mid 1990s, a division based upon religious commitment has also become evident among mainline Protestants, politically cleaving them between the two major parties. Analyzing the partisan frequency distribution among these religious identifiers reveals some important trends. First, denominational differences, although they have diminished significantly, still exist between mainline Protestant and Catholic voters. Partisanship has remained a static variable with regard to political behavior. Also, the political parties have become ideologically

polarized, especially since 1980; religious commitment is dividing all three religious groups, with this division most pronounced among younger voters, hence the ongoing realignment within these groups is occurring among the youngest generation of identifiers, as the religiously committed tend to be Republican, while non-committed tend to be more Democratic.

In order to provide empirical conformation that these trends are indeed occurring I will test for ideology and generational differences. First, an ideological frequency distribution will allow me to determine the similarities or differences in the ideological self-identification of Catholics, evangelical, and mainline Protestants. Higher levels of conservatism would explain movement toward the Republicans, while higher levels of moderate and liberal identifiers may explain continued Democratic affiliation. In addition, an ideological frequency distribution among these religious groups should confirm or deny the advent of an ideological realignment with the electorate and determine if Catholic voters are part of or are becoming part of the broader ideological realignment within the American electorate. Next, a regression analysis of ideology and age cohorts will allow me to determine the strength and direction of these variables upon partisanship. Finally, a regression analysis of issue attitudes and socio-demographic characteristics will allow me to determine if other variables are having a significant effect upon partisan affiliation within the American electorate.

**Table 4 Catholic Ideological Identification, 1980-2000.**

Year	Committed %					Non-committed%				
1980	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	16.9	20.8	28.5	33.8	130	19.9	23.4	25.5	31.2	141
1984	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	17.1	30.0	26.5	26.5	200	27.7	24.3	30.1	17.9	173
1986	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	13.4	29.9	40.2	16.5	97	17.6	31.4	29.4	21.4	102
1988	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	16.1	22.6	37.2	24.1	137	17.2	27.0	31.6	24.2	174
1990	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	18.6	26.7	26.7	28.0	172	17.9	26.1	27.2	28.8	184
1992	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	17.4	28.0	34.8	37.2	207	23.7	25.6	30.0	20.7	207
1994	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	15.1	22.9	45.8	31.3	166	21.9	29.0	31.7	17.4	165
1996	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	20.2	24.5	41.1	14.2	163	25.3	29.5	33.7	11.5	166
1998	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	11.4	26.7	46.7	15.2	105	21.9	29.0	32.3	16.8	155
2000	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	5.3	13.5	18.2	63.0	170	11.3	17.2	15.1	56.4	186

Source: NES Data, 1980-2000. 1982 is not presented in table as measure of religiosity was not used for that year.

**Table 5 Evangelical Ideological Identification, 1980-2000.**

Year	Committed %					Non-committed%				
1980	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	3.6	13.0	37.0	46.4	138	11.4	17.9	25.2	56.9	123
1984	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	9.1	16.8	48.2	25.9	197	18.8	21.8	21.2	38.2	165
1986	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	3.4	26.5	48.7	21.4	117	10.6	25.9	23.5	40.0	85
1988	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	7.2	15.5	43.0	34.3	207	13.7	17.6	30.7	38.0	153
1990	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	8.1	21.5	43.9	26.5	223	8.3	24.8	19.3	47.6	145
1992	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	8.0	18.1	45.3	28.6	276	17.2	22.5	24.5	35.8	151
1994	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	5.1	19.2	54.7	21.0	214	12.1	28.4	37.9	21.6	116
1996	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	8.2	16.4	55.4	20.0	195	15.7	23.5	30.4	30.4	102
1998	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	6.8	27.1	45.8	20.3	118	10.0	32.9	35.7	21.4	70
2000	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	5.7	5.7	24.4	64.2	176	11.2	15.9	8.4	64.5	107

Source: NES Data, 1980-2000. 1982 is not presented in table as measure of religiosity was not used for that year.

**Table 6 Mainline Ideological Identification, 1980-2000.**

Year	Committed %					Non-committed %				
1980	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	8.0	24.6	39.4	28.0	175	18.2	21.3	30.4	30.1	193
1984	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	13.3	23.3	43.4	20.0	249	13.7	25.9	31.9	28.5	313
1986	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	11.9	29.9	43.3	14.9	134	18.2	30.9	29.7	21.2	165
1988	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	11.7	24.4	43.7	20.2	213	15.0	24.4	39.0	21.6	287
1990	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	16.9	25.9	28.0	29.2	189	16.0	30.2	29.0	24.8	262
1992	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	16.4	25.0	41.4	17.2	232	18.6	26.9	33.7	20.8	312
1994	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	9.2	25.4	43.8	21.6	185	13.2	31.4	39.7	15.7	204
1996	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	11.6	24.9	48.1	15.4	181	20.9	24.6	37.0	17.5	211
1998	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	13.0	32.8	40.5	13.7	131	19.7	36.5	29.9	13.9	137
2000	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Lib.</u>	<u>Mod.</u>	<u>Cons.</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>N</u>
	6.8	12.0	26.0	55.2	191	11.2	13.3	12.8	62.7	188

Source: NES Data, 1980-2000. 1982 is not presented in table as specific measure of religiosity was not used for that year.

As expected, Table 4 provides support for the cleaving of Catholic voters based upon religiosity and ideology. Among committed Catholics, the trend has been, since 1980, to increasingly self-identify as conservative. For example, in 1980, 28.5 percent of committed Catholics identified as conservative, compared with 46.7 percent in 1998. The data demonstrate a consistent trend of rising levels of conservatism among committed Catholics, while liberal and moderate identifiers within this sub-group remained stable.

Between 1980 and 2000, ideological identification among non-committed Catholics remained rather stable. However, when compared to committed Catholics, a dramatic distinction emerges that amplifies the growing ideological cleavage among Catholic voters. In 1980, among committed and non-committed Catholics, there existed a 3-point difference in liberal and conservative identification. Table 4 shows that liberal identifiers among committed and non-committed Catholics were 16.9 percent and 19.9 percent respectively. Similarly, conservative identification among committed and non-committed Catholics was at 28.5 percent and 25.5 percent respectively. This affirms that religious commitment was not a base of political division among Catholics in 1980.

By 1998, however, the difference between committed and non-committed Catholics who identified as conservative or liberal grew to 14-points and 10-points respectively, thus suggesting further that religious commitment is playing a role as a determinate of ideology and is serving as a source for political division among Catholics. The stable and consistent trend among committed and non-committed Catholics between 1980 and 2000 becoming ideologically divided also suggests that religious commitment is serving as a force for partisan realignment

among Catholics and that denominational differences are in fact diminishing as a source of political cleavage with the electorate.

The findings in Table 4 indicate that the new chasm between religiously committed and non-committed Catholics is driving the partisan change established in Table 1. As expected, while committed Catholics have increased in their frequency of ideological self-identification as conservatives, there has also been a concomitant increase in their partisan affiliation as Republicans. This is exemplified by the data in Table 1 that shows that 33.8 percent of committed Catholics in 1980 identified as Republican, while in 2000 48.2 percent of committed Catholics identified as Republican, a 15-point increase. These data also show that as liberal identification among non-committed Catholics has increased, Democratic identification has remained stable, with non-committed Catholics remaining slightly more Democratic than the electorate in general. Thus far, the evidence suggests that among Catholic voters, religious commitment has become an effective predictor of ideological affiliation and partisan identification. These findings undergird the premise that conservative ideology is linked to Republican partisan identification. It may also be inferred that religious commitment is driving partisan change as Republican partisan identification and conservative ideological identification frequencies are most prevalent among voters who are committed to their religion.

Table 5 provides further support for ideological realignment and religious commitment as a societal cleavage which manifests itself in secular partisan alteration. Conservative ideological identification among committed evangelicals was high in 1980 and has remained at extremely high levels through 2000. As expected and demonstrated in Table 2, the increased conservative ideological identification by committed evangelicals has been concomitant with increased

Republican identification. In 1980, Republican identification among committed evangelicals was at 34.1 percent, however, 59.1 percent of these identifiers registered affiliation with the Republican party by the election of 2000. Again, as expected, conservative ideological identification during the same time-period became more prevalent among committed evangelical voters. Conversely, among non-committed evangelicals, lower levels of conservative identification between 1980 and 2000 have also meant lower levels of Republican partisan identification.

Table 6 also provides further evidence to support the notion of an ideological realignment and the cleaving of committed and non-committed religious identifiers. As the data reveals, ideological identification among committed mainline Protestants has remained relatively stable and high. Between 1980 and 2000, there has been very little variance in levels of conservatism reported among committed mainliners, and their affiliation with the Republican party has also remained stable and vibrant. What Table 6 does expose is the dramatic rise among non-committed mainline Protestants who describe themselves as moderates on the ideological scale. In 1980, 21.3 percent of these identifiers called themselves moderates, compared to 36.5 by 1998. In addition, while levels of moderate identifiers have dramatically increased, Democratic affiliation among non-committed mainline Protestants between 1980 and 2000 has also markedly increased. In 1980, 41.1 percent of non-committed mainliners self-identified as Democrats, while 43.9 percent identified as Republican. By the 2000 election, 51.6 percent were affiliating with the Democratic Party, while only 34.6 percent were associating with the Republicans.

Among all three religious groups, Catholics, evangelicals, and mainline Protestants, there exists a dramatic shift in partisan affiliation between committed and non-committed members.

The evidence suggests that shifts in ideological identification are related to shifts in partisan affiliation. Among all these groups, rising levels of conservative ideological identification has been associated with higher levels of Republican identification. As levels of liberal or moderate identification become more prominent, so do levels of Democratic Party affiliation. Most interestingly, higher levels of conservatism and Republican identification have become the trend among committed members of all three religious traditions.

With regard to the Catholic voter, the cross-comparison with Protestant adherents has revealed some important findings. First, the new cleavage of religiosity is evident among Catholics and Protestants, suggesting that this phenomenon is a trend which transcends denominational differences and implies that committed members of each religious tradition will continue to coalesce into the ranks of the Republican party. Secondly, the data also reveals that there has been a lag among committed Catholics reporting higher levels of conservatism and Republican identification. As the trend began with evangelicals in the 1980s and early 1990s, this pattern did not emerge in any significant manner among committed Catholics until the mid-to-late 1990s. A regression analysis of socio-demographic and policy attitudes against partisan identification will present a more robust examination of the effects of the specific variables that are affecting partisan and ideological change among Catholic voters and will measure the extent to which these variables differ among committed and non-committed adherents in each religious group.

**Table 7 Independent Variables and Catholic Partisanship, 1980-1990.**

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients Committed	Unstandardized Coefficients Non-committed
(Constant)	-1.911	-.722
Ideology	3.124***	2.086***
Gender	.015	.160
Union	-.333	-.613
Aid to Minorities	.845	1.010**
Abortion	-.287	.012
Jobs	.365	.773
Spend/Service	1.569**	2.089**
Income	.786	.256
Education	.502	.438
Suburban	.228	-.215
Rural	-.073	-.788
Region	.033	.087
Woman's Role	.342	-.598
Defense	.258**	.299*
Vat II	.807**	.172
PstVatII	1.718***	.582

N=228

N=260

Source: American National Election Studies, 1980-1990.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 7 provides some evidence as to which variables are affecting Catholic partisanship. During the Reagan/Bush era, 1980 to 1990, ideology and generation were the most significant variables predicting Republican partisanship among committed Catholics. As hypothesized, the force of ideological conservatism is causing partisan change, and this change is most evident among the youngest generation to enter the electorate. Therefore, generational replacement seems to be producing larger Republican gains within the Catholic electorate. Issues positions associated with the Republican party, limited government and defense spending, also registered as significant predictors of Republican partisanship in the regression model. Among non-

committed Catholics, rural voters and union members were most likely to be Democratic. Surprisingly, ideology, aid to minorities, government spending, and defense spending were all significant variables predicting Republican affiliation among non-committed Catholics. Although generational differences were not statistically significant among the non-committed, they at least approached significance. Clearly, younger Catholics who are committed are becoming more Republican. It is also important to note that among non-committed Catholics, ideology also registered as the most statistically significant variable, suggesting that those non-committed Catholics who hold conservative policy positions were more likely to be affiliated with the Republican Party.

The variables in Table 7 which did not register as statistically significant are also worth noting. Surprisingly, considering the amount of literature on the gender gap, even when ideology is excluded from analysis, the gender variable did not even approach statistical significance. When ideology was excluded from the model, the weight of the abortion coefficient, in regression analysis not shown, gained statistical significance. However, gender did not, and this was true for both periods examined. This model does not support the “conventional wisdom” of the political pundits that abortion is the wedge driving the so-called gender gap. In addition, much attention has been allocated in recent scholarship to the idea that racial conservatism has been a major impetus in the decline of the Democratic fortunes among Catholic voters. Again, this model does not support that notion, as racial conservatism was only significant among non-committed Catholics in the first period, 1980 through 1990. The evidence presented here suggests that racial conservatism has not been as prominent in determining partisanship among religious identifiers as many scholars have posited in recent literature.

Table 8 reviews the strength and direction of independent variables upon partisan affiliation among committed and non-committed Catholics in the second period, 1992 through 2000. Again, as hypothesized, ideological conservatism and generation continues to achieve statistical significance, with variables measuring socio-economic status gaining in prominence as a predictor of partisanship during this time-frame.

**Table 8 Independent Variables and Catholic Partisanship, 1992-2000.**

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients Committed	Unstandardized Coefficients Non-committed
(Constant)	-1.724	-.992
Ideology	3.912***	3.999***
Gender	.207	-.121
Union	-.700**	-.459*
Aid to Minorities	.490	.297
Abortion	.196	.160
Jobs	.963	.417
Spend/Service	.955	1.480*
Income	.671	1.085*
Education	1.121*	.306
Suburban	.458	-.023
Rural	-.067	.009
Region	-.072	.009
Woman's Role	.428	.128
Defense	.105	.076
Vat II	.327	.353
Pst Vat II	.575	.865*

N=359

N=403

Source: American National Election Studies, 1992-2000.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Again, conservative ideology is the dominant variable among Catholic voters in predicting partisan affiliation. The evidence from the partisan frequency distribution, the ideological frequency distribution, and the regression model all support the concept of the emergence of an ideological realignment era, beginning in 1980 and gaining momentum throughout the 1990s. Importantly, the age cohort also continues to be a powerful explanatory variable in predicting affiliation, actually gaining statistical significance among non-committed Catholics during this time-period. Once again, as younger cohorts continue to display Republican tendencies, the significance of the age cohort in predicting partisan identification is bad news for the Democratic party. In addition, conservative positions on government intervention in the economy and government spending gained statistical significance. Socio-demographic variables such as income and education levels also gained statistical significance. Once again, gender did not even approach statistical significance, even when ideology was excluded, and the racial conservatism measure actually lost statistical significance. However, no other variable even comes close in statistical significance to the ideological variable.

**Table 9 Independent Variables and Evangelical Partisanship, 1980-1990.**

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient Committed	Unstandardized Coefficient Non-committed
(Constant)	1.311	.518
Ideology	2.330***	2.187***
Gender	-.292	.376
Union	-.261	.006
Aid to Minorities	-.972	-.095
Abortion	.607	.562
Jobs	.826	.635
Spend/Service	1.271***	.516
Income	.088	.660
Education	.636	.458
Suburban	.098	-.186
Rural	-.448	-.189
South	-.947*	-.466
Region	-.069	.001
Woman's Role	.640	.715
Defense	.109	.177
JFK era	.610	.011
Reagan era	.890***	1.473**

N=265

N=164

Source: American National Election Studies, 1980-1990.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 9 reveals that ideology and generation are the most statistically significant variables predicting partisan affiliation among evangelical Christians as well. The data continues to support the thesis of ideological realignment and the notion that a realigning era is most evident among younger voters. In addition to the usual economic and ideological variables, residing in the southern United States is a significant variable in predicting party affiliation for committed evangelicals during the first period (1980-1990), as those religionists who hold

traditional values continue to be drawn to the Republican party. Again, gender did not even approach statistical significance, even when controlled for ideology. For committed and non-committed evangelicals alike, the effect of ideology as a predictor of partisan identification continues to be the most significant variable. Across all models and in all three religious traditions, ideology and its effect on partisanship is highly significant ( $p < .001$ ), with most other variables lagging far behind.

**Table 10 Independent Variables and Evangelical Partisanship, 1992-2000.**

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients Committed	Unstandardized Coefficients Non-committed
(Constant)	-.020	-.766
Ideology	4.296***	2.506***
Gender	.244	.054
Union	-.874***	-.399
Aid to Minorities	-.700	.767
Abortion	.751***	.181
Jobs	1.165***	.671
Spend/Services	.782	1.492
Income	1.621***	.238
Education	.570	.217
Suburban	-.261	.838
Rural	-.494	.834
South	-.077	-.586
Region	-.065	.101
Woman's Role	-.428	.136
Defense	.015	-.018
JFK era	.312	.307
Reagan era	.617**	.967**

N=427

N=208

Source: American National Election Studies, 1992-2000.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 10 shows how ideology continues to be the dominant independent variable among committed and non-committed evangelicals alike. As with Catholic voters, ideological identification is a strong predictor of partisan affiliation. In addition, the age cohort variable also continues to be statistically significant in the second-period as well among both committed and non-committed evangelicals, suggesting the persistence of the trend that today's voters are much more likely to be Republican than the previous generation. Among committed evangelicals, income has become another potent predictor of Republican partisanship, suggesting that they are being propelled toward the Republican party through a mixture of social and economic conservatism. Again, when ideology is excluded from the regression model, the abortion variable becomes statistically significant; however, gender does not reach statistical significance.

**Table 11 Independent Variables and Mainline Partisanship, 1980-1990.**

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient Committed	Unstandardized Coefficient Non-committed
(Constant)	1.545	-.299
Ideology	3.342***	3.283***
Gender	.354	.196
Union	-.799***	-.757***
Aid to Minorities	-.004	.580
Abortion	.434	.824***
Jobs	1.019	.194
Spend/Services	.969	.769
Income	-.120	.787
Education	-.205	1.187***
Suburban	-.272	.154
Rural	-.479	.449
South	-.587	-.562
Region	-.103	-.023
Woman's Role	-.500	.195
Defense	.218***	.133
JFK era	-.040	-.046
Reagan era	-.041	-.224

N=327

N=410

Source: American National Election Studies, 1980-1990.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 11 confirms statistical significance for ideology among committed and non-committed mainline Protestant identifiers during the first period. In addition, economic positions are also significant for committed mainliners, while education levels are significant for the non-committed. As with their Catholic and evangelical counterparts, gender is not a statistically significant variable for mainliners, even when ideology is excluded from the regression model. This is the case even though statistical significance for abortion increases when ideology is

removed, lending further evidence to the idea that abortion may not be the force driving the gender gap in American politics.

**Table 12 Independent Variables and Mainline Partisanship, 1992-2000.**

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients Committed	Unstandardized Coefficients Non-committed
(Constant)	-.186	-.699
Ideology	4.185***	3.654***
Gender	.021	.173
Union	-.051	-.234
Aid to Minorities	.696	.846
Abortion	.780***	.498
Jobs	.277	.665
Spend/Services	1.186***	1.314***
Income	.825	.717
Education	.913**	.621
Suburban	.494	.269
Rural	.002	.098
South	-.307	-.562
Region	-.038	.031
Women's Role	-.142	.004
Defense	-.009	.072
JFK era	-.475	-.203
Reagan era	-.138	-.037

N=405

N=487

Source: American National Election Studies, 1992-2000.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 12 shows that ideology among mainline Protestants, both committed and non-committed, is the most statistically significant variable in predicting partisanship. Interestingly, economic variables have gained statistical significance for committed mainline

Protestants during the second period, and the JFK era age cohort was not significant. Once again, when ideology was excluded, the abortion variable gained significance, however, gender did not.

Clearly the evidence from the regression model confirms the ideological realignment thesis, demonstrating that those who consider themselves to be ideological conservatives are most likely to be Republican, whether they are committed religionists or non-committed. However, the frequency of conservative ideological identification and Republican partisan identification is more likely among the committed. This supports the idea of the decline of denominationalism, as ideology is the most important determinant of partisanship regardless of religious affiliation. For Catholic voters, as well as non-Catholics, partisanship is best predicted by ideology. The regression model shows that Catholics are now becoming part of the broader ideological realignment which has taken place within the electorate since the election of 1980. However, there has been a lag in Catholic movement toward the Republican party, as the regression model shows that ideology as a statistically significant variable was more pronounced for Catholics in the second period. In addition, the ideological frequency distribution also illustrates this lag, as the number of committed Catholics identifying as ideologically conservative was rather anemic until the mid-1990s, when compared to their Protestant counterparts.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The evidence presented in this thesis lends support to important concepts, enhances our understanding of the Catholic voter, and provides a framework for recognizing the electoral consequences of the new dynamic of the “Catholic vote.” Clearly, the frequency distributions and the regression models have demonstrated that ideological affiliation is the strongest predictor of partisan identification. The party system has dramatically changed since the election of 1980, and the evidence shows that the electorate has indeed been engaged in an era of partisan realignment based upon ideology and religious commitment. Within each of the religious traditions examined, Catholic, evangelical, and mainline Protestant, one variable emerged as statistically significant, and dramatically significant, among committed and non-committed members: ideology. This variable was significant among all groups, sub-groups, and in both periods analyzed. In fact, ideology has become, in the mid-to-late 1990s, an even stronger predictor of partisanship than in the 1980s. The research model in this thesis supports the idea of ideological realignment most ably posited by Abramowitz and Saunders (1998).

Beyond this concept, however, it is clear that bases of group support for the parties have also changed since 1980. Conservatives are much more apt to be affiliated with the Republican party, and liberals with the Democratic party, a basic tenet of the ideological realignment theory which has been affirmed in this model. In addition, those who are committed to their religion are much more likely to identify as ideologically conservative, while the non-committed have a greater tendency to identify as ideologically liberal. Therefore, the origin of group partisan

support is based upon religious commitment and ideology, with religiosity serving as the impetus for the partisan cleaving of the electorate.

The other significant aspect of the ideological realignment and the cleaving of the electorate based upon religious commitment is that since commitment and ideology are significant among all three religious traditions examined, the concept of the decline of denominationalism, or “old-world” cleavages based upon group identification or ethnicity, also receives significant support by this research model. Clearly, the new values-based cleavage is driven by religious commitment and ideology and has begun to obscure the traditional cleavage of group identity. However, the research model utilized in this thesis also demonstrates that while denominationalism has dramatically declined, reports of its demise have been exaggerated. The regression model clearly suggests that those Catholic voters who were part of the pre-Vatican II era and were born before 1940 are still carrying their traditional partisan attachment. For example, among committed Catholic pre-Vatican II cohorts, generation affiliation actually outweighed ideology in statistical significance in predicting partisanship. This suggests the continued existence of group-based divisions within the electorate, the emergence of a new commitment based division, as well as the static nature of partisan identification.

The ideological realignment, commitment-based cleavage, and the decline, although not the absence, of denominationalism are also confirmed by the fact that these changes within the electorate are most prevalent among the youngest age cohort. For example, age cohorts are statistically significant predictors of partisanship among the religious groups who have demonstrated the greatest shift in partisan allegiance, committed Catholics and committed evangelicals, in both time-periods. Much of the evidence presented suggests that Catholic voters,

as well as voters in general, who have entered the electorate since 1980 are more likely than were their parents to become affiliated with the Republican party. The commitment-based cleaving of the Catholic electorate which has recently become more pronounced also suggests that “culture war” politics has permeated, as it has the electorate in general, Catholic voters as well.

Scholars continue to debate whether there is or is not such a thing as the “Catholic vote.” Clearly, this study has emphasized the diminution of Catholicity as a base of distinction within the American electorate. Instead, the picture of the Catholic electorate that emerges from this thesis is one of a cleaved “Catholic vote,” one that is younger, more affluent, and conservative and another that is older and more liberal. As the traditionally Democratic bloc of pre-Vatican II age cohorts are inevitably replaced by younger cohorts with Republican tendencies, the latter group will come to dominate the ranks of Catholic voters within the electorate.

A complex set of forces converge to produce a mosaic of sub-groups that is the “Catholic vote.” This study attempts to bring us closer to a more thorough comprehension of the patterns of partisanship among Catholic identifiers within the American electorate. The evidence which has emerged from this study explains the recent trends in the political behavior of American Catholics, and provides a framework for understanding the patterns which will transpire in the elections cycles to come. As the number of pre-Vatican II cohorts continues to dwindle, the ideological force of social conservatism will continue to propel younger committed Catholics toward the Republican party. In addition, the evidence suggests that rising income levels and conservative economic policy will propel a segment of non-committed Catholics toward the Republican party as well. Based upon the data presented in this thesis, then, the Democratic party should continue pursue the traditionally pro-union, pro-Democratic segment of the Catholic

electorate, along with non-committed and ideologically liberal Catholic identifiers. Conversely, Republicans should focus on fostering a coalition of fiscally and socially conservative Catholics. These Catholics are younger and are considered committed to their religion.

There is much work to be done in order to assess the future partisan patterns of American Catholics. The election of 2004 will provide ample opportunity for additional research on the question of Catholic partisan identification, as the Democratic nominee for president of the United States, John F. Kerry, is a Catholic, and is only the third Catholic presidential nominee of any major political party in American history. With extensive press coverage given to Kerry's Communion issues with several American Bishops, continued opposition to abortion and homosexual marriage from the Vatican, and the Democratic party's overt support for abortion and same-sex marriages or "civil-unions," researchers will have plenty of data to analyze with regard to Catholic issues and Catholicism in the American electorate as well as its effect upon Catholic political behavior. The findings which have surfaced in this study, however, reveal a continued decline in Democratic support from Catholic voters, and a continued secular realignment which, although lacking an evangelical fervor, will produce, within a decade, a solid Republican majority among Catholic identifiers within the American electorate.

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