

ers were not only the smallest of the three groups, but also the most rational. Unlike the other two, the switchers based their vote on how they were treated between elections. Moreover, they behaved this way regardless of how they voted in the past. Key also determined that standpaters, the largest group, were rational. He was less upbeat when it came to new voters.

Consequently, while the influential American Voter model suggested that voters were not well informed or concerned and thus often cast their votes irrationally, Key claimed this was not necessarily the case. Key's study presented a picture of the American voter as careful to consider what happened since the last election and to cast their vote retrospectively, on the basis of a reasonable assessment of past performance; to this extent Key argued they were responsible and behaving rationally. Key's defense of the American voter not only served as an important counterpoint to the American Voter model, it has influenced subsequent work in this area as well.

Out of Key's notion of a more reasonable, rational electorate has grown an entire body of literature on electoral behavior from scholars such as Morris Fiorina, Charles Franklin, John Jackson, and many others. Like Key, for example, Fiorina argued that voters behave rationally. Fiorina's work has been influenced not only by Key, but other scholars such as rational choice theorists like Anthony Downs.

The model of rational voting that has developed in subsequent years has been used to help address important questions regarding electoral behavior, such as: Why do people vote? (For instrumental rather than altruistic reasons, in short they expect to benefit in some way). Who votes? (The rational, reasonable, self-interested). While it is appealing in many ways, as is rational choice theory itself, the rational voter model is not without its critics and detractors. One major criticism is that despite its popularity, in the last several decades there is still not enough empirical evidence to support its major assumptions and claims.

SEE ALSO: Voter Knowledge/Ignorance; Voter Self-Interest.

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Realignment

REALIGNMENT THEORY EMERGED as the result of a straightforward observation: American political life has been dominated by only two parties since the Civil War, but their ideologies, their electoral base, and the balance of power between them have changed radically more than once. Realignment theory is the attempt to explain when, why, and how these changes occur. Realignments account for changes in the patterns of two-party competition in the United States as the joint effect of two processes. First, adjustments of the policy positions endorsed by the two parties cause realignments. Second, shifts in partisan support from various constituencies as a response to these adjustments create realignments. To qualify as realignments, these changes must be durable. Typically, realignments start with a national election where the balance of power between the two parties is altered significantly.

There are several ways in which realignments can be analyzed and assessed. One approach is to look at survey data, and see if any changes in the patterns of partisan support are discernible at the individual level. Unfortunately, survey data are not available for most of the last two centuries. However, scholars have analyzed aggregate electoral returns available at state, county, town, or precinct levels, to detect differences or changes in voting patterns across various regions or between urban and rural locations.

Comparing the regional bases of support for each party in presidential elections with those of legislative elections offers useful information about the process of realignment. For instance, the results for the Democratic Party in the south have traditionally been better in the elections for Congress than they were in presidential elections. The same can be said about the results of the Republican Party in New England. The explanation is simple: there were liberal and conservative wings in both parties, and in each case, the presidential candidate represented the dominant faction, liberal in the Democratic case, conservative in the Republican case. The Democratic incumbents in the conservative south represented that party's conservative minority, and the Republican incumbents in the liberal northeast represented that party's liberal minority. These gaps were only closed when conservative Republican legislators replaced conservative Democrats in the south, and when liberal Democrats replaced liberal Republicans in

New England. In both cases, the result was that parties became more homogeneous ideologically, with many voters changing their party allegiance in the process.

Another approach is to compare shifts in the voting patterns of rural versus urban locations. V.O. Key, one of the intellectual fathers of the theory of realignments, used this approach to compare electoral returns in two localities in Massachusetts. He compared Somerville, a city with a large percentage of foreign-born inhabitants, and an equally large number of Catholics, with Ashfield, a small, overwhelmingly native-born and Protestant community. In the early 1900s, the Democratic candidates' share of the vote in presidential elections in the two communities was virtually the same. By the 1920s, the Democratic vote in Somerville started to rise, whereas in Ashfield it started to fall, so that by 1932 the gap between the two localities in Democratic support was 50 percent.

To show changes in partisan support among various ethnic groups, Key compared Republican registration in three Boston wards, ward 5 (predominantly "Yankee"), ward 14 (Jewish), and ward 15 (Irish), between 1928 and 1952. In both ward 5 and ward 15, Republican registration remained about the same throughout the period (above 60 percent in the first case, less than 15 percent in the second). In the Jewish ward, though, the change was dramatic. There was a fourfold decrease in Republican registration, from an almost 80 percent high in 1928 to less than 20 percent in 1952.

These examples show creative ways in which scholars have circumvented the absence of survey data. Equally important, they highlight the type of changes in the electoral base of the two parties that constitute a central element of realignments. To explain realignments, it is useful to consider the liberal-conservative dimension typically used to describe political competition. Such a one-dimensional view is of limited use here, and cannot readily explain the changes in party positions and voter support that are associated with realignments. Instead, competition involves at least two dimensions: an economic dimension and a social dimension. While the Republican Party represents conservative policy positions on both dimensions, and the Democratic Party represents the liberal positions, it was not always like this.

In the early 20th century, the Republican Party was at least as liberal as the Democratic Party on social issues. As civil rights issues moved into the forefront of political debate during the 1950s and 1960s, the Republican Party was gradually taken over by its conservative wing,

and moved toward a more conservative position on social issues, whereas the Democratic Party moved in the opposite direction. A process of voter adjustment followed this process of changing the policy positions endorsed by each party. For example, libertarian voters, who are economically conservative, but socially liberal, did not feel represented by either party. Some tried to find a different vehicle for representation, such as the Libertarian Party. Others tried to take over one party or the other, moving it into a libertarian position. If they succeeded, the outcome would be another realignment.

While there is disagreement about how many realignments have occurred so far, and their exact timing, the most serious contenders for the title of realigning elections are 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1932. Whether there has been an additional realigning election since the 1960s is debatable, but the current positions of the two parties and their electoral base are very different from what they were at the time of the New Deal. Thus, if there has not been a realigning election since, perhaps there has been a secular (or creeping) realignment, whose end result is similar to that of a realigning election. Although the concept of realignment was developed in the context of American politics, it can be useful to explain political developments elsewhere, for instance, to account for the rise in middle-class support for moderate left-wing (especially Green) parties in other advanced industrial democracies.

SEE ALSO: Conservatism; Election Types; Liberalism.

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Recall

THE RECALL IS an election to remove a public official from office before the end of his or her term. It is