

# Examining Strength of Party Affiliation Over Time

## Overview

### Description

Political parties are an essential part of political culture in the United States. The fortunes of both major political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, rise and fall over time. In this assignment, students are asked to examine data about political party affiliation over time and extrapolate the implications for political parties in the future.

**Final Product:** Students will produce a report in which they act as political advisors to a political party. They will summarize the national election results since the 2006 election and then, based on the data they have reviewed for their assigned demographic, advise the party by 1) explaining how party strength is faring currently and 2) providing advice to party leaders on how to strengthen the party in the future.

### Subject

US Government

### Task Level

Grade 12

### Objectives

Students will:

- Perform independent research.
- Interpret and explain trends found in data.
- Determine the implications of data trends and draw conclusions.
- Apply conclusions toward problem solving to help strengthen a particular political party.
- Produce a report to the leadership of a political party, which addresses current concerns about party strength.

### Preparation

- Read the Instructor Task Information and the Student Notes.
- Prepare student copies of the Student Notes pages.

- Access the American National Election Studies website, <http://www.electionstudies.org>, which provides substantive data on national elections from 1952 through 2004. Teacher may choose to add more recent election data as available.
- Determine which voting behavior trends students will be working with.
- Determine which demographic groups students will be working with.
- Determine the number and depth of the trend descriptions that will be required.
- Determine the number and depth of the party suggestions to be required of the students.
- Provide students with websites that focus on the elections of 2006 and 2008, from which they are to extrapolate further information about the trends in political party strength. Such websites include:
  - Election of 2008:  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/114016/state-states-political-party-affiliation.aspx>  
“State of the States: Political Party Affiliation.”  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/118285/Democrats-Best-Among-Generation-Baby-Boomers.aspx>
  - <http://www.gallup.com/poll/118207/Republicans-Face-Steep-Uphill-Climb-Among-Women.aspx>
  - Election of 2006:  
[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/11/election\\_2006\\_what\\_happened\\_an.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2006/11/election_2006_what_happened_an.html)  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/congress/newfaces07/>

## Prior Knowledge

- Students should be able to read and interpret tables and graphs as well as access websites on the Internet.
- Students should have some knowledge of the history of America’s two major political parties and be aware of changes in each party’s membership over the past 60 years.

## Key Concepts and Terms

- Democrat
- Partisanship
- Political party affiliation
- Political socialization
- Polling
- Realignment
- Republican

## Time Frame

This assignment requires one class period for introducing and beginning research. Devote an additional class period for group practice with data interpretation and usage. Outside of class, students complete additional online research and develop a draft of their data interpretations in a week. Instructor reviews of interpretations and overview of expectations for implications section of the paper may be done in class, but spend a class period discussing results, expectations and modeling effective work. Allow students a week outside of class to revise their drafts. This assignment can be modified to meet the needs of different classroom schedules and student ability levels.

## *Instructional Plan*

### **Getting Started**

#### ***Learning Objectives***

Students will:

- Explain the importance of party affiliation to the political process.
- Discuss how political socialization affects party affiliation.
- List the historical trends in partisanship since 1952.

#### ***Procedure***

1. Discuss with students the importance of party affiliation in American politics, why people join parties and what some historical party realignments have been. Have students read the textbook chapter on political parties, including history, party functions, and their role in government.
2. Review with students how to interpret data from tables and how to draw conclusions from such data.
3. Review with students the difference between primary and secondary sources and the value of each in research.
4. Provide students with data (charts, graphs, etc.) on the 2004 election using the following websites:  
[http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/politics/2004\\_ELECTIONRESULTS\\_GRAPHIC/](http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/politics/2004_ELECTIONRESULTS_GRAPHIC/)  
<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=2004>  
[http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2004/president/us/general\\_election\\_bush\\_vs\\_kerry-939.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2004/president/us/general_election_bush_vs_kerry-939.html)

Break them into groups and allow them to interpret the data and explain its relevance to the election. Ask them how and when they would use this information.

### **Investigating**

#### ***Learning Objectives***

Students will:

- Access data on the Internet.
- Observe the trends of partisanship across demographic groups.

### ***Procedure***

1. Have students access the American National Election Studies website (<http://www.electionstudies.org>). Have them click on the link marked Guide to Public Opinion, and then select the link for Partisanship. Have students select the link for Strength of Partisanship. There are four links under this heading. Make sure the class is divided evenly among the four options listed. Tell students to scroll down to the links marked Percent among demographic groups who responded and select the response link they have been assigned (Independent, Leaning independent, and so on).
2. Have students analyze the table for the demographic they have chosen (gender, age, education, and so on).
3. For the elections of 2006 and 2008, have students collect as much information as possible that relates to their chosen demographic. If possible, have students expand the table to include the latest elections.

## **Drawing Conclusions**

### ***Learning Objectives***

Students will:

- Apply knowledge of political parties to demographic data.
- Explain the trends in partisanship, especially since 2006.
- Produce well-reasoned arguments for data interpretation.
- Present analyzed data in a clear and concise manner in the form of a written report.

### ***Procedure***

1. Ask students to explain the trends demonstrated among the demographic groups selected. This should be done as homework and presented in written form.
2. After discussion in class about the identified trends, have each student prepare a report. Students should act as political advisors to a political party and advise the party, based on the data they have seen. This report should include:
  - a. A brief summary of the party's ups and downs since 1952.
  - b. A discussion and description of the most current trends.
  - c. An explanation of why partisanship may be increasing or decreasing.
  - d. Students' expectations (based on the data) for shifts in partisanship in the future.
  - e. Students' advice to party leaders for adapting to changes in partisanship over time.

- f. A reference list.
3. Provide feedback on report drafts.
4. Discuss report results, expectations, and model strong examples of student work.
5. Instruct students on how to revise and allow them to resubmit their work.

## *Scaffolding/Instructional Support*

The goal of scaffolding is to provide support to encourage student success, independence, and self-management. Instructors can use these suggestions, in part or all together, to meet diverse student needs. The more skilled the student, however, the less scaffolding that he or she will need. Some examples of scaffolding that could apply to this assignment include:

- In the Getting Started section, bring in a video of the news footage of the 1968 Democrat Convention riots that occurred in the heat of the Vietnam War. This illustrates the passions that may be involved with party politics since the people were demonstrating against a Democrat administration.
- Convert the individual activities to group work. For example, four groups of students (representing "the four options" referred to under Procedure #1 on pg. 4) could give PowerPoint presentations of their findings.
  - Practice interpreting data in class on a more intensive level. If the directions seem too general or vague, make them more explicit.
  - Provide a review or have a class discussion of the goals and functions of political parties.
  - Provide a review or have a class discussion on political socialization and the importance of demographics.
  - Review students' interpretations of data beyond the election of 2004.
  - Check student work on data interpretation several times throughout the assignment.
  - Have students provide an outline of their projects (prior to turning in final reports) detailing the data-based arguments to be included in their final reports.
  - Provide opportunities for multiple drafts and review of the final report.

## Solutions

The information below is intended to help you assess students' final work products. It may not represent all possible strategies and ideas. The accompanying scoring guide provides specific examples of ways a student might demonstrate content understanding and mastery of cross-disciplinary skills.

### **Sample Findings**

If you have asked students to look at the Strength of Partisanship table, they will see that the percentage of males who classified themselves as strong partisans dropped from 32 percent in 2000 to 31 percent in 2002 to 28 percent in 2004. During the same time females increased from 31 percent to 38 percent. Starting in the 1990s, women demonstrated a higher degree of partisanship than men. This difference becomes greater in the 2000s. Factors that explain this might include gender differences on issues such as the war in Iraq, national security questions, and the economy. Students should examine data from the 2006 and 2008 elections to verify the continuance of this trend. If it did not continue, have students use their knowledge of events of these years to suggest reasons for the change.

Another trend obvious from the data is the disparity in strong partisanship across levels of educational attainment. From the 1950s through the late 1980s, those with lower levels of education were significantly more likely to classify themselves as strong partisans than those with higher levels of education. If possible, have students determine whether this trend held in 2006 and 2008.

The advice given to political party leaders by the students should be linked to the data they are discussing and explaining. So if they discussed partisanship and gender, they should advise the parties on which gender would require more attention to draw into the party (men), which might be more likely to cross party lines and vote for the other party (men), and which is more likely to be loyal party members (women). But they should also consider the overall data implications—i.e., only 28 percent of men and 38 percent of women classified themselves as strong partisans in 2004. That suggests that the overwhelming majority of people do not think of themselves as strong partisans, so political parties cannot simply count on their votes. Parties will have to work to educate and attract voters on their issues and for their candidates, realizing that the party label (name) by itself will not suffice.

### **Necessary Elements**

Group-generated solutions can be in the form of rules, legal measures, community action projects, prevention, and so on. If any of these solutions involve freedom of speech or expression issues, they must be discussed as possible limitations on the groups' proposed solutions.

Students should put forth a persuasive argument, backed by sufficient evidence, to support their recommendations to a political party about what that party should do to gain or keep loyalty among members of a demographic group.

Students should cite information that supports their analysis of the trends in political partisanship. They should advance a logical conclusion clearly based in research and data analysis rather than opinion. Any data sources used should be cited accurately and a Works Cited page should be included.

***Key Connections***

Students should apply logic to hypothesize about possible reasons for demographic trends they identify, such as using examples from the historical context to support their assertions.

Students should demonstrate adequate recognition of the scope of a complex issue. They should effectively break the complex task of determining and explaining fluctuations in partisanship into component tasks that can be undertaken separately.

## TCCRS Cross-Disciplinary Standards Addressed

| Performance Expectation  | Getting Started | Investigating | Drawing Conclusions |
|--|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <i>I. Key Cognitive Skills</i>   |                 |               |                     |
| A.1. Engage in scholarly inquiry and dialogue.   | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| B.1. Consider arguments and conclusions of self and others.  | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| B.2. Construct well-reasoned arguments to explain phenomena, validate conjectures, or support positions. |                 |               | ✓                   |
| C.1. Analyze a situation to identify a problem to be solved.   | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| C.3. Collect evidence and data systematically and directly relate to solving a problem.                  | ✓               | ✓             |                     |
| D.1. Self-monitor learning needs and seek assistance when needed.  | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| D.2. Use study habits necessary to manage academic pursuits and requirements.                            | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| D.3. Strive for accuracy and precision.  | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| D.4. Persevere to complete and master tasks.   | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| E.1. Work independently.   | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| F.1. Attribute ideas and information to source materials and people.                                     |                 |               | ✓                   |
| F.4. Understand and adhere to ethical codes of conduct.  | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| <i>II. Foundational Skills</i>   |                 |               |                     |
| A.1. Use effective prereading strategies.  | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| A.5. Analyze textual information critically.   | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| B.1. Write clearly and coherently using standard writing conventions.                                    |                 |               | ✓                   |
| C.5. Synthesize and organize information effectively.  |                 |               | ✓                   |
| C.6. Design and present an effective product.  |                 |               | ✓                   |

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| D.1. Identify patterns or departures from patterns among data. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| E.1. Use technology to gather information.                     | ✓ | ✓ |   |

### TCCRS Social Studies Standards Addressed

| Performance Expectation   | Getting Started | Investigating | Drawing Conclusions |
|---|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <i>I. Interrelated Disciplines and Skills</i>   |                 |               |                     |
| B.3. Analyze causes and effects of major political, economic, and social changes in U.S. and world history.                                     |                 | ✓             | ✓                   |
| C.3. Explain and analyze the importance of civic engagement.  | ✓               |               | ✓                   |
| E.1. Identify different social groups (e.g., clubs, religious organizations) and examine how they form and how and why they sustain themselves. | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| E.2. Define the concept of socialization and analyze the role socialization plays in human development and behavior.                            | ✓               |               |                     |
| F.1. Use a variety of research and analytical tools to explore questions or issues thoroughly and fairly.                                       |                 | ✓             |                     |
| F.2. Analyze ethical issues in historical, cultural, and social contexts.   |                 |               | ✓                   |
| <i>II. Diverse Human Perspectives and Experiences</i>   |                 |               |                     |
| B.4. Evaluate how major philosophical and intellectual concepts influence human behavior or identity.   |                 |               | ✓                   |
| B.6. Analyze how individual and group identities are established and change over time.  | ✓               | ✓             | ✓                   |
| <i>IV. Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation of Information</i>   |                 |               |                     |
| A.1. Identify and analyze the main idea(s) and point(s) of view in sources.   | ✓               | ✓             |                     |

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| A.4. Understand the differences between a primary and secondary source and use each appropriately to conduct research and construct arguments. | ✓ | ✓ |   |
| A.6. Read research data critically.  | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| B.3. Gather, organize, and display the results of data and research.   | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| B.4. Identify and collect sources.   |   | ✓ |   |
| D.1. Construct a thesis that is supported by evidence.   |   |   | ✓ |
| D.2. Recognize and evaluate counter arguments.   |   |   | ✓ |
| <i>V. Effective Communication</i>  |   |   |   |
| A.2. Use conventions of standard written English.  |   |   | ✓ |
| B.1. Attribute ideas and information to source materials and authors.  |   |   | ✓ |

## TEKS Standards Addressed

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| <b><i>Examining Strength of Party Affiliation - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Social Studies, Government</i></b>   |
| 113.44.c.11. Government. The student understands the role of political parties in the U.S. system of government. The student is expected to:<br>113.44.c.11.C. identify opportunities for citizens to participate in political party activities at local, state, and national levels.   |
| 113.44.c.14. Citizenship. The student understands the difference between personal and civic responsibilities. The student is expected to:<br>113.44.c.14.A. explain the difference between personal and civic responsibilities.<br>113.44.c.14.B. evaluate whether and/or when the obligation of citizenship requires that personal desires and interests be subordinated to the public good.<br>113.44.c.14.C. understand the responsibilities, duties, and obligations of citizenship such as being well informed about civic affairs, serving in the military, voting, serving on a jury, observing the laws, paying taxes, and serving the public good.<br>113.44.c.14.D. understand the voter registration process and the criteria for voting in elections. |
| 113.44.c.15. Citizenship. The student understands the importance of voluntary individual participation in the U.S. constitutional republic. The student is expected to:<br>113.44.c.15.A. analyze the effectiveness of various methods of participation in the political process at local, state, and national levels.<br>113.44.c.15.B. analyze historical and contemporary examples of citizen movements to bring about political change or to maintain continuity<br>113.44.c.15.C. understand the factors that influence an individual's political attitudes and actions.   |

**Examining Strength of Party Affiliation - Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Social Studies, Government**

113.44.c.16. Citizenship. The student understands the importance of the expression of different points of view in a constitutional republic. The student is expected to:

113.44.c.16.A. examine different points of view of political parties and interest groups such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the National Rifle Association (NRA), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) on important contemporary issues.

113.44.c.17. Culture. The student understands the relationship between government policies and the culture of the United States. The student is expected to:

113.44.c.17.A. evaluate a U.S. government policy or court decision that has affected a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the U.S. Supreme Court cases of *Hernandez v. Texas* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*.

113.44.c.17.B. explain changes in American culture brought about by government policies such as voting rights, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill of Rights), the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, affirmative action, and racial integration.

113.44.c.19. Science, technology, and society. The student understands the impact of advances in science and technology on government and society. The student is expected to:

113.44.c.19.A. understand the potential impact on society of recent scientific discoveries and technological innovations.

113.44.c.19.B. evaluate the impact of the Internet and other electronic information on the political process.

113.44.c.20. Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:

113.44.c.20.A. analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions.

113.44.c.20.B. create a product on a contemporary government issue or topic using critical methods of inquiry.

113.44.c.20.C. analyze and defend a point of view on a current political issue.

113.44.c.20.D. analyze and evaluate the validity of information, arguments, and counterarguments from primary and secondary sources for bias, propaganda, point of view, and frame of reference.

113.44.c.20.E. evaluate government data using charts, tables, graphs, and maps.

113.44.c.20.F. use appropriate mathematical skills to interpret social studies information such as maps and graphs.

113.44.c.21. Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

113.44.c.21.A. use social studies terminology correctly.

113.44.c.21.B. use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation.

113.44.c.21.C. transfer information from one medium to another, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using computer software as appropriate.

113.44.c.21.D. create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.

# Examining Strength of Party Affiliation Over Time

## *Introduction*

In this assignment, you are going to review information on how different groups in society feel about political parties. Using data from the last 60 years, you will provide explanations of the trends in party affiliation. The final product is a report in which you act as a political advisor to a political party and advise its leaders on what the data trends suggest for its future as well as how you think the leaders should adjust their activities.

## *Directions*

### **Getting Started**

1. Using your government textbook, determine the functions of a political party.
2. Participate in a discussion on interpreting data and the use of primary and secondary sources. Analyze in groups the data for the 2004 election. Share your results with the class.
3. Access the American National Election Studies website, <http://www.electionstudies.org>.
4. Find the data table selected by your instructor.
5. Examine the table and identify the trends.
6. Make notes for yourself of every trend you can see in the data.
7. Ask your instructor for feedback on the trends you have identified.
8. Access at least three more websites to obtain information about the elections of 2006 and 2008. Try to determine whether the trends through 2004 continued or if new trends have since emerged.

### **Investigating**

1. For each trend you have identified, use your knowledge of American history and politics to determine what might explain the fluctuations in partisanship. To do this you will need to:
  - a. Look at the points in the data where you see changes in the patterns of partisanship.
  - b. Identify the year or the decade of the change.

- c. Look up (in a history textbook or online) the major events or factors of that time that might explain this shift in partisanship.

## Drawing Conclusions

1. Select a political party (Democrat or Republican) on which to focus your investigation.
2. Taking into consideration the goals and functions of political parties, explain how each trend you identified affects the party.
3. Develop a list of suggestions (and explain each) of what the party should do or what changes need to be made in light of the changes in partisanship you have identified.
4. Write a report incorporating these suggestions. Preface your report with a brief summary of the ups and downs of the political party since 1952. Properly cite sources. Your report should include:
  - a. A brief summary of the party's ups and downs since 1952.
  - b. A discussion and description of the most current trends.
  - c. An explanation of why partisanship may be increasing or decreasing.
  - d. Your expectation (based on the data) for shifts in partisanship in the future.
  - e. Your advice to party leaders for adapting to changes in partisanship over time.
  - f. A reference list.
5. Revise your drafts based on teacher feedback and class discussion.
6. Submit final drafts.