

8. The Rise of the Republican Right and the New Democrats

The rightward turn in party politics, under way since the 1970s, was deeply shaped by race, class, and gender politics. Under pressure from corporate leaders, politicians of both parties, but especially Republicans, embraced a neoliberal economic agenda that called for minimal governmental interference with labor markets and economic transactions. At the same time, declining participation of working-class voters and the absence of a strong progressive movement reduced political pressure to protect workers' rights. The result was a dramatic rollback in corporate taxes, social services, and environmental and workplace regulations. Meanwhile, Republicans gained popularity among traditional whites—especially southern, evangelical, male, and working-class whites—by constructing an emotionally powerful, racially coded conservative discourse and championing policies that appealed to nativism, racial resentment, and patriarchal “family values.” To try to recapture support among traditional white voters, New Democrats moved rightward on social issues. Like Republicans, they championed tough immigration, criminal justice, and welfare policies. Their strategy has not been wholly successful, however. Lacking a bold vision and rhetoric of their own, and unable to effectively address the economic concerns of white working-class voters, Democrats have been unable to recapture the popularity they once had.

CONSERVATIVE CORPORATE POLITICS

During the 1970s, corporate elites became more mobilized politically. One manifestation of this was the growth of coordinated corporate campaign contributions.¹ As Jerome Himmelstein points out, “In 1974 labor Political Action Committees [PACs] still outnumbered corporate PACs by 201 to

89. Within two years corporate PACs outnumbered labor PACs by almost two to one (433 to 224), and by 1984 by more than four to one (1,682 to 394).² By the late 1990s, corporate PACs spent eleven times as much as labor PACs on political campaigns.³ As Manza and Brooks observe, “the largess available from corporate PAC sources . . . has been important in transforming both parties, but especially the Democratic party, into more corporate-oriented parties increasingly incapable of mobilizing voters from below.”⁴ American business leaders also hired additional lawyers and government relations staff, funded broad-based lobbying organizations, and opened Washington offices. They invested more money in think tanks that could shape public opinion and policy debates through advertising campaigns, editorials, and research.⁵ While business leaders continued to be politically divided, they formed more broad-based coalitions, rather than acting as narrow interest groups representing particular industries or companies.⁶

Conservative corporate heads were especially mobilized. Beginning in the 1970s, business investments in “ultra-conservative” think tanks outpaced those in “moderate-conservative” ones.⁷ Right-wing think tanks paved the way for conservative policy reforms by promoting supply-side economics and neoliberalism. Along with corporate lobbyists, they pushed for an agenda that included tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy, decreased social spending, and fewer government regulations on business activity.⁸ Conservative business leaders urged the corporate community to favor Republicans rather than incumbents, as they usually did. In the 1980 election, “88 percent of the largest corporate PACs engaged in an ideological strategy by directing more than 30 percent of their giving to Republican challengers, six times the figure for the next closest year, 1984, when 14 corporations did so.”⁹ This rightward shift in corporate campaign contributions, along with Reagan’s 1980 victory, put Democrats on the defensive. In an effort to recapture support from both corporate donors and white voters, moderate Democrats—known as the “new Democrats”—formed the Democratic Leadership Council and moved their party rightward on economic and social issues.¹⁰ Afterward, corporate PACs returned to their pragmatic strategy of giving more money to incumbents.¹¹

Increased corporate political activity, and its more conservative bent after 1970, constituted a response to a perceived economic and political crisis. In part, corporate elites were reacting to increasing international economic competition and declining rates of economic growth and profit. Economic restructuring also meant that business leaders were more invested in labor-intensive service industries, which increased pressure on them to reduce

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labor costs. Many American businesses, especially low-wage employers and small businesses, responded to these economic pressures by pursuing the “low road” to economic growth. They sought to increase profits and outmaneuver their rivals by minimizing taxes and labor costs.¹² At the same time, corporate heads were reacting to the erosion of their political power. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, mass-based movements and public interest groups made considerable gains in terms of consumer and environmental regulations.¹³ Along with low-wage employers, industries most affected by government regulation—such as oil, chemical, lumber, paper, pharmaceutical, fabricated metals, rubber, and machinery—donated heavily to Republicans in 1978 and 1980.¹⁴ Conservative corporations were politically powerful because they had tremendous resources to promote ideas and candidates and because they controlled the economy and could disinvest, or threaten to do so, if governmental policies were not perceived as “business-friendly.”¹⁵

Increased political activity by conservative corporate elites led to noticeable shifts in national domestic policies. Under the Reagan, Bush I, and Bush II administrations, Congress cut taxes for corporations and the wealthy.¹⁶ All three Republican administrations oversaw declines in regulatory programs and generally favored business over labor interests. President Reagan began his administration by firing and permanently replacing striking federal air traffic controllers, and then appointed “business-friendly” members to the National Labor Relations Board. Likewise, George W. Bush, at the behest of employer groups, intervened in a contract dispute between the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the Pacific Maritime Association, ending the employers’ eleven-day lockout and reducing the union’s bargaining power. He later championed regulations to strip overtime pay from white-collar workers.¹⁷

Republicans, increasingly followed by new Democrats, championed “balanced-budget conservatism,” which made deficit reduction through social spending cuts a major priority in the 1980s and 1990s. However, between 1981 and 1983, under Reagan, deficits doubled as a percentage of federal spending, as military spending rose to new heights, unemployment rose, and huge corporate tax cuts were implemented. Deficits reached unprecedented levels—\$200 billion—in the mid-1980s. The sheer magnitude of the deficit—and the threat it posed in terms of raising taxes, inflating interest rates, and reducing the value of government bonds—increased political support among the corporate elite for reducing the deficit. Given the benefits they accrued from a strong military and tax cuts, corporations and wealthy families sought to balance the budget mainly through cutbacks on federal

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aid to the poor.¹⁸ The spread of such ideas among financiers in the 1980s and 1990s was especially significant, since they could refuse to buy government bonds and raise interest rates, which would hurt the economy and make it difficult to finance federal deficits. President Clinton was warned of this, which encouraged him to make deficit reduction a priority, despite his earlier promises to raise corporate taxes and create jobs.¹⁹ Indeed, although President Clinton pushed for a national health insurance plan, tougher environmental and workplace regulations, and the Family and Medical Leave Act, he favored free trade, deficit reduction, and welfare reform.²⁰ George W. Bush, who has championed both corporate tax cuts and bloated military budgets, belies fiscal logic. Yet, like his predecessors, he continues to oppose efforts to increase welfare expenditure, while Congressional support for proposals to link spending cuts to tax cuts remains strong.²¹

THE RIGHTWARD TURN IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

Conservative business elites would not have been as influential as they were, however, had Republicans not been able to build a politically effective “top-down” coalition, gaining mass support from white voters.²² Whereas black support for Democratic presidential candidates has been remarkably stable, white support declined 13 percent between 1960–64 and 1992–96. Almost the entire decline occurred among less educated whites. Whereas support for Democratic candidates declined by only 1 percent among college-educated whites, it declined by 14 percent among those without four-year college degrees.²³ As Manza and Brooks observe, “Non-skilled workers moved from being the most Democratic class in all earlier elections to only the fourth most Democratic class in 1996.”²⁴ Meanwhile, professionals were becoming more supportive of Democrats because of their liberal positions on social issues. By 2000, middle-class whites were more likely to vote Democratic than their working-class counterparts, only 40 percent of whom supported the Democratic presidential nominee, Al Gore.²⁵

Republicans’ growing appeal among whites was especially strong in the South. Electoral realignment among southern whites, underway since the 1940s, when Democrats stepped up concessions to the civil rights movement, became more marked after 1964, and even more pronounced after 1980.²⁶ Figure 2 shows the rising share of Congressional seats held by Republicans in the former Confederate states and border states. Between 1980 and 2000, Republicans’ share of southern House seats grew from 35 to 58 percent, while their share of southern senators grew from 28 to 59 percent.²⁷

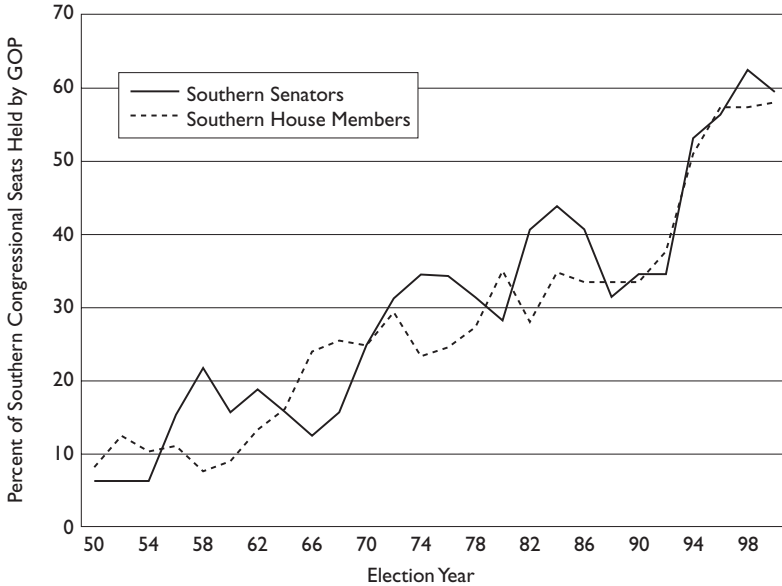


Figure 2. Republican strength in southern congressional seats, 1950–2000. (Southern states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.) Source: John L. Moore, Jon P. Preimesberger, and David R. Tarr, eds., *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), pp. 1236–66, 1569–77.

Republican gains in the 1980s and 1990s were partly related to their ability to mobilize resources. Unlike the Democratic National Committee, the Republican National Committee controlled the party's campaign fund, making it better able to strategically channel its funds to close races.²⁸ Because their policies were more favorable to the rich, Republican Party committees were better fundraisers than their Democratic counterparts. For example, they raised more than three times as much as their Democratic counterparts between 1977 and 1984, enabling them to gather more information about the electorate and its attitudes.²⁹ Yet, resources alone do not sway voters. The decline of progressive social movements, including the civil rights, feminist, and labor movements, and Democrats' lack of an alternative vision provided an ideological vacuum, a vacuum filled by conservative voices that constructed an emotionally powerful, coherent political discourse.³⁰

As George Lakoff suggests, conservatives skillfully drew conceptual links between public policy and a culturally resonant metaphor for morality: the

strict father. The “strict father” model of morality emphasizes paternal authority and strict rules in order to encourage “self-discipline, self-reliance, and respect for legitimate authority.”³¹ Drawing on the popular metaphor of the nation as a family, this moral model presents people as naturally weak and in need of paternal protection from external threats and of strict punishment to reinforce self-discipline and self-reliance. This model for morality underlies support for a variety of disparate policies, including opposition to gun control and affirmative action and support for military spending, welfare reform, and restrictive immigration laws. Lakoff argues that conservatives “have learned that politics is about family and morality and myth and metaphor and emotional identification. They have, over the past twenty-five years, managed to forge conceptual links in the voters’ minds between morality and public policy. They have done this by carefully working out their values, comprehending their myths, and designing a language to fit those values and myths so that they can evoke them with powerful slogans, repeated over and over again, that reinforce those family-morality-policy links, until the connections have come to seem natural to many Americans, including the media.”³² Meanwhile, liberals have been unable to construct a bold alternative agenda or a coherent and emotionally powerful discourse of their own. Instead, they have engaged in issue-by-issue debates and appealed to rationality and group interest.³³

Conservative rhetoric was powerful partly because it drew on widely held racist, sexist, and classist beliefs. Invoking the myth of equal opportunity, conservatives bestow moral authority on dominant groups, viewing their success as the result of moral strength, while blaming the misfortunes of disadvantaged groups on personal deficiencies.³⁴ The appeal of this paternalistic rhetoric grew among white workers, concerned about the rise of single motherhood and increasingly resentful of government programs for racial minorities and the poor. Such resentments were racially motivated but also fueled by the economic losses that workers experienced at the end of the century.

ECONOMIC LOSSES AND PRAGMATIC CONSERVATISM

Poor economic conditions during the Carter years undermined Democrats’ image among these voters as the party of prosperity.³⁵ The 1970s witnessed a period of “stagflation,” as economic growth and productivity slowed after 1973. Accompanying this was a shift in the economy from manufacturing to services, which helped keep unemployment levels high. For those at the bottom of the labor market, real wages stagnated or even declined after

1973. Meanwhile, inflation rose, increasing the perceived burden of taxes and social expenditures. Worsening this situation, Democrats approved regressive taxation policies, including a rise in Social Security taxes, which hit workers with below-median incomes the hardest.³⁶

As Ruy Teixeira and Joel Rogers suggest, white working-class voters became pragmatically conservative in this context. Resentful of Democratic politicians, who did little to alleviate their economic woes, they were attracted to Republicans' antitax message because it promised to save them money. White workers did not, however, become more ideologically conservative. As numerous polls show, they still support federal intervention in many policy areas, including economic management, health care, aid for the elderly, and conservation of natural resources.³⁷ Nevertheless, Republican appeals to "taxpayers' interests" and attacks on federal programs that disproportionately serve minorities, such as AFDC, public housing, and grants-in-aid to cities, struck a chord with white suburban working- and middle-class voters. Republicans' antitax and antistatist messages strategically pitted white middle-class and working-class "taxpayers" against poor, minority "tax eaters." This united them with ideologically conservative corporations around an antiwelfare agenda, despite differences in their interests regarding regressive taxes, government regulation, and social spending.³⁸

Promises that Republicans' tax cuts would stimulate economic recovery and benefit workers were unfulfilled, however. Conditions worsened for most white workers in the 1980s and 1990s. The combined effects of downsizing, deindustrialization, and offshore production significantly raised unemployment rates, which peaked at 9.7 percent in 1982 and remained above 5 percent through 1995.³⁹ Even during the employment boom of the late 1990s, workers experienced economic insecurity. Because employers relied more heavily on contingent workers, it became more difficult for workers to find long-term fulltime jobs. By 1997, about 30 percent of the labor force was temporary, part-time, or contract workers.⁴⁰ Real wages for those at the bottom of the labor market stagnated or declined.⁴¹

Working-class voters became increasingly disaffected and volatile, as neither party seemed capable of improving their lives. In the Clinton-Dole presidential race in 1996, voter participation was the lowest it had been since 1924. That year, less than half (49 percent) of the voting-age population actually voted, compared to 53 percent in 1980 and 62 percent in 1960. Despite "get out the vote" campaigns by both parties, voting participation levels rose only slightly (2 percent) in the 2000 election.⁴² Electoral apathy was especially concentrated among low-income and working-class voters, who were traditionally Democratic. The turnout rate was less than 35 per-

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cent for the poorest one-fifth of the population in 1996, compared to 75 percent for the richest one-fifth of Americans, a far larger class gap than in most industrialized countries. Likewise, middle-class voters were 15 percent more likely than working-class voters to vote in 2000.⁴³ Such trends benefited Republicans and pushed Democrats rightward on welfare issues.

Nevertheless, many white workers renewed their support for the Democrats in 1992, helping to elect Bill Clinton. Clinton's southern roots and his promises to expand social programs to "make work pay" increased his popular appeal. Support for Democrats remained weak, however, and the conservative realignment among nonskilled workers became even sharper after 1992, as wages continued to stagnate or decline and Clinton appeared incapable of fulfilling his electoral promises to working families. Stymied by Congressional opposition, he failed to enact his touted public health insurance program. At the same time, under pressure from Wall Street and the Federal Reserve, Clinton made deficit reduction a major priority. He increased taxes, including the gas tax, and toned down his requests for social programs. Such backtracking was encouraged by Democrats' greater reliance on middle-class and affluent voters. Whereas Kennedy received about three times as many votes from working-class voters as from professional and managerial voters in 1960, in 1992 Clinton received about equal numbers of votes from these classes. Only about one-fifth of Clinton's votes came from working-class voters that year, about the same share as his Republican rival received.⁴⁴

Disappointment with the Democrats gave congressional Republicans record gains in 1994. That year, the GOP gained 55 seats in the House, taking control of it for the first time in forty years. They also ruled the Senate, winning eight additional senate seats. For the first time, they won a majority of southern congressional seats and governorships. As Republicans gained critical mass, a number of southern conservatives in Congress and state legislatures switched parties in the mid-1990s, further accelerating the region's realignment.⁴⁵ In the 1990s, Democrats lost seats, mainly in the South and in districts that were predominantly white, working-class, and suburban or rural.⁴⁶

Support for congressional Democrats and President Clinton increased as the economy improved, and as congressional Republicans overstepped their reach and attacked popular social policies, such as environmental regulations, education, and Medicare.⁴⁷ These gains were modest, though, and Republicans retained control of Congress after 1996.⁴⁸ And, despite high approval ratings for the Clinton administration, class differences in presidential voting continued to decline among whites. Although support for

Republicans continued to be greatest among more affluent voters, a majority of working-class whites supported George W. Bush in 2000.⁴⁹

APPEALS TO RACIAL CONSERVATISM

White workers' growing support for Republicans did not reflect only their economic concerns but also their racial conservatism. Since 1964, when congressional Democrats stepped up their support for blacks' demands and Republicans became more conservative on racial issues, race has become the largest cleavage among American voters. While white support for Democrats declined, black support for the party remained remarkably stable, with 90 percent of blacks or more supporting Democratic presidential candidates since then.⁵⁰

Republicans courted the white vote by becoming more conservative on racial issues and employing racially charged rhetoric. This strategy was especially important in the South. As Hastings Wyman Jr, a South Carolinian Republican activist, recalls, "Racism, often purposefully inflamed by many southern Republicans, either because we believed it or because we thought it would win votes, was a major tool in the building of a new Republican Party in the south."⁵¹ This strategy apparently paid off, especially among southern white men, who flocked to the GOP more quickly than their female counterparts. Voter surveys show that Republican identification among southern white men became increasingly associated with opposition to busing programs to integrate schools and aid to blacks over time.⁵²

In the 1980s and 1990s, Republicans engaged in a series of attacks on affirmative action policies. As Edsall and Edsall recall: "The Reagan administration consistently established not only its opposition to quotas, goals, and timetables, but also demonstrated that it would challenge these practices whenever possible—in the courts, in the enforcement policies adopted by regulatory agencies, and in the negotiation of consent decrees and other agreements with private and public-sector employers."⁵³ President George H. W. Bush followed in Reagan's footsteps when he vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1990, calling it a "quota bill."⁵⁴ His son, George W. Bush, similarly opposed affirmative action policies.⁵⁵ Conservative attacks on affirmative action were also waged at the state level. In California, for example, a majority of voters (80 percent white), passed Proposition 209 in 1996 to abolish affirmative action in college admissions.⁵⁶

This rollback of civil rights gains was justified through a populist discourse of conservative egalitarianism that portrayed Republicans as advo-

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cates of equal opportunity and individual initiative and demonized Democrats as creating unfair special preferences for racial minorities and women. This “race-free political language” helped to legitimize racially conservative policies and increase support for Republicans, especially among white Democrats.⁵⁷ A 1981 Washington Post/ABC survey, for example, found that Democrats who supported Reagan in 1980 were more conservative on racial issues than were Reagan’s Republican supporters or Democratic loyalists.⁵⁸

Republicans’ appeal to white racism was effective in gaining white working-class support, and put pressure on Democrats to follow their path. Democrats continued to defend affirmative action, since doing otherwise would have seriously jeopardized their electoral support among blacks. Nonetheless, they joined Republicans in appealing to racism in more subtle and symbolic ways. Along with Republicans, Democrats called for cutbacks in social programs, such as AFDC, that would disproportionately affect blacks and Latinos.⁵⁹ Bipartisan campaigns to “get tough on crime” and wage a “war on drugs”⁶⁰ likewise targeted poor people of color and preyed on white anxieties about the growing urban minority “underclass.”⁶¹ By 2001, nearly 40 percent of federal prisoners were black, and 32 percent were Latino. Most had been convicted of drug offenses.⁶² “Apartheid sentencing” for drug offenses, which penalized users of crack cocaine more heavily than users of heroin or powder cocaine, contributed to such racial disparities.⁶³ Similarly, prosecutions of pregnant drug-users disproportionately targeted blacks, despite studies showing comparable rates of drug abuse among black and white women.⁶⁴

Republicans also appealed to race-based nativism. Between 1980 and 2000, the number of immigrants doubled (from 14 to 28 million), and their share of the U.S. population grew from 6 to 10 percent. With the end of national origin quotas in 1965, immigrants were more likely to be non-white, with most immigrants coming from Latin America and Asia.⁶⁵ In response, public support for restrictions on immigration grew. In 1965, 33 percent of national survey respondents favored such restrictions, compared to 66 percent in 1995. The share of Americans falsely believing that most immigrants were illegal also rose, from 49 percent in 1986 to 68 percent in 1993.⁶⁶ Much of this nativism is racialized. Polls show significantly greater opposition to Asian, Latin American, and African immigrants than to European immigrants.⁶⁷

Nativism did not emerge spontaneously from below. Anti-immigrant politicians, intellectuals, and organizations encouraged a “moral panic” about the negative effects of immigration. In the 1980s, male immigrants, especially Latinos, were accused of taking jobs away from native-born workers and depressing wages. In the 1990s, as the immigrant population became

more feminized, attacks on Latino immigrants focused more heavily on women's and children's use of social services. Despite research to the contrary, immigrants were accused of being overly reliant on welfare and creating a fiscal burden for white taxpayers.⁶⁸ Nativist groups, such as the Federation of American Immigration Reform (FAIR), blamed immigrants for "overwhelming schools and welfare rolls."⁶⁹

The backlash against immigrants was also a "reactionary impulse to reconstitute the nation as an ethno-culturally homogeneous . . . collectivity."⁷⁰ Symptomatic of this, U.S. English and its allies campaigned for state laws declaring English to be the official language. Such campaigns proved to be highly popular, drawing support not only from conservative white racists, but also liberals concerned about barriers to immigrants' upward mobility. By 1996, twenty-three states had adopted "Official English" measures.⁷¹ Anti-immigrant pundits also emphasized the cultural effects of immigration. A good example is Jean Raspail's (1983) *The Camp of Saints*, whose distribution was financed by FAIR and other anti-immigrant groups. *The Camp of Saints* describes how third world immigrants invaded Europe and destroyed its civilization. Similarly, Peter Brimelow's (1995) *Alien Nation: Common Sense about America's Immigration Disaster* claims that non-Anglo immigrants' cultural diversity is the real threat to the nation,⁷² although he also confesses his fear of "the fateful day when American whites actually cease to be a majority."⁷³ To promote anti-immigrant policies, Cordelia Scaife May gave \$2.5 million dollars to FAIR, U.S. English, and the Center for Immigration Studies. FAIR received nearly \$300,000 between 1985 and 1989 from the Pioneer Fund, a conservative foundation that previously sponsored eugenics research.⁷⁴

Republican politicians mobilized nativist sentiments, especially during the 1992 and 1996 presidential election campaigns. Republican candidates Pat Buchanan, Pete Wilson, and Bob Dole urged their party to adopt tougher immigration policies and made immigrant-bashing central to their campaigns.⁷⁵ For example, Buchanan blamed immigrants for "declining living standards, the widening income gap . . . high crime, declining property values and a general sense that . . . communities are veering out of control." As one commentator put it, immigration was the "Willie Horton issue" of the 1996 primary.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the Republican Party remained divided over immigrant issues, as its moderate wing sought to bring more ethnic and racial minorities into their fold.⁷⁷

Restrictive immigration laws also gained bipartisan support, enabling Congress to pass a series of them in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷⁸ The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, passed

shortly after Congress denied legal immigrants access to public assistance through PRWORA, was especially punitive. It strengthened border enforcement, increased penalties for misusing or forging identification papers, and expanded the crimes for which immigrants could be deported.⁷⁹ In 1996, moderate Democrats, such as Clinton, joined Republicans in calling for greater limits on legal immigration.⁸⁰

After 1996, a number of leading Republicans softened their stance, fearing their anti-immigrant positions had hurt their electoral support among Latinos, a growing segment of Catholic voters who might otherwise join the Republican Party because of its emphasis on traditional “family values.” For example, Newt Gingrich and other congressional Republicans supported an amnesty program for thousands of Nicaraguans and Cubans in 1997. In 2001, George W. Bush announced support for a bilateral immigration deal with Mexico that combined a guest worker program with limited amnesty for illegal immigrants. The plan was put on hold, however, after anti-immigrant hysteria mounted following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. The revised plan, announced in 2004, excluded the amnesty provision.⁸¹

“FAMILY VALUES” AND THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

Republicans also courted the vote of white traditionalists, especially evangelicals concentrated in the South, by promoting conservative Christian and “family” values. Conservatives upheld the patriarchal, two-parent, heterosexual nuclear family as the ideal, attacking the rights of women, sexual minorities, and nontraditional families. In his 1980 presidential campaign, for example, Reagan attacked the Equal Rights Amendment, endorsed the female housewife, and opposed women’s right to abortion.⁸² During the 1992 election, Bush’s running mate, Dan Quayle, demonized Murphy Brown, a popular television character, for having a child out of wedlock.⁸³ Despite Bush’s initial objections, the Republican National Committee that year endorsed a constitutional amendment to ban abortion and opposed civil rights for gays and lesbians.⁸⁴ Likewise, George W. Bush opposed abortion, except in cases of rape, incest, or to save a woman’s life, and opposed Democrats’ proposal to allow homosexuals to openly serve in the military.⁸⁵ While Democrats were more supportive of feminism and civil rights for gays and lesbians, many expressed concerns about the social consequences of single motherhood and supported the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which banned same-sex marriage.⁸⁶

TABLE 8. *National Rates of Divorce, Out-of-Wedlock Births, and Teenage Births, 1960–2000*

Year	Divorce Rate*	Out-of-Wedlock Birth Rate**	Teenage Birth Rate***
1960	2.2	21.6	—
1980	5.2	29.4	53.0
1990	4.7	43.8	59.9
1996	4.3	44.8	54.4
2000	4.1	45.2	48.7

* Per 1,000 people. SOURCES: U.S. Bureau of the Census 2001b, table 68. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics 2001c, table 12.

** Per 1,000 unwed women, aged 15–44. SOURCES: Ventura and Bachrach 2000, table 3; Martin, Park, and Sutton 2002, table 5.

*** Per 1,000 women aged 15–19. SOURCES: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics 2001a, table 4; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, 2001b, table B.

In promoting conservative family policies, Republicans appealed to, and mobilized, broad social concerns about the decline of the heterosexual, two-parent, patriarchal household. Public outcry over shifting family patterns did not simply correspond to actual trends in family relations. While rates of unwed motherhood increased in the 1980s and 1990s, rates of divorce and teen motherhood fell in the 1990s but nonetheless remained sources of considerable public alarm (see Table 8). Attacks on unwed and teen mothers, often racially coded, resonated with the public because they gave expression to broader concerns about inner-city poverty, welfare dependency, and long-term shifts in family structures and sexual mores.⁸⁷

Politicians' emphasis on traditional "family values" was linked to the rise of the Christian Right, which revitalized the Republican Party and shifted it rightward on social issues. The politicization and conservative realignment of evangelical Christians, underway since the 1970s, escalated after 1983.⁸⁸ Before the 1960s and the spread of dominion theology, most evangelicals separated the church from the purportedly corrupt world of secular politics. Dominion theology encouraged Christians to become more active politically and to utilize secular institutions to return America to its biblical principles, including the traditional family and unfettered capitalism.⁸⁹ Republican activists, seeking to revitalize their party, also mobilized evangelical and fundamentalist Christian voters.⁹⁰ As part of this effort, New Right leaders lent

resources to create and expand Christian Right groups.⁹¹ Most notably, Paul Weyrich, Richard Viguerie, and Ed McAteer (of the Conservative Caucus) convinced Reverend Jerry Falwell in 1979 to use his large Baptist church, weekly television broadcasts, and clergy contacts to build the Moral Majority. Within the first year, 400,000 members joined the Moral Majority, contributing \$1.5 million. Meanwhile, Pat Robertson mobilized 200,000 charismatic and fundamentalist Christians for a “Washington for Jesus” demonstration in 1980, while 40,000 Christian right activists attended a series of public affairs briefings.⁹² Much of the activism of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians in the 1980s and 1990s focused on countering the demands of the feminist and gay rights movements. They also opposed the spread of secular humanism and sexual liberalism, calling for school prayers and an end to pornography and sex education in public schools.⁹³

In 1980, the Moral Majority, Christian Voice, and secular conservative groups, such as the Conservative Caucus and Free Congress Foundation, mobilized voters. Appealing to conservative “family values” and “long-standing evangelical and fundamentalist discontents with a secularized, hedonistic, and permissive society,” they drew southern whites into the Republican Party. Christian Voice alone raised some \$500,000 for voter mobilization for the 1980 election.⁹⁴ Altogether, these groups reportedly registered between two and three million new evangelical voters for this election. Evangelical voters supported Ronald Reagan, who endorsed a constitutional amendment for prayer in public schools and several anti-abortion measures. Reportedly, evangelicals made up two-thirds of Reagan’s ten-point margin over Jimmy Carter.⁹⁵

After 1980, conservative and Christian organizations, including Pat Robertson’s newly formed Freedom Council, continued to mobilize voters. The effectiveness of such mobilization drives is not clear, however. Data from the National Election Studies show no evidence of a mobilization or realignment among denominationally conservative Protestants or southern Baptists between 1960 and 1982.⁹⁶ Likewise, national surveys show that a relatively constant 11 to 15 percent of whites supported the Christian Right between 1980 and 1988.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s, the Christian Right had become a significant pressure group within the Republican Party and pushed it to become more supportive of conservative social policies.⁹⁸ Jeff Manza and Clem Brooks claim that the rising influence of the Christian Right on the Republican Party was “due not so much to a rapid increase in votes from conservative Protestants, but instead from the loss of the moderating influence of liberal (and moderate) Protestant voters.” Liberal Protestants both shrank in number and became more Democratic after the 1960s.⁹⁹

The Christian Right lost some support in the late 1980s, when its most prominent televangelists became mired in personal scandal.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, the Christian Right remained active, raising about \$27 million and winning about one million votes (about 9 percent of the total) for Pat Robertson's 1988 bid for the Republican presidential nomination. Robertson was mainly popular among charismatic Christians and evangelicals; surveys indicate that Robertson's supporters tended to be less affluent, less educated, more female, younger, more likely to be from the South and rural areas, and more new to politics than other Republican supporters. After Robertson lost the nomination, 80 percent of evangelical voters supported George H. W. Bush.¹⁰¹ Although Bush's top advisors consulted with a hundred Christian Right leaders shortly after his election, the Bush administration disappointed them by providing only lackluster support for their causes.¹⁰²

Robertson's defeat and the preacher scandals were only temporary setbacks for the Christian Right. By the early 1990s, the religious broadcasting industry put forward new preachers, who quickly gained large audiences. Meanwhile, conservative Christian leaders focused more heavily on state and local politics, where they made significant gains. They revitalized their movement by reaching out to racial minorities, running "stealth candidates,"¹⁰³ and forming alliances with secular conservatives.¹⁰⁴ They also formed new interfaith organizations to replace Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, which disbanded in 1989. The most important of these was Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, claiming more than one million members and 1,700 chapters in 1995.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Dr. James Dobson merged his Focus on the Family radio broadcast ministry, heard on 1,300 stations in 1989, with the Family Research Council and used both groups to lobby for conservative family policies. Concerned Women of America (CWA), a conservative, mass-based lobbying organization formed in 1979, also grew, claiming more than 600,000 members by 1992.¹⁰⁶

In the 1990s, the Christian Right increased their activism within the Republican Party. A 1994 study found that it played a dominant or substantial role in the state Republican Party in thirty-one states, including ten of the eleven former Confederate states.¹⁰⁷ The Christian Right was also active within the national Republican Party. In the 1992 Republican primaries, Pat Buchanan won between 20 and 30 percent of the votes (more than twice the portion garnered by Robertson in 1988).¹⁰⁸ That year, more than 40 percent of the delegates to the Republican National Convention were evangelical Christians, while an estimated 15 to 20 percent were Christian Coalition members. Their members also made up almost 20 percent of the Republican platform drafting committee.¹⁰⁹ Over George H. W. Bush's objections, this

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committee endorsed home schooling, school prayer, and bans on abortions and pornography, and opposed civil rights for gays and lesbians, public funding of “obscene” art, and the distribution of contraceptives in public schools.¹¹⁰ The platform helped maintain the religious Right’s support for Bush, who won a majority among only two demographic groups: people making more than \$100,000 a year and white evangelical Christians.¹¹¹

Clinton’s victory in 1992 mobilized the Christian Right and reunited Republicans. The Christian Right, now drawing support from a wider range of faiths, was both a beneficiary of and a political force behind Republicans’ unprecedented victories in the 1994 midterm Congressional elections.¹¹² The Christian Coalition distributed 30 million voter guides in 1994 and 45 million in 1996. According to one survey, about 20 percent of Americans claimed to have relied on this literature.¹¹³ By 1996, religious conservatives who attended church at least once a week and claimed that religion guided their life a “great deal” made up 9 percent of all voters but 23 percent of all GOP voters.¹¹⁴ In the 2000 election, more than half of George W. Bush’s supporters were white Christians who regularly attended church, while two-fifths were evangelicals.¹¹⁵

While Republican support for conservative social policies may have helped to garner support from the Christian Right and white men, 60 percent of whom voted for George W. Bush in 2000,¹¹⁶ it alienated women, especially working women, from the party. Accompanying the rise in women’s labor force participation, the gender gap in the vote has increased gradually since the 1950s. The conservative realignment of the white electorate, even in the South, has been most pronounced among men. Based on analyses of data from the National Election Study, Manza and Brooks found that working women’s support for social spending and feminism, significantly higher than that of men and nonworking women, accounts for much of this gender gap.¹¹⁷

The rise of the Republican Right and the New Democrats at the end of the century reflected shifts in both elite and electoral politics. First, in response to globalization, economic restructuring, and a wave of regulatory reforms in the 1960s and 1970s, many corporate heads embraced neoliberalism and became more politically mobilized. In response, politicians of both parties, but especially the Republicans, championed rollbacks in corporate taxes, economic regulations, and social programs.

Second, both Republicans and Democrats moved rightward on social issues, as they competed for the support of white traditional voters. Republicans revitalized their party by gaining support from white south-

erners, evangelical Christians, and white working-class males. They did so by constructing an emotionally powerful, coherent conservative discourse that drew support from the widely held “strict father” model of morality, which emphasizes paternal authority and strict rules to encourage self-reliance. This same moral model was used to justify welfare cutbacks, rollbacks in affirmative action, and strict immigration policies, an agenda that appealed to the antitax and racial sentiments of white workers, especially in the South. Republicans also drew support from the Christian Right. Encouraged by the spread of dominion theology and funding from Republican strategists, the Christian Right became a powerful political force by the 1980s, especially in the South. While moderate Protestants generally shifted their allegiance to the Democrats, evangelical and fundamentalist Christians remained loyal, and increasingly active, members of the Republican Party, pushing it to the right on social issues.

As Democrats lost electoral support among traditional white voters, they also moved rightward on social issues, championing tough new criminal justice and immigration policies, expressing alarm about the social consequences of “father absence,” and signing into law the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act. This defensive strategy was only partially successful. While it reduced Republicans’ lead somewhat, working-class voters were becoming increasingly volatile and disinterested in electoral politics. Without a bold new agenda and rhetoric of their own, Democrats were unable to regain the popularity they once had with working-class white voters.

The growing coalition of Republican voters brought new power to the Republican Party but also increased divisions within it. Serious disputes emerged between social and economic conservatives, between its religious and secular wings, and between racial and gender conservatives and those seeking votes from minority and women voters. Nevertheless, by appealing to the reactionary racist and patriarchal sentiments of white working-class voters, the Republican Party gained considerable electoral ground and broke the back of an already weakened New Deal coalition. Attacks on welfare mothers provided Republicans with fertile ground for attacking liberals and uniting its disparate constituents: racial conservatives, nativists, the Christian Right, and neoliberal corporate elites. Meanwhile, Democrats, seeking to retain their support among white voters and business donors, retreated in their support for AFDC. The welfare backlash that followed is the subject of the next two chapters.

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