Washington Square Citizens League

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Current Status of Political Parties

Robin Kolodny, PhD, guest speaker

The Historical Development of American Political Parties

Source: Salt Lake Community College

"Americans want a politics they don't have to hate. And therein lies our hope: Democracies are uniquely open to change, and if citizens want politicians to move beyond false choices, it is in their power to demand it."

–E. J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.

Political parties started early in the American republic, despite the fact that many founders—in theory, if not in practice—disparaged the factionalism and corrosive influence of political parties. In his **farewell address**, President **George Washington** warned against political parties, particularly those based on geographic loyalties. He went on to say that partisanship "serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms; kindles the animosity of one part against another; foments occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passion." Nevertheless, political parties became entrenched in the political system.

In a survey course such as the one you are taking, there really isn't time to go into the full scope of American party development, but you should be familiar with several important developments in the history of the American party system. One thing you should note is that, ideologically speaking, American political parties resemble tectonic plates on the earth's surface that don't stay firmly put in one place. Conservatism and progressivism have at various times found homes in different political parties.

Beginnings of the Party System

Party struggles really began within the Washington administration itself, personified by the political differences between his Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, and his Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Jefferson believed in a less energetic central government than did Hamilton—at least until Jefferson became president later and carried through the Louisiana Purchase without getting clear congressional authority. Hamilton pushed for the United States to develop its manufacturing sector and become a commercial power, while Jefferson envisioned a secure republic made by yeomen farmers with small landholdings. Jeffersonians formed the **Democratic-Republican** party, explicitly aiming to invoke the Revolution's egalitarian

principles, while the Hamiltonians formed the **Federalist** party to remind people of the Constitution's triumphal plan. It is somewhat ironic that Jefferson had a hand in founding a political party, because he shared Washington's antipathy for them. He said, "If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all." And James Madison similarly warned against the evils of faction in *Federalist #10*. Despite that, the Democratic-Republican party coalesced around Jefferson and Madison. The Federalists initially had the upper hand in early party competition, selecting John Adams to replace Washington in 1797. But the Democratic-Republicans came charging back with Jefferson's two-term administration beginning in 1801, James Madison's two terms, and James Monroe's two terms ending in 1825. The Federalists quickly faded from the scene.

Democrats and Whigs in the Antebellum Period

With the Federalists fading, the Democratic-Republicans were the only game in town, but then they disagreed among themselves in the 1820s and formed two discrete parties: the **Democrats**, which have continued to the present day, and the National Republicans, which then became the **Whig Party** that eventually dissolved over slavery in the 1850s. Meanwhile, back to the 1830s and 40s: The Democratic Party was the dominant one, electing Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, James Polk, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan between 1828 and the beginning of the Civil War. The Whigs managed to elect two ill-fated presidents. The first was William Harrison, who delivered a long inaugural address on a cold and windy day and died of pneumonia about a month into his presidency. (5) Zachary Taylor was the other Whig elected president. After taking office in 1849, he died of acute gastroenteritis sixteen months later. (6) The interesting thing about the antebellum national party system was that it was the Whigs, not the Democrats, who believed in using the central government's power to make "internal improvements" to the country such as roads and canals. The Democrats were the party of the "common man," which is still its reputation, but the Democratic party then was also openly hostile to Blacks, whether slave or free. **John C. Calhoun**, a prominent Democrat from South Carolina who at times served as a representative, a vice president, and senator, once lamented that the phrase in the Declaration of Independence that all men were created equal "has become the most false and dangerous of all political errors. . . We now begin to experience the danger of admitting so great an error to have a place in the declaration of independence."

The Civil War Crisis

The American party system was rocked by the crisis over slavery and states' rights that resulted in the Civil War. The Whig party split into a Northern wing that held on to the principles of an active central government, and a Southern wing whose members were concerned that a central government powerful enough to make "internal improvements" was powerful enough to end slavery. The Democrats were split between North and South as well, but that party survived whereas the Whig party completely disintegrated. In the mid-1850s, northern Whigs joined some antislavery Democrats and members of the antislavery Free Soil Party to create the modern **Republican Party**.

Historian Heather Cox Richardson reminds us that the early Republican Party opposed great wealth accumulation, promoted land distribution, the equal rights of immigrants, and government promotion of a transcontinental railroad. Many early Republicans were so progressive that they were referred to as **Red Republicans**. Were you ever taught that in school? Neither was I. Pledged to fight the "twin relics of barbarism"—slavery and polygamy—early

Republicans were mobilized when the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed, which overturned the Missouri Compromise of 1820, and allowed new territories to permit slavery if they wanted. Early Republicans had a vision of America as a land free not only from slavery, but from **wage slavery** as well—meaning the business exploitation of for-hire laborers. They celebrated autonomous workers—primarily independent farmers and the self-employed—and feared the power of capitalists, regardless of whether they were plantation owners in the South or factory owners in the North. **Alvan Bovay** was one of the people who initiated the push to establish the Republican Party in 1854. He is credited with naming it "republican" to hearken back to the views of Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. He worked on a number of radical causes, including a "vote yourself a farm" campaign, and wrote for George Evans' *Working Man's Advocate* and *Young America* newspapers. **Abraham Lincoln**, the Republican's second presidential candidate, won the very divided election of 1860 with only 40 percent of the popular vote. The land reform that Bovay and Evans advocated in the 1850s was pushed by Lincoln and became the Homestead Act of 1862, which distributed land in the West to settlers who would "improve" it. (8) With the demise of the Whig Party over the slavery issue, the Republicans and Democrats became the pre-eminent political parties in American politics to this day.

Republican Dominance

The era from the Civil War to the Gilded Age was one in which the Republicans dominated the presidency—they elected twelve of fifteen presidents from 1860 to 1929—and often enjoyed Republican majorities in the House and Senate as well. The Republicans dropped any hint of "red republicanism" and evolved into a party that promoted business interests and economic growth, pushed public schools that produced the standardized graduates that business leaders needed, endorsed the gold standard that promoted price stability that business leaders wanted, and supported high tariffs on imports that protected U.S. manufacturers. It was during this period of Republican dominance that wealth and income inequality grew to obscene levels that were fueled by monopoly capitalism. The Democrats maintained a stronghold in the South and strong support among Northern-city Catholic immigrants and small Mid-western farm owners. Later, the South became known as the **Solid South** because Democrats dominated there until after the mid-1960s when Republicans began to rise. Populism gripped the Democratic Party in the late 1890s and it looked like they might break Republican dominance, but in the election of 1896, the Republicans' huge financial advantage and victories in the Electoral College-rich Northeastern states kept the Democrats out of the White House. The spirit of progressivism infected both parties in the early 1900s, but it created the most lasting impression in the Democratic Party. In the 1912 election when Republicans split between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson became president, and the Democrats began to embrace many progressive ideals—using government to solve social problems, controlling the power of large business interests, and instituting social reforms such as extending the right to vote and banning child labor. However, the Democratic Party remained a bastion of racism, particularly in the South.

The New Deal Coalition

The period from the 1930s to the 1960s was a period of Democratic party ascendance. The Great Depression began with the stock market crash in October 1929 and marked the death-knell for Republican's long-held dominance of national politics. Many people came to the conclusion that

reckless pro-business Republican policies of the 1920s caused the Depression, and also were convinced that **President Herbert Hoover's** conservative response to the crisis was insufficient. The 1932 election brought Democrat **Franklin Roosevelt** to power–the only president to win election four times–and his administration used government's power to alleviate suffering, regulate the economy, and put people back to work. The overall policy, known as the **New Deal**, included such features as Social Security, unemployment insurance, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Works Progress Administration, among many others. The Democrats dominated national politics from 1933 to the end of the 1960s, largely because of what has become known as the **New Deal Coalition**. They cobbled together a coalition of unionized workers, farmers, Jews, white-collar professionals, African-Americans, and urban immigrants who were predominantly Catholics. The New Deal programs were popular enough that the Republican Eisenhower administration left them in place in the 1950s, and the Democratic Johnson administration built on them somewhat in the 1960s.

Contemporary Party Struggles

Things can change rather quickly in politics, but we can make the following observations about the contemporary party system. The first thing to note is the **demise of the New Deal Coalition**. The success of the Civil Rights Movement, the cultural turmoil of the late 1960s, and the stridency of the Democratic party's anti-Vietnam War wing fractured the New Deal coalition and hurt many Democratic candidates' electoral chances. The New Deal coalition had been built upon the economic interests of the common man regardless of race or religion. By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the Republicans became increasingly successful in attracting support from Whites opposed to racial desegregation, from men and women who were disconcerted by women's liberation, from rural voters concerned about gun control, and from voters who disdained the perception of pacifism in American foreign policy. Moreover, the *Roe v. Wade (1973)* decision legalizing abortion and the rise of the gay rights debate handed Republicans two social issues that were instrumental in courting Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and Mormons.

Beginning in the 1960s, Republicans pursued what most people call the **Southern Strategy**—a conscious and largely successful attempt to capture the South by playing on White's fears of the Civil Rights movement. The **Southern Strategy** was really a broader strategy linking the South with suburban and rural areas across the United States, aimed at White fears of racial integration, urban crime, and economic insecurity. In a 1981 interview, Republican strategist Lee Atwater explained that the Southern Strategy rested on stressing race without overtly mentioning it:

You start out in 1954 by saying, "N_____, n_____, n_____." By 1968 you can't say "n_____"—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff, and you're getting so abstract. Now, you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites.... "We want to cut this," is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than "N_____, n_____."

The Republican party also embraced an assault on public schools—relabeled in their vocabulary as "government schools"—at the behest of religious conservatives opposed to school integration and the teaching of evolution. The Southern Strategy was successful. The Democrat's Solid

South transformed to become a bastion of Republican office holders instead. Republicans won all but one presidential election from 1968 to 1992, won eight of the thirteen presidential elections from 1968 to 2016, and wrested both congressional chambers from Democrats control. Similarly, Republicans dominated state gubernatorial and legislative elections in 2010, which allowed them to gerrymander district boundary lines to their advantage following the 2010 census. Even when outsider Donald Trump captured the Republican presidential nomination in 2016 against the wishes of party leadership, the Republicans were able to win the White House again with help from the Electoral College even when their candidate lost the popular vote that year. In 2020, President Trump lost his bid for reelection, but the Republican Party maintained control over the majority of state legislatures and regained control of the House of Representatives. Donald Trump won the presidency in 2024, and the Republicans captured both chambers of Congress.

Meanwhile, the Democratic party hewed sharply to the right in the late 1970s in order to compete with the Republicans. The Democrats increasingly turned to the same sources as the Republicans to fund their candidates—corporations and the wealthy—and it pursued policies that were often indistinguishable from the Republicans. Bill and Hillary Clinton led the way in this transformation, aggressively courting Wall Street and corporate money and supporting anti-welfare, pro-finance, tough-on-crime policies designed to win back voters that the party had lost to Republicans. Still socially liberal, the Democratic party became controlled by the New Democrats, who can more properly be called the **Corporate Democrats** because of their connections with and deference to large corporations.

President Obama was solidly in the corporate wing of the Democratic party, and his policies were described by one astute political observer as "crafted by representatives of corporate/financial America, who happen to entirely make up his inner circle." This was particularly true of Obama's tepid response to the Great Recession that was caused by Wall Street's predatory behavior, but also manifested itself in the very corporate friendly Affordable Care Act. Progressive members of the Democratic Party had no place to go until democratic-socialist Bernie Sanders reignited their hopes in his failed attempt to gain the Democratic presidential nomination in 2016. Sanders' candidacy in 2016 and again in 2018 underscored the deep divisions in the Democratic party between its corporate and progressive wings. In 2020 the Democrats nominated Joe Biden as their presidential candidate, a veteran politician solidly in the corporate wing of the party. Once elected, Biden packed his cabinet with corporate leaning politicians and bureaucrats. In July of 2024, Biden withdrew from running and endorsed Kamala Harris, his vice president, and the party nominated her the next month. She lost.

Why do we need political parties?

Source: protectdemocracy.org, April 19, 2024

The unpopular but necessary building blocks of democracy

Americans dislike and distrust our political parties; a mere 11% of Americans express high confidence in them when compared to many other institutions, reflecting their well-deserved reputation as a vulnerability to American democratic stability. And yet, parties are essential organizing institutions in any modern democracy. The size and complexity of the multiple levels of government in the United States and the diverse and distributed nature of the electorate necessitate organizations that can serve as the connective tissue of our politics and promote a

multiracial, pluralistic democracy. Accordingly, "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties."

Yet, there is a natural impulse to view the parties as the problem and seek to further weaken or even try to eliminate them from our politics completely. Despite the understandable frustration with our political parties and a historical context that includes their intentional exclusion from the Constitution, a variety of reforms that weakened parties over time have served only to exacerbate the problems we have today.

Healthy political parties make our democracy accessible and responsive

For a healthy democracy to function effectively, it needs political parties.

Political parties can and should stabilize democracy by organizing politics and facilitating political participation. Where they do so responsibly, voters can identify the party that most closely matches their political beliefs and values and find ways to be engaged in democratic life.

While there are many ways in which political parties contribute to stabilizing and bolstering democracy, the following are vital to sustaining a system that is representative, responsive, and resistant to authoritarian takeover.

Political parties organize varied and sometimes competing interests into coalitions

The main goal of political parties is to win elections. In a democracy as large and diverse as the United States, they can only do that by being attractive spaces where groups of voters with different interests can coalesce into blocs large enough to succeed at the polls. In the best of circumstances, this means that political parties are the institutions where various interest groups negotiate their differences in order to cooperate on election day and beyond. Thus, parties can provide a critical platform to a diverse set of voices within the electorate.

Political parties engage and inform voters

Political parties have an essential role in explaining the stakes of policy issues to their supporters, as well as in mobilizing them during and between elections. Parties work to "get out the vote" and boost participation in elections. Between elections, they provide a vehicle for people to participate in politics. Where parties establish and maintain a reasonably coherent set of policy views, the party label itself offers important information to voters on election day. Americans vote more often and for more offices than almost any other democracy, and the average voter would find it nearly impossible to research every candidate in every race. Where parties are well-connected to society and have a meaningful platform, party labels can give voters a shortcut for identifying the candidates most likely to support their interests and those of their communities.

Political parties recruit and select candidates

Prior to election day, parties have a critical role to play in elevating candidates for office who are capable of doing the job and likely to appeal to voters. At local levels, this often involves encouraging talented individuals to run for office in the first place, an important part of bolstering political participation. At state and national levels, parties are responsible for narrowing the field of potential candidates. Healthy, pro-democracy parties also assess a candidates' commitment to democratic norms during this recruitment and selection process. Where demagogues or

would-be authoritarians try to pursue elected office, political parties are the crucial first institutional barrier to those efforts.

Political parties coordinate governance

Imagine a political system in which there were no stable coalitions, governors or presidents had to work with legislatures that had little meaningful leadership, and every piece of proposed legislation required securing support one member at a time. Governing would happen at a snail's pace (if at all) and responding quickly to important issues would be next to impossible. Political parties provide the organized "teams" that are needed for elected officials to cooperate productively.

In short, political parties can and should stabilize democracy by organizing politics and facilitating political participation. Where they do so responsibly, voters can identify the party that most closely matches their political beliefs and values and find ways to be engaged in democratic life. Office holders can rely on parties to help them cooperate with one another and govern. This engagement and efficacy helps citizens feel represented and reinforces support for democracy itself, particularly where parties uphold democratic norms among their members and leaders.

The problem isn't political parties — it's political party weakness

The history of American democracy and democratic reform is full of well-intentioned efforts with unintended consequences; reformers often tinker with some element of our political system (election rules) without always addressing or accounting for another key element of our democratic system (political organizing). The adoption of partisan primaries provides a powerful example. Primaries were meant to empower voters rather than corrupt party bosses in the selection of candidates, an attempt to increase "voters' confidence and shor[e] up democratic responsiveness" as many current reforms seek to do. However, in effect they also disregarded the organizing and connecting role political parties played. Over time, primaries have also hampered the functionality of government by weakening party leaders' ability to meaningfully vet candidates for office—leading to fewer candidates with experience and "posturing over legislating." Similar patterns have played out in areas such as campaign finance reform.

These dynamics have accumulated over time and chipped away at some of the key characteristics of healthy parties. Today, we have professional, campaign-oriented parties that are less responsive, less representative, and less capable of the "mobilization functions they once performed." Reformers today should not repeat the mistakes of the past: sidelining parties as institutions has harmful long-term effects on our democracy. And ultimately it will do very little to reduce extremism or combat corruption.

When political parties don't do their jobs, democracy suffers

While healthy, responsible parties meet these needs in a responsive and representative democracy, America's two-party system too often does not. Our winner-take-all electoral system, which relies on primaries to select candidates, weakens parties and our democracy. More recent changes in campaign finance regulations and the media environment further undermine parties' representativeness, accountability, and transparency.

When parties are weakened in this way, one of two things happens. In some cases, the quality of our democracy simply suffers. Voters become apathetic, governing runs up against gridlock, and

candidate quality plummets. In other cases, quasi-institutions of non-representative, unaccountable groups begin to fulfill traditional party functions while being beholden to their own interests (e.g., Super-PACs with minimal disclosure requirements). Indeed, history has shown that efforts to exclude parties either fail (to great consequence for electoral innovation) or lead to "party-weakened alternatives that . . . are often worse than what existed before."

Political parties are a necessary feature of democratic life. No other institutions in our political system have the same opportunity to either enforce democratic norms or threaten the entire democratic system.

Can we expect parties to self-correct out of electoral self-interest? While we might expect voters to hold parties who abandon their responsibilities accountable at the ballot box, electoral results do not bear this out. Despite the fact that people have such a low regard for parties, partisan identity remains strong, leading voters to often support whomever their party nominates over the nominee of an opposing party. This dynamic of weak parties incapable of establishing and enforcing democratic norms and strong partisanship leads to seeming endorsement of unrepresentative and authoritarian factions by voters who share the same partisan identity. These factors leave parties open to influence and takeover by motivated, undemocratic forces while well-funded, less transparent, minoritarian institutions outside of party organizations fundraise, set policy agendas, and influence elected officials without accountability and input from the voting public.

Political parties are a necessary feature of democratic life

Political parties are a necessary feature of democratic life. No other institutions in our political system have the same opportunity to either enforce democratic norms or threaten the entire democratic system. No other institutions have the same abilities to link voters to elected leaders and to incentivize cooperation over narrow, individual self-interest. So as much as Americans may be disappointed with their track record in our two-party system, getting rid of political parties is not an option. But, neither is blindly handing more centralized power to political parties. Instead, we need reforms to political parties and our electoral system that incentivize and enable parties to be more representative of their voters, responsive to their varied interests, and resistant to takeover by authoritarian factions. We need healthier parties, and we need *more* parties.

How political parties have changed over time

Interview with Didi Kuo, PhD, *Stanford Report*, February 14, 2024

A number of factors have led to political parties getting weaker. Stanford political scientist Didi Kuo explains why and what implications this could have for 2024 and beyond.

As Americans head to the polls this year, a growing number of voters are **disgruntled by national politics and their elected officials**. Survey after survey has found that Americans are increasingly falling out of favor **with the country's two political parties** – a trend likely to continue in what Stanford political scientist **Didi Kuo** is describing as a "brutal" campaign season.

"Americans are already exhausted by it, even though it has barely begun," said Kuo, a center fellow at the **Freeman-Spogli Institute for International Studies** (FSI).

Like other democratic institutions, political parties are reckoning with **a crisis of public confidence**.

“Political parties remain critical to organizing democracy but they are beleaguered,” said Kuo.

Stanford Report sat down with Kuo to learn more about the discord between political parties, candidates, and voters and what these fissures may mean for the 2024 election.

No longer gatekeepers

Kuo sees several factors that have led to political parties’ waning support among the American public, including reforms made in the early 1970s.

Until then, political parties used to have more power in selecting the party nomination for presidency.

But **after Hubert Humphrey secured the Democratic Party nomination** in 1968 for president of the United States without ever taking part in any of the country’s primary races, **changes to the presidential nomination process** were made to give voters more power in deciding who will represent the party at the general election.

“Political parties used to be gatekeepers in politics. Now, voters have a much bigger say in determining who’s going to be the presidential candidate,” said Kuo.

Those changes made it possible for Donald Trump, an insurgent candidate who had neither formal membership in the Republican Party nor any previous military or government experience to secure the nomination.

Over recent years, incumbents have faced challengers in primary elections who often tout their lack of government experience as a strength rather than a weakness.

“The party seems to have very little leverage determining who gets to run under its party label,” Kuo said.

This makes the party vulnerable to outsiders and radical candidates, and also undermines the party’s ability to choose candidates who share the party’s priorities. The party has few ways to manage factional conflict or vet candidates for office when it cannot serve as a gatekeeper in politics.

More susceptible to outside influences

Another change Kuo sees as transformative to the current political landscape was the **Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002** – also known as the McCain-Feingold Act – that limited financial contributions people can make to political parties and campaigns.

“That had the consequence of expanding the type of financing that donors would pursue outside of the party through 501(c)(4)s or super PACs,” Kuo said.

In addition, the ruling by the Supreme Court in the **2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*** case equating corporate, political communication to that of an individual has also accelerated new ways for political power to take shape.

“What we see is a world not just of parties trying to vie for seats in the legislature or candidates, but also of these external party organizations that sometimes are connected to the party and sometimes not,” Kuo said. “These groups can run their own ads, drum up support for their own

issues, and collect a lot of money, sometimes undisclosed, on behalf of specific candidates and parties."

Kuo thinks these party-like organizations will be particularly important in 2024. "Many groups are mobilizing voters around specific issues, such as abortion rights, while others may mobilize for and against specific candidates, like the faction of 'Never-Trumpers' from 2020," Kuo said.

A growing appeal of populist candidates

Another issue Kuo is paying attention to is the rise of populist, extremist candidates, a trend occurring both in the U.S. and across the globe.

Kuo, alongside her colleagues at FSI, have examined how after the financial crisis of 2008, an increasing number of voters on both the left and right have become frustrated – aggrieved, even – by their democratic and economic institutions.

"One of the things people were turning toward were populist candidates who claimed that the entire system was rigged," Kuo said.

Kuo added: "2024 is going to be a really difficult year for Congress. It'll be a real test of whether or not extremists can still outperform moderate Republicans."

New ways to mobilize

The advent of digital and social media has had a transformative effect on how political parties and candidates can rally their base. In addition, data analytics afforded by these new tools has also helped candidates build targeted and effective communication strategies – all without the backing of a political party.

An example of that is Stacey Abrams, who led a galvanizing campaign to flip her home state of Georgia from Republican to Democrat in the 2020 election.

"Stacey Abrams had a massive organizational, multiyear effort in Georgia because she was convinced that you could turn the state blue, but **the party was not behind those efforts**," Kuo said. "It was driven at a local level."

Meanwhile, the same tools that have helped candidates reach people at the local level are also being used to find support beyond their precincts.

"There's empirical evidence showing that new candidates who come into the political process to challenge an incumbent often have a lot of support from outside their district," said Kuo. "It's easier now for people to find candidates they support and circumvent a traditional party approach to cultivating a candidate."

No longer reflecting what voters want or believe

When Americans are surveyed about how they feel on different policy issues, they are actually not that divided. Rather, it is **the political class that has become more polarized**, leading voters to feel alienated from their party.

"People feel distant from parties more and more," Kuo said.

Increasingly, people are shunning a party label entirely and **identifying as independent**. Here too, political scientists see changes among how independents behave as well.

The conventional wisdom was that independent voters were people who didn't like labels but were still solidly Democrats or Republicans, Kuo explained.

"Now, there is new evidence showing that people who call themselves 'independent' are turned off by the party system and see both parties as corrupt. They are very cynical about the role of special interests," she added. "They don't think their vote matters. When people develop this attitude, that's more of a rejection of the party system. ...

Political parties have gotten weaker

Overall, these changes have culminated in political parties becoming weaker.

"Parties have always had this tension between being run by a set of leaders who make decisions and also being democratic," said Kuo.

Over the year to come, Kuo expects tensions to continue – not only among political parties but with other democratic institutions as well.

"I think there will continue to be a big tension between what the Supreme Court rules on things like democracy and rights and what people actually want," Kuo said, adding how this has already been seen at the state level where voters have taken a collective stand against issues like restrictive abortion measures.

"Hopefully, there's some way in which democracy can serve as a corrective to some policy areas where people feel as if a majority opinion is not represented."

Growing number of independent voters poses challenges for both parties

BY JULIA MANCHESTER - The Hill, 09/24/2025

The number of registered independent voters is on the rise in the U.S., forcing campaigns to grapple with tough questions about how to target these voters ahead of next year's midterms and the 2028 presidential election.

According to a recent report from The Hill's partners at Decision Desk HQ, a majority of U.S. states are reporting their most significant voter registration gains are coming from voters who do not want to be affiliated with a political party. On top of that, exit polling from the 2024 presidential election found that self-identified independents outnumbered registered Democrats.

Experts say one of the main drivers in independent voters is a growing discontent with the two-party system.

"Dissatisfaction with the partisan rancor of our current political environment and a feeling of frustration about gridlock and things like that are contributing to people saying 'Hey, I don't want to openly say that I identify with one of the two major parties,'" said Geoffrey Skelley, chief elections analyst at Decision Desk HQ.

Some say part of the rise in independent voters can be attributed to increased automatic voter registration in various states. Front-end administration automatically enrolls the voter at the Department of Motor Vehicles and permits them to opt out during the process. Back-end administration auto enrolls the voter but does not allow them to opt out during the process.

Skelley noted one trend that has remained unchanged is that most independents tend to lean either to the left or the right. Exit polling from last year's presidential election suggests that many independents swung toward Republicans, appearing to play a key role in delivering major battleground states to President Trump.

According to exit polling data from Edison Research, the share of independent voters in 2024 tied Republicans at 34 percent. Democrats' share of the electorate came in at 32 percent. Additionally, the turnout share of independent voters increased by 8 points in November but was still behind Republicans and Democrats.

Some Democrats say this should be cause for concern for the party, given Trump's widespread wins.

"This isn't a surprise," said Jon Reinish, a Democratic strategist. "It's also a very direct rebuke and an indication of the fact that national Democrats, so many of them have lost their way and have just failed at communicating to voters, so voters are either being pulled to the right or they're being disaffected and registering that dissatisfaction by going to the independent option."

However, exit polling showed former Vice President Kamala Harris outperformed Trump with independents. According to Edison Research, 50 percent of independents said they voted for Harris, while 45 percent said they voted for Trump.

Still, the data showed Trump improving his standing among independents by 4 points.

Reinish blames the Democrats' slippage with independent voters on the failure to meet voters where they are and speak to them in an authentic manner.

"Stop talking like you're trying to run a small liberal arts college and talk to people about what exactly matters," he said.

One Republican operative noted the GOP has been able to target these voters by focusing on kitchen-table issues that are catered toward particular states.

"It's going to the economy, cost of living, education, public safety. Those are consistently at the top," the operative said. "But it's also going to be things like energy costs."

The operative used New Jersey's gubernatorial race as an example of a state where energy costs are one of the top issues, noting GOP nominee Jack Ciatarelli's talking point that the state has driven up those costs.

"That same persuadable message isn't going to work in a Virginia for a Winsome Sears," the operative said, referring to state Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears (R), who is running for governor.

"Their behavior varies state by state, election by election, issue by issue," the operative said. "It's not a monolith. A good chunk of independent voters aren't truly independent. They tend to vote with a party 90 percent of the time but can be persuaded in big critical races."

Skelley echoed this point, noting independent voters often reflect a state's political lean. Last week, the Colorado secretary of state office announced unaffiliated voters make up the majority of registered voters. According to the data, 50.3 percent of registered voters said they were unaffiliated, while 24.8 percent said they identified with the Democratic Party and 22.4 percent said the same about the Republican Party.

But that does not necessarily mean a statewide win for Republicans in Colorado would be easy. According to Axios Denver, 60 percent of those unaffiliated voters lean to the left, while the rest lean toward Republicans.

“We know at the end of the day given Colorado’s lean that generally speaking those voters are more likely to be Democratic-leaning than Republican-leaning,” Skelley said. “In a state that is more conservative, there is a decent chance that those voters are going to lean Republican.”

Massachusetts and Alaska lead the states in independent voters, with independents making up 62 percent of the voting population in Massachusetts and 60 percent in Alaska.

Other states with large independent voter shares include New Hampshire, Connecticut, North Carolina, Iowa and Oregon, showing how independent voters are spread throughout red, blue and purple states.

Skelley predicted the increased share of independent voters ironically could stand to feed partisanship, allowing the most staunch supporters of each party to take the reins of party apparatuses and campaigns.

“To some extent that also means they are in a way absenting themselves from the political process given how we nominate candidates, who people within parties listen to, who’s volunteering for campaigns, who’s involved in politics,” Skelley said. “It is quite possible that is contributing to polarization because people who might be less stringent in their partisan views are not involving themselves closely.”

The Republican operative noted that ultimately, both parties will have to grapple with the rise in independent voters going forward.

“That independent voter does get treated differently in each state and even their propensity to vote is different in each state,” the operative said.

“You have to be able to figure out how to message to both,” the operative added. “This is the art of campaigning.”

The big NYT party registration story

Gelliott Morris, *Strength in Numbers*, August 24, 2025 (edited)

1. Are registrations a leading or lagging indicator?

The New York Times made quite a splash with a fresh analysis of state-by-state party registrations this week (8/20/2025). Reporters Shane Goldmacher and Jonah Smith write that “Of the 30 states that track voter registration by political party, Democrats lost ground to Republicans in every single one between the 2020 and 2024 elections — and often by a lot.”

They write that in 2024, new registrants leaned GOP “for the first time since 2018” and “Democrats held a roughly 517,310 registration advantage among active voters in Pennsylvania in November 2020, according to state records, but that edge dwindled to 58,530 voters this summer.” In North Carolina, the Democratic edge is now just 17,000 votes, compared to nearly 400,000 in 2020.

So here’s where I add my take. First, the trend is undeniably bad for Democrats. It’s possible this is the worst 4-year decline in registration for either party over the last 20 years. At the same time, I’m not sure if we are learning anything shockingly new with this analysis: voter data showed the

party losing ground last year, and of course the Democrats lost 6 points in popular vote margin from 2020 to 2024. Of course their voter registration numbers took a beating too! So should the new data cause us to massively update our priors?

2. The rise of non-partisan and minor-party voters

The other thing to address is the growing trend of new voters identifying as neither Democrat nor Republican. According to the *Times*, just 24% of new voters nationwide in 2024 registered as Democrat, while 29% identified as Republican. That leaves 47% who registered without a party or with a minor party (such as e.g., Green, Socialist, Libertarian)….

The most common party registration in America is not with either of the two major parties, but explicitly against them both. Democrats should be worried about their recent political headwinds, but Republicans should be thinking about their shrinking position as well. The act of registering against both major parties reveals something about the psychology of the public. A deep sense of frustration with politics is leading to a systematic shedding of major-party political identities in voters' psyches, and a growing appetite for minor-party candidates.

And this trend does not show any signs of slowing down.

'Nothing Is Forever in Politics': 3 Writers on the Collapse of the Trump Coalition

By Frank Bruni, Kristen Soltis Anderson, and Nate Silver, Nov. 7, 2025, NYT (edited)

Frank Bruni, a contributing Opinion writer, hosted a written online conversation on Thursday with Kristen Soltis Anderson, a contributing Opinion writer and Republican pollster, and Nate Silver, the author of "On the Edge: The Art of Risking Everything" and the newsletter Silver Bulletin, to assess this week's elections — who won, who lost and what it means for American politics.

Frank Bruni: Kristen, Nate, welcome to one of the very, very rare weeks since Donald Trump's election last November in which Democrats are, at least metaphorically, dancing in the streets. And the jitterbug seems justified! No? What does the nitty-gritty of Tuesday's returns definitively say — or not say — about Democrats' resuscitated hopes and changed fortunes, and are there a few results that you find most compelling?

Kristen Soltis Anderson: Tuesday's results are a reminder that nothing is forever in politics. Pronouncements that coalitions have changed and one party has captured the hearts of a demographic group are always susceptible to events. Groups like young voters, or Latino voters, did not become forever Republicans after the 2024 elections. In short: Parties have to deliver or voters will look to the alternative.

Bruni: Kristen, you're killing my buzz. Queering my jitterbug. But I hear you and agree: Some perspective — and a great deal of caution — is in order.

Nate Silver: What stands out is that this really was a clean sweep. To steal the headline I used at my own newsletter, it was a 10 out of 10 night for Democrats. They won basically everywhere they wanted to win, and they won big.

Democrats not only won everywhere — they also beat their polls, especially in New Jersey. So it's at least possible that polls of a broad cross section of voters — right now, most of the polling you

see of 2026 or Trump's approval is conducted among registered voters or all adults, not *likely* voters — actually underestimate how much of a drag Trump is on Republicans.

Bruni: Let me come at this from a different angle, following up on Nate's mention of Trump. Precisely where, how and how much does he factor into all of this? I feel strongly, in my gut, that this is a repudiation of him; the enormous margins of Abigail Spanberger's victory in the Virginia governor's race and Mikie Sherrill's in the New Jersey governor's race *must* reflect many voters' disgust with the president. Also, he was tellingly quick on Wednesday morning to proclaim that he wasn't on the ballot. This had nothing to do with him! But in fact he was on the ballot, wasn't he?

Anderson: Trump is great at turning out voters. The problem is that he's great at turning out Democrats *even when he's not on the ballot*, while his coalition includes a lot of "low propensity" voters who couldn't be bothered to turn out for an off-off-year election.

Silver: Let's keep in mind that elections where the president *isn't* on the ballot are usually rough for the party occupying the White House. That's been no less true in the Trump era; Democrats had a pretty good midterm in 2018. Furthermore, Trump is now approaching first-term levels of unpopularity. He's at a minus-13 in our tracking, and there's been a recent downturn.

Bruni: So if I'm hearing both of you correctly, it's absolutely legitimate to extrapolate from what happened Tuesday to the midterms next year, at least if conditions remain largely the same and Trump, not known for soul-searching and responsibility-taking, stays his toxic course?

Anderson: Republicans have time to turn this around. If Trump is able to deliver on his economic promises of lower cost of living and a booming economy come November 2026, things won't necessarily look as grim. You've got senior-level White House officials like James Blair publicly acknowledging that ceding "affordability" to Democrats is creating political problems for Republicans. The reality, though, is you can't message your way out of an affordability crisis, as the Biden and then Harris campaigns found out spectacularly....

Bruni: Kristen, since you mentioned them, let's discuss Latino voters. Some numbers I saw from Union City, N.J., showed that the Latino vote for Trump there had risen to about 41 percent last year, from about 19 percent in 2016. But on Tuesday, the Republican candidate for governor, Jack Ciattarelli, got only about 15 percent of Union City's Latino vote. Does that have implications beyond him and New Jersey? How big an alarm bell for Republicans is that and how does that factor into your expectations for the midterms?

Anderson: This should set off alarms. Trump has reoriented the G.O.P. around a diverse, working-class coalition. They want safety, security, affordability. They like the party of the guy who isn't afraid to wave out the McDonald's drive-through window.

Silver: Yeah, in New Jersey last year, there was almost a 1-to-1 correspondence between where Trump gained ground in a surprisingly strong finish and the share of Hispanic voters in the town or county. And those counties bounced back strongly to Sherrill. That might be the single best sign for Democrats from Tuesday.

The thing a lot of people don't get is that Hispanic voters are actually one of the swingier groups. Democrats have learned the hard way that they can't take those votes for granted. But Republicans can't either. And there's a bifurcation between college-educated Hispanic voters

and those who didn't finish college, who are more Trump-friendly. Like "noncollege" voters of other races, the second group doesn't always show up for midterms.

Trump Was Never a Kingmaker. Are Republicans Finally Seeing It?

The round table convenes to discuss what comes after the Democrats' big wins — and whether the "red hat" coalition can recover.

By Jamelle Bouie, Michelle Cottle, and David French, Nov. 8, 2025, NYT (edited)

Michelle Cottle: It was a huge week for the Democrats. The party scored major victories in high-profile elections in New York, New Jersey, Virginia and California. Voters were fired up. Turnout was high. Even political junkies obsessively following these races — myself included — were surprised by the severity of the spanking that Republicans took.

So I want to get this conversation started by talking about what all of this means for the Democratic Party, for the Republican Party and where American politics are headed next. Jamelle and David, I want your first thoughts. Give me your headline for what Tuesday's election says about the country at this moment.

Jamelle Bouie: I wrote this the night of the elections, but this is just a reminder that Donald Trump has never been a particularly good vote-getter for other Republicans. For himself, he's been a very effective vote-getter. And he's able to turn broad unpopularity into narrow electoral wins through his ability to mobilize infrequent and low-propensity voters.

But when it comes to other Republicans, when he's not on the ballot, he's an albatross around their necks, and that's been consistently the case. That was true in 2017. That was true in 2018. That was true in 2022. And it's true this year in 2025. When Trump is on the ballot, voters will turn out to vote for Donald Trump. And I think that Republicans should not dismiss this as a bunch of blue states. Had these elections gone the other way — had Spanberger underperformed the averages, had Jay Jones lost, had Mikie Sherrill lost, which the polling suggested was a possibility — and if Andrew Cuomo had won. Republicans should be crowing right now about how they've made inroads into blue states. So what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

The scale of the Democratic wins should be a flashing warning sign to the Republican Party. Not just that the national environment is very favorable to Democrats, but that voters have ceased making distinctions between Trump and other Republicans. They're treating other Republicans like they would treat Trump. And that is the nightmare scenario. It makes it much more difficult for incumbents next year to distance themselves from the president.

So I would say if I were a Republican incumbent right now, I would be thinking: What can I do to distance myself from Trump? And interestingly, like, the one Republican who seems to have gotten this message is Marjorie Taylor Greene, of all people.**...**

French: Let me look at this from the standpoint of a similar metric that Republicans used after the 2024 election, to indicate that their win in their view was broader than maybe the final outcome indicated. And that was that all kinds of places all across America, from blue counties to red counties, they all went more red.

And so that gave a lot of Republicans this idea that what we've done is we've started a realignment. We started a push of the whole country more in this rightward direction. But if you apply the same analysis now, late in the evening on Tuesday, it looked as if every single Republican — I mean every single Virginia county — was more blue in 2025 than it was in 2021. So applying that same metric, that would be a real warning sign for Republicans.

Second, I really agree with Jamelle. We have been down this road for 10 years now. The MAGA world does not tend to do well when they're not named Donald Trump, unless they're in a super, super, super red place. When I was writing my book several years ago, at the very beginning of the pandemic, when I was wrapping it up, I did this thing where I went and I looked back at every rhetoric around every election cycle.

So whether it was Bush winning re-election in 2004, the Democrats having a big 2006, Obama's ascendance in 2008, the Tea Party revolution in 2010, the rhetoric was always the same. It was: We've cracked the code, we've figured it out, we've got the realignment. It is: We are winning from now on. And so you had that exact same rhetoric after Trump won in 2024. But if you have a memory greater than a goldfish, you know that unless you actually sit down, hunker down and govern well and deal with core concerns of constituents, your victory is ephemeral.

And so what did Trump do? He didn't sit down and focus like a laser on inflation and grocery prices and all of that stuff. He launched his vengeance tour. He has squandered the good will that he had when he was inaugurated in near record speed — maybe the only speed that eclipsed his first squandering in 2017**....**

Changing Partisan Coalitions in a Politically Divided Nation

Pew Research, April 9, 2024 (edited, graphs not included)

Party identification among registered voters, 1994-2023

The contours of the 2024 political landscape are the result of long-standing patterns of partisanship, combined with the profound demographic changes that have reshaped the United States over the past three decades.

Many of the factors long associated with voters' partisanship remain firmly in place. For decades, gender, race and ethnicity, and religious affiliation have been important dividing lines in politics. This continues to be the case today.

Voters are roughly evenly split between the parties

Yet there also have been profound changes – in some cases as a result of demographic change, in others because of dramatic shifts in the partisan allegiances of key groups.

The combined effects of change and continuity have left the country's two major parties at virtual parity: About half of registered voters (49%) identify as Democrats or lean toward the Democratic Party, while 48% identify as Republicans or lean Republican.

In recent decades, neither party has had a sizable advantage, but **the Democratic Party has lost the edge it maintained from 2017 to 2021.**

Pew Research Center's comprehensive analysis of party identification among registered voters – based on hundreds of thousands of interviews conducted over the past three decades – tracks the changes in the country and the parties since 1994. Among the major findings:

The partisan coalitions are increasingly different. Both parties are more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past. However, this has had a far greater impact on the composition of the Democratic Party than the Republican Party.

The share of voters who are Hispanic **has roughly tripled** since the mid-1990s; the share who are Asian has **increased sixfold** over the same period. Today, 44% of Democratic and Democratic-leaning voters are Hispanic, Black, Asian, another race or multiracial, compared with 20% of Republicans and Republican leaners. However, the Democratic Party's advantages among Black and Hispanic voters, in particular, have narrowed somewhat in recent years.

Education and partisanship: The share of voters with a four-year bachelor's degree keeps increasing, reaching 40% in 2023. And the gap in partisanship between voters with and without a college degree continues to grow, especially among White voters. More than six-in-ten White voters who do not have a four-year degree (63%) associate with the Republican Party, which is up substantially over the past 15 years. White college graduates are closely divided; this was not the case in the 1990s and early 2000s, when they mostly aligned with the GOP. *(Explore this further in Chapter 2.)*

Beyond the gender gap: By a modest margin, women voters continue to align with the Democratic Party (by 51% to 44%), while nearly the reverse is true among men (52% align with the Republican Party, 46% with the Democratic Party). The gender gap is about as wide among **married men and women.** The gap is wider among **men and women who have never married;** while both groups are majority Democratic, 37% of never-married men identify as Republicans or lean toward the GOP, compared with 24% of never-married women. *(Explore this further in Chapter 3.)*

A divide between old and young: Today, each younger age cohort is somewhat more Democratic-oriented than the one before it. The youngest voters (those ages 18 to 24) align with the Democrats by nearly two-to-one (66% to 34% Republican or lean GOP); majorities of older voters (those in their mid-60s and older) identify as Republicans or lean Republican. While there have been wide age divides in American politics over the last two decades, this wasn't always the case; **in the 1990s there were only very modest age differences** in partisanship.

Key Groups Where Each Party Has Wide Advantages	
Republican Party	**Democratic Party**
• White evangelical Protestant	• Women with a college degree
• Latter-day Saint (Mormon)	• Urban
• White voters without a college degree	• Hispanic
• Veterans	• Born in in 1990s
• Rural	• Asian
• White men	• Religiously unaffiliated
• Born in 1940s	• Black

What this report tells us – and what it doesn't

In most cases, the partisan allegiances of voters do not change a great deal from year to year. Yet as this study shows, the long-term shifts in party identification are substantial and say a great deal about how the country – and its political parties – have changed since the 1990s.

The steadily growing alignment between demographics and partisanship reveals an important aspect of steadily growing partisan polarization. Republicans and Democrats do not just hold different beliefs and opinions about major issues, they are much more different racially, ethnically, geographically and in educational attainment than they used to be.

Yet over this period, there have been only modest shifts in overall partisan identification. Voters remain evenly divided, even as the two parties have grown further apart. The continuing close division in partisan identification among voters is consistent with the relatively narrow margins in the popular votes in most national elections over the past three decades.

Note: The following two articles, one written in June and the other two days after the November election, reach contrary conclusions about whether a political realignment has occurred.

The American Political Realignment Is Real

By **William A. Galston,** June 3, 2025, The Wall Street Journal

The Democrats' defeat in 2024 reflected long-term shifts in the electorate, not merely Kamala Harris's vulnerability or Joe Biden's decision to seek re-election. If these trends persist through the 2028 presidential election, the long-predicted realignment of America's political parties will be completed.

The New York Times reported on May 24 that the Republican Party had increased its vote share in three consecutive presidential elections in 1,433 counties, nearly half the national total. The Democratic Party had increased its share in all three elections in only 57 counties. Some 42.7 million voting-age Americans live in counties with consecutive Republican gains, compared with only 8.1 million in counties with consecutive Democratic gains.

In Texas, which Democrats once dreamed of shifting into their column, 124 counties have tilted further right since 2012, while only two counties have tilted further left. In New York, long a blue bastion, 43 of the state's 62 counties showed Republican gains of 10 percentage points or more between 2012 and 2024, and Democrats' statewide victory margin shrunk by half.

Demographic patterns influenced these geographical shifts. The clearest divide was on education level: In not a single county in which the Republican Party increased its share of the vote did a majority of adults hold a college degree. Ethnicity also mattered: Sixty-six of the 67 U.S. counties with a majority Hispanic population voted more Republican in 2024 than in 2012. Income was important, too: 95% of U.S. counties trending more Republican had median incomes below the national median.

Earlier in May, the political analytics organization Catalist took a granular look at changes in voting patterns since 2012. Among black voters, support for the Democratic presidential candidate fell from 96% in 2012 to 85% in 2024. For black women, the decline was a relatively

modest 7 points, compared with 16 for black men, widening the gender gap from 2 points in 2012 to 11 in 2024.

During this period, Latino support for the Democratic presidential ticket fell from 68% to 54%. Again, sex mattered. While support for the Democratic candidate fell from 71% to 60% for Latina women, it collapsed from 63% to just 47% for Latino men.

Because the median age of Latino eligible voters is lower than for most other segments of the electorate, trends among young Latino adults are especially important—and they're not comforting for Democrats. Among Latino voters 18 to 29, Democratic support fell by 19 points, from 76% in 2012 to 57% in 2024—by 14 points among young women and 24 points among young men.

Among Asian and Pacific Islander voters, the fastest growing of any demographic group in the electorate, trends were similar. Between 2012 and 2024, their support for Democratic presidential candidates declined by 13 points, 11 points among women and 16 points among men.

Political ideology is also an important factor in recent elections. A March report from Blue Rose Research documented the rising significance of ideology. While Democrats held most of their ground among liberal nonwhite voters in the past three presidential elections, a significant portion of Hispanic and Asian voters describe themselves as moderate, and the decline in support for Democrats among these segments of the electorate was especially severe—an 11-point decline in support for Democrats among Asian moderates and a 23-point decline among Hispanic moderates.

Some retrospective Blue Rose findings further illuminate the dynamics of the 2024 presidential contest. Asked last October which was more important to them at the time, "preserving America's institutions" or "delivering change that improves Americans' lives," only 18% of those polled chose the former while 78% chose the latter. No wonder Democrats' appeals to saving democracy fell flat. Of those polled at the time, 53% said that things were going so poorly in America that they favored major changes, even a "shock to the system." In this respect, Donald Trump has delivered.

Taken together, these three reports point to the declining significance of race and ethnicity for voters' choices, the rising significance of education levels, and the effect of ideology on voter preferences in a polarized party system.

If Mr. Trump is able to produce change that improves the lives of working-class voters, he may well seal their realignment with an economically nationalist, culturally conservative Republican Party and pass a new Republican majority on to his successor. If he can't, the future course of American politics will be up for grabs.

Two Signs That Democrats Flipped Trump Supporters on Tuesday

It wasn't just about superior turnout. Party switchers played a significant role in Virginia and New Jersey.

By Nate Cohn, NYT, Nov. 6, 2025

In the Trump era, Democrats have seemed to excel among the highly engaged, highly educated voters who predominate in low-turnout, off-year elections, only to struggle when more irregular and less educated voters flock to the polls in presidential years.

But on Tuesday, when Democrats won the Virginia and New Jersey governor's races by wide margins, it wasn't simply because more Democratic-leaning voters showed up to the polls while more Republican-leaning voters sat out. The Democratic candidates also succeeded at winning over a modest but meaningful sliver of President Trump's supporters, based on exit polls and authoritative voter file records.

While it's always challenging to nail down the details of an electoral shift, the available data generally suggests that Democratic gains were driven slightly more by flipping Mr. Trump's supporters than by benefiting from a superior turnout, at least for Abigail Spanberger in Virginia and Mikie Sherrill in New Jersey.

Together, the combination of a more Democratic electorate and success among those swing voters was enough to turn light blue Virginia and New Jersey into Democratic romps. It was also enough to allow Democrats to reverse last year's losses among Hispanic voters, as many of Mr. Trump's new Hispanic supporters from 2024 stayed home and many others returned to the Democrats.