

Routledge Research in American Politics and Governance

A TALE OF TWO PARTIES

**LIVING AMONGST DEMOCRATS AND
REPUBLICANS SINCE 1952**

Kenneth Janda



"A pioneer of the modern social sciences offers a remarkable tale of how American political parties have developed over the past 17 presidential elections. He draws on his own experiences as a citizen, political scientist, student, and mentor, as well as analyses of nearly 70 years of data. Charting the evolving composition of the parties, Professor Janda shows how the social bases of the parties have changed and how social features, rather than ideology, have come to define the Democrats and Republicans. While this raises questions about how well responsible party government works, Professor Janda ends with an optimistic view of the future. This book is a social science masterpiece from which we will all learn."

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"Kenneth Janda inventively examines survey data to uncover the extent to which Republicans and Democrats today are different from those in the 1950s. He documents changes as to how different groups identify with the parties as well as in which groups constitute the base of each party. Janda presents the numbers, but then he delightfully adds his own perspectives on these seven decades of politics. As to be expected, the answer is that there has been change in some of the sociological differences between the parties, but the surprise is how many have stayed the same."

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"Drawing upon social identity theory, Janda helps us understand why—at a time when the policy differences between the two parties have never been more stark—their support bases are driven more by social identity than by policy. With analysis covering the period from 1952 to 2020, the already-interesting story is made even more interesting with touches of autobiography and analogies from—believe it or not—the world of sports. In an era marked by hyperpartisanship, extreme polarization, and political tribalism, this is an entertaining and highly informative book that should be read by all serious students of American party politics."

Robert Harmel, *Professor, Texas A&M*

"I loved this book. Full of engaging writing and personal insights, Janda takes us on a highly informative and highly readable tour of the evolving two-party system of the past seven decades. This book will be valuable to scholars and students of American political parties and political parties' history, but its straightforward and accessible presentation should recommend it to an even wider audience."

Steven Greene, *Professor, North Carolina State University*

"This is an excellent study of partisan identity, with important new insights into the nature of identity, the ways demographic bases of partisans' identities have evolved over time, and especially, into how partisan identity relates to ideology. Janda draws on identity theory to develop the close affinity of partisan identity to team identification in sports, with fruitful results. Among other things, this helps him to develop the idea that parties largely cause ideology rather than the other way around. All that, and it is also a good read!"

W. Phillips Shively, *Professor Emeritus, University of Minnesota*



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A Tale of Two Parties

Since 1952, the social bases of the Democratic and Republican parties have undergone radical reshuffling. At the start of this period southern Blacks favored Lincoln's Republican Party over suspect Democrats, and women favored Democrats more than Republicans. In 2020 these facts have been completely reversed. *A Tale of Two Parties: Living Amongst Democrats and Republicans Since 1952* traces through this transformation by showing:

- How the United States society has changed over the last seven decades in terms of regional growth, income, urbanization, education, religion, ethnicity, and ideology;
- How differently the two parties have appealed to groups in these social cleavages;
- How groups in these social cleavages have become concentrated within the bases of the Democratic and Republican parties;
- How party identification becomes intertwined with social identity to generate polarization akin to that of rapid sports fans or primitive tribes.

A Tale of Two Parties: Living Amongst Democrats and Republicans Since 1952 will have a wide and enthusiastic readership among political scientists and researchers of American politics, campaigns and elections, and voting and elections.

Kenneth Janda is Payson S. Wild Professor Emeritus of Political Science at Northwestern University. He is co-founder of the international journal *Party Politics*; co-author of *The Challenge of Democracy: American Government in Global Politics*, 15th ed. (2021); author of *Party Systems and Country Governance* (2011) and *The Emperor and the Peasant* (2018). He received the Samuel J. Eldersveld Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Political Science Association's Political Parties and Organizations Section in 2000, and the APSA's Frank J. Goodnow Award for service to the discipline and profession in 2009.

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A Tale of Two Parties

**Living Amongst Democrats and
Republicans Since 1952**

Kenneth Janda



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To Ann Janda, my wife, resident copy editor, and former head of Northwestern University's Social Science Data Services. She also served as Northwestern's Official Representative to the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. For decades, Ann disseminated data from the ICPSR and the American National Election Studies to students and faculty until retiring in 2006.



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Preface

I write as a political scientist and as a citizen who since 1952 has witnessed major changes in party politics. At age 16 in 1952 and a junior in high school, I listened to the radio's comprehensive coverage of the Democratic and Republican nominating conventions. That does not single me out. Some 6.5 million Americans living in my age group (85 or older) heard the conventions too. However, they are too smart to put their recollections and reminisces in a book about contemporary politics.

My personal experience figures into this story another way. As a 24-year-old predoctoral student at Indiana University, I spent the 1959–1960 academic year at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, where I was privileged to observe Angus Campbell, Warren Miller, Phillip Converse, and Donald Stokes analyze national 1952 and 1956 election surveys. Although my doctoral research dealt with roll-call voting in the Kentucky state legislature, not electoral behavior, my influential mentor at Indiana, Professor Charles S. Hyneman, arranged for my appointment anyway. Professor Campbell, head of Michigan's SRC, was suitably accommodating, while Warren, Phil, and Don treated me like a member of their research family. I learned a lot that year as the four published what became arguably the most influential book in the study of American politics, *The American Voter* (1960).

I never did write my thesis on roll-call voting in Kentucky, nor did I switch to study electoral behavior. My Michigan experience led elsewhere. I persuaded Henry Teune, my fellow IU PhD candidate, to join me in designing and conducting a survey of all candidates for the Indiana General Assembly in 1960.¹ That summer before the November election, Henry and I traveled across the state interviewing House and Senate candidates. We collected data on 238 out of 277 candidates, which we used in our 1961 dissertations: Henry's on legislative interest groups and mine on representational behavior. So I did survey research, but on legislative candidates, not voters.

For decades after, I maintained contact with Miller, Converse, and Stokes through the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, which was created in 1962 to share data from the SRC's national election surveys with researchers across the nation.² The SRC had already conducted

national voter surveys in the presidential elections of 1948, 1952, and 1956. Treating the 1948 survey as a pilot study, *The American Voter* relied mainly on the 1952 and 1956 data. Those surveys formed the basis of what became known as the American National Election Studies (ANES), a collection of all election surveys since 1952 now available online.³

Using ANES data for 1952–2016, the National Opinion Research Center General Social Survey data for 2004–2018, a 2019 Voter Study Group survey, and a Nationscape survey for 2020,⁴ this book examines the social traits of political party identifiers—i.e., citizens who, when asked, say they consider themselves as Democrats or Republicans. It analyzes their party identifications according to region of the country, economic status, urbanization of residence, level of education, religious affiliation, and ethnicity. It also examines citizens' ideological self-placement. This book is about people's political identity, not their voting behavior.

It began as an update to my 2013 Apple iBook, *The Social Bases of Political Parties: Democrats and Republicans 1952–2012 and 2032*. My iBook was fully interactive, allowing readers to navigate within the text by clicking on underlined phrases, but it was only available in electronic form for Mac users.⁵ In printed form, this book lacks that capability, but it extends the analysis to include the 2020 presidential election years.

A Tale of Two Parties also offers a different perspective on the social traits of those who identify with the Democratic and Republican parties. Whereas my iBook treated parties as reflecting their social bases, this book evaluates the social bases of parties in terms of social identity theory. People from different social groups often identify as Democrats or Republicans so they can belong to what they perceive as a desirable social crowd.

Sports researchers also use social identity theory to explain partisanship in sports. Fans don't deliberate on their choices of teams; they identify with local teams already favored by their friends and neighbors. Sports fans form a supportive crowd. They love their players (who can do no wrong) and hate their opponents (who do no right). Green Bay Packers fans in Wisconsin wear cheesehead hats to solidify their identity with their professional football team, not because they like cheese. This book develops at some length the similarity between the considerable research on sports fans and the study of political partisanship.

Democrats readily tell interviewers that they are politically liberal and Republicans say they are politically conservative. People tend to think that liberal voters identify as Democrats and conservatives as Republicans. In contrast, this book argues that many voters become Democrats and then say they are liberal, and even more become Republicans and then say they are conservative. Because many voters don't clearly understand the liberal and conservative positions on an ideological continuum, partisanship influences their ideological claims as much as ideology influences their partisanship.

Finally, I speculate on why partisanship in 2020 differs so much from partisanship in 1952. Technological changes in communication over the past seven decades account for much of today's political polarization.

Notes

- 1 Kenneth Janda, Henry Teune, Melvin Kahn, and Wayne Francis, *Legislative Politics in Indiana: A Preliminary Report to the 1961 General Assembly* (Bloomington, IN: Bureau of Government Research, Indiana University, 1961).
- 2 See "About ICPSR" at www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/about/. I served as an ICPSR Council Member from 1965 to 1967.
- 3 See "About Us" at <https://electionstudies.org/about-us/>.
- 4 See Nationscape at www.voterstudygroup.org/nationscape.
- 5 *The Social Bases of Political Parties* is available as an iBook at <https://books.apple.com/us/book/social-bases-political-parties/id602462683?mt=13>. It also can be downloaded as a PDF at www.janda.org/bio/parties.htm. That book assessed the relationship between the parties' social bases and their aggregation and articulation of issues in congressional voting. This book does not pursue that connection.