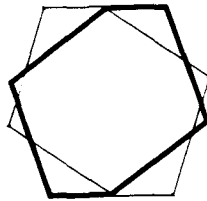


THE GRADUATE SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY CENTER
OF THE CITY UNIVERISTY OF NEW YORK



**Party Political Preferences of U.S. Hispanics:
The Varying Impact of Religion, Social Class and
Demographic Factors**

by

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Introduction

The Hispanic population of the U.S. is growing in political importance due to size and its concentration in a few politically important states (Bean and Tienda, 1987). The 1990 Census revealed that Hispanics number over 22 million persons, or 9 percent of the U.S. population. This population group grew by 53 percent in the decade 1980-1990. The interpretation of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, under which congressional and state reapportionment creates Hispanic majority districts wherever possible, increases the voting impact of this population growth. Obviously Hispanic party preferences are and will be important to both the Democratic and Republican parties.

The Hispanic population of the U.S. is pluralistic (Choldin, 1986). Diversity among Hispanics emanates from different points of origin and historical experiences (Nelson and Tienda, 1985). There are citizens and aliens, legal and illegal residents, very recent immigrants as well as people in the southwest, who can trace back their family histories for generations within what is now the United States. Eighty-five percent of the U.S. Hispanic population originates in Mexico, Puerto Rico and Cuba. The Mexican-Americans are a numerical majority and dominate California and Texas. New York is divided between Puerto Ricans and other sub-groups, while Florida contains the most diverse Hispanic population with a large Cuban-American plurality (Fitzpatrick, 1971; Wilson and Portes, 1980). However, considerable economic and socio-demographic variation as well as differences of race and language use exist, even within the various origin groups (Stolzenberg, 1990; Borjas and Tienda, 1985).

The first goal of this paper is to examine the party political preferences of self-identified Hispanics. Secondly, we aim to provide a socioeconomic and demographic profile of this population according to political party preferences. Thirdly, we explain the social basis for support of the Democratic and Republican Parties. Lastly, we attempt to predict the impact of changing trends in individual characteristics on the future political party preferences of U.S. Hispanics. Thus, the crucial research questions are to investigate whether the Hispanics can be considered a coherent

political minority group, and further to examine to what extent they resemble or follow either the white or African-American political party preference patterns.

Data and Methodology

Our data source is the 1990 CUNY National Survey of Religious Identification (NSRI) (Kosmin *et al*, 1991), based upon the ICR Survey Research Group of Media, Pennsylvania's twice-weekly national omnibus survey, EXCEL. This involved sampling over 113,000 households using the GENESYS random digit dialing (RDD) system. One thousand households were contacted in each of 113 successive rounds over the period of April 1989 to April 1990. An adult respondent was chosen in each household using the last-birthday method of selection. The procedure allowed for equal probability of household selection from every state (except Alaska and Hawaii). It should be noted that the data were collected only for the civilian non-institutional population in telephone households. NSRI is based upon self-reporting on the question "What is your religion?" which had a refusal rate of only 2.3 percent. One of the unique features of NSRI was that it revealed for the first time the religious profile of Hispanics. NSRI allows us to disaggregate the one-third of U.S. Hispanics who are Protestant and of no or other religion from the Catholic majority in order to see how religious identification affects political outlook.

This paper utilizes 4,868 interviews where the respondent identified him/herself as Hispanic. The respondents were interviewed by telephone in English and asked "Are you of Hispanic origin or background?" They were then asked "Are you white Hispanic or black Hispanic?" The key NSRI question for this paper was the common party political preference question: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as: a Republican; a Democrat; an Independent?" The refusal rate to this particular question on party political preference among Hispanics was 1.5 percent.

Although the language barrier is problematic, we believe that it is not crucial for this topic, since according to the 1990 census 63 percent of the Hispanic

population speaks English "very well." Even those who speak only limited English probably could answer the NSRI key questions. Moreover, English speakers are more likely to be citizens and politically active.

Our analysis of the data begins with a descriptive economic and socio-demographic profile of party political preference of U.S. Hispanics. For this analysis we use the post-stratified and weighted results for the following NSRI variables: region, state, religion, household income, educational attainment, race, gender, and age.

This first stage bi-variate analysis is followed by an analysis of variance utilizing a multi-classification procedure for the Democratic party preference. For the multi-level analysis, using unweighted data and the above explanatory variables, we limit our sample to 1,647 respondents who provided preferences for the two major political parties and resided in the five largest states of Hispanic residence.

Results

A) Demographic and Socioeconomic Patterns

The NSRI weighted results revealed that 65 percent of Hispanics identify with the two main political parties, 41 percent preferring the Democrats, and 24 percent the Republicans. The remainder of the respondents comprised 27 percent who self-reported as Independents, just under 2 percent who supported some other party, and 6 percent who were Don't Knows and Refusals.

The descriptive analysis begins with chart 1, which contains 4 pie charts of party political preference of U.S. Hispanics by Census region. The 1990 U.S. Census reveals the following distribution of the Hispanic population: 45% in the West, 30% in the South, 8% in the Midwest, and 17% in the Northeast. Chart 1 shows that Hispanics in the South are less likely to be Democrats, while those in the West and the Midwest are less likely to be Republicans and tend to be more independent. However, the geographic division according to these four Census regions is misleading since the South includes two states, that are quite dissimilar politically,

Texas and Florida.

U.S. Hispanics are highly concentrated geographically minority. Half the nation's Hispanic population is located in two states: California and Texas, which have over 7 million and 4 million Hispanic residents respectively. However, the state with the highest proportion of Hispanic residents is New Mexico, with 38%. For each of the top five states in terms of Hispanic population size, the 1990 U.S. Census indicates the following: 26% of the population in California are Hispanics; 26% in Texas; 12% in New York; 12% in Florida and 8% in Illinois.

Chart 2 provides pie charts for these five largest states. In fact, they show quite clearly the different patterns for Texas and Florida, which were subsumed in the aggregate regional figures for the South. We can now observe that the percentage of Democrats in Florida is half of that in Texas (25% and 50% respectively). Moreover, only among Hispanics in Florida is there a solid plurality of Republican supporters, 46%, compared to only 20% in Texas. The preference patterns of Hispanics in New York are similar to those in California, while those of Hispanics in Illinois resemble those in Texas. Hispanics' preferences in Florida clearly follow a very distinct and different pattern from those of the other large states.

The NSRI distribution of U.S. Hispanics by religious identification shows that 66% are Roman Catholic and 23% identify with other Christian religious groups, mainly Protestant denominations.¹ A variety of other religions attracts 4% of the Hispanics, while 6% have no religion. The pattern of party political preferences by religious identification varies somewhat among these four religious identification groupings, as shown in Chart 3. Compared with the Catholic majority, the Protestants are 7% more likely to be Republican and 6% less likely to be Democrats. The small Other Religion grouping resembles the Catholic distribution, but the No Religion group has many more political independents. If we focus on the gap between the two

¹ The main Protestant denominations represented among NSRI Hispanics were the various Baptist groups with 7.4%; Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses and Methodists each account for about 2% of the Hispanic weighted sample.

main parties we find that it favors the Democrats by 22% among Roman Catholics, by 18% among No Religion, by 10% among Other Religions, and only by 9% among Protestants. The religious composition of the support for the two major parties is given in Chart 4. The data within each party show quite clearly that Hispanic Democrats are 7% more likely to be Roman Catholics than are Republicans, while conversely Hispanic Republicans are 7% more likely to be Protestants and are 7% less likely to be Catholics.

We now turn to socioeconomic data and their influence on political patterns. Chart 5 shows the overall percentage distribution of party preferences for nine income categories. A clear pattern emerges whereby Democratic supporters are concentrated in the middle income groups with annual household incomes of \$25-40,000. In contrast, Republican support follows a linear pattern from under 20% among the lowest income households to nearly 40% among the highest income group. Republican support outscores Democrats only among those with annual household income of over \$75,000. Low-income household respondents tend to be politically independent.

Chart 6 looks at Hispanics' household income distribution within each political party. The Republican pattern is the more uniform, though with some over-representation of the \$30-40,000 income category. On the other hand, the distribution of Democratic party support according to income is more uneven, and particularly weak at the upper levels.

Party political preference by educational level is provided in Chart 7. Overall, the variations among the five educational categories are much smaller than those found for income. The less educated are less likely to identify with the two main parties. Republicans attract more support as educational attainment increases; however, this pattern changes after the college graduate level. Republican preference dips among the small minority of Hispanics (2%) with post-graduate degrees.

Opinion polls and election results demonstrate that race is a major predictor of party affiliation in the U.S. The majority of Hispanic respondents (79.9%) self-reported as white, while 13.5% said they were black. We find that white Hispanics

are 10% more likely than black Hispanics to be Republicans, and conversely they are 7% less likely to be Democrats. As can be seen in Chart 8, the Democrat-Republican differential is 32% among blacks, but only 15% among whites.

In recent years there has been a tendency for females to prefer the Democratic party (Pomper, 1989). Chart 9 confirms that Hispanics in 1990 follow this general pattern. In particular, women are 7% more likely than men to support the Democratic party, and 3% less likely to support the Republicans. Again, we can calculate the Democrat-Republican gap, which is 13% among men and 23% among women.

One of the most important NSRI findings relates to the age structure of the Hispanic supporters. Chart 10 shows quite clearly a linear pattern across age groups. Party political preferences change significantly with age. Democratic support increases as the population ages, and simultaneously the gap between the two parties widens. The younger the age group, the greater the preference for the Republicans. The independent preference closely follows the Republican pattern.

We can now summarize our descriptive analysis. From the data we can create composite profiles of the Hispanic respondent who is most likely to state that he/she prefers the Republican or Democratic party or is an independent. The most typical average Democrat is likely to be an elderly, black female, Roman Catholic residing in Illinois, who has a household income of \$20-25,000 a year, and holds a post-graduate degree. In somewhat of a contrast, the most likely Republican Party supporter should be a white Protestant male in his early twenties, residing in Florida, who has a high income and a college degree. The ideal Hispanic independent is also a young male, but in contrast to the Republican, he is a high school dropout with low income level, who identifies with no religion and resides in the Midwest.

B) The Multi-level Analysis

The analysis of variance of Democratic Party preference versus Republican preference for our sub-sample of 1,647 Hispanics in Table 1 indicates that all the explanatory variables except education are highly statistically significant. We tested the two-way interactions and none were found to be significant (not shown in the table). Since the

two-way interaction component is negligible, it is valid to assume an additive model, and we can now utilize the results of the multiple classification analysis in Table 2.

The geographic variable of state of residence has the strongest effect on Democratic party preference among U.S. Hispanics, even after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic factors. The adjusted estimated effects in Table 2 reveal that only 38% of Hispanics in Florida prefer the Democratic Party, compared to 73% and 70% of those in Illinois and Texas respectively. Hispanics in California and New York are very similar to the grand mean of 63% Democrats.

The second most important factor is the age cohort with differences of 26% between the young age group (18-34) and the oldest (55+). Over 80% of Hispanics 55 years and over favor Democrats, again beyond the effect of other individual characteristics such as race, gender, income or religious identity.

The differences between whites and blacks are quite large, since 76% of Black Hispanics are Democrats. Religion has as large an effect as race. The variation between Protestants and the No Religion group is 14%. Gender, income and education all have roughly the same moderate impact on Democratic Party preference. The overall R square statistic is .11.

Discussion

Our study shows that in 1990 two-thirds of U.S. Hispanics identified with the two major parties and favored the Democrats in a ratio of just under 2:1. Hispanics seem to occupy a middle position between white and black Americans. Our NSRI data relating to non-Hispanic whites show that they slightly favor the Republicans, while our African-American respondents favor the Democrats over the Republicans by 6:1. Interestingly, the pattern of Hispanic party preferences is most closely aligned with that of American Jews, for whom the NSRI data showed that 43% are Democrats and 22% are Republicans (Kosmin, 1991).

We found that younger age cohorts among Hispanics favor the Democrats less and the Republicans slightly more. This trend does not occur among African-

Americans. The Hispanic pattern somewhat parallels our NSRI data for non-Hispanic whites, whereby the senior citizen cohort favored the Democrats over the Republicans by 9%, but the age cohort under 25 preferred the Republicans by a margin of 17%.

Party political preferences of Hispanics are influenced by class factors, yet income is more important than educational level. It was found that Republican preferences increased rapidly with incomes of over \$40,000 a year. Again, this trend resembles that of mainstream American whites.

NSRI data show that Protestant denominational identification is linked to greater support for the Republican Party among white Americans in general. However, this is not the case for African-Americans, who are both overwhelmingly Protestant and Democratic (Kosmin, 1991). Further analysis of our data shows that there are in fact no significant class differences between Catholic and Protestant Hispanics. The income distribution patterns of the Catholics and Protestants are very similar as are the two profiles for the educational attainment variable. Thus, within the two main segments of Christian Hispanics we find homogeneity in terms of socioeconomic indicators. Nevertheless, our results in this paper show quite clearly that religious identification does have an influence on party preference among Hispanics, and that its impact is very similar to that for whites rather than for blacks.

Although Hispanics do follow the general religious pattern for whites in party political preferences, in terms of race they split internally in line with the general American pattern. Black Hispanics are much more likely to prefer the Democratic over the Republican Party than are white Hispanics, though the race gap is not as wide as among non-Hispanics. In this regard they can be viewed as an intermediate group. Had NSRI been specifically designed for Hispanics we would have dealt with the race question quite differently. The dichotomous white/black choice is inappropriate for this group, many of whom are Mestizos of mixed American-Indian and European ancestry. The 1990 U.S. Census showed that among Hispanics a slight majority answered white to the race question, while 40% answered "Other", 3% answered black and 2% said Asian. Nevertheless, only 13% of the NSRI's Hispanic respondents refused to classify themselves either as white or black Hispanic.

Differences by state most strongly determine Hispanic political preferences. The Hispanic political culture in Florida is unique. Floridian Hispanics are much more favorably disposed to the Republican Party than elsewhere. This electoral fact has been evident for some time, and it has been linked to the Cuban immigrant, anticommunist influence. However, the trend must go beyond this group since according to the 1990 U.S. Census, Floridian Hispanics are a mixed population with only approximately 30 percent identified as Cubans. The fact that, in Florida, religious identification has no effect on Democratic Party support, confirms the emergence of a specific local political culture. Only 25% of Catholics and 24% of Protestants prefer the Democratic Party in Florida. In contrast, the religious factor operates outside of Florida. Californian Protestants (34%) are much less likely to be Democrats than are Protestants in Texas (43%) and Illinois (45%), while in New York the pattern of political preference reverses. New York Protestants are more likely (53%) to support the Democrats than are New York Catholics (45%). Most of New York's Hispanic Protestants are Puerto Ricans. So our finding on the role of religion suggests that Puerto Ricans are similar politically to African-Americans, since for both communities Protestantism does not tend to be associated with increased Republican affiliation.

What can we predict for the future of Hispanic political party preferences? Firstly, the Hispanic population is not monolithic politically. It resembles white America more than black America in the ways class and local political cultures influence patterns of party support. The Florida phenomenon of Hispanic Republicanism seems well established and is likely to continue. Our political profiles suggest that, as time and social mobility affect the Hispanic population, support for the Republican Party should increase. Moreover, as the older generation dies out, college graduation rates increase, and Hispanic household income rises, we should expect that support for the Democratic Party will be reduced.

The evidence from NSRI suggests that Protestant denominations are gaining a significant following among Hispanics. This religious trend should also aid the Republican Party nationally, outside of New York State. Moreover, since Mexican-

Americans and Puerto Ricans seem to be the most loyal Democrats, it appears that increased diversity in the sources of Hispanic immigration, towards other parts of Central and South America and the Caribbean, would favor the Republican Party. Thus, our overall expectation is that Hispanic support for the two main parties will slowly become more balanced and that the pattern of Hispanic political preferences will increasingly reflect the mainstream majority of Americans. These trends will have an impact in Congress over time. The newly created Hispanic congressional districts, outside of Florida, will return Democrats initially, but we expect that the seats in the Northeast and California may become increasingly competitive between the parties. Though it appears that there is no national Hispanic vote, there is a tendency for a voting bloc to exist at the state and local level. Here we should be aware of influences, which we could not investigate, such as the importance of community leaders as power brokers for or within the political parties.

Future studies on the largely unresearched Hispanic vote ought to assess the role of country of origin on party political preferences among U.S. Hispanics; therefore a specific question on the matter should be added. Another suggestion for a future survey is an option to conduct the interview in Spanish. In any case an additional question is essential, namely whether the respondent is a registered voter; since we wish to concentrate on those Hispanics who are participants in the American political process.

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Table 1: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF DEMOCRATIC PARTY PREFERENCE

| Variable | Sum of Squares | d.f. | Mean Square | F | P |
|-----------|----------------|------|-------------|--------|------|
| Race | 2.209 | 1 | 2.209 | 10.649 | .001 |
| Education | 1.428 | 3 | .476 | 2.295 | .076 |
| Religion | 2.582 | 3 | .861 | 4.150 | .006 |
| State | 14.307 | 4 | 3.577 | 17.245 | .000 |
| Age | 10.962 | 2 | 5.481 | 26.426 | .000 |
| Gender | 2.515 | 1 | 2.515 | 12.124 | .001 |
| Income | 2.890 | 2 | 1.445 | 6.967 | .001 |
| Residual | 316.078 | 1524 | .207 | | |
| Total | 381.961 | 1646 | .232 | | |

$R^2 = .11$ $R = .33$

Table 2: MULTIPLE CLASSIFICATION ANALYSIS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY PREFERENCE

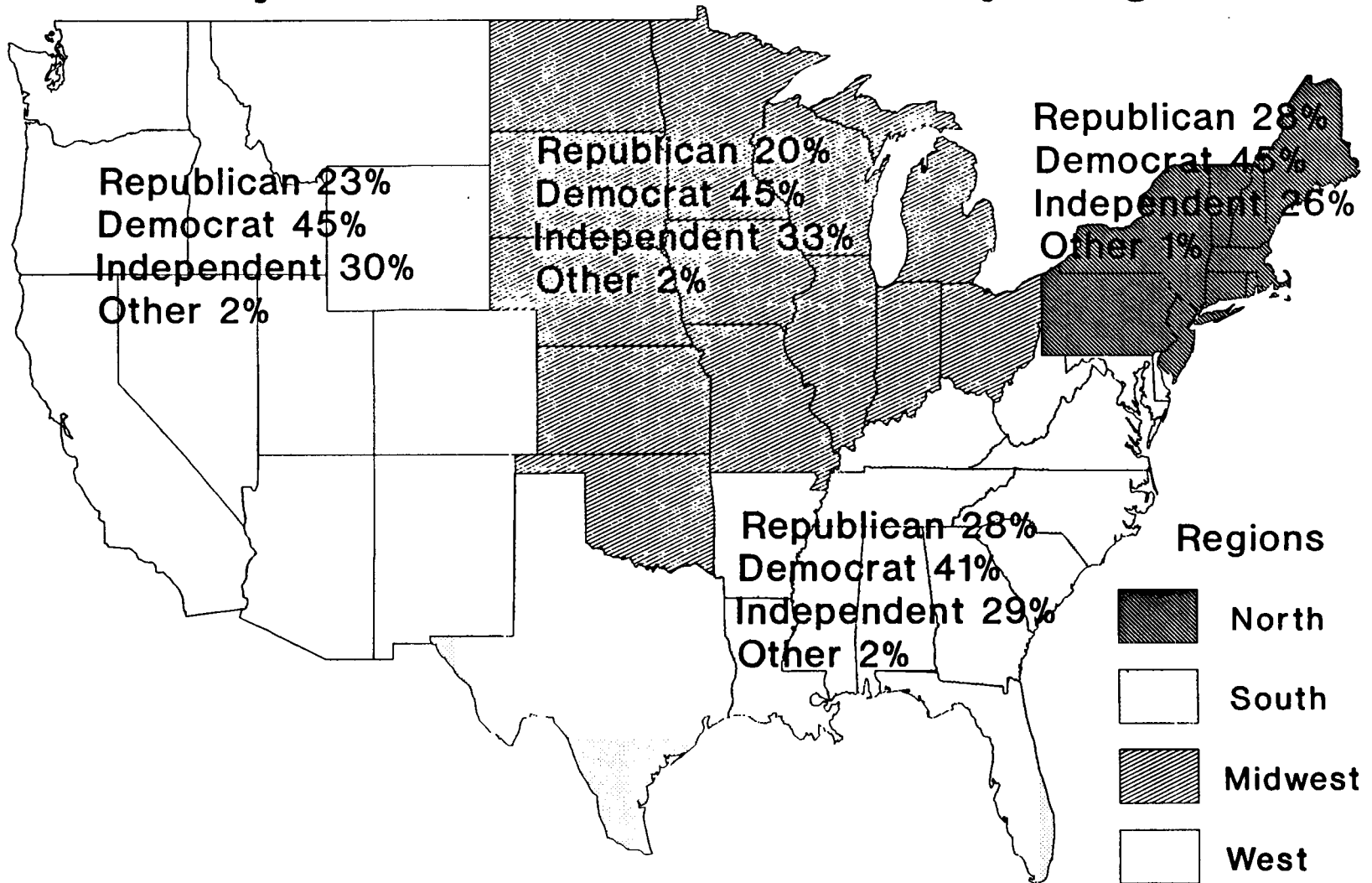
Grand Mean = .63

R² = .11

| VARIABLE/CATEGORY | N | BETA | EFFECT |
|---------------------|------|------|--------|
| 1. Race | | .08 | |
| White | 1523 | | -.01 |
| Black | 124 | | .13 |
| 2. Education | | .06 | |
| < High School | 280 | | -.06 |
| High School | 625 | | .03 |
| Some College | 455 | | .01 |
| College Graduate | 287 | | -.01 |
| 3. Religion | | .08 | |
| Roman Catholic | 1181 | | .02 |
| Other Christian | 334 | | -.08 |
| No Religion | 85 | | .06 |
| Other | 47 | | .00 |
| 4. State | | .20 | |
| California | 646 | | .01 |
| Florida | 194 | | -.25 |
| Illinois | 91 | | .10 |
| New York | 306 | | .02 |
| Texas | 410 | | .07 |
| 5. Age | | .17 | |
| 18 to 34 | 953 | | -.07 |
| 35 to 54 | 529 | | .06 |
| 55 + | 165 | | .19 |
| 6. Sex | | .08 | |
| Male | 798 | | -.04 |
| Female | 849 | | .04 |
| 7. Income | | .09 | |
| Under \$20K | 587 | | .02 |
| Under \$40K | 675 | | .03 |
| \$40K + | 385 | | -.08 |

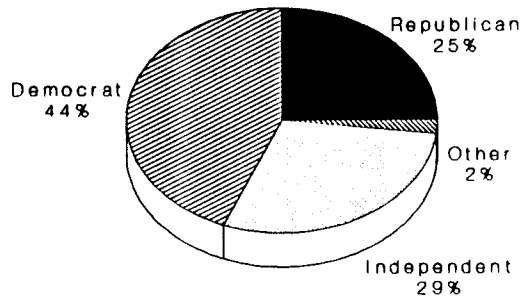
1: U.S. Hispanics 1990

Party Political Preferences by Region

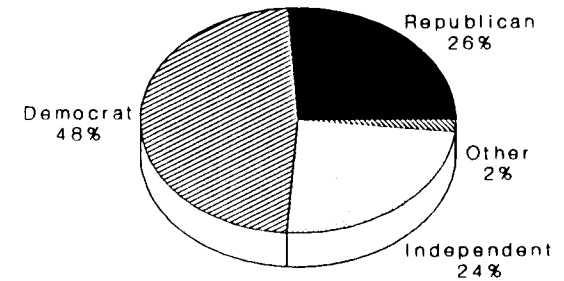


2: Party Political Preference by State

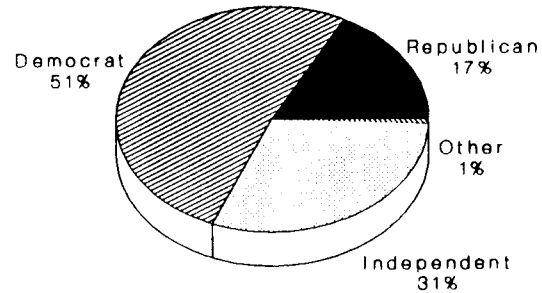
CALIFORNIA



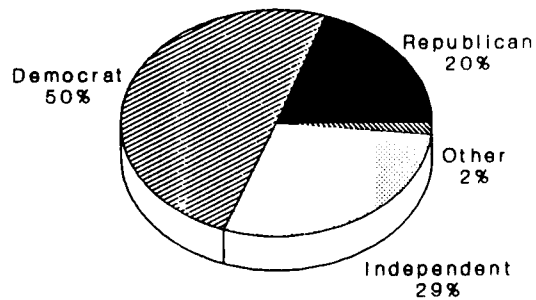
NEW YORK



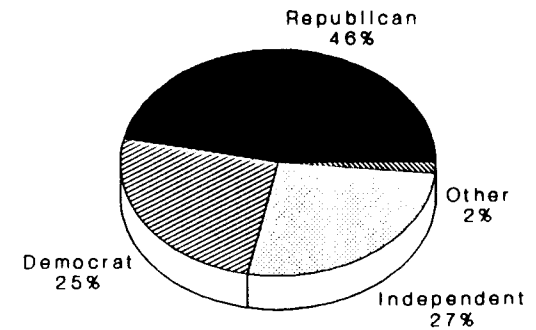
ILLINOIS



TEXAS

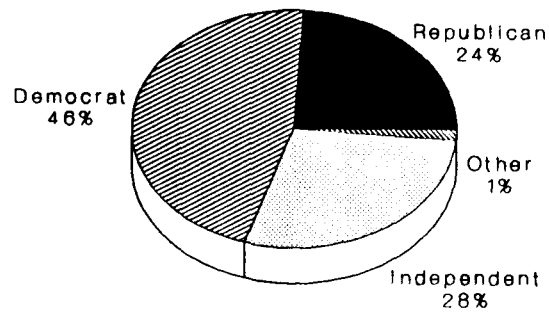


FLORIDA

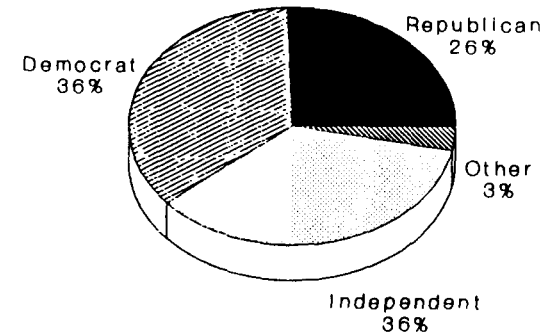


3: Party Political Preferences by Religious Identification

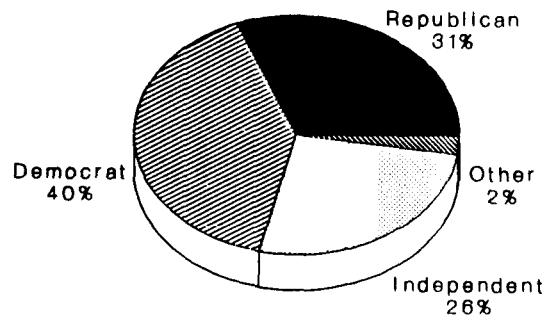
Roman Catholic



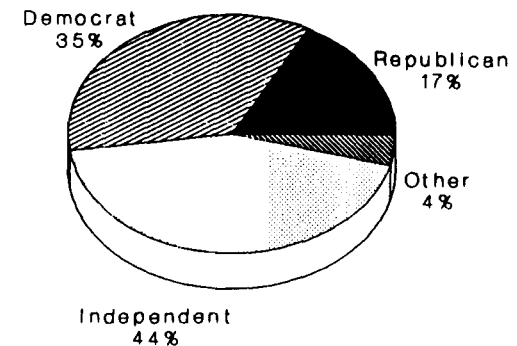
Other Religions



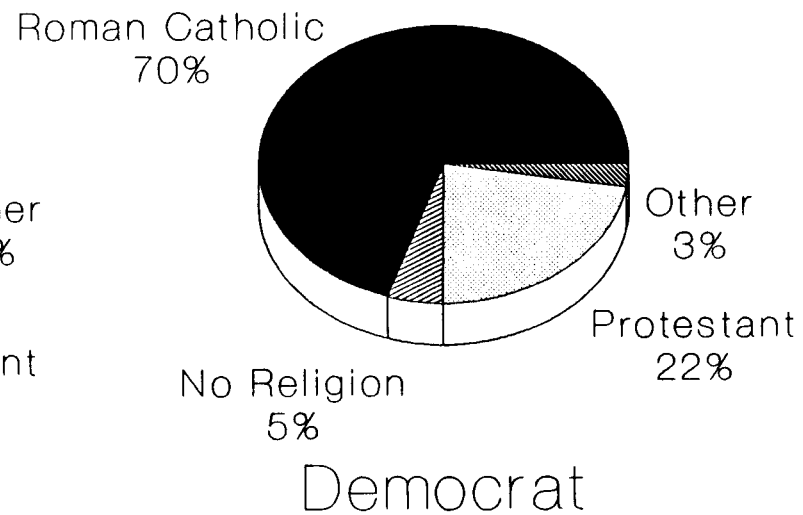
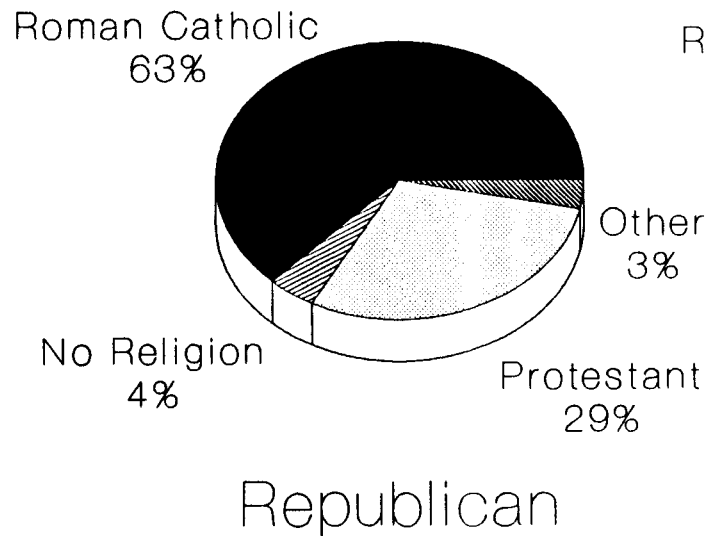
Other Christian



No Religion

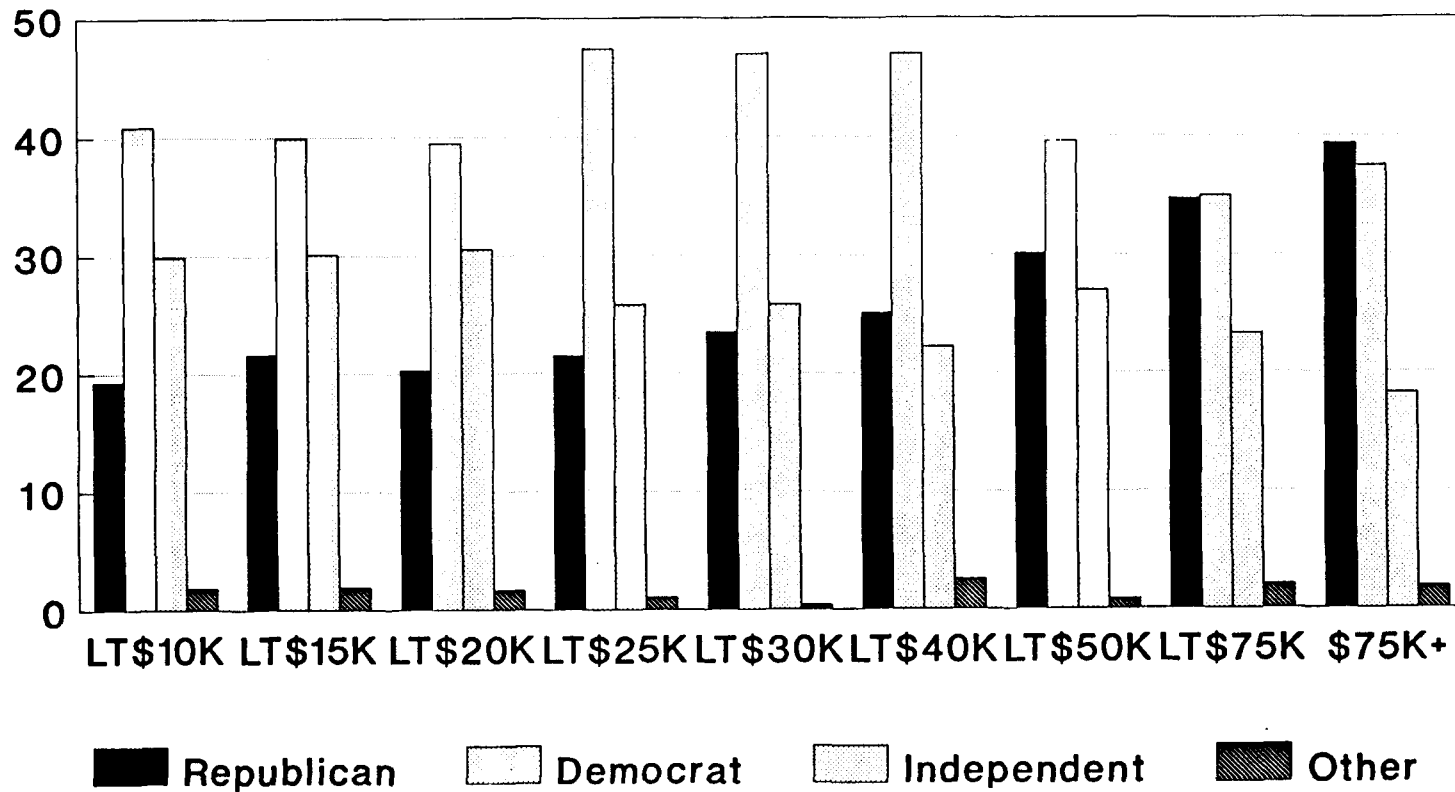


4: Religious Composition of the Political Parties



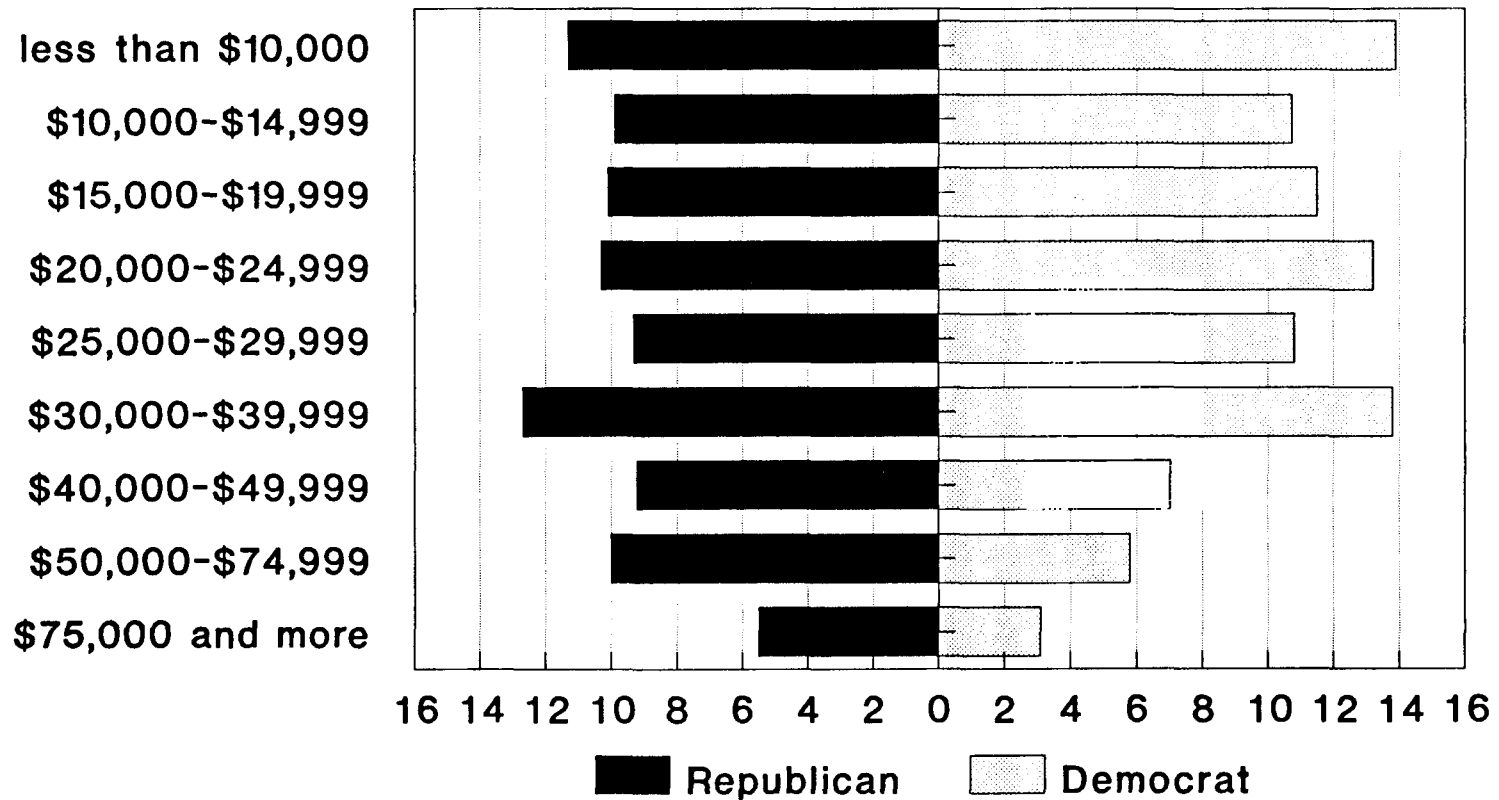
Total Republican=23.8%
Total Democrat=40.8%
Weighted data

5: Household Income and Party Political Preference



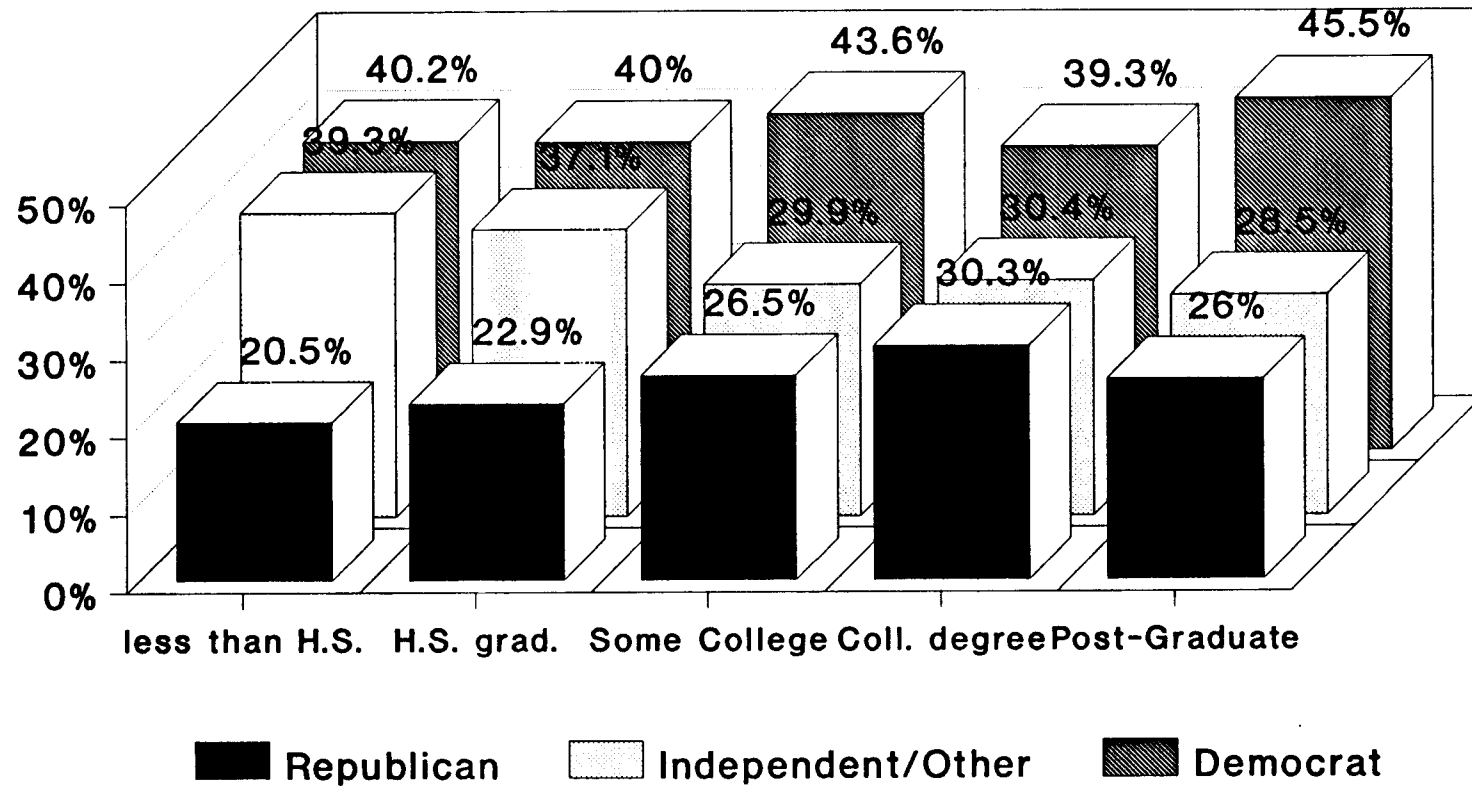
Weighted data
 Percentage distribution for each
 income group

6: Household Income Distribution within the Political Parties



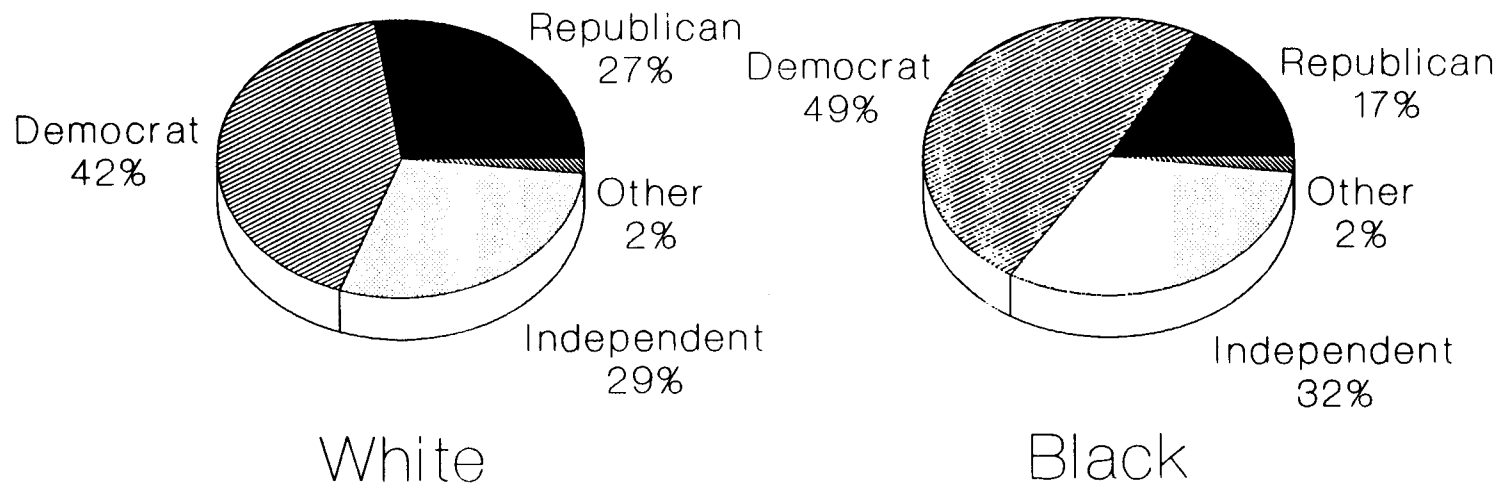
Percentage distribution for each party
Weighted data

7: Party Political Preference by Education



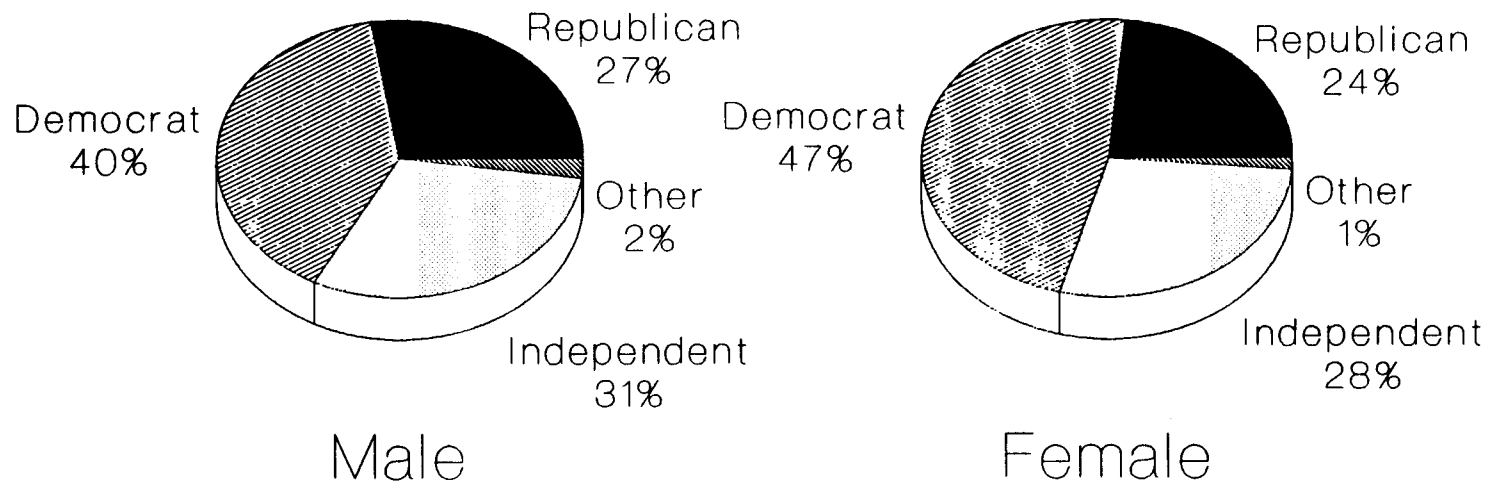
Weighted data
 Percentage distribution for
 educational level

8: Party Political Preference by Race of U.S. Hispanics 1990



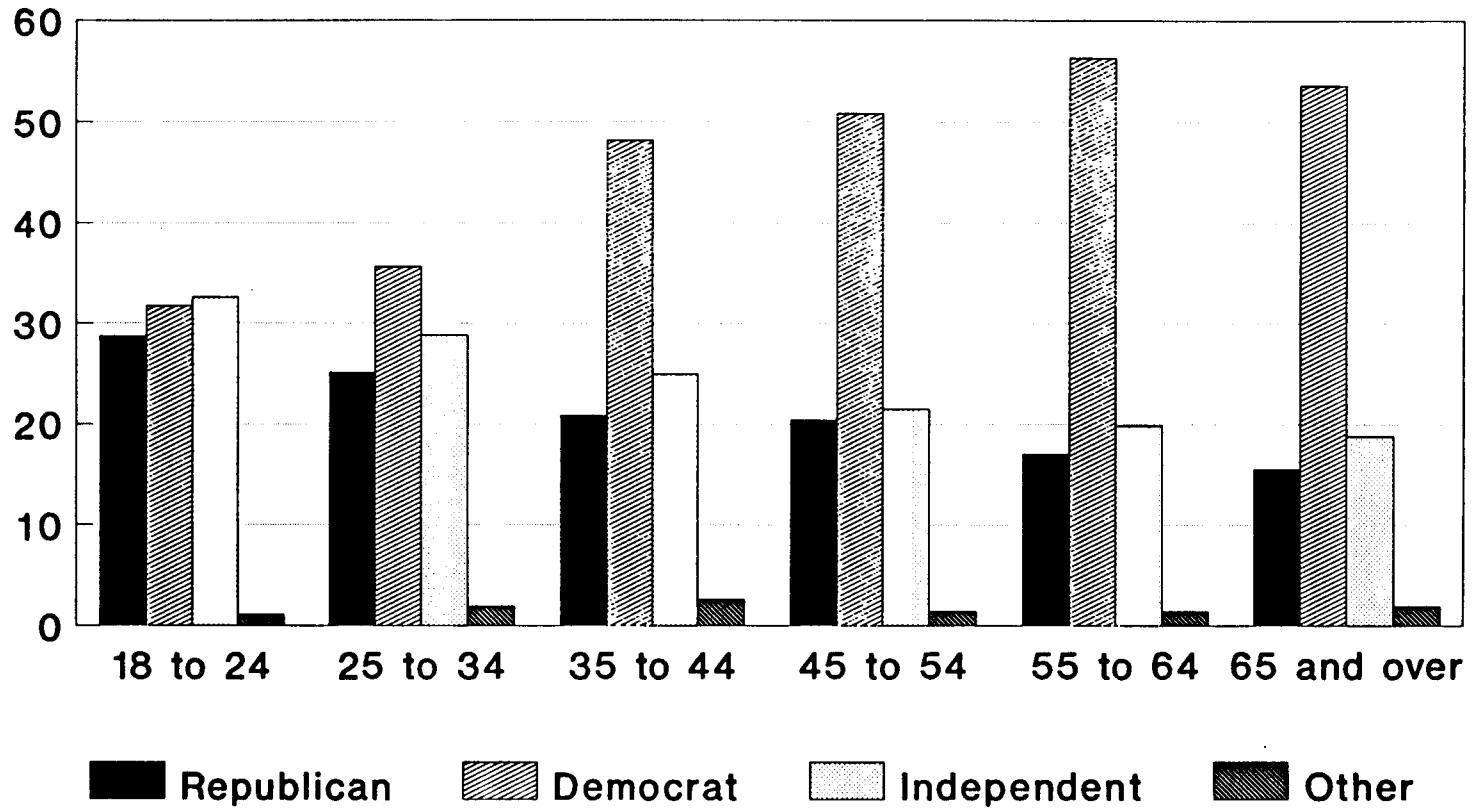
79.9% Whites
13.5% Blacks
Weighted data

9: Party Political Preference by Gender



Weighted data

10: Age Group and Party Political Preference



Weighted data
Percentage distribution for each
age group