Chapter 7
Class and Politics

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TEXTBOOK MODELS of how class inequalities influence political processes and outcomes suggest a vast array of topics. There are class differences in political participation and citizen activism, as well as differences in partisanship and voting behavior. Classes have varying political capacities, especially if we compare class-related organizations such as business and trade associations versus unions or groups seeking to represent the poor. Political institutions often favor some classes over others. Tensions between the current global economy and national institutions and configurations of class power raise important questions; historical evidence suggests that both class inputs into the political system and redistributive policy outputs ebb and flow over long periods of time. Moving from the micro to the macro, from the local to the global, and across time and space, there is no shortage of suggestions about how class matters for the political life of democratic capitalist societies.

But all of these claims are neither uncontroversial nor uncontested. Class divisions as a source of electoral behavior or policy preferences have sometimes been said to be either modest or declining, with other factors providing more vital influence (Kingston 2000, chapter 6; for a review of this literature, see Brooks, Manza, and Bolzendahl 2003). The comparative welfare state literature presents a striking paradox for strong models of class politics: the nearly universal weakening of union strength coupled with increasing flows of global capital have not, surprisingly, produced much systematic evidence of welfare state retrenchment to date (Korpi 2003; Brooks and Manza 2007, ch. 3). Indeed, most of the evidence is just the opposite: although specific policies and eligibility rules in programs for health,
sickness, unemployment insurance, and social assistance have changed, overall spending levels have proven surprisingly resilient. These outcomes persist even as the social forces that brought the welfare state into existence in the first place have lost political influence.

Given such contradictory interpretations and results, it should come as little surprise that sorting out the relationship between “class” (however defined) and political outcomes is complicated. Several issues are especially pressing. First, class divisions may shape political outcomes, but so too do policy and political outcomes shape class politics—for example, the rise of the welfare state and the ways in which redistributive social policies have transformed the operation of labor markets and levels of inequality between groups. Class power from below was an important source of welfare state development in the first place, but today welfare state institutions empower lower classes and change the balance of class capacities. Second, studying variation in class politics is important. For example, research on class differences in political participation produce the intriguing result that in high-turnout countries there are few, if any, differences in turnout rates among classes, while in lower-turnout countries the class skew in participation grows. With the advent of truly compatible comparative data sets containing individual-level sociodemographic characteristics and information about respondents’ attitudes and political behaviors and country-level data sets with information about policy outputs, we now have the tools to engage such comparative questions systematically (see, for example, Evans 1999; Svalldor 2006; Brooks and Manza 2007). But generalizing such findings into coherent theories and generalizations about class politics has proven difficult.

The goal of this chapter is to sort through some of the debates and evidence about class politics and to provide a coherent portrait of how and when class matters.¹ We take as our primary reference point contemporary American politics, although to understand the distinctiveness of class politics in the United States we will need to introduce a comparative perspective. As we shall see, there are a variety of ways in which the context of American politics both enables and frustrates class politics. For example, class divisions in voting behavior are relatively weaker than in a number of other affluent democracies, where strong unions and social democratic parties organize class interests in the electoral arena. But class differences in political participation—an oft-neglected aspect of how class locations shape political behavior—are far greater in the United States than in other countries. Further, the unique system of financing political campaigns in the United States provides another important avenue of class influence on politics not found elsewhere. Donations by wealthy individuals and corporate political action committees, with virtually no ceilings on candidate expenditures, are unique in the democratic world. And in recent decades vast and growing disparities in the sources of campaign financing highlight a key source of class influence on politics in the United States.
Questions about class politics are of both scholarly and public interest. There have been many recent and highly visible discussions of how rising levels of inequality influence American politics. A task force of the American Political Science Association, for example, has recently issued a substantial report declaring that “the voices of citizens with lower or moderate incomes are lost on the ears of inattentive public officials, while the advantaged roar with a clarity and consistency that policymakers readily hear and routinely follow” (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005, 1). Thomas Frank’s best-selling 2004 book What’s the Matter with Kansas? has also stirred a considerable debate. Frank identifies a decline of traditional class politics that he located in an emerging alignment of the white working class with the Republican Party. According to Frank, conservative politicians and strategists have successfully framed electoral contests around social issues such as abortion, gun control, and family values, encouraging working class voters to overlook (or misunderstand) their own economic interests (see also Roemer 1998). Several hard-hitting critiques of the Frank thesis have now appeared, showing that income groups remain as strongly aligned in the early twenty-first century as four decades ago (Bartels 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Other work employing occupational measures of class, including our own, finds a more mixed picture of “class realignment” that is not easily captured by the debate between Frank and his critics (see Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; Manza and Brooks 1999).

These examples suggest that the question of class and politics is a lively one. To discipline our narrative, we focus on several specific questions. We start with one of the core concerns of this volume: What are the mechanisms through which class divisions manifest themselves in contemporary American politics? Next, we turn to three specific empirical questions about class politics and recent trends: class differences in turnout and other forms of political participation; class voting; and class impacts on the financing of elections. We conclude the chapter with a few general observations about the continuing importance of the analysis of class divisions in American politics.

**How Does Class Matter?**

Why do classes differ politically? Analysts of class politics have often defined “class” in very different ways. The predominant components of class location identified elsewhere in this volume—income, wealth, education, occupation—vary in their impact on political behavior, as in other arenas of social life (Conley, this volume; Grusky and Weeden, this volume). Perhaps the common usage is to examine differences among income groups (Bartels 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Income groups share a common interest in certain kinds of public policies, such as taxes or social provisions. But there are also a variety of reasons why current income may poorly
capture an individual's class location. Income groups have no common organizational anchor, and as Michael Hout notes in his chapter, current income alone is a poor measure of long-term social standing and life chances (see also Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1993). Education level is sometimes substituted as a measure of class (Frank 2004), although individuals with the same level of educational attainment also do not necessarily have any organizational anchor connecting them outside of their occupational locations.

It is for these reasons that we believe occupation provides the most plausible basis for thinking about how specifically class-related political micro processes and influences occur (cf. Grusky and Sorensen 1998). Workplace settings provide the possibility of talking about politics and forging political identities, and work also provides the springboard for membership in organizations where class politics are engaged: unions, professional associations, business associations, and so forth. Moreover, even setting aside the associational and network dimensions of class micro foundations, common occupational locations tend to give incumbents a shared set of interests connected by the level and type of assets they possess or control in labor and capital markets (Wright 1985; Grusky and Sorensen 1998; Manza and Brooks 1999).

However class is measured, debates center on how and why class location influences political behavior. The classical literatures identified both individual-level mechanisms and organizational and institutional factors. Focusing first on individual-level processes, three generations of scholarship on class politics have proposed a set of mechanisms—economic interests, social-psychological factors, and social networks—that provide a robust tool-kit with which to analyze variation in class politics.

The most straightforward of the class models of voting behavior grew out of the nineteenth-century assumptions—shared by proponents and foes alike—that support for socialism derives from economic interests. Working class voters would vote for socialist parties as a way of pursuing their material interests, while bourgeois or upper middle class voters were presumed to favor conservative parties that would protect their relative economic advantages. Economic models of voting behavior have been considerably refined over the years. Analysts now distinguish between retrospective and prospective evaluations of candidates, parties, and issues, as well as between egocentric (one's own interests) and sociotropic (the well being of the nation as a whole) evaluations. Further, a number of important elaborations focus on voters' class-based responses to economic factors. Douglas Hibbs's (1987; Hibbs, Rivers, and Vasilatos 1982) pioneering work on macroeconomic conditions and vote choice suggested one type of class-specific application: working class voters prefer economic outcomes in which unemployment is low, whereas middle class voters prefer a low-inflation environment. And indeed, there is evidence that the Democrats have sought to reduce unemployment while the Republicans have focused
on inflation (Alesina, Londregan, and Rosenthal 1989, 1993). Democratic presidents produce more income growth for poor families than rich families, while Republican presidents have sponsored larger gains for affluent families (Bartels 2004, 2008). Such evidence implies that parties tend to adjust their policy priorities accordingly in order to best serve their electoral constituencies (Haynes and Jacobs 1994).

A second, quite different set of mechanisms connecting class location to political behavior centers on the importance of subjective identification, or "group consciousness." Models of this sort extend the classical "Michigan School" (Campbell et al. 1960) approach to studying voting behavior by broadening the concept of group membership to focus on the degree to which people identify with, or develop positive affect toward, a particular group (or class). If objective group membership does not involve a subjective component, it can be expected to have less influence over attitudes and behavior. Working class voters will behave as the classical economic interest model predicts largely to the extent to which they view themselves as members of the working class (Centers 1949; Vanneman and Cannon 1987; see also Hout, this volume).

At the heart of the social-psychological mechanisms accounting for group-based political differences are conceptions of the "linked fate" of group members (Dawson 1994, ch. 4). In his important formulation of this argument in relation to African American political identities, Michael Dawson argues that a strong sense of linked fate helps to explain why remarkable levels of political solidarity persist among African Americans, with 90 percent or more regularly supporting Democratic presidential nominees, even as class divisions among African Americans have grown. On this account, middle class blacks see their own prospects as tied to the well being of all blacks because "the historical experiences of African Americans have resulted in a situation in which group interests have served as a useful proxy for self-interest" (Dawson 1994, 77; but cf. Pattillo, this volume). A similar logic can be applied to classes. Union membership, for example, strengthens class-linked voting behavior among the working class (Form 1995), while membership in upper class institutions likewise serves to strengthen conservative consciousness among the affluent (Domhoff 2006). But when members of particular classes see their primary interests as linked to racial, religious, or other non-class identities, class-based political behavior declines (Manza and Brooks 1999).

A large research literature has identified the processes of group identification in the United States that reduce the impact of class identification (Vanneman and Cannon 1987; Hout, this volume). The landmark statement of this position was developed by Seymour Martin Lipset (1960/1981), who postulated that cross-cutting cleavages reduce the impact of class divisions. At the center of the analysis of such cross-cutting cleavages in American politics today is the enduring power of racial identities and racial resent-
ments (see, for example, Kinder and Sanders 1996; Gilens 1999). Numerous analysts have traced the weaknesses of working class identity to American racial divisions (for example, Wilson 2001). The relative strength of the religious cleavage in American society, in which high levels of competition in the religious marketplace and a denominational structure that cross-cuts the class divide, represents another constraint on the salience of class-based identities (Wuthnow 1988). More contentious have been claims that moral and religious values undermine class identities, a widely believed but controversial thesis (see, for example, Frank 2004).

Hout’s chapter in this volume presents mixed evidence about the extent of class identification in the United States today. He finds that for those individuals in objective working class locations and with subjective consciousness aligned with their lived experience, class cleavages are sharpened. Those working class respondents who perceive themselves as “middle class,” however, are less likely to support redistributive social policies.

The third major factor connecting class location to individual political behavior concerns the role of social networks. Neighborhoods, workplaces, occupational groups, and organizations embed individuals within social networks that provide the basis for discussion that shapes their political attitudes and behavior. Social networks of family, friends, coworkers, and other members of social or civic organizations disseminate new beliefs and, alternatively, reinforce predispositions. Robert Huckfeldt and John Sprague (1995) demonstrate the importance of network-based information to voters’ decisionmaking and voting behavior, arguing that such information is routinely transmitted through both strong ties (such as those to friends) and weak ties (for example, those between individuals acquainted solely through a common contact; for an application to class networks see Weakliem and Heath 1994). Related findings concern the impact of social mobility on political preferences. Lifelong social ties arising from individuals’ class origins and current class location influence political behavior far more than those of mobile citizens (whose “destination” class is different than their family class). Nan De Graaf, Paul Nieuwbeerta, and Anthony Heath (1995) present evidence suggesting that the behavior of mobile individuals falls between those more typical of their class of origin and those of incumbents of their current class. These findings are important; one of the most robust arguments in favor of the decline of class politics is the breakup of once-solid working class communities and neighborhoods where identities and networks persisted over time (Pakulski and Waters 1996, ch. 5).

These three mechanisms—economic interests, group-based consciousness, and social networks—are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily in conflict. Social networks can reinforce a sense of class-based consciousness; common economic interests may locate individuals in neighborhoods and communities and other non-class groups such as schools and churches. The analytical problem of separating out the respective influences of each
is demanding, and few existing election data sets contain fully adequate measures to carry out appropriate tests. The American National Election Studies, for example, typically contain batteries of items about respondents’ economic situation and social group identities but lacks detailed measures of respondents’ social networks.

The probabilistic nature of the relationships between interests, identities, networks, and political behavior warrants further comment. A crucial general problem for class analysis is that class location—however defined—is not a sole or even necessarily primary influence on the attitudes and behavior of members of different classes. Some, or even many, working class voters may choose conservative parties for reasons that cannot be explained by their current class location (as is true for upper class left wing voters). For example, when a group of billionaires led by the father of Microsoft founder Bill Gates opposed the Bush administration’s proposal to eliminate the estate tax, they could not be said to be acting out of material self-interest. Further, class location is itself subject to measurement error. We assign individuals in surveys to a class location even when they may have widely varying material assets (Grusky and Weeden, this volume). Misidentification attenuates our estimates of the linkage between class and behavior. Finally, because class cleavages vary significantly over time and across electoral contexts or polity, class analysts must pay close attention to the key question of magnitude in their investigations.  

*Macro Processes*

In addition to the micro mechanisms through which class location exerts influence on political life, the organizational and institutional context of clan politics matters as well. Claims about weak or diminishing impacts of class at the level of micro-political behavior must be viewed alongside evidence of the persistent or even growing macro impacts of class. It is striking that in current scholarly discourses the leading “death of class” texts almost completely ignore the macro context to focus solely on micro evidence (see, for example, Kingston 2000). This is an important lacuna. Governments operate in national and global political economies in which class power through investment decisions provides a critical set of constraints on the distribution of outcomes and the making of public policy. Politics is never simply about individuals who participate and how they vote; interest groups, social movements, and political parties are also intimately connected to class forces. Although these organizational effects are challenging to measure, it is shortsighted to dismiss them from theory and research.

Let us briefly consider some of these points in more detail. The existence of organizations such as unions and business associations influences the political alignment of classes. Unions organize workers, not only at the point of production but also at the polls. In the United States, organizations
representing minority-group interests are especially important in organizing political action among subordinate groups, even if not explicitly based on class interests (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, ch. 6; Leighley 2001). At the top of the social hierarchy, the interest groups and institutions of the powerful—peak business associations and upper class organizations—align upper class groups politically and exert disproportionate political influence (Domhoff 2006).

Political parties vary widely in the degree to which they seek to organize on the basis of social cleavages such as class, but some common patterns can be found. Institutional features of the electoral systems shape the number and types of political parties and their general character (such as catchall parties versus parties organized around specific cleavages) (see, for example, Mair 1997). In the majoritarian two-party system in the United States, the major parties have a strong incentive to be catchall parties that appeal across the board to a wide array of groups, while in multiparty systems quite different electoral strategies will be common (Powell 2000). Changes in class structure change the incentives for parties as well. An instructive example is the transformation of European social democratic parties from class-based parties to parties that compete more broadly for middle class votes (see Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 2001), although, as we will suggest later, a similar dynamic has occurred in the class bases of American parties.

A final set of macro factors influencing class politics are the feedback processes through which class divisions are reinforced by policy outcomes and politicians’ strategic behavior. Policy outcomes themselves, particularly over the long term, tend to influence the perceptions and preferences of voters, and those that are skewed toward the benefit of some groups both reflect the existence of significant cleavages in the political system and reproduce those differences. Once in office, parties reward their supporters and attempt to make good on at least some of their campaign promises, thereby responding in a manner that reinforces group-based loyalties.

It would go beyond the scope of the chapter to try to summarize all these impacts (on the United States, see, for example, Weir 1998; Hacker 2002; for comparative evidence, see, for example, Lijphart 1997; Hicks 1999; Esping-Andersen 2001; Huber and Stephens 2001). Growing income inequality in the United States over the past three decades provides perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the failure of public policies to blunt the force of class divisions (Page and Simmons 2001; Jacobs and Skocpol 2006; Bartels 2008). The impact is most visible in recent changes in tax policy that have disproportionately benefited capital and higher earners (Graetz and Shapiro 2005), and also in the failure of the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation (Bartels 2008, ch. 8).

One intriguing new line of work highlights how class divisions manifest themselves in relation to the responsiveness of policy to citizens’ preference.
For example, there is robust evidence that public policy responds to aggregate public opinion (Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002). While there are important sources of variation in the degree of responsiveness of policy to opinion (Manza and Cook 2002), the weight of the evidence suggests that politicians listen to the public at least some of the time. However, the question of whose opinions are listened to is a critical one. Martin Gilens (2005) and Larry Bartels (2008, ch. 9) argue that responsiveness in the United States is significantly higher for the rich than the poor. Analyzing the policy attitudes of rich and poor, Gilens (2005) finds that when attitudes between the two groups vary, it is the rich who are more likely to enjoy policies that are in accord with their preferences. Research on the average levels of responsiveness may thus mask class-linked variation in the degree to which politicians respond to public opinion.

**How Much Does Class Matter in American Politics?**

The previous section argues that class impacts can be found across the micro and institutional contexts of democratic capitalist political systems. At the same time, we noted that measuring and analyzing these impacts is challenging. We now turn to three applications: political participation, voting behavior, and campaign finance, focusing on evidence and debates concerning class politics in the contemporary United States.

**Political Participation:**

**Class Differences in Participation**

Writing in 1949, V. O. Key (1949/1964, 527) asserted that "the blunt truth is that politicians are under no compulsion to pay much heed to classes and groups of citizens that do not vote." It is thus appropriate to start with the question of voter turnout. Some key facts are not in dispute. A hallmark of American elections is the comparatively low rate of participation. And the aggregate matters in relation to class differences in participation. In elections where turnout is far from universal, resource-rich groups vote at higher rates than do more disadvantaged groups, but this is not the case in countries with much higher rates of turnout (Lijphart 1997, 1-2). The United States is thus not surprisingly marked by a substantial cleavage-based skew in political participation. For example, a turnout gap of some 25 percent or more between the highest and lowest turnout classes (such as professionals versus unskilled workers) has been found in many analyses (Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; Lijphart 1997).

Both individual-level and institutional explanations have been proffered to account for class skews in participation. The sociodemographic attributes of individuals linked to class position, such as education, income, gender,
and labor force status, all contribute to subsequent class differences in turnout rates. One long-standing staple of the turnout literature has been the importance of education (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 13–36; Teixeira 1992; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). To be sure, educational effects on turnout are often mediated by other, associated factors, such as knowledge of the candidates and issues, newspaper reading, perceptions of political efficacy, and concern with the outcome of the election (Teixeira 1992; Conway 2000, 25–28). But there can be little doubt that education is the dominant individual-level influence on American voter participation. Because education levels are unevenly distributed across the class structure, the powerful effects of education on turnout contribute to class differences in participation.

As alluded to earlier, social networks have long been thought to have significant impacts on individual political participation. Networks provide a key source of both information and motivation. The basic idea is straightforward: interactions about politics with others enhance the likelihood of one’s political participation, and the greater the degree of interaction, the greater the effect (Huckfeldt 1986; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Mutz 2006). Networks also provide incentives to participate; as Sidney Verba and his colleagues (1995, 16) pithily put it, one reason people do not participate is “because nobody asked.” This finding appears to hold across both aggregate contextual measures of social environment and measures of individual networks. The impact of social networks on turnout reinforces class differences in participation, in part because of the similarity in turnout propensity between individuals and members of their surrounding networks.

Turning to political and institutional sources of class differences in turnout, we should begin by noting one of the least recognized sources of participation, namely, eligibility. Official turnout statistics are based on a denominator that includes the entire voting-age population. But barriers to participation for legal immigrants, convicted felons and ex-felons, and several other small groups are an increasingly important source of nonvoting (McDonald and Popkin 2001). Eligibility has an impact on some classes more than others. The share of immigrants and disenfranchised felons at the bottom of the class structure has grown steadily over time, following the 1965 immigration reforms and with rising incarceration and criminal conviction rates since the 1970s (Manza and Uggen 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Nolan McCarty and his colleagues (2006, ch. 3) have further shown that over time the share of immigrants in the population is associated with trends in income inequality.

Other analysts have suggested the importance of the mobilizing activities of parties and political organizations as a powerful source of class inputs into participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Mobilizing elections, in which the parties seek to expand the electorate, produce higher turnout rates. Declining mobilization efforts from the 1960s onward, however, have been associated with declining (or stagnating) turnout, even in the face of
increases in education levels within the electorate as a whole (see esp. Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; see also Burnham 1982; Piven and Cloward 2000). These scholars have argued that the Democratic Party and the social movements and organizations affiliated with it have generally lost the capacity to reach out to disadvantaged voters as part of a broader trend toward a more elite-oriented, money-driven party. Steven Rosenstone and John Hansen's (1993) widely cited analysis produced statistical evidence from individual-level survey data suggesting that declining mobilization accounted for one-half of the turnout decline between 1960 and 1988. The importance of mobilization in relation to skewed class turnout rates is based on the simple dynamic in which well-endowed groups with high turnout rates are largely unaffected by mobilization efforts. But mobilization can be quite important with lower turnout rates (Leighley 2001), such as minorities and the working class.\(^{10}\)

In specifying institutional factors, analysts have pointed to several class-related mechanisms: the difficulty of voter registration in the United States compared to countries that use an automatic system of voter registration (Piven and Cloward 2000; Powell 1986); the higher costs of voting when national elections are held on a workday, in contrast to (most) democratic polities that schedule elections on weekends or national holidays (Crewe 1981; for discussion of the extraordinary differences in turnout between Puerto Ricans voting in Puerto Rico, where elections are held on either Sunday or a national holiday, versus Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland, see Freeman 2004); and the limited range of ideological choices available to voters in the American two-party system, and in particular the absence of a labor or social democratic party to mobilize working class voters (see, for example, Burnham 1982; see also Jackman 1987).

**Trends in Class Bias in Political Participation**

From the standpoint of the impact of class divisions on turnout, a key question has been how much group-based inequalities in participation have grown, if at all. In other words, is the turnout decline (whatever its precise magnitude) concentrated disproportionately among certain groups, most notably the working class or the poor? An extensive body of research has produced agreement on a key point: there is no evidence of any narrowing in turnout inequality. But on the question of whether there has been any increase in participation inequalities, contradictory results abound. Evidence of an increased skew in participation has been found using income and education to measure socioeconomic status (Bennett 1991; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Freeman 2004) and occupation (Burnham 1982). Most studies measuring educational differences in turnout have found greater decline among less-well-educated groups (Leighley and Nagler 1992; Teixeira 1992; Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2002), even among analysts who are
skeptical of any overall increase in social cleavage-related bias (esp. Leighley and Nagler 1992).

However, a number of other analysts have found little to no evidence of an increasing skew and emphasize instead that turnout decline reflects electorate-wide trends. Jan Leighley and Jonathan Nagler (1992) argue that income is the best single measure of the class skewness of the electorate and that there has been no change in the relative participation rates of different income groups (on midterm elections, see also Shields and Goidel 1997). Utilizing a new data set—the Roper Social and Political Trends Data—with over-time measures of participation across a range of political and charitable activities, Henry Brady and his colleagues (2002) find largely trendless patterns in the turnout ratio of upper to lower socioeconomic groups; these authors conclude that while substantial participation inequalities remain, “the voters remain the same.” Using an occupational measure of class, we find limited evidence that turnout has fallen among working class voters, principally among skilled workers (see Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; see also Manza and Brooks 1999, ch. 7).

Overall, the trend debate has proven difficult to resolve, in part because estimates based on self-reported turnout are subject to nonrandom reporting biases, and different model specifications yield different results. These sources of uncertainty hold across the major data sets (the National Election Study and the Voter Supplement Module of the Current Population Survey [CPS]) and across different specifications of class. We conclude that there is at best only modest evidence for an increase in class divide on turnout. But this should in no way obscure the fact that by any measure the persisting class-based skew in participation rates in elections in the United States is substantial and consequential.

**Class Divisions in U.S. Voting Behavior**

The most widely analyzed question of class politics in the electoral arena concerns the choices that voters actually make at the ballot box. As with participation, there are questions about both the magnitude of the class divide and the existence of possible trends in the alignment of classes and parties.

Turning to the question of trends, a wide range of scholars have argued that traditional group-based political alignments have eroded, often directly paralleling the decline of left-right political cleavages (Franklin 1992; Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992a, 1992b; Van der Eijk et al. 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg 1993; Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996; Dalton 1996;). Ronald Inglehart and his collaborators’ arguments about the emergence of a “new politics” rooted in a clash between materialist and postmaterialist values start from the assumption that there has been a decline in social cleavages such as class and religion (see, for example, Inglehart 1990, 1997).
Much of this debate is cross-national, with the comparatively higher rates of class voting in Europe making them potentially more susceptible to decline. The debate is complex: there is evidence of declining class voting in some countries, but not in all (Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, and Manza 2006; Evans 1999). Much of the question depends on how one analyzes “class voting.” In the traditional approach, introduced and popularized by Robert Alford (1963), class voting is the proportion of “manual workers” voting for left parties minus the proportion of nonmanual workers voting for the same parties. In the “Alford index,” working class voters are expected to align with left parties, and vice versa for nonmanual workers. Later extensions tweaked the basic formula but left its underlying assumptions in place.

More recent scholarship on class voting challenges the assumptions of the Alford index. Critics point to the limitations of a simple, dichotomous model of classes, alongside problems with constraining “class voting” to a single dimension that imposes a strict ordinality on class and party alignments. In our earlier work (Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; Manza and Brooks 1999), we sought to develop an approach that does not require assumptions of any specific correspondence between particular classes and parties but rather measures class voting as the sum total of each class’s divergence from the electorate-wide average.

In the debate over trends in class voting in the United States, recent work has suggested two striking findings. Income-based models have found persistence of the classical alignment, with lower-income voters remaining as Democratic as before (Bartels 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). To be sure, growing affluence from the 1950s through the early 1970s pushed all voters to the right (Brooks and Brady 1999), but the relationship between relative income groups and vote choice has remained as strong as ever (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006).

However, an occupational-based model of class voting produces a more nuanced picture. Classes have realigned politically. In our own six-class model distinguishing professional, managers, the self-employed, routine white collar workers, skilled manual workers and supervisors, and non-skilled workers, we find that considerable realignment has occurred (Manza and Brooks 1999, ch. 3; see also Hout and Moody 2006). Professionals moved from being the second-most Republican class to the most Democratic class by the 1990s. The self-employed moved from a centrist position to a strongly Republican bloc in recent elections. Skilled and nonskilled workers shifted toward the center, with nonskilled workers remaining in a weaker Democratic alignment. These trends suggest some important features of class-based political alignments that are not picked up by income measures.

The question of trends in class voting—and their impact on elections more generally—has been reignited by the debate over Thomas Frank’s (2004) recent polemic. Frank argues that white working class voters have defected to the Republicans and into an alliance with affluent voters, creating a
coalition "uniting business and blue collar" (Frank 2004, 8). His argument is that class-based voter alignments have declined because of successful Republican inroads into the working class electorate based on appeals to symbolic social issues and traditional family values. Our own investigation of these trends suggests a somewhat different picture (Manza and Brooks 1999, ch. 3). We do find evidence that social issues have become an important source of class realignment, but not because conservative views on such issues have pushed working class voters to the right. Rather, we find strong evidence that social issue liberalism has pushed professionals (and to a lesser extent other middle class voters) toward the Democratic Party.11

**Putting It All Together: Political Class Coalitions**

There is no single way of capturing the overall electoral impact of class divisions. But one approach that we believe is promising is to focus attention on the ways in which biases in turnout combine with changes in class-based political alignments and the size of social classes to shape major party coalitions. Focusing on the class bases of the parties—where the voters come from—enables a sharper understanding of some of these processes. In other words, by taking into account the relative size of social classes as well as their turnout and vote choice, we can obtain a better sense of the combined impact of class politics on the electoral strategies and policies that politicians and parties ultimately pursue. Indeed, because such processes as the declining size of the number of manual workers and their increasing unwillingness to support Democratic candidates are difficult to reverse over short periods of time, they set in place powerful constraints that party officials cannot readily ignore.

How have class voters' turnout levels, alignments with parties, and relative size influenced the major parties' coalitions? A few previous analysts have advanced different estimates addressing these questions (see, for example, Axelrod 1972; Erikson, Lancaster, and Romero 1989; Stanley and Niemi 1993; Bartels 1998). Our own earlier effort (Manza and Brooks 1999, ch. 7) considered trends through the early 1990s. We found that in the postwar era the Democratic Party experienced a major shift from a party with more working class voters than professional and managerial voters to one with far larger representations of the latter. As displayed in the estimates shown in figure 7.1, we estimate that the ratio of working class voters to professional or managerial voters fell from nearly three-to-one in 1960 to parity by 1992.12 Decomposing this shift reveals several dynamics. Professionals have both grown in size and become significantly more Democratic (see Brooks and Manza 1997). Both skilled and nonskilled workers have moved toward the center—skilled workers in the 1960s and nonskilled workers in the 1980s and 1990s, although the latter remain a reliably Democratic bloc. Because both classes have declined in size, however, their relative contributions
to the Democratic coalition have decreased. These trends have only deepened in recent elections, with professionals and managers now providing slightly more votes than skilled and nonskilled voters for Democratic candidates. A smaller increase in the share of votes has come from routine white collar workers since the 1960s.

With such a significant shift in the source of the votes, it can hardly be surprising that Democratic strategists and elected officials have found fewer electoral rewards in maintaining the economic and social policies of the New Deal. Indeed, it is precisely the growing prominence of middle class voters within the Democratic coalition that provides officials with incentive to give greater emphasis to market-related and meritocratic policy ideas.

These results suggest, then, a pair of thematic impressions. Clearly, the growing prominence of the new middle classes in the contemporary Democratic Party, when coupled with the relative decline of the traditional working class, exerts pressure away from the modestly egalitarian agenda the party pursued between the 1930s and 1960s. Further, viewed in conjunction with the relatively high level of representation of these groups within the Republican column, we find evidence of contraction in the occupational polarization of working class forces versus middle class
Financing American Elections: 
Class Capacities and 
American Exceptionalism

When it comes to the politics of class in the United States, nothing is more unusual compared to other democratic countries than the American system of financing elections. In other countries, public financing of elections, mandatory free media access, or strict limits on the amounts that can be spent set limits on the importance of money in the political system. But in the United States, extraordinary, and rapidly increasing, amounts of money are spent on political campaigns.\textsuperscript{33} This system’s potential for class-based influence on politics is thus considerable.

To be certain, the availability of large amounts of money to finance American political campaigns is hardly a recent phenomenon. Affluent individuals and groups have long taken advantage of opportunities for political influence (see, for example, Corrado 1997).\textsuperscript{14} But recent increases suggest the possibility of a widening class divide in influences on elections. Concerns about the political role of money have received widespread media and popular attention, both in relation to the potential for corruption and with respect to domination by monied interests. At the same time, however, a number of analysts have argued that these impacts are frequently overstated (Ansolabehere, de Figueiredo, and Snyder 2003; Burstein 2008).

Where does political money come from, and how can we characterize it in class terms? Broadly speaking, contributions come from either individual donors or political action committees (PACs). PAC contributions can be divided into three categories: business-related PACs, labor PACs, and "ideological" PACs, the last category including all types of groups organized around specific issues, such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the National Organization of Women (NOW). Business PACs include both those associated with individuals and groups. Labor PACs are generally associated with single unions, although the most prominent labor PAC is the AFL-CIO’s Committee on Political Education (COPE). While PAC money receives a great deal of public attention, it is individual donations that account for the largest share of total donations. The vast majority of the largest of these contributions are made by affluent individuals.

The overall trends in campaign finance can be seen in table 7.1, which presents our estimates of total PAC and individual contributions to congressional campaigns through the 1978 to 2006 election cycles in real (2006) dollars, collapsing “hard” and “soft” money donations (as well as “527” donations after 2002).\textsuperscript{15} The table shows that total contributions from business sources ratcheted up by some 950 percent in midterm elections, and by 823 percent in presidential election years. While the amounts contributed by organized labor and ideological PACs also increased (quite considerably for ideological PACs), the totals are dwarfed by those from business

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Trends in National Election Campaign Finance, 1992 to 2006 (in Millions of Dollars, Inflation-Adjusted)}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & PAC Contributions & Individual Contributions \\
\hline
1978 & 150 & 250 \\
1980 & 200 & 300 \\
1984 & 300 & 450 \\
1988 & 400 & 600 \\
1992 & 500 & 750 \\
1996 & 600 & 900 \\
2000 & 700 & 1050 \\
2004 & 800 & 1200 \\
2006 & 900 & 1350 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Total Business PAC Contributions</th>
<th>Total Labor PAC Contributions</th>
<th>Total Ideological PAC Contributions</th>
<th>Total Individual Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>$66.5</td>
<td>$31.8</td>
<td>$8.3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>122.4</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>111.4</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>152.3</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>139.4</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>263.1</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>$459.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>262.7</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>353.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>407.7</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>536.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>357.3</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>407.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>669.7</td>
<td>104.7</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>817.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>615.5</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>719.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>769.4</td>
<td>101.6</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>1,014.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>631.7</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>703.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change from 1978 to 2006 (midterm elections)
- Total Business: 950%
- Total Labor: 280%
- Total Ideological: 810%

Change from 1980 to 2004 (presidential)
- Total Business: 823%
- Total Labor: 288%
- Total Ideological: 589%

Change from 1992 to 2004 (individual)
- Total Business: 154%

Note: All estimates shown in 2006 dollars. "Total" includes hard and soft (unregulated) contributions from 1992 to 2002 to all candidates for national office (U.S. House, Senate, and the presidency). After 2002, totals include hard and estimated 527 (ideological advocacy) contributions. Note that 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004 are presidential years and thus reflect higher overall contributions than in midterm congressional elections without a presidential ballot.
sources. The ratio of business to labor contributions rose from a little over two-to-one at the beginning of this period to approximately seven-to-one at the end.

Focusing on corporate donations, however, understates the full impact of political money from upper class sources. Millions of Americans make campaign donations in their own names (or those of family members), often alongside donations to their corporate PAC. While most of these donations are in modest amounts, when we consider larger individual contributions—which in the aggregate provide the vast bulk of the total amount donated—the class disparity in individual donations is substantial. For example, in 2002 the Center for Responsive Politics was able to categorize about 70 percent of donations over $200 for the 2000 election cycle. It reports that individuals associated with business interests contributed a total of $533.7 million to election campaigns, compared with less than $1 million contributed by individuals associated with organized labor.

Survey data on individual-level giving to political campaigns are consistent with this finding: patterns of significant giving are heavily skewed toward individuals from affluent households. For example, Verba and his colleagues (1995, 191–96) found that 56 percent of households with incomes over $125,000 donated to a political campaign in 1989, with the average amount of such donations being $1,183, compared with just 6 percent of households with incomes below $15,000 (who gave an average of $86). Surveying large ($200 or more) contributors to the 1996 congressional campaign, Robert Biersack and his colleagues (1999) report that 79.5 percent of large donors had incomes over $100,000, and 42.4 percent had incomes over $250,000. These authors find that large donors are far more conservative politically than NES respondents (with only 29 percent identifying as Democrats, compared with 52.4 percent of the NES sample for that year), though they are more liberal on social issues than the NES sample. While many affluent individuals and households give to the Democrats or pro-Democratic advocacy groups, the economic interests of these donors mark them as distinctly different than the Democratic Party of the New Deal era.

**Skewing Outcomes? Assessing the Political Impact of Money in American Politics**

In the vast social science literature on campaign finance, the ultimate question is whether political money skews election outcomes and public policy. There are, as Bartels and his colleagues (2005, 113) put it, two ways in which money might matter: “It can influence elections and it can affect the behavior of elected representatives.” We can, however, break down the question further by distinguishing the role of money in influencing who runs for political office; the role of money in influencing election outcomes; the role of money in shaping the voting patterns of those who are elected; and the impact of
money on other significant types of legislative behavior. At every stage of the political process, there are arguments in favor of the power of money to skew outcomes, but at the same time, in none of these areas has the existing body of research established firmly that money is the decisive factor.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Who Runs}  Political recruitment—who runs for office—is clearly influenced by the need to be able to raise large amounts of money to finance competitive campaigns for national or important state offices. The bloated war chests of incumbents (or the large amounts raised by one candidate for an open-seat election) have been shown to deter potential challengers. Only those with the networks and resources to raise the funds needed to be competitive will seek political office (see, for example, Box-Steppensmeier 1996). The money system works as a kind of signaling process in which early fundraising plays a much greater strategic role than late fundraising. Because early fundraising is much easier for candidates who already have access to elite money networks, some have argued that the early fundraising process constitutes a “money primary” (Magleby and Nelson 1990, 58–61; Clawson, Neustadt, and Weller 1998, ch. 1; Domhoff 2006, ch. 6). Another increasingly important recent development has been the growing number of affluent candidates who can give or loan start-up funds to their campaign out of their own pocket and signal, right off the bat, the viability of their campaign.

In the “money primary”—not unlike the actual election—momentum and visible evidence of a high probability of ultimate success are key factors in being able to raise money. Political reporting is increasingly paying attention. The money primary is important because it serves to eliminate potential challengers who do not have access to the same types of resources as incumbents or front-runners. In a more speculative vein, it may force challengers to tailor their message in ways that will appeal to potential donors. Although an incumbent’s large war chest may not deter challengers who expect to have access to significant resources themselves, it makes grassroots efforts significantly more difficult than in the past.

\textbf{Who Wins}  Aside from the impact of money on candidate selection, there are extensive controversies over the question of whether the amount of money spent during an election significantly influences the outcome. Some research suggests that money plays a much bigger role in determining the success of challengers, while greater amounts are of more marginal benefit for incumbents (see, for example, Jacobson 1990; Abramowitz 1991). However, the endogenous role of money in elections makes such conclusions problematic. Rational incumbents will raise and spend more money in close elections—that is, in elections that they are more likely to lose—than in races that weigh heavily in their favor from the outset (Green and Krasno 1988; Gerber 1998). Because many incumbents spend little and win easily, while those who
spend more often face tougher challenges (and thus have a greater likelihood of losing), the spending effect can appear spurious.

Nonetheless, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that to beat an incumbent or to win an open seat a challenger needs to be able to raise large amounts of money and that those funds must come primarily, though not exclusively, from business interests or affluent individuals. (The national parties are also providing increasing support to their candidates, but generally only after those candidates have already shown themselves adept at raising money on their own.) In terms of who wins, then, the impact of money may show up either at the stage of political recruitment, when the universe of potential candidates winnows, or in the election outcome, which is harder to measure and document.

Legislative Voting Patterns Does money influence legislative votes on policy, either for individual legislators or in the aggregate? Periodic vote-selling scandals excite journalistic outrage. But what is the larger picture? With little, if any, direct evidence of systematic vote selling, much hinges on the assumptions of measures and statistical models. Key to the question is whether money matters after controlling for party and ideology. Early examinations split inconclusively between those who find that contributions influence voting patterns (Ginsberg and Green 1986) and those who find no effect (Welch 1982). Such different results have often been attributed to the variance of issues on which votes are cast and to competing approaches to measurement issues.

A related but more sophisticated version of the influence argument suggests the existence of a “spot market” in which votes are exchanged for contributions. Proponents of this approach (Austen-Smith 1995; Baron 1989; Stern 1992; Stratmann 1992) claim that contributions are short-term investments through which the donor secures political favors (such as votes on relevant issues or the framing of legislation in ways that are beneficial to the donor) or ensures that legislators honor past agreements. Short of legislators admitting that their voting behavior was influenced by PAC donations, however, direct evidence of money buying votes is almost impossible to find. Members of Congress can always claim that their voting behavior leads to contributions from like-minded PACs rather than vice versa. In lieu of direct evidence, scholars have attempted to support the spot market hypothesis by showing that PAC behavior closely corresponds to behavior that one would expect if votes were being exchanged for contributions. Thomas Stratmann’s (1992) analysis of the behavior of PACs associated with the farming industry is illustrative: he shows that these PACs tend to contribute more money to legislators whose voting decisions are uncertain than to those who are expected to vote in the PAC’s interest. This suggests that a relationship between PAC contributions and voting patterns cannot be solely attributed to shared political interests (that is, PACs give money to
Certain candidates *because* they vote in accordance with the PAC’s interest) but instead indicates attempts by PACs to sway undecided legislators.

Critics of the spot market thesis abound. A second generation of research on the influence of money on votes has introduced techniques for distinguishing how voting behavior influences PAC contributions as well as how PAC contributions influence voting behavior (see, for example, Levitt 1998; Wawro 2001). This line of work suggests that contributions do not dictate voting patterns in a unidirectional fashion from money to subsequent votes. Other recent critics of the view that money changes votes have pointed out that the scholarly attention given to the influence of PAC contributions on voting patterns is exaggerated because PACs do not contribute enough money to be very influential. Legislators are, in this view, not capable of being bought off with contributions from a single PAC (even if the PAC gives the maximum $5,000). House incumbents are likely to spend $1 million on reelection (and Senate incumbents far more), and this amount rises even higher in competitive races. Those who hold a “safe” seat should be even less subject to influence (see, for example, Milyo, Primo, and Groseclose 2000).

The theoretical case for the impact of money on voting thus requires a more nuanced interpretation than a simple vote-buying thesis would suggest. Indeed, one model argues that the relationship between contributors and legislators is best understood as a long-term commitment between those parties. Alan Neustadtl (1990, 559), for example, reports that “PAC directors indicate that there is a long-term give-and-take established between interest groups and members and that, as a political player, one cannot be concerned only with legislative outcomes.” In explicitly theorizing this relationship, Dan Clawson, Neustadtl, and Mark Weller (1998) draw on Mauss’s famous analysis of the gift to argue that donations create a “gift” relationship in which periodic small favors are exchanged, but not any specific or immediate responses on the part of the recipient legislator (such as voting a particular way on a particular issue) (see also Schram 1995). Like a gift, the donation implies unnamed obligations and acts of reciprocity—that is, that legislators will attend, where possible, to the interests of contributors with whom they have a relationship (see Clawson, Neustadtl, and Weller 1998, 84–87).

**Conclusion**

Class matters in American politics. There are multiple dimensions through which class-based inequalities are felt, and one of the challenges for a class analysis of politics is to pay attention to the layering of these impacts. To conclude that class is a minor factor in American politics, as Paul Kingston (2000, ch. 6) has asserted, requires an unduly restrictive focus on those arenas—for example, public opinion and vote choice—where class has its most limited impact. Viewed more broadly, and taking into account the
full range of ways in which class divisions become manifest, we arrive at a rather different set of conclusions.

The starting point of our analysis was to note that American political institutions are internationally distinctive in ways that encourage some kinds of class politics while discouraging others. Class remains a source of electoral division—especially in relation to political participation, but less so in terms of vote choice. The existence of institutional barriers to participation (such as holding elections on workdays and placing the onus for registration in most states on voters) is one key example. The system of campaign finance provides yet another pathway for the affluent to exert influence.

Turning to the question of how class matters, we posited three mechanisms: economic interests, group identities, and social networks. Individuals may think about politics or behave politically in ways that relate to their own economic circumstances or their views of the economic well being of the country as a whole. Subjective identification with a class or class-based social group can reinforce, or in some cases produce, a certain kind of class-linked behavior. Finally, exposure to, or involvement with, class-based social networks reinforces class influences on politics.

In our review of the evidence of class impacts on American politics, we noted large differences in participation and political money but more modest differences in class voting. However, even though in most models class has only a modest impact on voting behavior, it is still useful to think about how changes in the class structure are influencing political outcomes. A class analysis of electoral politics reveals sharp changes in the class character of the electoral coalitions of the major parties, with the weight of working class voters diminishing significantly in the Democratic Party’s electoral coalition. We know that policy outputs over the past few decades have favored a widening of class inequality in the United States. If we are to understand the reasons why policy is more responsive to the wishes of the affluent, a class analysis of politics remains of vital import.

Research assistance was provided by Sarah Lowe. We thank Annette Lareau and Dalton Conley for their generous and helpful comments on this chapter.

Notes

1. Analysts of class politics use the term "class" in a number of different ways. We discuss these, and our own preferred approach, in the next section.

2. Such a rendering assumes that (class) voters evaluate the expected utility of the political choices offered by candidates and parties. In this view, "groups" are ultimately aggregates of self-interested actors (albeit with similar calculations of utility), and group-based voting is explained in terms of calculations regarding which party is more likely to bring about the desired economic outcomes (see, for example, Lipset et al. 1954, 1136).
3. Morris Fiorina’s (1981) pioneering work developed an economic model of vote choice that distinguished between the retrospective versus prospective orientations of economic expectations and behavior. Whereas retrospective voting involves comparisons between present and past economic evaluations, prospective voting requires comparisons between future and current economic expectations. Fiorina argues that because voters tend to be more concerned with the outcomes of government policies than the details of policy implementation, retrospective voting is the more common orientation found in the American electorate. Roderick Kiewiet’s (1983) research illustrates the importance of conceptualizing and measuring the variable target of economic evaluations: voters’ evaluations are egocentric when they involve perceptions of economic conditions experienced by an individual; voters’ evaluations are sociotropic when they involve considerations of national economic prosperity (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981). Either may provide the basis for economic voting.

4. We discuss in more detail the dynamics of the “ethno-religious” cleavage in American society in relation to other kinds of political identities in Manza and Brooks (1999, esp. ch. 4).

5. We discuss this point in further detail in Brooks, Manza, and Bolzendahl (2003).

6. In American political history, the two-party system (and the institutional rules that enforce it) has long been seen as an important source for blunting the political expression of working class interests (see, for example, Burnham 1982; Piven and Cloward 1997).

7. Richard Freeman (2004) cites one recent international survey showing that turnout in national elections in the United States ranks an extraordinary 138th among the 170 countries that hold elections—far lower than all similar capitalist democracies except Switzerland (which ranked 137th).

8. Such sharp socioeconomic-based cleavages are not generally found to the same degree in other countries, although cross-national research frequently finds that in those countries without compulsory voting there are small to moderate effects of education on turnout (Powell 1986, 26–27; Font and Viros 1995; Dalton 1996; Lijphart 1997, 2–3; but see Topf 1995).

9. Diana Mutz (2006) has recently produced new survey-based evidence suggesting that individuals with substantively cross-cutting and conflictual networks are less likely to participate. This finding suggests that the content of network interactions matters, although not the basic fact of their importance.

10. It is worth noting that since the late 1980s both the Democratic and Republican Parties and their allies have significantly increased their efforts to mobilize voters; National Election Study (NES) data show that while 22 percent of voters were contacted by one of the parties in 1960 (the year with the highest post-war turnout), in 1996, 29 percent of voters were contacted, and in 2000 fully 36 percent of voters were contacted (the highest total ever recorded), without stimulating an increase in aggregate (or working class) turnout rates (on party mobilization, see Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 2002, 90). The field experiments undertaken by Alan Gerber and Donald Green (2000, 2004) suggest that certain kinds of contacts—especially those based on person-to-person contact—are much more likely to raise turnout. One explanation for the decline in
turnout rates in spite of increased party contact with potential voters is the inefficient mode through which such contacts are made, which in turn may be linked to the organizational decline of the labor movement and other grassroots organizational capacities that use in-person contacts.

11. Bartels (2006) challenges Frank’s (2004) evidence of shifting class voting, in relation to both income groups and educational level. Bartels shows that neither voters with low education nor voters with low income have moved toward the Republicans, as Frank claims.

12. For full details of this analysis, see Manza and Brooks (1999, ch. 7). In a striking replication for Britain, Anthony Heath and his colleagues (2001, ch. 7) find an equally dramatic shift in the ratio of workers to professionals and managers in the Labour Party, from 5.2-to-1 in 1974 to 1.7-to-1 in 1997.

13. The financing of political campaigns in the United States is governed by a complex set of regulations and laws. Fears that wealthy corporate and individual campaign donors were buying government influence early in the twentieth century led to an initial attempt at campaign finance reform, the Tillman Act of 1907, which sought to ban corporate contributions to federal campaigns. The effectiveness of this legislation was limited, however, by lack of enforcement and its susceptibility to loopholes. Similar limitations have characterized the numerous attempts at campaign finance reform up to the present (Corrado 1997; Goidel, Gross, and Shields 1999; Mutch 2001).

The Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971, along with key modifying amendments in 1974, 1976, and 1979, defines the landscape of money and politics today. The act put into place new requirements for the disclosure of money received by candidates while placing new limitations on contributions to candidates and political parties. Under the 1974 amendments to the act, in each election individuals may contribute up to $1,000 to a candidate, $5,000 to a political action committee (PAC), and $20,000 to national parties, but no more than $25,000 total; PACs are allowed to contribute up to $5,000 each election to a candidate, $5,000 to other PACs, and $15,000 to national parties. “Soft-money” contributions were made legal in the 1979 amendment to the FECA; these contributions have no ceiling but are limited to non-candidate-specific, party-building activities, such as get-out-the-vote drives and issue advertisements (see Potter 1997; Magleby 2002).

In a recent attempt to eliminate the influence of very large soft-money contributions coming overwhelmingly from business sources, the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 prohibited (after the 2002 election) national party committees (that is, the Democratic and Republican Parties) from accepting and spending soft-money contributions. But it also allowed for increased individual contributions and, perhaps more importantly, continued to allow unrestricted soft-money expenditures. The latter—which can be used for voter registration, get-out-the-vote efforts, voter “education” efforts, and other activities so long as these are not formally coordinated with the parties—exploded in 2004 and showed no signs of diminishing during the 2008 election season.

14. For example, in the first of her pioneering studies of campaign contributions, Louise Overlacker (1932) found that nearly 70 percent of all money contributed to the 1928 federal election campaigns came from donations of over $1,000.
15. Unlike soft-money contributions, which are not regulated or limited by federal law and may be used for party-building activities, such as voter registration drives and general campaigning for the party (see note 13), direct, “hard-money” election expenses are regulated by the FECA. Before 1990, soft-money contributions were not required by law to be reported, so systematic data on soft-money contributions are only available beginning with the 1992 election cycle, and they were ended by federal legislation in 2002. During this ten-year span, however, there was a dramatic increase in business soft-money contributions: from $92 million to $351 million in 2002 (in real 2004 dollars). Soft-money contributions were barred after the 2002 election by the campaign finance reform legislation known as the McCain-Feingold Act. This measure raised the amount of allowable hard-money donations for individuals and PACs, but eliminated soft-money expenditures on behalf of a candidate. The upshot was that in 2004 hard-money expenditures increased. And because McCain-Feingold permits election-related “issue advocacy” that does not explicitly mention a candidate, a new type of campaign organization known as a “527 group” (named after a section of the act) has sprung up. In 2004, even though they got off to a late start, 527s spent over $500 million on activities such as partisan get-out-the-vote drives and issue advertising.

16. Many of the recent debates turn on complex methodological issues—what two leading analysts once described as “the statistical morass that surrounds the study of campaign finance” (Ansolabehere and Gerber 1994, 1115). We do not have the space here to discuss all of the debates over competing statistical approaches, but there are a couple of common issues that appear repeatedly. Most notably, there are linked questions about simultaneity bias and assumptions about the exogeneity of money in the political process. For instance, models that treat campaign contributions as an exogenous variable tend to ignore the possibility that PACs give legislators money because these legislators vote in a particular way. Such models are unable to distinguish between these two scenarios. The most sophisticated models for the role of money at any of the four stages attempt to build in parameters for capturing processes that may shape both the amounts of money received and their impact.

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