Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Partisan Realignment

- These articles offer differing views as to when realignments occurred and whether they were sudden or gradual
- What are the characteristics of classic realignment theory (Burnham, Key, Sundquist)?
  - enduring change in party ID
  - caused by cataclysmic event (b/c otherwise PID stable)
    - war
    - Depression
    - Or new issue cleavage (slavery)
  - Foreshadowed often (1928 > 1932)
  - Can only know it happened after the effect
  - Critical elections in which change happens
    - Normal elections
    - Deviant elections
    - Might happen as old party system ages
  - 1860, 1896, 1932 widely agreed upon
- Different types:
  - Replacement of one party by another (1860)
  - Absorption of one party into another (1896)
  - Shift of key groups from one party to other (1932)
- How happen:
  - Conversion of party loyalties in response to issue context or social/ec environment
  - Or mobilization of new or previously disenfranchised voters
- Voters don’t change positions on issues; but cleavage dividing parties has changed, so might now ID with a different party than before
- How does “issue evolution” differ? (Carmines and Stimson)
  - not sudden earthquake, not single critical election
  - but gradual process – parties realign over issue, voters eventually follow and resort themselves
  - parties resort over race; Dems become party of racial liberalism
  - conservatives, esp in South, resort toward Rep party
  - 1964 has point when parties start issue change in earnest, but happening since 1948 (Truman integrating armed forces). Finally in 1992, Reps get PID advantage in South.
- Questions for the different theories:
  - have there been realignments since 1932?
  - What are their natures? Sudden, gradual? Issue based? Ideology based?
  - When did they occur?
  - How do you know – data?
  - Conversion or mobilization of new voters?
  - Is “realignment” the right term for changes that have happened since 1932 or 1964?
  - Always a top-down process? Parties change first and voters subsequently re-sort?
What is underlying theory of PID? Unchanging partisan loyalty that changes only b/c of big shock, or possibility for short-term forces to alter PID?