Party Position Change in American Politics

*Coalition Management*

America’s two-party system is highly stable, but its parties’ issue positions are not. Democrats and Republicans have changed sides on many subjects, including trade, civil rights, defense spending, and fiscal policy and have polarized on newer issues like abortion and gun control. Yet party position change remains poorly understood. In this book David Karol views parties as coalitions of groups with intense preferences on particular issues managed by politicians. He explains important variations in party position change: the speed of shifts, the stability of new positions, and the extent to which change occurs via adaptation by incumbents. Karol shows that the key question is whether parties are reacting to changed preferences of coalition components, incorporating new constituencies, or experimenting on “groupless” issues. He reveals that adaptation by incumbents is a far greater source of change than was previously recognized. This study enhances our understanding of parties, interest groups, and representation.

David Karol is Assistant Professor of Political Science in the Charles and Louise Travers Department of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. He was formerly a visiting scholar at the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics at Princeton University. He is coauthor of *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations before and after Reform* and coeditor of *Nominating the President: Evolution and Revolution in 2008 and Beyond*. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Politics, Studies in American Political Development, International Organization, Brookings Review*, and *The Forum*. 
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DAVID KAROL
University of California, Berkeley
To my parents, Nathaniel H. and Liliane Karol, the only people happier than me to see this book in print
Contents

List of Figures page viii
List of Tables xi
Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction 1
1 Explaining Party Position Change: Theory and Method 6
2 Coalition Maintenance: The Politics of Trade Policy 35
3 Coalition Group Incorporation: The Politics of Abortion and Gun Control 56
4 The Politics of Race: Coalition Maintenance in the North, Coalition Group Incorporation in the South 102
5 Coalition Expansion: The Politics of National Defense and Fiscal Policy 134
6 Conclusions 182

Appendix: Data Sources and Procedures 191
Bibliography 287
Index 303
List of Figures

2-1 Interparty Difference in Support for Freer Trade on Key Votes: House of Representatives (Democratic Support – Republican Support), 79th through 109th Congresses (1945–2006) page 44

2-2 Correlation between Representatives’ Positions on Key Trade Votes and D1 and D2 NOMINATE Scores, House of Representatives, 79th through 109th Congresses (1945–2006) 46

2-3 Difference of Means between Republican and Democratic Support for Trade Liberalization among Representatives (Republican Mean – Democratic Mean), 87th through 93rd Congresses (1961–1974) 51


3-2 Difference of Means between Democratic and Republican Support for Abortion Rights among Representatives (Democratic Mean – Republican Mean), 93rd through 103rd Congresses (1973–1994) 80

3-3 Effects of Party- and State-Level Public Opinion on Senators’ Votes on Abortion, 93rd through 106th Congresses (1973–2000) 82

3-4 Correlation between Senators’ Positions on Abortion and D1 and D2 NOMINATE Scores, 93rd through 106th Congresses (1973–2000) 83
List of Figures

3-6 Difference of Means between Democratic and Republican Support for Gun Control among Representatives (Democratic Mean − Republican Mean), 90th through 106th Congresses (1967–2000) 92
3-7 Correlation between Senators’ Positions on Gun Issues and D1 and D2 NOMINATE Scores, 90th through 106th Congresses (1967–2000) 93
3-9 Interparty Difference in Support for a Handgun Ban (Democratic Support − Republican Support), Gallup Polls, 1975–1999 98
4-1 Interparty Difference of Means (Republican Mean − Democratic Mean) on Support for Racial Liberalism, All MCs and Northern MCs Compared, House of Representatives, 60th through 102nd Congresses (1906–1992) 107
4-3 Interparty Difference between Republican and Democratic Means on Racial Liberalism (Republican Mean − Democratic Mean), All Representatives and Those Serving throughout the Period, House of Representatives, 85th through 89th Congresses (1957–1966) 125
4-4 Party and Public Opinion as Predictors of Senators’ Positions on Racial Issues, 90th through 102nd Congresses (1967–1992) 131
5-1 Interparty Difference of Means on Defense Spending (Democratic Mean − Republican Mean), Senate, 86th through 93rd Congresses (1959–1974) 144
5-2 Correlation between Defense Spending Scores and D1 and D2 NOMINATE Scores: Senate, 86th through 100th Congresses (1959–1988) 145
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-3</td>
<td>Interparty Difference on Defense Spending (Net Democratic Support – Net Republican Support), Gallup Polls, 1935–2000</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>Interparty Difference of Mean Support for Income Tax Cuts among Representatives (Republican Mean – Democratic Mean), 88th through 96th Congresses (1963–1980)</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-5</td>
<td>Correlation between Support for Income Tax Cuts and D₁ and D₂ NOMINATE Scores, House of Representatives, 88th through 96th Congresses (1963–1980)</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

1-1 Models of Party Position Change  page 19

2-1 Interparty Differences in Support for Freer Trade among All Senators and among Democrats and Republicans from the Same States: Key Votes, 79th through 109th Congresses (1945–2006)  49

2-2 Percentage of Long-Serving Representatives (Stayers) and the Rest of House Voting for Freer Trade on Two Trade Policy Votes with Similar Cutpoints: 1962 and 1973  52

3-1 Percentage of Long-Serving Representatives (Stayers) and the Rest of the House Voting Pro-Choice on Two Abortion Votes with Similar Cutpoints: 1974 and 1994  80


3-3 Percentage of Long-Serving Representatives (Stayers) and the Rest of the House on Supporting Gun Control on Two Gun Control Votes with Similar Cutpoints: 1968 and 1988  97

4-1 Interparty Difference of Means on Civil Rights Measures Opposed by Business and on Noneconomic Civil Rights Issues Compared, House of Representatives, Selected Congresses, 1965–1992  120

4-2 Comparison of the Positions of Long-Serving Representatives (Stayers) and the Rest of the House on Two Civil Rights Votes with Similar Cutpoints: 1964 and 1970  127
List of Tables

5-1 Percentage of Long-Serving Senators (Stayers) and the Rest of the Senate Supporting Defense Spending on Two Votes with Similar Cutpoints: 1959 and 1968  146

5-2 Party and Local Interests as Predictors of Senators’ Votes on Defense, Selected Congresses, 86th through 101st Congresses (1959–1990), OLS Models  154

5-3 Comparison of Interparty Differences on Mean Support for Defense Spending, Selected Votes among All Senators and Democrats and Republicans from the Same States, 84th through 101st Congresses (1955–1990)  155

5-4 Share of Campaign Contributions Given to Republican Congressional Candidates: The Defense Sector in Comparative Perspective  157

5-5 Percentage of Long-Serving Representatives (Stayers) and the Rest of the House Supporting Tax Cuts on Two Votes with Similar Cutpoints: 1963 and 1978  174
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