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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Black Millennials, Slipping Alliances, and the Democratic Party

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Abstract

Recent election cycles show a reluctance among Black millennials to support the Democratic Party, which suggests that they are not captured by the party like their predecessors. While we know that African Americans have historically remained a loyal voting bloc, it is important to analyze whether there are generational differences with respect to Black Democratic Party loyalty. In this study, I analyze Black millennial partisanship identification and compare it to Black non-millennials (Baby Boomers and Gen X'ers). To test this, I employ a multi-method approach. My results show that while Black millennials continue to identify with the Democratic Party, they are not as loyal to the Democratic Party when compared to Black non-millennials. Further, I find that Black millennials are not changing loyalties to the Republican or a third party. Instead, Black millennials are willing to withhold their vote altogether if they are not satisfied with any Democratic candidates. My work has critical implications in how we understand Black politics and reveals that Democratic candidates will have to earn Black millennials vote going forward.

Keywords: Millennials; partisanship; party loyalty; democratic party; political behavior; black politics; generations

Introduction

During the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama emphasized targeting young voters and the group most influenced by Obama's mobilization efforts was Black[1] millennials (Fisher 2012; Ford, Johnson, and Maxwell 2010). Black millennials were a catalyst in helping elect Obama into office. The 2008 election was the first time that Black turnout matched White turnout and Black millennials spearheaded this (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009). Enthusiasm among Black voters was at an all-time high, and it seemed that the Democratic Party had gained the support of a new group of voters (McKee, Hood III, and Hill 2012). In fact, research shows that

when compared to other millennial groups, Black millennials have the highest party identification for the Democratic Party (Rogowski and Cohen 2015). Additionally, Black millennials continue to favor the Democratic Party over the Republican Party (Rogowski and Cohen 2015).

However, after the 2008 election, we noticed a decrease in support for the Democratic Party among Black voters. Although support of Obama remained high among Black voters, the lack of attention in pursuing Black issues resulted in a decline in Black Democratic Party identification (Bositis 2011; Hajnal and Lee 2011; Kohut et al. 2011). More specifically, this took a noticeable dip among Black millennials as support for Democratic presidential candidates in 2016 was much lower for Black millennials compared to Black non-millennials[2] (Black Baby boomers and Gen X'ers) (Collins and Block 2020).

Past research demonstrates that the Black electorate is a loyal voting bloc for the Democratic Party (Frymer 1999; Gay 2014; White and Laird 2020). Much of this has relied upon the Democratic Party's willingness to support racial policy positions in favor of Black interest (Carmines and Stinson 1989; Frymer 1999). In fact, loyalty is so strong that African Americans are willing to change their individual interest to conform to group interest (White and Laird 2020; White, Laird, and Allen 2014). One crucial reason for this loyalty is that Black non-millennials came to age experiencing prominent leaders in the Democratic Party making substantive changes in their lives. Examples include the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the rise of the Black middle class (Hajnal and Lee 2011; Tate 2010).

Further, Black non-millennials experienced Black leaders associated with the Democratic Party push issues that benefitted the Black community (Tate 1994). Moreso, the Republican Party did not position itself as a viable option for the Black electorate. With the Republican Party's use of racialized coded language during election campaigns, Black voters supporting the Democratic Party was the reasonable choice (Edsall and Edsall and Edsall 1992; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Streb 2001). As a result, the tangible benefits that the Democratic Party provided and the Republican Party's inability to respond to Black voter's needs have largely resulted in Black non-millennials becoming a "captured minority" (Frymer 1999).

On the other end, calling Black millennials a "captured minority" is not as simple. Yes, Black millennials have come to age and witnessed the election of the first Black president. Moreover, Black millennials have experienced Black candidates elected as mayors across the largest cities in America (Hajnal and Lee 2011). Despite the historic outcomes within the Democratic Party, Black millennials believe that they have not seen tangible benefits from the party which has resulted in growing frustration (Barker and Fulwood III 2020). Coupled with the Republican Party's continued inability to present itself as a viable option, and Black millennials are amid a "political crossroad."

As such, while we know of the loyalty that the Black electorate at large has with the Democratic Party, less is known on whether there are intra-group differences with respect to Democratic Party loyalty. Considering that Black millennials now represent the largest voting bloc within the Black electorate, it is important to reexamine Black Democratic Party loyalty. With recent election cycles showing a

reluctance among Black millennials to support the Democratic Party, I argue that Black millennials will not be as tied to the Democratic Party when compared to Black non-millennials. Moreso, I argue that Black millennials will hold the Democratic Party accountable by forcing the party to earn their vote. Lastly, I argue that Black millennials will not switch party loyalties to the Republican or a third party but will be more willing to withhold their vote from the Democratic Party. This leads me to my research question: do Black millennials have the same party loyalties to the Democratic Party as compared to Black non-millennials?

My goal for this paper is to address whether the Democratic Party will have the same hold on Black millennials as they do with Black non-millennials. To test this, I employ a mixed-methods approach. I conduct 14 virtual in-depth individual interviews, and I use data from the 2016 and 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey and 2020 Cooperative Election Survey.[3] My results show that while Black millennials still identify with the Democratic Party, they are not as loyal to the Democratic Party when compared to Black non-millennials. Moreso, I find that Black millennials are not changing loyalties to the Republican or a third party. Instead, Black millennials are willing to withhold their vote altogether if they are not satisfied with any Democratic candidates. In turn, my analysis has important implications for party politics as it reveals that Black millennials are not a "captured minority." In fact, Democratic candidates must create new tactics to mobilize Black millennials as it seems that they are not conforming to the status quo that we have become accustomed to with Black non-millennials. Moreso, to have their full support, Black millennials want to see tangible benefits from the Democratic Party. As such, this will require Democratic candidates to earn Black millennials vote going forward.

Understanding Black Party Loyalty

Since the party realignment, it is well known that Black Americans have had unwavering support of the Democratic Party (Abramowitz 1994). As early scholarship demonstrated, party identification is a central component in the political identities of Americans and will stay with them over their life course (Campbell et al.1960; Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994). This is especially true for Black voters. Many Black Americans describe themselves as strong Democrats, and they support Democratic candidates at rates unmatched by other segments of the population (Gay 2014). In fact, voting for the Democratic Party has become a group norm within the Black community (Gay 2014; Wamble et al. 2022; White and Laird 2020). Democratic Party loyalty among Black Americans has remained consistent over the years, and to understand how Black Americans became a loyal voting bloc, early evidence of this phenomenon traces back to the Reconstruction era.

During the Reconstruction era, Black voters were allowed to have a voice in the electoral process. Following Emancipation and electoral rights ratified under the 15th Amendment, Black men were allowed to cast ballots in local, state, and federal elections (White and Laird 2020). In turn, Black voters (Black men) responded by voting in significant numbers. Black voters showed their loyalty to the Republican Party as there was a belief that the party supported enfranchisement and Black interest (Fraga 2018; Frymer 1999). Since Southern Democrats were against civil

rights issues, this gave Black voters a heuristic on which party to support. That is not to say that all Black voters voted for the Republican Party. In fact, there is evidence which shows Black support contributing to Democratic victories, even though many Democratic candidates were former slave owners and Confederate soldiers (Drago 1998; Walton 1975). Nevertheless, at its apex, Black voting turnout remained high during Reconstruction and their loyalties was for the Republican Party (Walton 1975).

As time progressed, during the 1920s–1940s when both parties' position was indistinguishable on civil rights, Black party loyalty was also split (Gurin et al. 1990). What occurred during this period was a gradual shift of Black voters from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party (White and Laird 2020). This was largely due to the New Deal's progressive economic and civil rights policies (Roosevelt 2016). Furthermore, the great migration created a new pool of eligible Black voters as they did not face the same barriers to vote in northern states as was the case in southern states (Grant 2019).

In turn, White politicians saw an opportunity to posture to Black voters as they believed the Black electorate could serve as a "balance of power" in close elections to help them reach their electoral goals (Bunche 1973; Grant 2019). By the 1964 Presidential election, the Democratic Party had become the party of racial liberalism while the Republican Party became the party of racial conservatism (Carmines and Stinson 1989). Further, landmark decisions made by the Warren Court on segregation and civil rights continued the shift to the Democratic Party among Black voters (Baugh 2011). The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 solidified the party realignment and African Americans have remained loyal supporters of the Democratic Party (Fraga 2018).

Racial Support and the Democratic Party

What has consistently generated party loyalty among Black voters is a party's willingness to support civil rights and Black interests. Carmines and Stinson show that changes in a party's position on racial policy issues best describe the partisanship of Black voters (Carmines and Stinson 1989). This allowed scholars to unpack how racial cues influence Black partisanship and political behaviors (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Lublin and Tate 1995; Tate 1991; Washington 2006 Fairdosi and Rogowski 2015). Furthermore, scholars revealed how Black group solidarity served as a key influencer that explains Black Democratic Party loyalty.

For example, Gurin and colleagues (1990) introduce the concept common fate and find that African Americans' view of politics is tied to their position within the Black community at large (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1990). Dawson expands upon this and develops his term linked fate. Dawson describes linked fate as African Americans who determine what policy, candidate, or party to support based on how it benefits the group at large (Dawson 1994). As we see, in addition to racial cues and civil rights, group solidarity is a strong determinant that explains Black partisanship.

Moreover, there is evidence of party loyalty going beyond racial ties. When presented with a White Democratic candidate and a Black Republican candidate, Black voters were likely to support the White Democratic candidate (Kidd et al. 2007; Lerman and Sadin 2016). Further, African American voters are more likely to

vote for the Black Republican candidate when party is not known and less likely to vote for the Black Republican candidate when party is known (Niven 2017). Since the Democratic Party has shown a willingness to support Black interests, this further explained the loyalty we see among the Black electorate. Moreso, we see that Black voters have displayed an unwavering amount of support for the Democratic Party that goes beyond traditional party attachment ideals.

Now, it is important to note that Black Democratic Party loyalty is not as black and white as we would like to think. White and colleagues (2014) show that Black Americans deal with a racialized social pressure that constrains and depresses individual self-interest (White, Laird and Allen 2014). In fact, there is an unspoken (and known) expectation that aligning with Black interest means voting for the Democratic Party as those who defect are considered "sellouts" (White, Laird and Allen 2014). Furthermore, White and Laird (2020) build on their work and examine how racialized social pressure has influenced unifying support of the Democratic Party (White and Laird 2020). One of the key findings focuses on an individual's social network. The authors find that "the greater the proportion of racial in-group members in a Black person's social network, the more likely it is that that individual will identify as a Democrat" (White and Laird 2020: 110).

Thus, this shows that supporting the Democratic Party can go against the individual interest of some Black voters, especially in the proximity of other African Americans. In fact, this suggests that the loyalty we see among Black voters is the result of feeling "bound" by the Democratic Party and not necessarily "close" to the Democratic Party (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016). This is particularly important as scholars have shown that Democratic Party loyalty has weakened over the years among the Black electorate (Smith 2014; Tate 2010). More specifically, as Black millennial turnout in recent election cycles has fluctuated and having remained vocal in their criticisms of the Democratic Party, this opens the door to examine their loyalties to the Democratic Party.

Key Characteristics of Black Partisanship: Age and Gender

After familiarizing ourselves with Black party loyalty, I will turn my attention to key characteristics while considering Black partisanship. As such, important to consider while examining Black Democratic Party loyalty are gender and age dynamics that influence the Black electorate (Dawson 1994; Tate 1994). Beginning with gender, Black women have had to consistently overcome challenges that Black men did not have to face that goes back to the Reconstruction era. As mentioned earlier, the 15th Amendment allowed Black men to vote; however, Black women were excluded from this right. Black women activists fought against this in their push for equal rights and Sojourner Truth highlighted in her speech "A'int I a Women" the intersectional issues that were unique to Black women (Smooth 2006).

In turn, the persistence that Black women have displayed in their fight for citizenship and equal rights has become commonplace. Historians noted that Black women protested at higher rates than Black men during the Civil Rights Movement (Greene 2006; Payne 1990; Sartain 2007). Further, Black women were leaders during the Civil Rights Movement and had roles comparable to Black male leaders (Barnett 1993). Despite serving as change agents to remedy the effects of inequalities that

African Americans faced, Black women were seen as unsung heroes and leaders (Barnett 1993). It was not until the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that Black women gained full voting rights and have been at the forefront of political and institutional change.

Subsequently, by the 1970s, Black women became strong supporters of the Democratic Party (Black 2004). In fact, identifying as a Black woman became positively related to identifying with the Democratic Party (Dawson 1994). Further, past studies showed that Black women had stronger partisan attachment to the Democratic Party than Black men (Black 2004). Additionally, Black women became as likely as Black men to engage in political activities and have higher levels of political ambition (Dowe 2020; Harris, Sinclair-Chapman, McKenzie 2005; Smooth 2006). Moreover, Black women have accounted for a majority of the Black voting electorate and had higher voting turnouts than Black men in the last three presidential and midterm elections (Simien and Hampson 2020).

Not only do Black women disproportionately identify with the Democratic Party but scholars have categorized Black women as the backbone of the Democratic Party (Brown and Gershon 2021; Brown and Lemi 2020). As we see, scholars have clearly identified gendered differences with respect to Democratic Party loyalty between Black women and Black men. However, we have yet to empirically test whether the gendered differences still hold true for Black millennials. There is early evidence that this is the case as Black millennial women were a critical voting bloc in President Biden's electoral victory (Adams et al. 2020). Thus, the next phase is determining if we will see Black millennial women continue to uphold past trends.

Moving onto age cohorts, Ryder (1985) shows that generational cohorts have distinctive circumstances that are unique to said cohort's history. Moreso, because cohorts have come to age under different historical periods, this has provided a unique influence on their political behaviors (Abramson and Inglehart 1992; Jennings and Niemi 1974). Knowing this helps establish the context needed to understand intra-group differences between Black millennials and Black non-millennials. For example, Black non-millennials came to age during the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. This era spawned a new and vibrant generation of young black people as they were politically engaged and involved in many affairs that pushed civil rights (Poussaint and Atkinson 1970). As a result, Black non-millennials developed distinct political behaviors based on their experiences with segregation, racial discrimination, and economic hardships (Simien and Hampson 2020). Further, their experiences developed a strong racial identity and facilitated a sense of civic duty (Franklin 2014; Shingles 1981). Moreso, because Black non-millennials came to age during the Civil Rights and Post-Civil Rights era, the Democratic Party could use civil rights and racial cues to capture Black voters which led to structural dependence (Frymer 1999; Walters 1988).

On the other end, Black millennials are a part of the millennial generation which scholars have called the future of American politics (Desante and Watts-Smith 2019; Fry 2016; Rouse and Ross 2018). The millennial generation has overtaken baby boomers as the largest adult living generation and is the most college-educated and ethnically diverse generation (Rouse and Ross 2018). While taking millennial generational characteristics under consideration, we see the implications it has on Black millennial Democratic Party loyalty. For example, Gay (2014) finds that Black

Americans with high political knowledge and conflicting policy views with the Democratic Party are less attached to the party. Given that Black millennials are the highest college-educated individuals among African Americans (Milkman 2017; Rouse and Ross 2018), this would suggest that we would see less attachment to the Democratic Party if party views do not align with Black millennials.

Furthermore, Black millennials came to age in a post-racial society with increased diversity and a new sense of hope that was embodied by the election of President Obama (Tesler 2016). In turn, it is possible that the structural dependence we see with Black non-millennials may not continue with Black millennials. Additionally, we have yet to see within the literature is how Black millennial Democratic Party identification compares with Black non-millennials. Thus, determining whether there are generational distinctions between Black millennials and Black non-millennials will give us a better understanding of Black partisanship going forward. Given what we have learned from the existent literature, this leads me to my proposed hypotheses:

> **H1:** *Black millennials will not be as loyal or enthusiastic about the Democratic Party when compared to Black non-millennials.*

> **H2**: *Similar to Black non-millennials, Black millennials will not shift their party loyalties to the Republican Party or another third Party.*

> **H3**: *Black millennials will be more willing to hold the Democratic Party accountable than Black non-millennials.*

> **H4**: *Black millennial women will have stronger ties to the Democratic Party than Black millennial men.*

Semi-Structured Interviews

To test my argument, I employ a mixed-methods approach, and I begin with discussing my interview data. I conducted 14 in-depth semi-structured virtual individual interviews in the Fall of 2022. To be included, participants needed to fit two criteria: they identified as Black or African American and needed to be born between the years 1946–1996. Prior to each interview, participants were given the objectives of my study and compensated $20 for their participation. Importantly, my interviews are a part of a larger project, and I will focus on the questions referring to party identification in this manuscript.

For my sampling strategies, I used three techniques. I began with a purposeful sampling strategy to gain my initial respondents. Participants were recruited via a flyer I created describing my research project and was distributed across my personal social media networks. This was intentional as I knew that my social networks comprised of both Black millennials and Black non-millennials who would either be willing to participate or share my flyer on their personal pages. From there, I reached out to individuals who I knew fit the criteria or was contacted by those who were interested in participating. Before moving forward with a

participant, they were screened to be sure that they met the requirements to participate.

After the interviews were completed, I asked participants if they could put me in contact with individuals in their network that fit my recruiting criteria. In turn, this allowed me to use my second sampling technique which was a snowball method. This aspect was key to my data collection to gain participants outside of my network. Furthermore, it allowed me to utilize a maximum variation sampling strategy. This was subsequently my third sampling strategy. Obtaining contacts from participants' individual networks allowed me to capture a wide range of perspectives about Black millennial and Black non-millennial partisanship behaviors (Bhattacharya 2017).

The data collection consisted of virtually recorded in-depth interviews across multiple states, which lasted approximately 40 minutes. I included open-ended questions that allowed for probing based on participants' response, and I began by asking the traditional party identification question. This question asked participants whether they think of themselves as a *Republican*, *Independent*, or *Democrat*. Based on the party the participants chose, the second part of this question asked whether they considered themselves a *strong, not very strong*, or *lean* insert given party. Participants were then asked if they feel that they belong to one of the two major parties. Finally, I concluded this section by asking participants what it would take to have a stronger identification with the party they chose.

The next step was transcribing all interviews, and I imported the results into Nvivo to conduct a thematic analysis. Of the participants interviewed, 50% were women and 50% were men. All participants except one were a part of the millennial cohort. While I only have one Black non-millennial, I will still include their response to provide a conversation between both groups.

From there, I created a codebook to code the interviews based on key identifying topics within my questions. The identifying criteria included *identity, party, belonging, and identification*. I also created subsections within each given criterion. Ultimately, my results stem from an in-depth reading of my interviews as I listened for themes from participants' responses related to their partisanship behaviors (Namey et al. 2008). My interviews complement my quantitative findings by unpacking *why* my respondents think the way that they do. Further, my interviews allow me to examine which concepts have different meanings to them. While I do understand the challenges of generalizing qualitative data, my goal is to provide a rich contextual understanding of Black millennial and Black non-millennial party identification with my interview results. The following section includes a discussion of interview results, and I will highlight patterns I found in Black millennial partisan behavior.

Qualitative Analysis: Semi-Structured Interview Results

As I begin, the first question that I asked respondents was the traditional party identification question which is a two-part question. The initial question was, "*Do you think of yourself as a Republican, Independent, or Democrat.*" The respondents overwhelmingly identify as Democrats, however, there was some indecisiveness while answering this question from Black millennials.

R2: "*I know I need to answer your question directly, which I don't want to but yeah I would say Democrat.*"

Respondent 2, who is a Black millennial male, is close with his dad and was influenced by the political conversations that he had with him. Whenever his dad gave him a perspective on politics that the respondent did not know, this led to them second guessing their party affiliation. Likewise, Respondent 4, a Black millennial male, initially chose to identify as an Independent, but reconsidered their response and changed to Democrat.

R4: "*Ideally, I would like to be independent. However, just because of how everything is being portrayed lately, I would say more of a Democrat.*"

Respondent 4 paused before answering the question, and his response suggested that he wanted to remain partial, even if it was not aligned with his interest. This speaks to White and Laird's findings on racialized social pressure (White and Laird 2020). On the other hand, I found that Black millennial women were more decisive in their response to this question.

R11: "*Okay, so I would say Democrat for sure.*"

R12: "*I'm a Democrat.*"

Respondents 11 and 12 are Black millennial women and highly involved in their local communities and state government. The following respondent is a Black non-millennial male and proudly identifies as a Democrat.

R5: "*I would definitely consider myself a Democrat.*"

Respondent 5 showed no hesitancy answering the question and even smiled with a sense of pride while providing their answer. Earlier in this interview, Respondent 5 discussed how he engaged with the Democratic Party, so the sense of pride was not surprising. After asking my initial question, it was directly followed up by asking respondents, "*Would you consider yourself to be a strong, not very strong, or lean Republican, Independent, or Democrat.*" Here, I continue to see variation with Black millennial and Black non-millennial responses. Continuing with the most recent respondent I discussed (R5), he identified as a strong Democrat.

R5: "*I will consider myself a strong Democrat, and probably because I think the party has or aligns more with social issues or legislation that relates to me and my group of people.*"

Although this response required more thinking on Respondent 5's end, he continued to display his pride with the Democratic Party when answering this question. Respondent 2 and Respondent 4 were on the fence with respect to the strength of their Democratic Party identification.

R4: "*I would say more of a lean Democrat with a progressive ideology.*"

R2: "*I don't really identify myself with a political party because of how my dad voted, and he voted for Trump.*"

Interestingly, here is the process in which both R2 and R4 went through while providing this answer. Both respondents took time to think through this question and continued to answer with a sense of indecisiveness. Additionally, Respondents 11 and 12 identify as strong Democrats, but express issues that the party must address.

R12: "*I'm a strong Democrat that believes in the core values, I just think there is a lot of stuff we have to work on.*"

R11: "*I would say strong Democrat for sure, but the caveat is that I do feel like there is more that the Democratic Party can do for issues that impact Black folks.*"

The answers on party identification between Black millennials and Black non-millennials were consistent. Both groups identify with the Democratic Party, but I uncovered in-group variation among Black millennial men and women. Black male millennials were less likely to identify as *strong Democrats* while Black female millennials were more likely to identify as *strong Democrats*. This supports hypothesis (4). Further, based on the responses from Black millennials, my results suggest that if the party aligns with their positions *and* follows through, they would be inclined to have a stronger identification with the party.

Moreover, my findings show that Black millennials have looser ties to the Democratic Party compared to Black non-millennials. Although Black female millennial respondents identified as *strong Democrats*, there was a reluctance in doing so. Furthermore, a common theme I found (particularly among Black millennials) was the sarcastic laugh or scoff before answering which party they identified with. Some respondents even rolled their eyes before answering the question. This was an indication to me of the indifference that Black millennials have toward the Democratic Party and helped make sense of the answers they gave.

The next question that I asked respondents was "*Do you feel you belong to one of the two major parties—Democrats or Republican.*"[4] I used this question to further understand Black Democratic Party loyalty, and my results continue to show that Black millennials are not as loyal to the Democratic Party.

R6: "*I'm not a card caring Democrat if that is the distinction here. I like to think of myself as more independent than anything.*"

Interesting here is that R6 (Black millennial male) directed the question back to their party identification, which they initially said that they identified as Democrat. Further, when I asked the next respondent this question (who is a Black millennial woman), she responded no, and this was based on her view on politics.

> R3: "*I would say no. Just because based on how I think about my political views, and how I've seen it play out in politics, I don't think there is a belonging for more progressive ways of thinking.*"

On the other end, R5 (Black non-millennial male) has a stronger sense of belonging to the Democratic Party.

> R5: "*I do feel like I belong to the Democratic Party because I feel like they are the party of inclusion, and when it comes to inclusion, I feel included in that.*"

Here, there is a clear dichotomy between R5 (Black non-millennial male) and R3 (Black millennial female) in their views toward the Democratic Party. R5 believes that the Democratic Party is inclusive while R3 believes that the party is not progressive enough. What I find from this question is that Black millennials have a weaker sense of belonging to the Democratic Party and in turn have a lower sense of loyalty toward the party. Lastly, I asked respondents, "*What would it take to have a stronger identification with the party that you chose.*" Here, respondents' answers served as a call-to-action for the Democratic Party, and what stood out among the responses is that Black millennial women (R3, R11, and R12) are leading the charge and support hypothesis (4).

> R2: "*Well for me I need consistency with what I want America to look like in a certain party.*"
>
> R3: "*For me I would need that type of courage and strength that is willing to fight, battle, and endure despite what others might think or feel.*"
>
> R11: "*I need the Democratic Party to lean on Black folks when it's time to vote and show up for the concerns that impact Black folks.*"
>
> R12: "*To be more present and in tune with our needs because we (Millennials) are the generation that is going to take over.*"

The answers from the respondents show that Black millennials identify with the Democratic Party and are willing to continue supporting the Democratic Party like their predecessors. Further, Black millennials are not switching loyalties to the Republican Party or third party. This supports hypothesis (2) that Black millennials are not switching party loyalties. However, I uncover that Black millennials are not as tied to the Democratic Party as Black non-millennials. Additionally, there is a low sense of belonging toward the Democratic Party among Black millennials which supports hypothesis (1) and further solidifies the lack of loyalty toward the Democratic Party. Moreso, based on the responses of Black millennials, the consensus is that Black millennials are looking for steadiness and support from the Democratic Party. If that is not received, Black millennials are likely to hold the Democratic Party accountable by forcing the party to earn their vote. In the next section, I will present a discussion of my survey analysis which will further solidify my qualitative findings.

Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) and Cooperative Election Survey (CES)

The 2016 and 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey (CCES) and 2020 Cooperative Election Survey (CES) is a large nationally representative survey that has several questions assessing political attitudes. One of the strengths of the datasets is its oversample of racial group participants, particularly Black millennials. This is important as nationally representative datasets are known to have small sample sizes of Black respondents, especially Black millennials. I am fortunate to have a large sample size of Black respondents because it allows me to gain a substantive comparison between Black millennial and Black non-millennial respondents. Furthermore, questions asked within the datasets are repeated over the years and permit a comparison across each year to analyze any changes.

Beginning with the 2016 CCES, this survey consists of 64,600 respondents. The pre-election cycle asked questions on general political attitudes, various demographic factors, and political information (Cooperative Congressional Election Survey 2016). There is a total sample size of 7,962 Black respondents. When I subset Black respondents by generation, there are 2,397 Black millennials, 2,285 Black Gen X'ers, and 2,639 Black baby boomer respondents. Next, the 2018 CCES consists of 61,000 respondents. Like the 2016 CCES, the 2018 CCES pre- and post-election cycle asks respondents questions on general political attitudes, demographic factors, and political information (Cooperative Congressional Election Survey 2018).

The total sample size in the 2018 CCES is 5,631 Black respondents. After I subset the data by generation, there are 1,800 Black millennials, 1,803 Black Gen X'ers, and 1,308 Black baby boomer respondents. The 2018 CCES capture midterm elections and will provide a useful analysis during an off-year election. Lastly, the 2020 CES consists of 60,000 respondents and 6,952 Black respondents. The questions on political attitudes and political information are repeated while accounting for the 2020 general election. As I continue to subset Black respondents by generation, there are 2,046 Black millennials, 1,697 Black Gen X'ers, and 2,133 Black baby boomer respondents.

Dependent Variables

The primary dependent variables for my hypotheses will analyze Black millennial and Black non-millennial Democratic Party loyalty. To examine this, I begin by analyzing Black Democratic Party identification. The party identification variable in 2016, 2018, and 2020 is on a seven-point scale, and I create a binary variable to capture Democratic and non-Democratic respondents. As such, the categories "Strong Republican," "Not very strong Republican," "Lean Republican" and "Independent" are coded as (0) "non-Democrat." On the other hand, the categories "Lean Democrat," "Not very strong Democrat," and "Strong Democrat" are coded as (1) "Democrat." The party identification measure allows me to determine how loyal Black millennials are to the Democratic Party, and how their views compare to Black non-millennials.

My next dependent variable will measure Black respondent intention to vote in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections. This variable will serve as a proxy to examine whether respondents are holding the Democratic Party accountable by withholding their vote. Thus, the question is worded to fit the 2016, 2018, and 2020 general and

midterm election cycles and asks respondents, "Do you intend to vote in the general or midterm election."

As such, I create a binary variable to capture whether respondents intend to vote or not in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections. The question in the 2016 CCES is on a five-point scale, and the categories "No" and "Undecided" are coded as (0) *"No intention to vote."* On the other hand, the categories "I already voted," "Probably," and "Yes, definitely" are coded as (1) *"Yes, I intend to vote."* In the 2018 CCES and 2020 CES, the question is on a six-point scale, and the categories "Undecided" and "No" are coded as (0) *"No intention to vote."* The categories "I plan to vote," "I already voted," "Probably," and "Yes, definitely" are coded as (1) *"Yes, I intend to vote."* From here, I will turn my attention to discussing my independent variables.

Independent Variables

My primary independent variables will measure how socioeconomic status and religiosity influence Black partisanship. As such, I control for gender, age, education, family income, and church attendance.[5] Moreso, I subset the data so that I only examine Black respondents. Beginning with gender, this is measured as a binary variable and the initial responses are coded as (1) *"Male"* and (2) *"Female."* I transform the variable so that (0) is coded as *"Male"* and (1) is coded as *"Female."* Next, I control for education and family income as scholars have found the role that both variables have on influencing Black partisanship (Gay 2014; Squire and Smith 1988). From here, age is measured using the year individuals were born. Cohorts are determined based on previous scholars who have used similar measures who study generations (Cohen 2010; Desante and Watts Smith 2020; Rouse and Ross 2018). I then showcase individual cohorts by creating dummy variables in which I capture Black millennial, baby boomer, and Generation X respondents.

While I refer to older African Americans as "non-millennials," analyzing individual cohorts will provide an added layer of nuance that would not be otherwise captured by condensing Black baby boomers and Gen X'ers into one cohort. As such, millennials are coded as individuals born between 1981 and 1996, baby boomers are coded as individuals born between 1946 and 1964, and Generation X will be coded as individuals born between 1965 and 1980. It is important to note that I did not include the Silent Generation in my assessment as the sample size did not justify inclusion. Lastly, to measure how religiosity influences partisanship, I include Black respondent church attendance as a control variable due to the importance that the Black church has within the Black community (Brown and Brown 2003).

Quantitative Analysis: Survey Results

In this section, I use logistic regression models to analyze my survey results. Like the first question I asked respondents in my interviews, my first dependent variable focuses on Black party identification. Here, my survey results align with my interview responses as I find that Black millennials are not identifying as strongly with the Democratic Party.

Beginning with the 2016 CCES, Table 1 displays the coefficient output for party identification. My results show that for every one-unit increase in party

Table 1. 2016 Black Partisanship Model

	Party Identification		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:			
Millennial	−0.576***		
	(0.059)		
Baby Boomer		0.575***	
		(0.066)	
Generation X			−0.042
			(0.064)
Education	0.568***	0.620***	0.631***
	(0.121)	(0.121)	(0.121)
Gender	0.363***	0.369***	0.343***
	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.059)
Income	−0.005***	−0.006***	−0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Church Attendance	0.031	0.044	0.114
	(0.097)	(0.097)	(0.096)
Constant	1.199***	0.775***	0.926***
	(0.094)	(0.090)	(0.090)
Observations	7,899	7,899	7,899
Log Likelihood	−3,752.218	−3,759.047	−3,798.628
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7,516.436	7,530.093	7,609.256

Note: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. Source. 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

identification, the log of the odds of Black millennials identifying with the Democratic Party decreases by .57 significant at the ($p < .001$) level. For Black non-millennial respondents, my results show that Black baby boomers and Gen X respondents were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. However, only the coefficient estimate for Black baby boomers is statistically significant. For Black baby boomers, for every one-unit increase in party identification, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers identifying with the Democratic Party increases by .57 significant at the ($p < .001$) level (Table 2).

Moreover, the 2018 CCES and 2020 CES have similar results. The 2018 CCES coefficient estimates show that for every one-unit increase in party identification, the log of the odds of Black millennials identifying with the Democratic Party decreases by .37 significant at the ($p < .001$) level. Moreso, Black baby boomers and Gen X respondents were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. However, similar to what we saw in the 2016 CCES, only the coefficient estimate for

Table 2. 2018 Black Partisanship Model

	Party Identification		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:			
Millennial	−0.361***		
	(0.065)		
Baby Boomer		0.646***	
		(0.082)	
Generation X			−0.014
			(0.068)
Education	0.578***	0.626***	0.603***
	(0.129)	(0.130)	(0.130)
Gender	0.460***	0.463***	0.454***
	(0.065)	(0.066)	(0.065)
Income	−0.005***	−0.005***	−0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Church Attendance	0.027	−0.007	0.075
	(0.104)	(0.105)	(0.104)
Constant	0.735***	0.449***	0.568***
	(0.097)	(0.092)	(0.093)
Observations	5,567	5,567	5,567
Log Likelihood	−3,018.806	−3,000.363	−3,034.137
Akaike Inf. Crit.	6,049.613	6,012.726	6,080.275

Note: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. Source. 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

Black baby boomers is statistically significant. For Black baby boomers, the coefficient estimate reports that with every one-unit increase in party identification, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers identifying with the Democratic Party increases by .64 significant at the ($p < .001$) level.

The same is true for the 2020 CES. The coefficient estimates in Table 3 show that for every one-unit increase in party identification, the log of the odds of Black millennials identifying with the Democratic Party decreases by .66 significant at the ($p < .001$) level. For Black Gen X and baby boomer respondents, the coefficient estimates show they were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party, and the results are statistically significant for both groups. For Black baby boomers, the coefficient estimate reports that with every one-unit increase in party identification, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers identifying with the Democratic Party increases by .91 significant at the ($p < .001$) level. Additionally, for Black Gen X respondents, the coefficient estimate reports that with every one-unit increase in

Table 3. 2020 Black Partisanship Model

	Party Identification		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:			
Millennial	−0.664***		
	(0.058)		
Baby Boomer		0.910***	
		(0.070)	
Generation X			0.203***
			(0.067)
Education	1.078***	1.007***	1.113***
	(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.113)
Gender	0.548***	0.534***	0.539***
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.057)
Income	−0.005***	−0.005***	−0.004***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Church Attendance	0.087	0.059	0.172*
	(0.090)	(0.091)	(0.089)
Constant	0.422***	−0.007	0.070
	(0.084)	(0.080)	(0.080)
Observations	6,942	6,942	6,942
Log Likelihood	−3,817.022	−3,788.185	−3,878.224
Akaike Inf. Crit.	7,646.044	7,588.370	7,768.448

Note: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. Source. 2020 Cooperative Election Study

party identification, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers identifying with the Democratic Party increases by .20 significant at the ($p < .01$) level.

Thus far, my results align with the answers from my interview responses which show that Black millennials are not as loyal to the Democratic Party. This is consistent with hypothesis (1). In addition, my results show that Black millennials are not changing party alliances and will continue to support the Democratic Party. This supports hypothesis (2). Of note, since Black millennials do not strongly identify with the Democratic Party, this continues to suggest that the Democratic Party must work to earn Black millennials vote. Furthermore, in 2016, 2018, and 2020, Black women across each generational cohort were more likely to identify with the Democratic Party and each coefficient estimate is statistically significant.

Moving forward, my second dependent variable will focus on Black respondents' intention to vote in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections. As mentioned previously, voter intention will serve as a proxy to determine whether Black respondents are holding the Democratic Party accountable by remaining on the fence with their

Table 4. 2016 Voter Intention Model

	Voter Intention		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:			
Millennial	−0.774***		
	(0.071)		
Baby Boomer		0.770***	
		(0.086)	
Generation X			0.025
			(0.078)
Education	2.140***	2.215***	2.214***
	(0.152)	(0.152)	(0.152)
Gender	−0.164**	−0.153**	−0.181**
	(0.075)	(0.075)	(0.075)
Income	−0.004***	−0.005***	−0.004***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Church Attendance	0.787***	0.815***	0.899***
	(0.117)	(0.117)	(0.116)
Constant	1.000***	0.421***	0.593***
	(0.111)	(0.105)	(0.105)
Observations	7,900	7,900	7,900
Log Likelihood	−2,728.679	−2,743.344	−2,787.563
Akaike Inf. Crit.	5,469.359	5,498.688	5,587.126

Note: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. Source. 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

vote. As such, beginning with the 2016 CCES, my results show in Table 4 that Black millennials had lower intentions to vote in the 2016 general election. The coefficient estimate reports that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black millennials intending to vote in the 2016 election decreased by .77 significant at the ($p < .001$) level. On the other hand, the coefficient estimates show that Black baby boomers had more intention to vote in the 2016 general election. In turn, the estimates show that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers intending to vote in the 2016 general election increased by .77 significant at the ($p < .001$). In addition, Black Gen X respondents also had more intentions to vote in the 2016 general elections, however, the results were not statistically significant.

In the 2018 CCES, my results are similar to what is shown in the 2016 CCES. For Black millennials, the coefficient estimates in Table 5 report that for every one-unit

Table 5. 2018 Voter Intention Model

| | Voter Intention | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:			
Millennial	−0.504***		
	(0.074)		
Baby Boomer		0.569***	
		(0.095)	
Generation X			0.148*
			(0.081)
Education	2.044***	2.093***	2.033***
	(0.154)	(0.154)	(0.154)
Gender	−0.128	−0.131*	−0.132*
	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Income	−0.003**	−0.003**	−0.003**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Church Attendance	0.588***	0.588***	0.664***
	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.119)
Constant	0.642***	0.295***	0.363***
	(0.109)	(0.103)	(0.103)
Observations	5,574	5,574	5,574
Log Likelihood	−2,414.000	−2,417.684	−2,435.493
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,839.999	4,847.368	4,882.986

Note: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. Source. 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Study

increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black millennials intending to vote in the 2018 midterm election decreased by .50 significant at the ($p < .001$) level. For Black baby boomers and Gen X respondents, the coefficient estimates show they had more intentions to vote, and the results are statistically significant for both groups. For Black baby boomer respondents, the coefficient estimates show that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers intending to vote in the 2018 midterm election increased by .56 significant at the ($p < .001$). Furthermore, for Black Gen X respondents, the coefficient estimates show that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers intending to vote in the 2018 midterm election increased by .14 significant at the ($p < .1$).

Continuing with the 2020 CES, my results align with what we see in 2016 and 2018. Beginning with Black millennials, the coefficient estimates report that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black millennials intending to vote in the 2020 general election decreased by .61 significant at the

Table 6. 2020 Voter Intention Model

| | Voter Intention | | |
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Dependent variable:			
Millennial	−0.615***		
	(0.075)		
Baby Boomer		1.004***	
		(0.103)	
Generation X			0.340***
			(0.094)
Education	2.590***	2.505***	2.601***
	(0.159)	(0.159)	(0.159)
Gender	0.066	0.048	0.068
	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.077)
Income	−0.007***	−0.007***	−0.006***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Church Attendance	0.694***	0.675***	0.778***
	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.119)
Constant	0.709***	0.295***	0.343***
	(0.108)	(0.100)	(0.100)
Observations	6,935	6,935	6,935
Log Likelihood	−2,470.760	−2,447.610	−2,497.444
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,953.520	4,907.220	5,006.888

Note: *$p < .1$; **$p < .05$; ***$p < .01$. Source. 2020 Cooperative Election Study

($p < .001$) level. As we saw in 2018, the coefficient estimates show that Black baby boomers and Gen X respondents had more intentions to vote in the 2020 general election. For Black baby boomer respondents, the coefficient estimates show that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers intending to vote in the 2020 general election increased by 1 significant at the ($p < .001$). Furthermore, for Black Gen X respondents, the coefficient estimates show that for every one-unit increase in intention to vote, the log of the odds of Black baby boomers intending to vote in the 2020 general election increased by .33 significant at the ($p < .001$) (Table 6).

Here, my results confirm hypothesis (3) that Black millennials are holding the Democratic Party accountable by remaining on the fence about voting. Further, while I did not ask respondents a question about their voting intentions, my findings here complement the call-to-action that Black millennial respondents gave to the Democratic Party. Black millennials are looking for more accountability from the Democratic Party and are willing to withhold their vote if they do not receive it.

Discussion & Conclusion

Over the years, one of the longest-known political norms within the Black community is Democratic partisanship. Scholars have spent years examining Black Democratic partisanship, and much of what we know about this phenomenon centers on African Americans at large (Dawson 1994; Tate 1994; Fyrmer 1999; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1990; Gay 2014). However, understanding whether Black millennials have the same loyalties to the Democratic Party as Black non-millennials has gone unanswered. While scholars have highlighted that Black millennials are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than other millennial groups (Rogowski and Cohen 2015), less is known on whether there are intra-group differences within the Black electorate. As such, I use my work to help fill the void. Considering how outspoken Black millennials have been toward the Democratic Party, in addition to a fluctuation in voting patterns in recent elections, this suggests that we are seeing a break in the "Black partisanship status quo" among Black millennials. Thus, I examine whether there are intra-group differences in Black Democratic partisanship using a multi-method approach.

Accordingly, my findings confirm each of my four hypotheses. First, I find that when compared to Black non-millennials, Black millennials are not as loyal to the Democratic Party which supports hypothesis (1). Additionally, although Black millennials are not identifying as strongly with the Democratic Party, there is no evidence that they are shifting party loyalties to the Republican or third party which confirms hypothesis (2). In fact, Black millennials want to continue supporting the Democratic Party, however, they are taking a "wait and see" approach. This approach highlights that the Democratic Party cannot assume that Black millennials will automatically vote for the party.

Subsequently, this brings me to my third finding. I find that Black millennials are willing to hold the Democratic Party accountable by remaining on the fence about voting in elections and support hypothesis (3). Granted, the Democratic Party does not have to focus on Black millennials changing party loyalties anytime soon. Instead, the Democratic Party must worry about Black millennials withholding their vote if the Democratic Party's views do not align with their own. Lastly, I find that Black millennial women have stronger Democratic Party loyalties than Black millennial men. Further, Black millennial women are more likely to hold the Democratic Party accountable than Black millennial men. This was highlighted in the call-to-actions that Black millennial women provided during my interviews. Not only does this finding support hypothesis (4), but it suggests that Black millennial women will continue to support the Democratic Party at high rates like their predecessors.

My project carries broader implications for party politics as my findings show that Black millennial partisanship behaviors are not what we have come to expect with Black non-millennials. In fact, we see evidence of this already taking place. This was evident in the 2020 Presidential election as the last half of Biden's election campaign was geared toward Black millennials beliefs (Adams et al. 2020). Moreover, in the 2022 Michigan gubernatorial election, Governor Whitmer intentionally targeted Black millennial voters, and this endured herself to the group. So much so that she gained the nickname "Big Gretch." As a result, having a better

understanding of Black millennial Democratic partisanship can change how the Democratic Party mobilizes Black voters going forward.

Furthermore, as Black millennials now represent the largest voting bloc within the Black community, they desire tangible benefits that will impact their everyday lives. While the Democratic Party will argue that the Black unemployment rate is the lowest in years and Biden has provided billions of dollars in federal funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Gurley, Bhattarai, and Nix 2023). There was a missed opportunity for the Biden administration to have "it's moment" with Black millennials in the battle to cancel student debt. Had Biden fought more to cancel student debt, that would have instilled a level of confidence among Black millennials that the Democratic Party would work to accomplish their campaign goals. Instead, there is continued uncertainty among Black millennials and their loyalties to the Democratic Party. In turn, my results shed light on intra-group differences with respect to Black Democratic identification and confirm that the Democratic Party will have to earn Black millennials vote going forward.

Notes

1 I will use Black and African American interchangeably throughout this article.
2 I define Black non-millennials as Black individuals apart of the baby boomer and gen X generation.
3 Formerly the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey.
4 Since all respondents considered themselves Democrats, the question will only apply to the Democratic Party.
5 For essential control variables such as linked fate, racial identity, political trust, political alienation, etc. I am limited with the dataset that I use as those variables (or similar variables) are not included in the 2016 and 2018 CCES or the 2020 CES. However, I do believe that the large sample size of Black respondents (particularly, Black millennials) makes up for the missing control variables. Additionally, to capture southern geography, I created a dummy variable using the zip code variable and sectioned respondents by region (Northeast, West, South, Midwest) However, creating the variable, the number of respondents dropped to an extremely small sample size, and the data did not justify inclusion of a southern geography control variable within my model.

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Appendices. Respondent demographic information

	Year Born	Gender	Education Attainment	Socioeconomic Status (when they were a teenager)
Respondent 2	1994	Male	Bachelor's	Middle class
Respondent 3	1989	Female	Masters	Lower-middle class
Respondent 4	1991	Male	Masters	Lower class
Respondent 5	1972	Male	Bachelor's	Middle class
Respondent 6	1986	Male	Masters	Lower-middle class
Respondent 11	1996	Female	Masters	Lower class
Respondent 12	1995	Female	Bachelor's	Lower-middle class