

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## Why Black Voters Are Sticking With Clinton

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February 12, 2016

One of the reasons most political analysts believe that Hillary Clinton will ultimately prevail in the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination, despite the growing, broad-based enthusiasm for Bernie Sanders in a Democratic primary electorate that appears to be moving leftward at a heedless pace, is that for now, at least, Clinton is besting Sanders among black voters. Nate Silver cites a recent South Carolina survey in which Clinton has the support of 74 percent of black voters to 17 percent for Sanders, which can't be encouraging news for the Vermont socialist. Not all of the news is discouraging for Sanders, however. He managed to secure 49 percent of the (quite small) minority vote in New Hampshire. It seems likely that minority voters in a largely white state like New Hampshire are different in important respects from black voters in the Deep South, a large (if oft-neglected) part of the Democratic coalition, but Sanders's modest success with non-white voters in New Hampshire, and to a lesser extent Iowa, ought to give him some encouragement.

Moreover, there is some indication that young left-wing black voters are growing more open to Sanders, in South Carolina and elsewhere. Ta-Nehisi Coates, one of the country's most well-known left-wing intellectuals, recently announced that he'll be voting for Sanders, despite Sanders's opposition to slavery reparations, a cause Coates has helped revive. And the Sanders campaign is pushing a new television advertisement featuring Erica Garner, the Black Lives Matter activist and daughter of Eric Garner, an African-American man who died in an encounter with the police in Staten Island in July of 2014. The ad has been almost universally praised on the left for its emotionally charged portrait of the younger Garner, and its juxtaposition of her story with various Sanders pronouncements on the importance of combating police brutality. Leaving aside the soundness of the claims advanced by the Black Lives Matter movement (see Heather Mac Donald in today's Wall Street Journal for a skeptical take, and Glenn Loury on why social-justice movements should avoid defining themselves around the alleged pervasiveness of police racism), Sanders is clearly capturing the imagination of white and some black leftists in the culture industries, who play such an important role in shaping the perceptions of the wider public.

So does this mean that Sanders will soon breach Clinton's firewall of black voters? I'm skeptical, for the following simple reason: Black Democrats are more conservative than white Democrats. Among whites, party affiliation is tightly correlated with ideology. That is less true among

African Americans, for a variety of reasons. Consider a recent analysis from Rob Suls and Jocelyn Kiley of the Pew Research Center:

Today, white Democrats are far more likely to describe their political views as liberal (50%) rather than as moderate (36%) or conservative (12%). In 2000, moderates constituted the largest share of white Democratic voters (46%), while just 28% described their views as liberal and 21% as conservative.

By contrast, more black and Hispanic Democratic voters characterized their views as moderate than liberal in 2015, and the self-described political views of both groups have remained stable in recent years. Last year, 42% of black Democrats called themselves moderates, 29% said they were conservatives and 27% called themselves liberals. Among Hispanic Democrats, 39% described their political views as moderate, 35% as liberal and 24% as conservative.

Black conservatives vote for Democrats in large numbers. One explanation, drawing on the work of Jonathan Haidt and Emily Ekins, is that because conservatives tend to value group loyalty more than non-conservatives, black conservatives see a tension between loyalty to the black community and support for the GOP, a party that is widely perceived as anti-black. The persistence of Democratic affiliation among black conservatives could be a matter, in some cases, at least, of racial loyalty trumping ideology. Theodore Johnson has addressed this dynamics in his National Review cover story on civil-rights Republicanism. Elsewhere, Johnson has elaborated on the theme of “linked fate”:

Linked fate, in a political context, suggests that black voters approach elections with one simple question: Which candidate is better for the African American population? The analysis begins at the most fundamental level by ascertaining which party or candidate is most likely to protect civil rights and support equal access to economic opportunity for blacks. Everything else is secondary. For example, a politician’s stance on renewable energy, free market economics, abortion, immigration, national debt, and role of the military in regional conflicts all pale in comparison to basic considerations of liberty.

This raises a number of different possibilities. A number of Sanders supporters insist that their candidate’s brand of socialism will do a far better job of advancing black interests than Clinton’s neoliberal progressivism, which can be understood as an appeal to linked fate. Another possibility, however, is that if black Democrats don’t accept that Hillary Clinton is hostile to black advancement, or that her agenda is objectively anti-black, the choice between Clinton and Sanders comes down to ideology, in which case we can expect black Democrats who identify as conservatives and moderates to rally around Clinton while those who identify as liberals are more inclined to back Sanders.