

CULTURE WARS, SECULAR REALIGNMENT, AND THE GENDER GAP IN PARTY IDENTIFICATION

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Changes in the U.S. partisan balance over the past decade are often attributed to the enhanced political salience of cultural issues. Yet as white men have continued to become more Republican in recent years, white women increasingly identify with the Democrats. To the extent that cultural issues are influencing this partisan change, men and women must be responding differently to this cultural agenda. Using a pooled ANES data set from 1988 through 2000, I explore the extent to which cultural values are responsible for this gender realignment. Findings suggest that salient cultural issues influence the partisan choices of both men and women, however in somewhat different ways. For women, the issues themselves—reproductive rights, female equality, and legal protection for homosexuals—have become increasingly important determinants of party identification. For men, the influence of cultural conflict on partisanship is argued to be equally pervasive, albeit less direct.

Key words: gender gap; party identification; partisan realignment; culture wars; voting behavior.

Recent scholarship suggests an ongoing secular realignment of U.S. political parties and their adherents. In particular, the decade of the 1990s was noted for the ascendance of cultural issues to the forefront of American politics and a growing political division between those that hold traditional versus progressive moral values (Carmines and Layman, 1997; Edsall, 1997; Hunter, 1991; Jelen, 1997; Layman, 2001; Merelman, 1994; Sobnosky, 1993). Admittedly cultural issues such as civil rights, abortion rights, women's rights, and gay rights, to name a few of the most currently salient, are not new. They have,

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however, become ever more consequential to the political and rhetorical distinctiveness of the parties and their followers. Numerous scholars have argued that cultural values and religious beliefs increasingly define party cleavages; in particular, evangelical and otherwise observant Christians increasingly make up the ranks of the Republican Party, while secular Christians, non-Christians, and non-believers bolster membership in the Democratic Party (Hunter 1991; Jelen, 1997; Kellstedt, Green, Guth, and Smidt, 1996; Kohut, Green, Keeter, and Toth, 2000; Layman, 1997, 2001; Miller and Shanks, 1996). To date, this political reorganization has not resulted in a Republican majority, *per se*, but the underlying groups that comprise the two major parties have nonetheless gone through notable transformations.

The somewhat consuming focus on cultural attitudes and religious orthodoxy as central features of this ongoing secular realignment underemphasizes two particularly conspicuous phenomena: the racial and gendered aspects of this partisan reshuffling. Indeed, the combatants in the culture wars, as they have been so defined, do not represent a diverse cross-section of the American polity. There is little evidence that the partisan realignment over cultural issues extends beyond white Americans, or more specifically, much beyond white Christians (Kohut et. al., 2000; Layman, 2001). Furthermore, recent changes in the partisan balance of white Americans are notable for their gender distinctiveness. White men, who had been moving in ever-growing numbers to the Republican Party since the 1960s, continue to do so. However, white women, who had also become somewhat more Republican in prior decades (especially during the Reagan years), have taken a distinctive change of course. Beginning in 1992, substantial numbers of white women left the Republican Party while growing numbers identified with the Democrats. To the extent that cultural issues have become more politically salient and increasingly define partisan loyalties in the recent decade, they clearly may have different implications for men and for women. The purpose of this article is to investigate the changing partisanship of white men and women from 1988 to 2000 and to identify correlates and possible causes of this most recent transformation of the American party system, paying particular attention to the roles of gender and cultural attitudes.

The initial part of this article uses National Election Study Data from 1952 to 2000 to explore the ebb and flow of party identification by gender. The findings from this exercise clearly illustrate the distinctiveness of the past decade and provide justification for the ensuing in-depth study of the 1988 to 2000 period. The concluding sections of the article, using a pooled American National Election Study data set, explore the relationship of social welfare opinions, cultural views, racial, and defense-related attitudes to the party identification of white men and women over this time period. I pay particular

attention to the increasing and decreasing salience of these given issues to party identification over time. My general theoretical claim, derived from the logic of Blumer's theory of group position (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996), is that men and women should have markedly different sets of considerations relating to party identification. The centrality of civil rights—rights to reproductive choice, the promotion of female equality, the defense of fair hiring practices, the legal protection of gays, and the continuing struggle for racial justice—have a somewhat different set of implications for white women than for white men. This progressive agenda offers both tangible and symbolic benefits for women that are not fully shared by their male counterparts. Indisputably, the “cost” of enhanced minority rights (in the most general sense) is disproportionately borne by white men who have long held a privileged status in American society. From this perspective then, I argue that the continuing growth in male Republicanism, in part, results from their defense of this privilege, while the growing Democratic Party identification of women during this most recent period reflects their unique interests in the advancement of progressive cultural policies.

PARTISAN REALIGNMENT AND THE GENDER GAP

While much has been written in the past 20 years about the nature of contemporary partisan realignments and the character and causes of the gender gap, these two areas of scholarly research have proceeded largely independent of one another. Given the gender patterns of changing party identification among whites during most of this period, this independence appears somewhat justified. Starting with the 1960s and continuing through the 1980s, increasing Republican identification was evident for both white men and women, as shown in Figure 1. The gender gap during this time period was more a question of the relative magnitudes of partisan change for men and women than a notable feature of the change itself.¹

Beginning in 1992, however, the partisan movements of white men and women begin to diverge, with women now turning toward the Democratic Party while men continuing to grow more Republican. Indeed, the growing difference between women and men that began in 1992 resulted in a partisan gender gap that was roughly double that of the prior decade, swelling to a full 14 percentage points at its height in 1996 (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999). What has gone unsaid in previous research, however, was that the past decade was not only distinctive because of the relative *size* of gender gap but was also significant because it represented the first sustained period where men and women were actually moving in opposite directions. Prior to the 1990s, men and women were both becoming less Democratic and more Republican, albeit

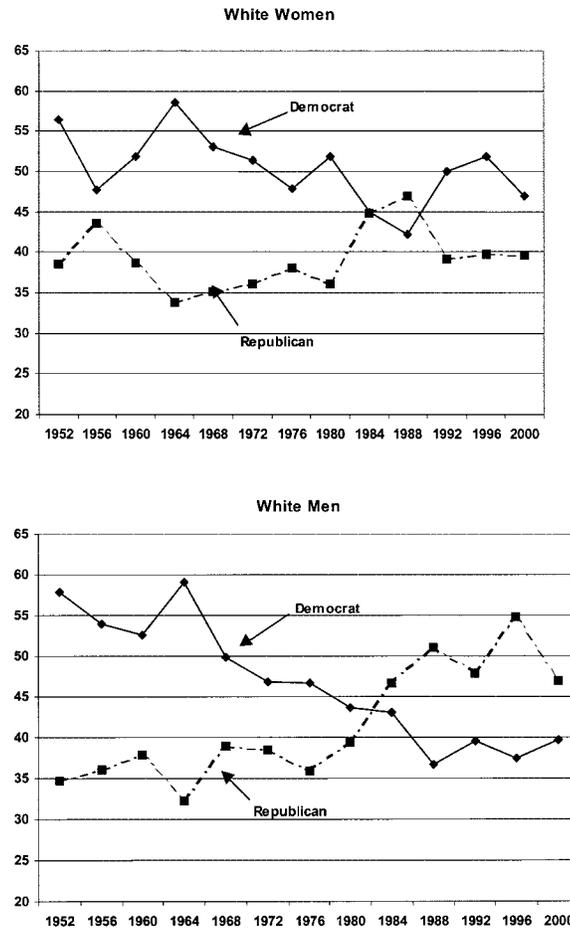


FIG. 1. The party identification of white men and women—1952 to 2000.

Source: American National Election Studies from selected years.

at different rates. The gender gap, largely driven by the disproportionate male preference for the Republicans, was a question of breadth but not direction. Beginning in 1992, however, white men and women were no longer moving in concert with one another. The female/male divergence during the past 10 years constitutes an important characteristic of partisan change, and it seems imperative that contemporary discussions of partisan realignment take these gender differences into account.

THE CULTURE WARS AND A SENSE OF GROUP POSITION

The scholarly usage of cultural values tends to encompass a wide range of political attitudes that are assumed to be more rooted in moral beliefs than in strictly political ones. Many scholars argue that, in response to the growing salience of cultural issues, the political preferences of the religiously orthodox and their secular counterparts increasingly hinge on moral issues as opposed to the traditional political differences between the parties (Davis and Robinson, 1996; Jelen, 1993; Kohut et al., 2000; Wilcox, 1996). James Davison Hunter (1991: 41), who is noted for originating the “culture war” metaphor, defines cultural conflict as “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding. . . . They are not merely attitudes that can change on a whim, but basic commitments and beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for people who live by them.” He offers abortion, child care, funding for the arts, affirmative action and quotas, gay rights, public values in education, and multiculturalism as examples of political issues that animate the culture wars and further suggests that opinion on these matters “can be traced ultimately and finally to the matter of moral authority.” Hunter importantly acknowledges that “the right to shape the public culture,” or at a minimum to contribute to its shaping, is at the heart of the political battle being waged (See also Merelman, 1994). Further, he concludes that the culture wars, at their core, are motivated by differing moral beliefs, otherwise, he argues, the fight would not likely be as ferocious as it is.

Clearly the crux of cultural politics is about *who* gets to shape the public culture and whose vision of social organization will prevail. It is not similarly obvious, however, that the primary individual orientations that invigorate cultural conflict are necessarily or exclusively questions of religious conviction or beliefs about moral authority. Rather, I point to racial prejudice research—in particular to Blumer’s theory of relative group position—and pose an alternative explanation for the sanguine nature of our public debate over so-called “cultural” issues.

The group position explanation, initially proposed by sociologist Herbert Blumer (1958) to explain white racial prejudice toward blacks, maintains that intergroup hostility is a product of competition between dominant groups and subordinate groups when such subordinate groups challenge existing power relations. The “sense of group position” that arouses racial prejudice is based on beliefs of in-group superiority, perceptions of out-group distinctiveness, an assumption of proprietary claim on important in-group privileges such as power and material wealth, and a challenge from subordinate groups for greater control of those valued resources to which dominant group members feel entitled. An emerging sense of group position is a social process spurred by elite debate and issue salience. It is not an immediate response to short-

term social or political events, rather it evolves in response to sustained challenges and public dialogue. As explained by Lawrence Bobo and Vincent Hutchings (1996: 955),

... the sense of group position is not reducible to learned individual feelings of group identity, affect, and stereotyping as emphasized by the classical prejudice model. Instead, a long-term social and historical process is shaped by exchange of ideas among organized leadership of racial groups. This exchange sparks, hones, disseminates, and thereby creates shared ideas about where the in-group ought to stand in the social order relative to other groups.

While the theory of group position has been applied to the study of black/white relations, and more broadly to group relations in a multicultural setting, it seems nonetheless a particularly apt framework for the study of cultural conflict. As much as the civil rights movement challenged preexisting social relationships and met with substantial resistance from dominant whites, women's rights advocates and gay rights activists have similarly challenged the values of a traditional social order: notions of marriage, of workplace, and of the military regime. For over 30 years, activists have agitated for greater political and economic inclusion. And particularly over the past 10 years, political parties and their leadership have come to the forefront of the public dialogue over who controls the culture. As colorfully described by Thomas Edsall (1997: 138),

The past thirty years have produced a revolution in the workplace, at home, and in bed. These trends have turned men, particularly white men, into powerful agents of conservatism, mainstays of the rightward movement of American politics. For many—but by no means all—men, the past three decades have been years of lost sexual and gender identity, and lost centrality in the culture. The major rights movements on behalf of women, minorities and gays have often identified as a common adversary the heterosexual white man.

The battle over cultural issues in contemporary American politics extends beyond philosophical debate or questions of racial dominance. There is an unmistakable gender component to the culture war. Why did white men and women become more politically split in the past decade than in any other contemporary period? In much the same way that many white Americans have been reluctant to support racially remedial public policies, I argue that white men have become increasingly resistant to the liberal cultural agenda of the Democratic Party. Social policies that advocate for greater female equality and expanding legal protections for gays and lesbians—particularly in the workplace and in the family—pose substantial challenges to a traditional social

order in which white men have been largely privileged. Those men who feel the most alienated by prospects of evolving social change, and the most threatened by challenges to status quo power relations, are therefore the most likely to be receptive to the conservative cultural appeals associated with the Republican Party. To generalize from the group position framework, growing Republican identification among white men, in part, reflects their interests in maintaining a public culture in which their values and dominance are protected.

Given this theoretical perspective on the gendered character of the culture wars, I return to the question of defining cultural values and cultural issues. In the context of this research and consistent with other work, cultural issues specifically include those that seek to alter existing social, political, and economic relations between dominant and subordinate groups. In particular, I rely on questions of abortion rights, women's rights, and gay rights to represent a relevant set of contemporary cultural issues. Racial attitudes, although certainly pertinent to questions of cultural warfare, are also included in this research but are nonetheless operationalized as a separate issue domain.

Cultural issues are not new to American politics and have certainly played a prominent role in partisan dialogue since the early 1960s. Why then did they become so politically important in the 1990s? Why, for example, don't we see significant gender realignments during the 1960s and 1970s, at the apex of the women's movement and the push to ratify the ERA? I pose several possible explanations. First and foremost, the women's liberation and ERA movements represented a profound challenge to the social organization of the country. In the early stages, there were far fewer adherents to these progressive ideas than there are now (Mansbridge, 1986). Simply put, it took a large-scale integration of women into the workforce, and a sustained public dialogue on female equality to engage and transform public opinion in large segments of the public—among both men and women (Manza and Brooks, 1998).

Additionally and particularly relevant, there continued to be substantial differences in the fiscal policies and social welfare positions of the parties and their major candidates up to and including the 1988 presidential election. The New Deal Party System, founded on these social welfare cleavages, would not likely undergo a broad transformation as long as these differences between the parties continued to be large and salient. In the early 1990s, however, Democratic candidate Bill Clinton and the moderate Democratic Leadership Council brought a fiscally conservative fervor to the party of the "tax and spend liberals." Reinventing government, debt reduction, balanced budgets, and the like were now Democratic policies. It was more difficult to pin the "tax and spend" label on the Clinton White House than it had been for previous Democratic administrations. For the first time since the New Deal realignment, the most significant and defining differences between the Democrats and Republicans were their social policy positions, in particular on

abortion rights and gays in the military. And while Hillary Clinton became a powerful symbol of the changing role of women in American society, the Clinton presidency, in its totality, became emblematic of cultural liberalism. As much as any other factor, I believe that the right turn of the Democratic Party on fiscal issues is responsible for the increasing political salience of cultural issues over the past decade.

SECULAR REALIGNMENT AND THE CULTURE WARS

Proponents of the culture war perspective on partisan realignment tend to inform their viewpoint with theories of secular realignment. The theory of secular realignment, and related processes of issue evolution, presume that shifts in party identification result from the increasing and sustained salience of political issues that cross-cut preestablished political relationships (Abramowitz and Saunders, 1998; Adams, 1997; Black and Black, 1992; Carmines and Layman, 1997; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Key, 1959; Petrocik, 1981; Sundquist, 1983). Social groups that once were predominantly Republican or Democratic, given the relative distribution of their attitudes on previous salient issue dimensions, become increasingly unhinged to old alliances as new issue cleavages unfold. The main issue cleavages at the onset of the New Deal Realignment were opinions regarding the size of government and appropriate role of the social welfare state (Ladd, 1970). Growing party polarization over racial issues is largely credited for much of the Southern political realignment beginning in the 1960s (Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Petrocik, 1981, 1987; Sears and Valentino, 2001). Cultural issues such as abortion and women's rights have also been identified as forces of secular realignment (Adams, 1997; Carmines and Layman, 1997), however their increasing salience in the political rhetoric of party candidates during the last decade suggest that they continue to grow in their relative importance.

The divergent patterns of partisanship between men and women that began in the 1990s also suggests that, if indeed differences in cultural values are driving partisan change, they may be driving men and women in different directions. Thus the remainder of this research turns to an empirical examination of political attitudes and their relative influence on the partisan choices of men and women from 1988 to 2000.

DATA AND METHODS

The data for this project come from American National Election Studies conducted in 1988, 1992, 1996 and 2000. Several objectives guide this research. At one level, I am interested in exploring how issues—and the changing importance of issues—translate into changes in party identification for

both men and women. The first set of analyses compares female/male opinion on a variety of issues to see whether male and female attitudes on cultural matters, social welfare programs, racial issues, and national defense have become more polarized over time.

The second set of analyses models partisanship for men and women using issue attitudes and demographic attributes as explanatory variables. I explore the main effects of cultural attitudes, social welfare opinion, racial views, defense-related judgments, income, education, age, and region on the party identification for men and women. Additionally, I use interaction terms to measure the relative changes in salience of these factors to partisanship over time. I look to explore three main questions: (a) Are there gender differences in the ways that women and men politicize their respective political values? (b) How have issues and demographic attributes changed in their relative importance to male and female partisanship over time? (c) Is there evidence that cultural attitudes are at the root of partisan change?

The final section of this research explores the underlying motives that inspire these partisan differences. Building on the findings from the first analysis, as well as other research that indicates the continuing and somewhat disproportionate importance of social welfare attitudes as predictors of party identification (especially for men), this second set of regressions use social welfare attitudes as a dependent variable. In this case, the explanatory variables are egalitarian attitudes, moral views, and racial attitudes as well as income, education, age, and region. Similar to the first analysis, I estimate the relative changes in the importance of these attitudinal dispositions and demographic traits over time. I look to explore two main questions: (a) Are there differences in the attitudinal underpinnings of social welfare opinion for women and men? (b) Do these differences support a group position explanation for partisan change?

ARE ISSUE OPINIONS BECOMING MORE POLARIZED?

One possible explanation for the growing gender gap in party identification is that male and female attitudes regarding cultural matters, social welfare, and racial issues have grown more disparate over the past decade. Previous research on the gender gap and gender differences in political attitudes consistently demonstrate that women, on average, are slightly more liberal than men with regard to social welfare attitudes, racial attitudes, and defense-related opinion (Conover, 1988; Gilens, 1988; Shapiro and Majahan, 1986). There are few, if any, significant differences between women and men on abortion attitudes and issues of female equality, but there are, in a relative sense, rather large (12 to 14 percentage points) differences between men and women on questions of homosexuality and legal protections for gays and lesbi-

ans (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999). Furthermore, several studies of the gender gap maintain that a substantial proportion of the gap can in fact be explained by the magnitude of these policy differences as they translate into partisan choice (Chaney, Alvarez, and Nagler, 1998; Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999). Were we to find evidence of increasingly polarized attitudes by gender, changes in the magnitude of male/female differences might indeed explain the expanding partisan difference between women and men.

The data in Figure 2 represent a gender comparison of mean values within various issue domains. All survey responses are coded liberal to conservative so that higher values reflect greater conservatism. Consistent with previous studies of gender and political attitudes, women are generally more liberal than men across most of the issue dimensions and in particular on cultural and social welfare issues.²

Nonetheless, these data do not indicate increasing opinion polarization between men and women. Public opinion research finds that, in the aggregate, Americans have become more liberal on racial and cultural issues over the past 40 years, while at the same time becoming more conservative on issues of social welfare spending and the appropriate size of government. (Brooks, 2000; Page and Shapiro 1992; Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo, 1997; Yang, 1997). Some of these trends are certainly evident in Figure 2. In spite of these overall trends, however, there is no evidence of a growing “opinion gap” between the sexes. By and large, gender similarities and differences have remained notably constant over this 12-year time period. There is thus, no reason to think that changes in the partisan inclinations of men and women over this period are linked to underlying movements in their respective political beliefs.

MODELING PARTISANSHIP AND PARTISAN CHANGE

To the extent that the issue opinions of men and women have not become more polarized since 1988, changes in party identification have likely resulted from alterations in the relative weights that men and women apply to these various issues when making partisan choices. The analysis in Table 1 uses an ordinary least squares regression to assess the relative importance of issues and demographic characteristics with regard to male and female party identification. The NES 7-point party identification scale is used as the dependent variable. All of the issue attitude measures are scales comprised of identical questions from the four selected years, thus any differences across time cannot be interpreted as a function of the measures themselves. Furthermore, all of the attitude measures are scaled from 0 to 1—most liberal to most conservative. The Cultural Attitudes scale combines three survey questions regarding abortion, the appropriate role of women in society, and the legal protections for homosexuals (Cronbach's $\alpha = .50$). The Social Welfare measure also in-

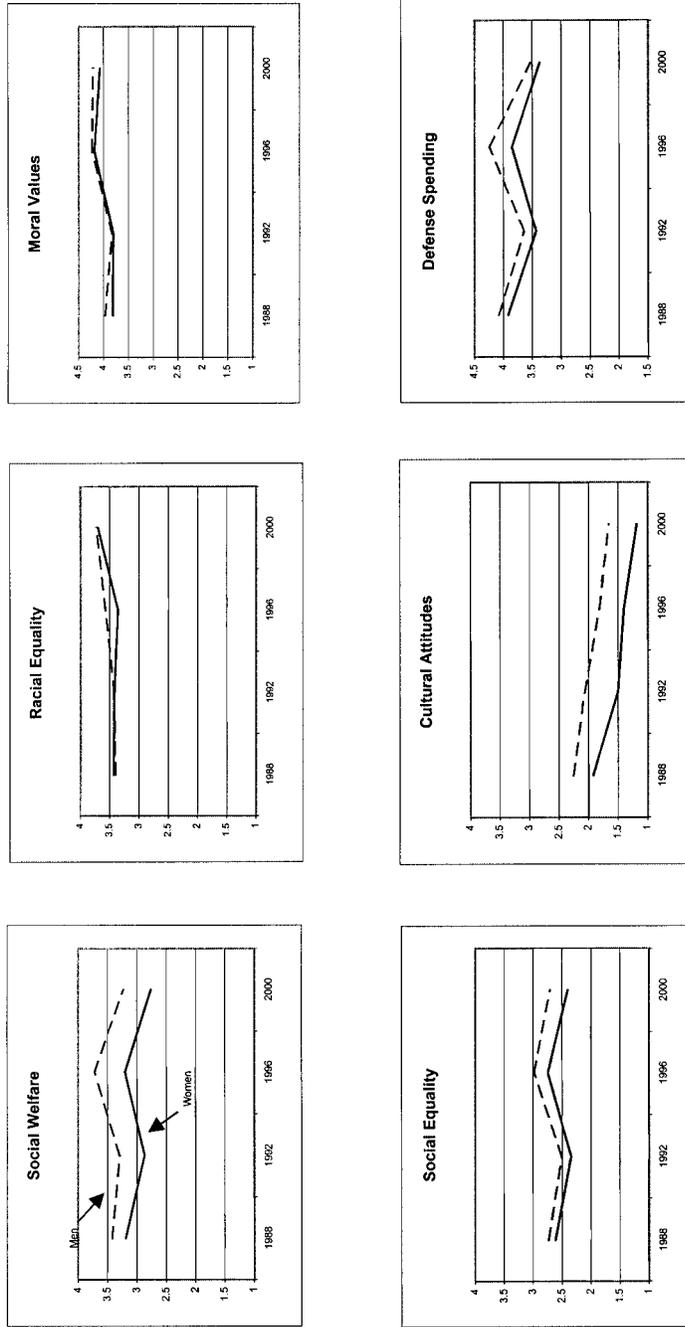


FIG. 2. Changes in the difference between male and female attitudes—1988 to 2000.

Note: Data points equal mean scale values for men (broken line) and for women (solid line). Higher values are more conservative across all measures.
 Source: American National Election Studies from 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000.

TABLE 1. Issue Attitudes and Their Relative Importance Over Time to the Party Identification of Men and Women 1988–2000

	Men		Women	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Cultural Attitudes	1.41*	0.21	0.98*	0.26
Social Welfare Attitudes	3.47*	0.26	2.47*	0.33 [#]
Racial Attitudes	-0.62*	0.21	0.67*	0.26 [#]
Defense Attitudes	2.20*	0.24	2.11*	0.28
Household Income	0.35*	0.17	0.69*	0.19
Education	0.80*	0.21	0.33	0.28
Age 18–25 versus mid range	0.93*	0.18	0.16	0.25 [#]
Age 65+ versus mid range	-0.12	0.15	-0.52*	0.18
Non-South vs. South	-0.50*	0.11	-0.69*	0.15
Time	-0.83*	0.41	-0.89*	0.50
<i>Over Time Effects: 1988 to 2000</i>				
Cultural Attitudes * time	0.16	0.12	0.70*	0.16 [#]
Social Welfare Attitudes * time	0.18	0.14	0.31*	0.19
Racial Attitudes* time	0.48*	0.11	-0.06	0.14 [#]
Defense Attitudes* time	-0.62*	0.14	-0.90*	0.18
HH Income* time	0.05	0.10	-0.31*	0.10 [#]
Education* time	-0.16	0.11	-0.08	0.15
Age 18–25 * time	-0.59*	0.10	0.13	0.13 [#]
Age 65+ * time	0.13	0.08	0.21	0.10
South* time	0.22*	0.06	0.32*	0.08
Constant	-.01	0.25	0.48	0.31
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.361		.306	

Notes: Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients and standard errors. All independent variables are scaled from 0 to 1. Time is scaled from 0 to 3. Party identification is scaled from 1 to 7. For methodology, see Note 3.

* $p < .05$.

[#]Gender difference is significant $p < .05$.

cludes three questions; the desirability of more services/more spending versus fewer services and less spending, whether the government or private insurers should provide health insurance, and whether the government should guarantee jobs (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$). The Racial Attitudes scale is comprised of three questions that gauge the desirability of government aid to minorities, whether the government should increase spending on blacks, and whether the government should ensure fair hiring practices for blacks (Cronbach's $\alpha = .62$). Finally, Defense Attitudes is a single 7-point scale regarding defense spending and whether it should be increased or decreased.

If indeed the increasing salience of cultural issues is at the root of the

growing gender gap, then these cultural issues should become more potent predictors of party identification over time. In order to explore this hypothesis and to estimate the relative increase or decrease in the importance of various issue attitudes and demographic attributes as predictors of party identification over time, I have constructed interaction terms that multiply the values of each explanatory factor by the year. The time variable is coded 0 for 1988 and increases by one for each subsequent election year (0 to 3). The top half of the regression table estimates the effects of issue attitudes and demographic traits in 1988 when the time variable equals 0. As each independent variable is scaled from 0 to 1, the coefficients in the top half of the table reflect the increase or decrease in Republican identification as one moves from the lowest to the highest point on the measure, controlling for all other factors. Coefficients reported in the bottom half of Table 1 calculate the extent to which each of the explanatory factors have grown or diminished in relative importance since the base year—1988. One can estimate the change in the coefficient for each independent variable over time by simply adding or subtracting the value of the interaction term coefficient for each election year (1992, 1996, and 2000). To the extent that cultural values are driving partisan change, the over time coefficient in the bottom half of the table should be significant.

CULTURAL VALUES AND THE PARTY IDENTIFICATION OF MEN AND WOMEN

The findings in Table 1 most certainly highlight some similarities and several important differences between how men and women have come to their partisan choices over this 12-year period. Opinion regarding the desirable level of government services and prospects for government provided health insurance and jobs are the most robust predictors of male party identification and are two and a half times as important as cultural attitudes. Men with very conservative opinions regarding the social welfare state are approximately three and a half points (out of seven) higher on the party identification scale than are men with liberal social welfare views, whereas men with very conservative cultural beliefs are approximately one and a third points more Republican than their culturally liberal counterparts.

Social welfare opinion is also important to women, although considerably less so than it is for men. The female coefficient in this case is approximately 30% smaller than that for men (a significant difference, $p < .05$), suggesting that male partisanship in 1988 was more closely tied to questions of the social welfare state than were women's partisan identities.³ The relative importance of these social welfare questions does not change over this time period for men, however it does increase for women. On balance, men place greater

weight on social welfare beliefs with regard to party identification than do women, although the male/female difference declines somewhat over time.

Defense-related attitudes are also consequential for men and women, however they become increasingly less so over time as evidenced by the large negative coefficients for the interaction terms. These negative coefficients ($-.62$ for men and $-.90$ for women) are interpreted as the respective decline in the magnitude of the defense spending coefficient in each of the subsequent three election years (1992, 1996, and 2000). For women, defense-related attitudes become insignificant predictors of party identification by 1996, and for men they become insignificant by 2000.

Cultural attitudes—questions of abortion rights, women's rights, and gay rights—have significant main effects for men, yet their relative importance to partisanship does not grow over this period. Given the lack of change over time, it appears that cultural issues are not at the root of recent partisan changes among men. This pattern, however, is somewhat reversed for women. While the main effects of cultural attitudes on party identification are significant for women, the over time importance of cultural values is particularly large. In 1988, the baseline year, culturally conservative women are approximately one point more Republican than culturally liberal women, all else being equal. The relative size of the cultural attitude coefficient increases $.70$ in each of the subsequent three election years to 3.08 by 2000. Indeed, cultural attitudes grow rather dramatically in their importance to female partisanship over this period, coming quite close to social welfare attitudes in their relative influence by 2000. The growing importance of women's cultural views over this period suggests that increases in Democratic identification among women may be tied, in part, to the party's cultural liberalism and the growing salience of these issues to women.

Men and women politicize their issue opinions in substantially different ways. Male partisanship is significantly connected to opinions of the social welfare state. Female partisanship is somewhat less tied to social welfare beliefs than it is for men, while cultural attitudes have increased significantly in their importance over this 12-year period. Can the partisan divide between men and women be explained by the increasing salience of culture issues in American politics? There is strong evidence that the culture wars—in particular partisan polarization over abortion and homosexual rights—may have recruited additional women to the ranks of the Democrats. Even though men and women share similar attitudes on abortion and women's rights, the greater emphasis that women place on these views tend to exacerbate the partisan differences between them. For men, cultural values show a consistent connection to partisanship, however social welfare attitudes matter much more to male partisan choices. Even as Democrats of late have scurried to the political center of the social welfare debate—balancing budgets, cutting deficits, pass-

ing welfare reform legislation—differences in social welfare opinions continue to be a defining feature of this party system. This persistent salience may be a relic of earlier eras, the long shadow of past political socialization, or it may be that social welfare opinion reflects a larger and less straightforward set of beliefs than often assumed.

SOCIAL WELFARE ATTITUDES AND A SENSE OF GROUP POSITION

As Kaufmann and Petrocik (1999; Figure 5) observed in previous research on the gender gap, the growing rate of male Republicanism from 1952 and onward tracks pretty faithfully with conservative changes in male attitudes regarding the social welfare state. And even in an era where social welfare policies purportedly take a back seat to salient cultural cleavages, judgments about the appropriate level of government services retain robust relationships with party identification, especially among men.

On their face, social welfare questions represent opinion on acceptable levels of government services, the perceived responsibility of the government to provide health care, and the desirability of government jobs programs to supplement the private sector. Nonetheless, beliefs about the social welfare state likely represent a much more diffuse set of considerations than these. For the economically at risk, the social safety net may represent important personal safeguards against economic calamity. Yet support for social programs extends far beyond the poor and working class, and opposition to the welfare state is often found among the economically vulnerable themselves. Opinions regarding social welfare are, in a sense, a collecting pot for views on a potentially vast array of issues. Social welfare beliefs may reflect philosophical convictions about community and communal obligations. We know from previous research that opinions on social welfare policy are often connected to feelings about racial minorities, particularly African-Americans, who avail themselves of governmental assistance (Gilens, 1999; Kinder and Sanders, 1996). Views of the welfare state may also be ideologically driven, with conservative opposition stemming from commitments to free markets and low taxes (Sniderman and Piazza, 1993). Furthermore, feelings about social welfare programs are often justified with references to larger cultural values such as individualism and egalitarianism (Feldman and Zaller, 1992).

Public opinion, as measured by the survey response, often rests on the particular considerations one brings to bear on the question at hand and on the relative accessibility of these various considerations. Equally important, elite discourse and political dialogue can powerfully influence the types of considerations that form the basis for public opinion (Zaller, 1992). During the Great Depression, one can imagine that social welfare beliefs were largely shaped by economic philosophies as well as more personal considerations. By

the 1990s, however, it is equally plausible that, given the salience of cultural politics, other considerations found their way into the politics of the welfare state. After all, social welfare programs largely benefit the poor, who come disproportionately from the ranks of racial minorities and single women. Questions of traditional values—out-of-wedlock births, the deterioration of the family, growing numbers of working mothers, drug use, and sexual promiscuity—can easily become tied to the larger issues of the social welfare state and what it supports. Opposition to social welfare programs is higher among men than among women. This difference may be explained by the greater economic vulnerability of women, or their greater compassion, or their greater reliance on the government more generally for jobs in the public sector (Beutal and Marini, 1995; Erie and Rein, 1988; Gilligan, 1982; May and Stephenson, 1994; Piven, 1985). From a group position perspective, however, social welfare conservatism, especially among lower income men who might benefit from these social welfare programs, may represent a first line of defense against economic and cultural challenges from subordinate groups. At a minimum, it appears that investigating the roots of social welfare opinion should shed important light on how cultural conflict may be indirectly tied to partisan realignment through the politics of the welfare state.

To explore the motivations that inform social welfare attitudes, I conduct an OLS regression analysis with social welfare attitudes as the dependent variable. I investigate several potential explanatory factors. One possible rationale for white Americans' increasing conservatism on social welfare issues, as well as gender differences in support for these programs, centers on egalitarianism. As argued by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto in their research on social dominance orientation, inegalitarian beliefs represent a central element of defense among dominant group members against challenges by subordinate groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle, 1994; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Those who consider social equality an important value are much less likely to subscribe to racially prejudiced ideologies than others, and general inegalitarianism is strongly tied to specific forms of intolerance such as sexism. If the increasing political salience of cultural issues influences public opinion on social welfare programs, then questions of social equality are likely to become co-mingled with the politics of the social welfare state and the people that it purports to help. The group position perspective assumes that salient cultural conflict makes beliefs about social equality politically relevant in ways they may not have been previously. Thus from this perspective, people who generally oppose efforts at enhancing social equality will become increasingly hostile to social welfare spending, and this pattern should be especially pronounced for men. The Egalitarian Attitudes measure used in this analysis is comprised of five questions regarding the importance of ensuring equality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$).

From an alternate perspective, the contemporary culture war is a battle of competing moral visions (Hunter, 1991). Were this the case, and to the extent that social welfare attitudes are related to cultural conflict, one would expect moral beliefs to correspond with social welfare attitudes for both men and women. Women, however, are on average more morally conservative than men while, at the same time, more liberal in their support for social programs. Thus a priori it seems unlikely that moral values will equally influence the social welfare beliefs of men and women. Furthermore, from a group position framework, it seems likely that moral judgments should influence men more. The Moral Attitudes measure used in this analysis incorporates three questions: whether new lifestyles are bad, whether people should be tolerant of different moral standards, and whether society should emphasize family values. To the extent that these questions embody competing moral visions—and the challenge that liberal values pose to traditional norms—they should be particularly salient to men who are, in a relative sense, more threatened by changing lifestyles and cultural mores.

Finally, I incorporate the Racial Attitudes measure from the previous analysis into this one as well. We know from previous research that white opposition to social welfare programs can be explained in part by conservative racial attitudes. Furthermore, much of the political realignment over the past four decades has been linked to party polarization over racial issues. It is certainly possible that recent partisan changes represent a continuation of earlier patterns and that increasing Republicanism among men and Democratic identification among women relate to their disparate opinions of the social welfare state as they relate to race. I include the racial attitude measure to test for this possibility. Also, consistent with the previous analysis, I include demographic factors that traditionally influence social welfare beliefs (age, income, and education) as well as a set of interaction terms that gauge the extent to which each of these factors has become more or less important over this 12-year period.

FINDINGS

The regression analysis in Table 2 illustrates important differences between how men and women come to form opinions about the social welfare state. Egalitarian beliefs—whether greater efforts should be made to improve social equality—have a significant main effect for men and are the singular most important factor over time. The coefficient for the interaction term is 40% greater for men than for women, suggesting that during the period from 1992 to 2000, beliefs about the importance of social equality have become increasingly tied to male judgments about the social welfare state. Egalitarianism is also consequential for women and their beliefs. Both the main and interaction

TABLE 2. Morality, Egalitarian Beliefs, and Racial Attitudes: Their Relative Importance Over Time to the Social Welfare Attitudes of Men and Women

	Men		Women	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Egalitarian Attitudes	0.92*	0.19	1.23*	0.20
Moral Attitudes	1.26*	0.16	.53*	0.19 [#]
Racial Attitudes	0.89*	0.14	1.26*	0.16 [#]
Household Income	0.75*	0.11	0.64*	0.11
Education	0.90*	0.14	0.63*	0.16
Age 18–25 versus mid range	0.23	0.12	0.07	0.14
Age 65+ versus mid range	–0.04	0.10	0.09	0.11
Non-South vs. South	0.18*	0.07	0.04	0.09
Time	–0.14	0.28	–0.38*	0.32
<i>Over Time Effects: 1988 to 2000</i>				
Egalitarian Attitudes * time	0.63*	0.10	0.38*	0.11 [#]
Moral Attitudes * time	–0.06	0.08	–0.01	0.10
Racial Attitudes* time	–0.11	0.07	–0.17	0.08
HH Income* time	–0.17*	0.06	–0.13*	0.06
Education* time	–0.17*	0.07	0.09	0.08 [#]
Age 18–25 * time	–0.07	0.07	–0.16*	0.07
Age 65+ * time	–0.03	0.05	–0.00	0.06
South* time	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.05
Constant	0.58*	0.17	0.97*	0.20
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.298		.299	

Notes: Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients and standard errors. All independent variables are scaled from 0 to 1. Time is scaled from 0 to 3. Social Welfare Attitudes DV is scaled from 1 to 7. For methodology see Note 3.

* $p < .05$.

[#]Gender difference is significant $p < .05$ one-tailed t test.

effects are positive and significant implying that, similar to men, female opinion on the social welfare state has become ever more influenced by their dispositions toward social equality. In 1988, men with low commitments to social equality are .92 points (on a 7-point scale) more conservative on social welfare issues than their liberal counterparts. By 2000, however the difference in social welfare attitudes between inegalitarian and egalitarian men grows to 2.81—almost triple the effect from 1988. The relative influence of egalitarianism on female social welfare beliefs also increases from 1.23 in 1988 to 2.37 by 2000. In sum, egalitarianism matters to both men and women, but the relative importance of this factor increases more for men than for women over this time period.

Consistent with the group position expectations, these findings indeed suggest that the growing cultural conflict of the past decade has made questions

of social equality more politically important. Social welfare spending works to reduce social and economic inequalities, yet as the findings from 1988 indicate, egalitarian beliefs were only weakly related to social welfare opinion for men and women. In the context of the 1990s and the increasing political salience of cultural issues, however, beliefs about social equality become ever more powerful predictors of social welfare attitudes. As anticipated, this effect is particularly noteworthy for men. Furthermore, as men hold more conservative beliefs regarding social equality, the increased salience of these attitudes regarding social welfare opinion exacerbates gender differences.

Moral attitudes are also more consequential to male social welfare opinions than to those of women. Men who believe that new lifestyles are bad and that new moral values should not be tolerated are more likely to be conservative on social welfare issues than are women who hold similar beliefs. While the coefficients for both are positive and significant, moral values are more than two times as important to men as to women in predicting social welfare attitudes (1.26 versus .53). This finding also conforms to the group position expectations. While women are on balance more traditionally conservative on moral matters, moral judgments are not as likely to form the basis for their opposition to social welfare spending. Male opposition to the welfare state is more influenced by moral views, presumably because social welfare beneficiaries largely represent those nontraditional groups whose claims challenge the long-established social order.

Racial attitudes correspond more strongly to women's views on the social welfare state than to men's views and decline somewhat in importance over time. By 2000, the effect of racial attitudes on the social welfare views of both men and women is considerably less significant than are more general beliefs about social equality.

With regard to the underlying dispositions that inform contemporary social welfare opinion, men and women differ on several fronts. Women's social welfare beliefs are tied more strongly to questions of equality than they are to morality. In spite of the fact that women are more disapproving of "new lifestyles" than men, these values do not play a central role in welfare opinions of women. And the finding that views of social equality and morality are more consequential to the social welfare beliefs of men than of women, conforms nicely with the proposition that cultural change is more threatening to the relative social status of white men.

DISCUSSION

The enhanced salience of cultural issues in the last decade most certainly appears to influence the partisan choices of men and women, albeit in somewhat different ways. For women, the issues themselves—reproductive rights, female equality, and legal protections for homosexuals—have become increas-

ingly important determinants of party identification. More than any other set of issues, these cultural policies grow in their political significance to women over this decade. Male partisanship is also influenced by their opinions on this set of policies, however, the relative influence of cultural issues is less pronounced among men and shows no evidence of growing consequence during this 12-year period. For men, social welfare policies continue to be the most significant set of beliefs that shape partisan choice, and they are more important to men than to women. On their face, these findings may suggest that the culture wars have had a disproportionate impact on the politics of women, given the increasing weight of cultural issues to female partisanship over time. At a minimum their effects appear more direct.

Social welfare opinion has and continues to play a central role in the partisanship of men and women. Men are more conservative on questions of social welfare and give them commensurately more weight than women do in their partisan calculations. Above all else, these differences must loom large in any story of partisan change. This research also suggests that men are less egalitarian than are women, and that for men, questions of social equity and traditional morality are more consequential to their social welfare attitudes than they are for women. When we overlay these two sets of findings—that traditional morality and egalitarianism are more consequential to male social welfare attitudes and these social welfare attitudes are then disproportionately important to the partisan choices of men as opposed to women—a picture begins to emerge. Male partisanship has also been affected by the cultural conflicts of the past decade, but for men this influence appears to have been less direct. Increasing male Republicanism may not be a pure manifestation of male opposition to abortion or gay rights, *per se*. Rather, these issues, in conjunction with the civil rights claims of blacks and other minority groups, represent a pervasive challenge to the racial and gender privilege long enjoyed by white men in the United States. I would argue that this is why beliefs about equality, and especially commitments to traditional morality, are more consequential to men's social welfare orientations and indirectly to their partisanship than they are to women.

The relationship between commitments to equality, traditional morality, race relations, support for the social welfare state and, ultimately, change in the party system is a complex one. A conventional perspective may take public opinions of the welfare state at face value—that indeed opposition to government jobs programs, government provided health insurance and the like represent a fairly straightforward set of beliefs. The extent to which moral values and commitments to social equality become tied to these straightforward questions opens up a potentially interesting line of inquiry about contemporary American politics. And while it's undoubtedly true that moral conservatism, racial conservatism, and lower levels of egalitarianism are likely to go

hand in hand with social welfare conservatism, the fact that the relationship between egalitarianism and social welfare conservatism increased significantly over the past decade, suggests more than a mere case of ideological constraint. As cultural issues have taken a dominant position in the rhetoric of political parties and their followers, questions of who controls the culture and whose vision will prevail has placed debates over the desirability of social equality closer to partisan politics than in previous times. As men are less committed to social equality than are women generally, these more conservative views translate into greater opposition to social welfare spending and, indirectly, greater support for the Republican Party.

Finally, I would note that the assumption that cultural conflict is rooted in competing moral visions is also weakened by this research. Women, who are more religiously devout than men and, on average, more committed to traditional moral positions, are nonetheless more politically liberal in both their partisan orientations and underlying political attitudes. The defense of traditional lifestyles and the rejection of liberal moral values appear to play a more significant role in the political beliefs of men than of women. Thus the argument that the politicization of cultural conflict rests ultimately on questions of moral authority cannot accommodate these inconsistent findings. If we interpret the asymmetrical influence of moral values from the group position perspective, however, they seem not inconsistent at all. This battle over who shapes the culture may be, in part, about competing moral visions, but the racial and gender implications of this battle also suggest a broader, more complicated set of concerns.

Contemporary research on the culture wars, religious beliefs, and secular realignment has identified important new cleavages in the American party system. Beyond the religious implications of these cultural issues, there are gender implications as well. The decade of the 1990s represented the first time in the past 40 years when there had been as sustained and growing divide between the politics of men and women. As we move forward into a new century, however, these dynamics may yet change again. To a large degree, the growing partisan divide between men and women can be attributed to the increasing salience of cultural issues. In the post-9-11 environment, however, it is unclear as to how important these issues will remain. Should questions of military might and homeland security overshadow the more traditional domestic political agenda, gender differences may recede—although not necessarily. As we continue to explore the complexities of an ever transforming party system, future research will most certainly need to take gender and gender differences into account.

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NOTES

1. On its face, this argument appears to contradict earlier research that maintains the gender gap to be a predominantly male-driven phenomenon; that men moved to the Republican Party while the partisanship of women remained relatively unchanged (Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999; Mattei and Mattei, 1998). These earlier studies, however, used the aggregate partisanship of all men and women to draw this conclusion. Isolating partisanship for white men and women, however, shows a somewhat different pattern. White women in fact did become more Republican during the 1970s and 1980s, just at a slower pace than white men (Wirks, 1986).
2. The gender difference between men and women on the cultural attitude scale is entirely driven by the male/female difference on gay rights. There are no gender differences in abortion attitudes or opinion regarding women's rights.
3. The t test for the difference in coefficients from separate sub-group regressions is

$$t = \frac{B_1 - B_2}{S_{pooled} \left\{ \frac{S_{B_1}^2}{S_1^2} + \frac{S_{B_2}^2}{S_2^2} \right\}^{\frac{1}{2}}}$$

where S_{pooled} is the square root of the pooled estimate of the population variance; where $S_{B_1}^2$ and $S_{B_2}^2$ are the variances of the estimates B_1 and B_2 ; and where S_1^2 and S_2^2 are the mean residual sum of squares from their respective sub-group regressions (Hardy, 1993).

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