SOCIAL CLEAVAGES AND POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS: U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 1960 TO 1992*

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The classics of postwar political sociology argued that a key to understanding political divisions in democratic polities lies with membership in social groups. Much recent scholarship, however, has argued that political cleavages arising out of social group memberships have declined. This study investigates these claims, analyzing the magnitude of and interrelationship among four major social cleavages—race, religion, class, and gender—in U.S. presidential elections since 1960. We improve over dichotomous measures of religion and class and introduce statistical models that permit measurement of relative *shifts in the vote choice of the core groups making up each cleavage. Our results do not support claims about the declining magnitude of social cleavages. The race cleavage has increased considerably since 1960, and the gender cleavage more modestly during this period, while the class cleavage has remained stable, and the religion cleavage has declined slightly. We find evidence of a slight* increase *in social group cleavages in presidential elections from 1960 through 1992. Net of change in the race cleavage, the overall social cleavage has been stable during this period.*

Political conflicts arising out of social cleavages based on race, class, religion, or linguistic divisions have been a central concern in the sociological study of politics (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Franklin et al. 1992). However, much recent scholarship on political behavior in postindustrial capitalist democracies—including the United States—has argued that social cleavages have declined in importance and are being replaced by "new" issue-based or ideological cleavages (Dalton 1988; Inglehart 1990; Franklin et al. 1992). In their recent review of the political behavior literature, Dalton and Wattenberg (1993) assert, ". . . the decline of sociologically based voting is most apparent for the class and religious cleavages, but a similar erosion of influence can be observed for most other sociological characteristics" (p. 200).

Have social cleavages in postindustrial democracies indeed declined? In this paper, we present a systematic assessment of the declining social cleavage thesis with respect to U.S. presidential elections since 1960. We focus on four major social cleavages: race, religion, class, and gender. Our goal is to examine what changes have occurred in the magnitude and interrelationships of these cleavages. Our measures of social cleavages substantially improve over earlier constructs because they are derived from models that do not conflate changes in the marginal popularity of the Democratic or Republican candidates with changes in the political alignments of particular social groups. Additionally, in their multivariate form these measures also can be used to estimate the size of social cleavages net of the influence of other

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variables (Hout, Brooks, and Manza 1995; Manza, Hout, and Brooks 1995).

We present a brief review of the social cleavage debate in the first part of the paper. In part two, we discuss the data and our measures. In the third part we present our results, first analyzing each social cleavage separately, and then analyzing them jointly to gauge their interrelationships during the time period under investigation. In conclusion, we summarize our principal findings.

THEORIZING CHANGE IN THE SOCIAL BASES OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Despite widespread assertions about changes in social cleavages in U.S. politics, there have been relatively few systematic assessments of their magnitudes or interrelationships. In their most recent survey of the presidential vote, Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde (1994) report evidence of growing racial divisions in voting since 1964, but ". . . except for race, all of the social factors we have examined—region, union membership, social class, and religion—have declined in importance during the postwar years" (p. 158). However, this study's reliance on dichotomous measures of "religion" (Protestant versus Catholic) and "class" (white-collar versus blue-collar) calls into question their finding of declining political cleavages among classes and religious groups (a limitation also affecting studies by Miller and Lockerbie [1992] and Erikson, Lancaster, and Romero [1989]).

The other body of literature assessing group differences in political alignments has emerged from studies examining the social bases of support for major party presidential candidates (Axelrod 1972, 1986; Erikson et al. 1989; Carmines and Stanley 1992) or party identification (Stanley, Bianco, and Niemi 1986; Petrocik 1987). Some of these studies emphasize the stability of group cleavages (Stanley et al. 1986; Erikson et al. 1989), while others suggest decline (Petrocik 1987; Carmines and Stanley 1992). These unresolved controversies suggest the need for an analysis that builds from more theoretically defensible conceptualizations of social cleavages. This is especially critical for cleavages that are not reducible to dichotomies, most notably the religion and class cleavages.

Conceptualizing Social Cleavages

We define a social cleavage as the difference in political alignment among groups constituting a particular dimension of social structure. For example, the gender cleavage is comprised of two groups—women and men—and its magnitude is a function of the extent to which their political alignments (measured by voting or partisanship) differ. The size of a cleavage increases when the average difference in vote choice on partisanship among the social groups comprising that cleavage grows, but decreases when these differences narrow.[1]

Proponents of the declining cleavage thesis have not consistently differentiated between two research questions about social cleavages, relating to their *magnitude* versus their *causal* impact. The magnitude of a social cleavage is a function of the differences in vote choice among the groups that make up a cleavage, while the causal impact of a cleavage is *also* a function of the size and turnout rates of the subgroups making up the cleavage. These are important but distinct questions about social cleavages and political alignments, and each requires a different type of measure. The declining cleavage thesis advances claims of both sorts. In this study we analyze change in the magnitudes of social cleavages.

DATA AND MEASURES

Data

We analyze data from the National Election Studies (NES) for the nine presidential elections held from 1960 through 1992 (National Election Studies 1995). Our dependent variable is vote choice in presidential elections (coded 1 for the Democratic candidate and 0 for the Republican candidate). Because of significant limitations in the coding of the religion variable prior to 1960 (in which all Protestant denominations were classified in

[1] In this study, we focus on differences in vote choice in presidential elections as our measure of political alignments.

a single, undifferentiated category), our analyses begin with the 1960 elections. Since most of the hypothesized declines in group cleavages are viewed as occurring *after* 1960, however, this limitation has little relevance for our analyses.

Independent Variables

Gender and race are coded as dichotomies (female = 1, African American = 1). In our multivariate analyses, we include age (in years), education (in years), and region (South = 1) as controls. Building from our recent work on class voting (Hout et al. 1995; Manza et al. 1995; Brooks and Manza forthcoming), we distinguish six class categories (professionals, managers, owners and proprietors, routine white-collar workers, foremen and skilled workers, semiskilled/unskilled workers) plus one category for non–full-time labor force participants (people working less than 20 hours per week, including those not employed). Our religion variable measures denominational differences (generally following the schema developed by Lopatto [1985] for coding the NES data). We distinguish between Catholics; Jews; those with no religion; three categories of Protestants denominations, which we label "conservative," "moderate," and "liberal" (Lopatto 1985; Smith 1990); and "other religions" (see Manza and Brooks 1997 for additional coding details).[2]

Measuring Social Cleavages

To answer questions about the magnitudes and interrelationships of changes in social cleavages, it is necessary to develop measures that distinguish change affecting all categories of a cleavage variable equally (what we term "absolute" change) and changes that have differential effects on one or more categories of a cleavage variable (what we term "relative" change). Measures that fail to distinguish absolute from relative types of change in voting behavior can lead to serious biases because they provide no way of differentiating shifts in party or candidate popularity that reflect changing preferences among all groups versus those involving group-specific shifts. For example, if support for Democratic candidates among *all* social groups declines at the same rate, the absolute level of support for Democrats declines, but the *relative* differences in support among groups remain stable.

Measures of cleavages also should be compatible with multivariate analysis: Models that cannot incorporate additional variables are not only unrealistic, they provide no basis for answering multivariate research questions. In the current study, we want to know not only whether the relationship between vote choice and a given social cleavage has changed over time, but also whether these changes are related to trends in *other* social cleavages. The latter is a multivariate question that requires us to estimate the effect of change in a particular cleavage net of changes in the other cleavages. Most existing studies of social cleavages use indices that restrict measurement to bivariate analysis (Petrocik 1987; Erikson et al. 1989; Abramson et al. 1994).

We use logistic regression models to analyze our dichotomous dependent variable. Using the coefficients from our preferred models, we derive two summary indices of social cleavages in presidential elections. Because these indices are measured in terms of standard deviations of the independent variable(s), they enable comparisons over time and among cleavages (Hout et al. 1995; Manza et al. 1995), even when the cleavage variables are polytomies (such as religion). For instance, an index score of .2 for the race cleavage indicates that racial groups differ from the overall mean by .2 (e.g., Whites' predicted probability of voting for the Democratic candidate is .3, and African Americans' corresponding probability is .7). A score of .1 for the race cleavage (to continue our example), would indicate a smaller average deviation, enabling us to infer that the religion cleavage is half the magnitude of the race cleavage.

Two Voting Cleavage Indices

Our first measure, which we term kappa (κ), is calculated as the standard deviation of the

[2] The Appendix presents the subgroups constituting the four cleavages and the percentage distribution in the NES sample for each cleavage for election years 1960, 1976, and 1992.

predicted probabilities of vote choice m (1 = Democratic candidate, 2 = Republican candidate) for a set of j categories of a cleavage at time t.[3] To calculate κ, we first transform the logit coefficients from our model into predicted probabilities of Democratic vote choice for each of the j categories of the variable representing a particular social cleavage.[4] By virtue of the probability metric, κ ranges between 0 and .5. A κ of 0 indicates that the groups comprising a particular cleavage do not differ in their likelihood of choosing the Democratic over the Republican candidate. By contrast, a score of .5 indicates maximum divergence in vote choice.[5]

We use equation 1 to calculate bivariate and multivariate κs for each of the four social cleavages in the analyses.[6]

$$\kappa_t = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{j=1}^{J}\left(\hat{P}_{tjm} - \bar{P}_{tm}\right)^2}{J}}. \qquad (1)$$

Bivariate κ is derived from a model that predicts vote choice using only effects for a specific cleavage; multivariate κ is derived from a model predicting vote choice with effects for all four cleavages. Whereas the *bivariate* index measures trends in a specific cleavage without taking into account changes in other social cleavages, the *multivariate* index measures trends in the presence of these changes.[7] Both bivariate and multivariate κs deliver useful information: By comparing the estimates for a particular cleavage according to each measure, we can determine whether the changes observed using the bivariate measure are in fact the product of (more fundamental) changes stemming from changes in other cleavages.

Equation 2 summarizes our second measure, which we term lambda (λ):

$$\lambda_{st} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{s=1}^{S}\sum_{j=1}^{J}\left(\hat{P}_{tsjm} - \bar{P}_{stm}\right)^2}{SJ}}, \qquad (2)$$

where λ_{st} is the mean of the four separate κs, and it measures the average size of the s social cleavages in vote choice at time t. λ thus represents the *total* social cleavage in a given election. Like κ, λ is measured in terms of probability, ranging between 0 and .5. A decline in λ over time indicates that social cleavages as a whole have narrowed, as hypothesized by the declining cleavage thesis.

RESULTS

To calculate κ and λ we first choose preferred models of trends for each of the four cleavages. In Table 1, columns 1 and 2 present fit statistics for our preferred model. The first four sections are for each of the individual cleavages. The fifth section, "all social cleavages," presents fit statistics for our preferred multivariate model of changes in all four cleavages considered simultaneously.

The preferred models—by imposing constraints on the year-by-cleavage parameters—imply that change in each cleavage follows substantively meaningful patterns. For comparison, we present in columns 3 and 4 fit statistics for a full interaction model that allows the cleavage and year variables to interact without any constraints.[8] With the par-

[3] See Hout et al. (1995) for the first application of the κ index to the study of class voting.

[4] It is possible to calculate κ using the logit coefficients themselves, but while both approaches are ultimately consistent, the current approach has the advantage of employing the more familiar probability scale.

[5] Using our earlier example of race, κ = .5 would be obtained if Whites' predicted probability of Democratic voting was 0, while African-Americans' corresponding probability was 1.0 (or vice versa).

[6] Both κ and λ (discussed below) are *margin-free* measures of social cleavages. Margin-free measures are appropriate when research questions relate to the magnitude of the association between an independent variable and dependent variable *independently* of the distribution of these variables (see Charles and Grusky [1995] for an example in stratification research showing the utility of margin-free measures). Both κ and λ can be modified to include a year-specific variable measuring the relative size of social groups, thereby enabling researchers to examine the impact of these marginal changes on the vote. Space limitations preclude such an analysis here.

[7] The multivariate indices must be calculated for specific values of the independent variables. Our baseline for the multivariate measures is the probability of choosing the Democratic candidate among non-full-time working, southern, White, male, conservative Protestants who are at the sample means for age (46.7 years) and education (12.4 years).

[8] The full interaction model also allows for all two-way interactions among the four cleavages.

Table 1. Fit Statistics for Logistic Regression Models of Change in Social Cleavages and Presidential Vote Choice, 1960 to 1992

	Preferred Model			Full-Interaction Model		
	(1)		(2)	(3)		(4)
Change Parameters[a]	–2 Log-Likelihood	(d.f.)	BIC	–2 Log-Likelihood	(d.f.)	BIC
Class						
Professionals * $Year_{1960-1992}$[b]						
Manager * $Year_{1960-\geq 1972}$[c]						
Self-employed × $Year_{\geq 1980}$[d]	13,150.89	(9,885)	–77,799	13,088.70	(9,842)	–77,466
Skilled workers * $Year_{1960-\geq 1972}$[c]						
Unskilled workers × $Year_{\geq 1980}$[d]						
Religion						
Liberal Protestants * $Year_{1960-1992}$[b]						
Catholics × $Year_{1960}$	12,856.98	(9,887)	–78,111	12,796.22	(9,842)	–77,758
Conservative Protestants × $Year_{1976/1980}$[d]						
Race						
Black × $Year_{\geq 1964}$[d]	12,446.08	(9,894)	–78,587	12,436.27	(9,887)	–78,532
Gender						
Gender * $(Year')^2$[e]	13,340.43	(9,894)	–77,691	13,331.72	(9,887)	–77,637
All Social Cleavages[f]						
Female × Non–labor-force participant	11,636.08	(9,868)	–79,157	11,403.14	(9,706)	–77,900

Note: Numbers in parentheses are degrees of freedom; N = 9,905. All models fit main effects for election year and the social cleavage variables.

[a] Parameters are for preferred models. Linearly constrained interaction effects denoted by "*"; unconstrained interaction effects denoted by "×."

[b] Election year coded 1 for 1960, 2 for 1964, . . . , 9 for 1992.

[c] Election year coded 1 for 1960, 2 for 1964, . . . , 4 for 1972 through 1992.

[d] Election year coded 1 for election years 1980 through 1992, 0 otherwise.

[e] Election year coded 2 for 1960, 3 for 1964, . . . , 7 for 1980 through 1992.

[f] Includes all change parameters from previous models, as well as additional parameters for main effect of age, years of education, and region (South = 1, otherwise 0).

tial exception of the class cleavage, none of the full interaction models of change in individual cleavages is close to improving the fit of the preferred models. For the class cleavage, the difference in –2 log-likelihood for the two models is significant at the .05 level, but BIC rejects the full interaction model. Given the BIC results and the earlier findings for the class cleavage (Hout et al. 1995; Brooks and Manza forthcoming), we select the more parsimonious model.

Our preferred model of change in the class cleavage reveals five class-specific trends. The voting behavior of routine white-collar employees and non–labor-force participants shows no trends relative to changes in the class-wide mean.[9] Professionals' voting trend is the most dramatic: Since 1960, professionals have moved from strong support for Republican presidential candidates into an alignment with the Democratic Party.[10] By contrast, managers' alignment with the Republican Party increased steadily from 1960 through 1972, and has remained at a stable, high level since that time. Skilled workers'

[9] An alternative model of change in the class cleavage that posits linear trends for all class categories fits poorly in comparison to our preferred model (BIC for this alternative model is –77,784).

[10] We have analyzed the causes of professionals' shift in greater detail in Brooks and Manza (1997).

alignment with the Democratic Party weakened during this period. Voting trends among unskilled workers and the self-employed have been more abrupt, with their support for Democratic candidates declining sharply during and after the 1980 election.

Our preferred model of the religion cleavage shows three group-specific changes in voting behavior. Liberal Protestants have moved steadily since 1960 from being the most Republican of the religious groups to a neutral alignment. The vote choice of Catholics, contrary to popular belief, has varied in tandem with the rest of the electorate, but our results show only a single category-by-year interaction, relating to their disproportionate support for Democratic candidate John Kennedy in 1960.[11] Finally, change among conservative Protestants is limited to the 1976 and 1980 elections, during which time Baptist Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter received relatively high levels of support from this segment of the electorate.[12] Net of these three changes, the religious cleavage has been stable.[13]

Our preferred model of change in the race cleavage includes a single trend parameter relating to change in the support given to Democratic candidates among African Americans after the 1964 election.[14] This result implies that the pivotal 1964 Goldwater/Johnson contest shifted a large portion of African American support to Democratic candidates after 1964. For gender, our preferred model reveals that the gender gap increased exponentially between 1960 and 1976, but remained at a constant level from 1980 through 1992.

The final model in Table 1 analyzes all four cleavages, thereby providing a basis for answering questions about change in the total social cleavage. Our preferred model includes the main and interaction effect parameters from the four preferred models, controls for age, education,[15] and region, and a single, additional parameter for an interaction between gender and the "non–full-time labor force" category of the class variable.[16] We use this multivariate model to calculate our λ index scores.

Trends in Voting Cleavages

The first panel of Figure 1 displays trends in race, religion, class, and gender cleavages according to our bivariate κs. By far the largest cleavage is for race, which—as already implied by our modeling results—increased dramatically after 1964. While average racial differences in presidential voting have fluctuated since that time, they show no sign of a net decline in magnitude. The multivariate κs in the second panel show that when the race cleavage is estimated net of changes in the other three cleavages (and the controls for age, education, and region) the picture of its evolution is very similar.[17]

The second largest cleavage is for religion, whose magnitude is roughly one-half that of race in the post-1964 period. The trend line for the religion cleavage reveals a net decline, a sizable portion of which is attributable to the inflated religion differences in the

[11] Additional analyses of the 1952 and 1956 elections reveal that Catholics' level of support for Democratic candidates (relative to all Protestants) was similar to that found in the 1964 through 1992 period (Manza and Brooks 1997).

[12] Given the disproportionate concentration of African American voters among conservative Protestants, we also evaluated a model that allowed for the interaction between race and being a conservative Protestant. The 3.03 reduction in –2 log-likelihood (1 d.f.) was not significant at the .05 level, providing no evidence for this interaction (allowing race to interact with a homogenous Protestant category also yielded a nonsignificant 1.71 reduction in –2 log-likelihood).

[13] A model positing linear voting trends for all religious categories does not fit as well as our preferred model (BIC for this alternative model is –78,041).

[14] An alternative model that imposes a linear constraint on this trend fits less well than our preferred model (BIC for this alternative model is –78,569).

[15] Nonlinear forms of age and education were not necessary for model fit.

[16] While the –2 log-likelihood test chooses the full interaction model, we found no evidence for any other significant interactions between cleavages or with time using a more detailed series of comparisons (thus corroborating BIC's choice of our preferred multivariate model).

[17] Our estimates of the race cleavage in the 1952 and 1956 elections reveal a similar picture of trends. Using our bivariate estimates, in 1952 κ = .15 and in 1956 κ = .16 (compare with κ = .26 in 1968 in Figure 1).

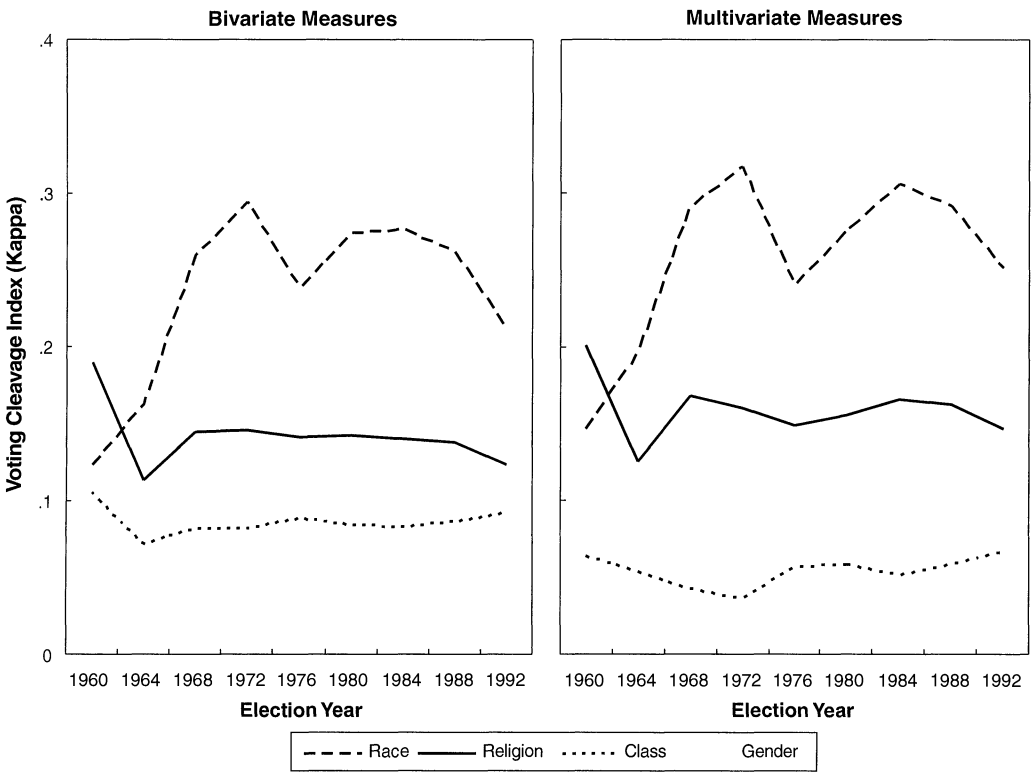

Figure 1. Race, Religion, Class, and Gender Cleavages in Presidential Elections, 1960 to 1992

1960 election, which were produced by Catholics' unusually high levels of support for Democratic (and Catholic) candidate John Kennedy. Like the race cleavage, the bivariate and multivariate indices show a similar picture of trends: Change in the religion cleavage is thus largely independent of change in other major social cleavages. The comparison of the bivariate and multivariate measures also shows that the magnitude of the religion cleavage is slightly suppressed by the other cleavages, given that the estimates for multivariate κ are slightly larger in the 1968 through 1992 elections.

The class cleavage has not undergone a monotonic pattern of change—instead it declined through 1972, and since then it has been rebounding. Class differences have been much smaller than the religion cleavage during the 1960 through 1992 period. By themselves, the bivariate results suggest that the gender cleavage could eventually grow to be equal in magnitude to the class cleavage. However, when gender and class are parameterized in the same model (see the right-hand panel), the possibility of convergence seems much less likely, given that the trend in gender differences disappears in the multivariate results. While a full examination of the origins of the gender gap is beyond the scope of the current study, we note that the proportion of women in the "non–full-time labor force" category declined from .70 in 1960, to .47 in 1992. Taken in conjunction with the significant gender × non–labor-force participant interaction, this shift is consistent with the inference that working women—by virtue of their experience in the labor force—have come to support the political party that is more likely to maintain (or extend) policies that address the interests of working women.[18]

The comparison between the bivariate and multivariate results in Figure 1 show that the gender-class linkage is the only instance of a trend in social cleavages that involves an interrelationship between cleavages. To ex-

[18] We evaluate this hypothesis in greater detail in Manza and Brooks (forthcoming).

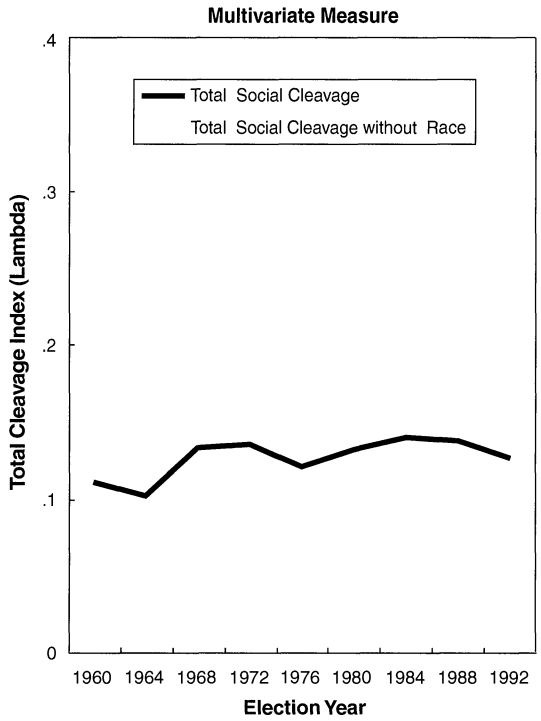

Figure 2. The Total Social Cleavage in Presidential Elections, 1960 to 1992

press the point another way, with the exception of the gender gap, change in a specific social cleavage has occurred independently of changes in other social cleavages in the 1960 through 1992 period. This result is evidenced by the fact that the picture of trends in race, religion, and class cleavages obtained using the bivariate κs is very similar to those obtained using the multivariate κs. The trends (or non-trends) we observe for race, religion, and class remain after taking into account change in all four cleavages and adding the age, education, and region controls to the model. In turn, this finding implies that change in a particular cleavage cannot be used to explain change in another cleavage.

Trends in the Total Social Cleavage

The results of our cleavage-specific analyses anticipate the key finding of our analyses of the total social cleavage: There has been no comprehensive decline in the social bases of political alignments in the United States. Figure 2 provides us with a systematic means of further exploring this issue, presenting λ index scores for the total social cleavage using our multivariate measure. The dark line, representing the average of the four cleavages, shows no net change in magnitude during the 1960 through 1992 period.

Has the growth of the race cleavage *prevented* the total social cleavage from declining, as some analysts have suggested (e.g. Miller and Lockerbie 1992)? The lighter trend line in Figure 2 tests this hypothesis. We derive the scores comprising this trend line by *excluding* race from the calculation of λ. The multivariate trend line remains flat from 1964 through 1992, revealing no net trends. The peak in the total social cleavage in 1960 is due to the unusual support for the Democratic candidate among Catholics. These results imply that even had the politicization of the race cleavage not occurred, there would still have been no decline in the total social cleavage from 1964 through 1992.

DISCUSSION

This study finds no support for the thesis that social cleavages have declined in magnitude

in U.S. presidential elections since 1960. In fact, there have been increases in two of the four major social cleavages we examine (race and gender), small decreases in one (religion), and overall stability in the fourth (class). Changes in specific cleavages have been largely unrelated to one another, with the exception of the gender gap, which disappears once the class cleavage is taken into account. This suggests that class-related factors are responsible for the emergence of a gap in voting behavior between men and women.

Social cleavages thus appear to be as relevant today as they were in the 1950s and early 1960s, when they were more widely studied (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Campbell et al. 1960, chaps. 12–17; Alford 1963). This result conflicts, albeit constructively, with "new politics" interpretations of political change (Dalton 1988; Inglehart 1990). Rather than displacing the old cleavages, newer ideological conflicts appear to have developed alongside persistent social-group–based cleavages in the U.S. electorate.

With regard to their magnitude, we find that the ordinal ranking of the race, religion, class, and gender cleavages has been stable since 1964. Moreover, the scenario hypothesized by the declining cleavage thesis does not appear likely, given the independence of changes in each cleavage. While there have been many important changes in the U.S. political landscape during the past three decades, the electoral divisions between major social groups generally remain as large as they were prior to the pivotal shifts of the 1960s.

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Appendix. Percentage Distribution of Voters in the NES Sample by Subgroup: 1960, 1976, and 1992

	Year		
Subgroup	1960	1976	1992
Race cleavage			
All other	95	92	89
African American	5	8	11
Religion Cleavage			
Liberal Protestant	25	17	14
Moderate Protestant	24	22	17
Conservative Protestant	22	25	25
Catholic	23	25	25
Jewish	4	3	2
Other religion	2	4	4
No religion	1	6	12
Class Cleavage			
Professional	8	13	18
Manager	5	8	8
Routine white-collar employees	11	12	11
Self-employed (nonprofessional)	9	7	8
Skilled worker	9	7	6
Unskilled/semiskilled worker	17	11	12
Non-full-time labor force	39	43	36
Gender Cleavage			
Men	48	44	47
Women	52	55	53
Number of cases	879	1,327	1,543

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