

THE ROLE OF PARTY ACTIVISTS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE ABORTION ISSUE

Edward G. Carmines and James Woods

This article examines the role of party activists in the partisan evolution of the abortion issue. Previous research indicates that party elites—specifically members of Congress—and partisans in the mass public have become more differentiated in their abortion attitudes during the last several decades with Democrats becoming more pro-choice and Republicans becoming increasingly pro-life. The missing piece of the picture is the behavior of party activists. Accordingly, this research examines the changes in the abortion attitudes of two groups of party activists during the last three decades: campaign activists and national convention delegates. From 1972 to 1980 there were no significant differences in the abortion attitudes of Republican and Democratic campaign activists, and the mean positions of the two parties' national convention delegates did not differ greatly. However, since 1984 there has been a growing differentiation in the abortion positions of both groups of party activists. Now Democratic activists are consistently pro-choice while Republican activists are equally pro-life. This evidence indicates that the differentiation on the abortion issue that has only recently emerged among partisans in the mass public was predated by an earlier and much more dramatic polarization that had already developed among party activists and elites, thus supporting a model of issue evolution introduced by Carmines and Stimson in their study of racial issues. We also find that citizens' abortion attitudes have become increasingly correlated with party voting not just in presidential elections but also in House, Senate, and gubernatorial contests during this period as well as being more closely related to political ideology. All of this evidence points to the growing extent to which abortion has become a partisan issue in American politics and the key role that party activists have played in this process.

Key words: abortion; campaign activists; issue evolution, national convention delegates; party activists.

Edward G. Carmines, Professor, Department of Political Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405. James Woods, Adjunct Professor, Department of Political Science, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506.

As the 2000 presidential election campaign confirmed once again, the issue of abortion continues to sharply divide the Democratic and Republican parties. Even as the Republican presidential nominee George W. Bush expressed "compassionate conservatism" on many domestic issues, he embraced the rigid pro-life position endorsed at the Republican National Convention. Moreover, his repeated vow that as president he would nominate only strict constructionists to the federal courts reinforced the impression that he would try to undermine a woman's right to an abortion that was established in *Roe v. Wade*.

Democratic party elites are just as pro-choice as Republicans are pro-life. They are clearly suspicious of any restrictions limiting access to abortion, and Gore pledged during the campaign to nominate only pro-choice justices to the Supreme Court. Abortion, in other words, has become a salient party cleavage issue, perhaps the most prominent issue difference between the parties in the post-civil rights era (see Layman, 2001, for an analysis of the growing differences between the parties on cultural/social issues).

In a recent paper, Adams (1997) analyzed the growing differences between the parties on abortion during the 20-year period between 1973 and 1994. Examining congressional roll call votes during this period, he shows that beginning in the late 1970s Republican and Democrat members of both houses of Congress became increasingly polarized over abortion. By the mid-1990s, according to his analysis, more than 80 percent of congressional Democrats were casting pro-choice votes while an equal proportion of Republican lawmakers were supporting the pro-life alternative. As he observes, "at least in Congress, abortion has evolved into a partisan issue, with each party dominating one side of the debate" (p. 724).

Analyzing the annual surveys conducted by the General Social Survey, Adams found a similar pattern in the widening differentiation over time between party identifiers in the mass public, although it is much less dramatic and more recent than the change among members of Congress. Ordinary Democrats, according to Adams' analysis, were actually more pro-life than ordinary Republicans throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s. However, this relationship was reversed in the mid-1980s. During the next decade Democrats enjoyed an increasing advantage among pro-choice voters, just as Republicans were strongly favored by those with a pro-life position. The result is that abortion has now become a partisan issue at the mass as well as the elite level of the party system.

Finally, Adams argues that the fact that the polarization began earlier and was more pronounced among members of Congress than in the electorate indicates that elite-level change prompted and gave rise to mass-level response.

As Adams notes, his account of the partisan transformation of the abortion

issue closely follows the issue evolution model of partisan change developed by Carmines and Stimson (1989) in their study of racial issues during mid-twentieth-century America. The issue evolution process, according to Carmines and Stimson, unfolds gradually and incrementally over an extended period, and causality runs predominately from elites to masses rather than vice versa.

Adams' study has thus significantly increased our understanding of the partisan evolution of the abortion issue in the United States. However, there is an important missing piece in this picture. There is a need, as Adams notes (1997, p. 735), to examine the role of party activists in the issue evolution of abortion. Carmines and Stimson's study of racial issues saw party activists as playing a pivotal role in the partisan transformation of racial issues. In particular, party activists, according to Carmines and Stimson's model of partisan change, provided the crucial mediating link between the mass electorate on the one hand and elite party actors on the other hand. Their analysis suggested that the elite reorientation on racial issues that initiated the issue evolution process did not directly lead to changes in the racial attitudes of partisans in the mass electorate. Instead, the influence was primarily indirect, flowing through the thousands of highly visible volunteer activists that dominate election campaigns in the country. As Democratic activists became more liberal on racial issues and Republican activists moved to the right, they were sending out clear and consistent signals about the divergent positions of their respective parties. Slowly but surely partisans in the electorate responded to these issue signals. The process culminated when ordinary Democrats and Republicans developed distinctive positions on racial issues.

The question we address here is whether party activists are playing a comparable role in the issue evolution of abortion. To answer this question, we examine the changes in the abortion attitudes of two groups of party activists. The first group is made up of the same campaign activists studied earlier by Carmines and Stimson. The second group is composed of the delegates to the national nominating conventions—"elite activists," in the words of John Aldrich (1995).

WHO ARE PARTY ACTIVISTS?

There is no easy way to identify who should be considered a political or a party activist in the United States. Falling between major officeholders at one end of the continuum and the largely inactive mass electorate at the other end, political activists are a heterogeneous group and include delegates to the national nominating conventions, those citizens heavily involved in campaign activities, major financial contributors to political parties and individual candi-

dates, and even the thousands of minor officeholders and party officials (Shafer, 1998).

We examine two sets of political activists that may have played a distinctive role in the partisan evolution of abortion. The first is composed of those ordinary citizens who are more heavily involved in campaign activities than the average voter. These are occasional activists on two accounts. First, as Nexon (1971) pointed out many years ago, they are only active during the election campaign. Once the ballots are cast, they retreat back into inactivity just like their fellow citizens. But these activists tend to be occasional in another sense as well. They do not compose a stable set of participants that are regularly and repeatedly involved in election campaigns. Instead, for the most part, they drift into and out of campaign politics from election to election depending on the attraction of the candidates and the salience of the issues.

We identify campaign activists using the 1972 to 2000 presidential-year surveys conducted as part of the American National Election Studies (NES). We begin with 1972 because it is the first NES survey that asked respondents about their abortion attitudes. These surveys ask respondents whether they engage in any of the following six activities: (a) voting, (b) working for a party or candidate, (c) trying to influence others' votes, (d) going to political meetings or rallies, (e) wearing a campaign button or putting a campaign sticker on one's car or a sign in one's yard, and (f) giving money to a candidate. Following the practice of others we define campaign activists as those respondents who engage in three or more of the six activities (see Carmines and Stimson, 1989, and Fiorina, 1999, for similar operational definitions of party activists). Based on this classification, campaign activists constitute about 5–10 percent of the various NES samples (see table A1 in the appendix for the exact number of activists in the 1972–2000 NES surveys).

The second set of party activists we examine are delegates to the national nominating conventions from 1972 to 1996, since there was no survey of delegates in 2000 (Buell and Jackson, 1991; Kirkpatrick, 1976; McClosky, 1964; Miller and Jennings, 1986). Convention delegates are as heterogeneous a group as campaign activists. Officeholders—major and minor—attend the national conventions as do financial contributors, issue activists, party workers, and representatives of interest groups. Selected in state primaries, caucuses, or conventions, the only thing that they have in common is that almost all national convention delegates are strongly committed to one of the party's presidential contenders.

Convention delegates and campaign activists overlap to some extent. Indeed, in some ways delegates may be considered an elite subset of campaign participants since they tend to be more extensively involved in politics and more deeply committed to their candidates and causes.

MEASURING ABORTION ATTITUDES

Since 1972, the NES surveys have included a question that asks respondents to choose among four alternatives the one that most accurately reflects their attitude toward abortion. Since 1980, NES has given respondents the following options: (a) By law, abortion should never be permitted; (b) The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger; (c) The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established; (d) By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice (see the appendix for the wording of the four alternatives used by NES before 1980). Each of the delegate surveys also includes an abortion question that asks respondents to choose among four alternatives ranging from most to least restrictive, although the specific wording of the options is not the same in all of the delegate surveys (see the appendix for the exact wording of the abortion item in the delegate surveys).

FINDINGS

As a baseline for future comparisons, Figure 1 shows the mean position of ordinary Democrats and Republicans in the public on the abortion issue from 1972 to 2000. There was little issue differentiation between partisans in the electorate through 1988. In fact, self-identified Democrats were actually slightly but significantly more pro-life than Republicans in both 1972 and 1976. (Table A1 in the appendix reports whether the mean differences in abortion attitudes for Republicans and Democrats are statistically significant among mass partisans and campaign activists in any given year.) Democrats became somewhat more pro-choice than Republicans in 1984 but this difference disappears entirely in 1988. However, the difference between partisans strongly reappears in 1992, and this time not only remains consistent but grows somewhat larger during the remainder of the period.

There are thus two aspects of this figure that are noteworthy. The first is how recently the partisan differences on abortion have emerged in the mass public: only in the 1990s have Democrats been consistently more pro-choice than Republicans. The second point driven home by the figure is the fairly modest extent of the difference in abortion attitudes found between Democrats and Republicans in the mass electorate. Average Democrats and Republicans do differ on abortion but only recently and only fairly modestly—a far cry from the deeply polarized public often emphasized in the mass media.

What happens when we examine the changes over time in abortion attitudes

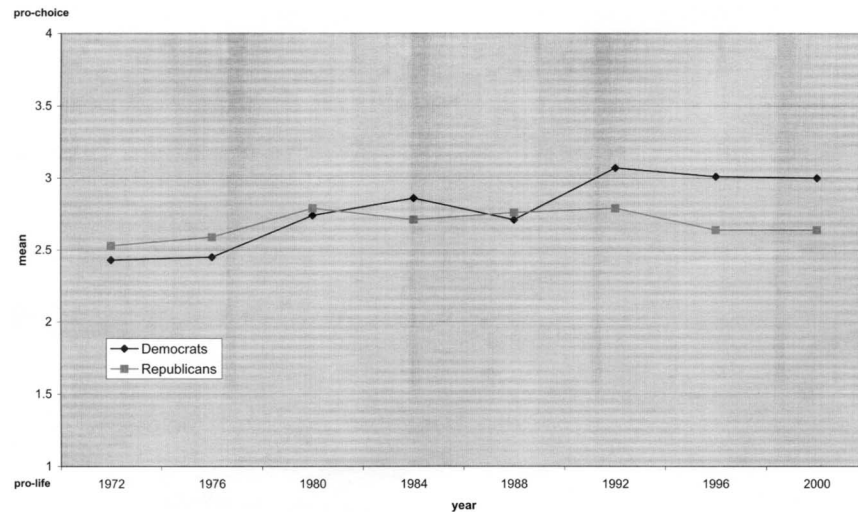


FIG. 1. Abortion attitudes of Democrats and Republicans in the public: 1972–2000.

among Democratic and Republican campaign activists? Figure 2 shows that there was little difference in the abortion attitudes of campaign party activists throughout the 1970s. Indeed, as reported in Table A1, the differences in abortion attitudes between Republican and Democratic campaign activists were not statistically significant in 1972, 1976, or 1980. Instead, compared to partisans in the mass electorate, both Democratic and Republican campaign activists were more pro-choice throughout the 1972 to 1980 period. However, in 1984 Democratic activists moved sharply toward a pro-choice position, perhaps a reaction against the pro-life orientation of the Reagan administration. This movement creates the first sizable polarization on abortion found among campaign party activists. The gap narrows substantially in 1988 but grows larger in 1992 and 1996 and becomes even more pronounced in 2000. By the end of the series, Democratic and Republican campaign activists differ by a full point on the 4-point abortion scale. Thus, at least among campaign activists, Democratic activists are now dominating the pro-choice position and Republicans have moved in a pro-life direction.

The foregoing results indicate that citizens' abortion attitudes have become more closely aligned with their partisanship since 1984 and that the relationship is significantly stronger among party campaign activists than among partisans in the mass electorate. That is, the mass parties have become more differentiated on abortion in the last two decades, and the differentiation is especially evident among campaign activists. This evidence suggests that not

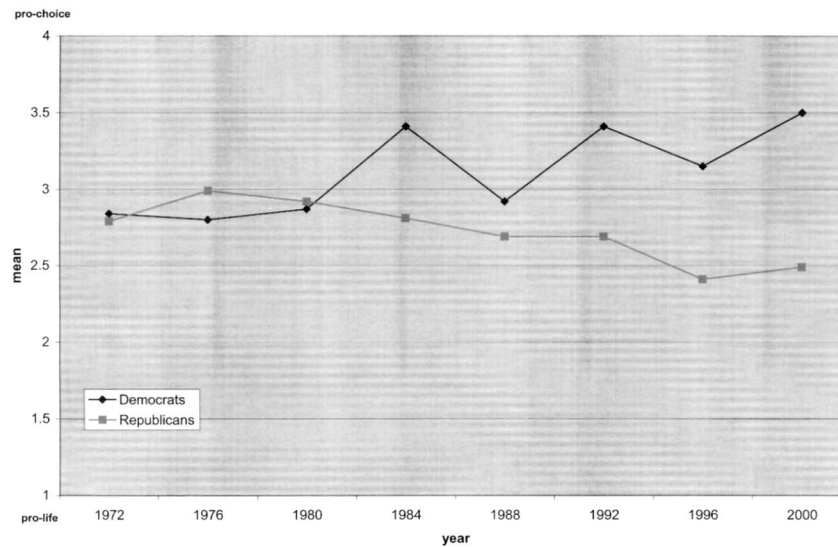


FIG. 2. Abortion attitudes of Democrats and Republicans among campaign activists: 1972–2000.

only do abortion attitudes now relate to one's partisan identity but also may affect the strength of that identification, especially among political activists. As a consequence, we should expect to see that the strength of one's partisan identification should be affected not just by abortion attitudes but by the interaction between a person's abortion attitudes and their level of political activity. Table 1 provides a formal test of this expectation. In this table, respondents' scores on the 7-point party identification scale (scored from strong Democrat to strong Republican) is regressed on activism (scored 0 if the respondent is not an activist and 1 if the respondent is an activist), abortion attitudes, the interaction between activism and abortion attitudes plus a set of six control variables: gender, race, age, income, education, and region (South versus non-South). We also include in each regression equation attitudes toward three political issues that should relate to the strength of partisanship and have been measured identically throughout this period: women's rights, aid to blacks, and guaranteed jobs/standard of living.

The results show an exceptionally clear pattern. From 1972 to 1980, neither the regression coefficients for abortion attitudes nor the coefficients for the interaction between abortion attitudes and activism are statistically significant. This is consistent with what we observed in Figures 1 and 2: namely, ordinary Republicans and Democrats did not differ in their abortion attitudes during

this period nor did their counterparts among campaign activists. These results, in other words, are fully consistent with the visual evidence that we saw earlier indicating that there were no substantial differences in abortion attitudes from 1972 to 1980 among either party identifiers in the electorate or partisans among campaign activists.

This pattern changes abruptly beginning with the 1984 NES survey. From 1984 to the end of the series in 2000, the coefficient for abortion attitudes is significant in each NES presidential election survey, indicating that the pro-life position on abortion was associated with increasing strength of a Republican partisan identification. Even more revealing is the coefficient for the interaction term between abortion attitudes and activism during this period: except for 1988, this coefficient is statistically significant in each presidential election. This evidence indicates that abortion attitudes and strength of partisanship are more highly related among campaign activists than in the total electorate. Again, this evidence is clearly consistent with the visual evidence seen in the figures, which showed that partisans in the electorate had different abortion attitudes during this recent period and that the differences were especially pronounced among campaign activists.

The convention delegates tell a parallel but not identical story to that of the campaign activists. As Figure 3 indicates, even in 1972, Democratic and Republican delegates differed significantly in their abortion attitudes with Democrats being more pro-choice than Republicans. This difference remains fairly stable through 1980 but then increases in each successive election. By 1996 the Republican and Democratic delegates are extremely polarized on abortion—a difference of almost a point and a half on the 4-point scale.

Finally, Figure 4 shows the differences in abortion attitudes at all three levels of the party system: convention delegates, campaign activists, and the mass public. Scores below (above) 0 indicate that Republicans, in the aggregate, are more pro-choice (pro-life) than Democrats. Three aspects of the figure deserve attention. First, issue differentiation occurs much later among partisans in the public than it does among either campaign activists or convention delegates. It is not until the 1990s that a clear partisan difference emerges in the electorate, a full decade after polarization can be detected among campaign activists and two decades after partisan differences are evident among convention delegates. Moreover, the overall partisan differences are much smaller in the public than among activists. For example, in 1996, the mass difference is less than a third of that found among campaign activists and less than a fifth of that for convention delegates.

It is perhaps tempting to interpret this limited issue change among mass partisans as being politically inconsequential. But this is true only if the partisan difference is viewed at an early stage in the unfolding process and without the benefit of seeing the more dramatic transformations that are occurring

TABLE 1. Regression on 7-Point Party Identification Scale, 1972-2000

	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
Constant	1.271*	1.865*	1.905*	3.101**	3.604**	3.856**	2.463**	4.786**
Activism	0.67	-.437	-.190	.984	.748	.474	1.054*	2.017*
Abortion	0.0935	-.0385	-.0202	-.220**	-.149*	-.319**	-.302**	-.325**
Abortion*activism	-0.183	.172	.250	-.389*	-.233	-.297*	-.316*	-.657*
Gender	0.0173	.0936	-.101	.0014	-.0423	-.136	-.273*	-.154
Race	-.687**	-1.11**	-1.1**	-1.03**	-1.387**	-1.268**	-1.005**	-1.592**
Age	.0085*	.0073*	-.00696	-.0056	-.00203	-.0091*	-.0033	-.0076
Income	.0485	.104	.133*	.143*	.0277	.142*	.187*	.105
Education	.238**	.283**	.220*	.196*	.167*	.259**	.259*	.158
South	.466**	.289*	.277*	.0548	.323*	.074	.0326	-.230
Women's rights	.0386	.0399	.0603	.0598	.034	.0823*	.116*	.0956
Aid to blacks	.0721*	-.00628	.116*	.156**	.0461	.0947*	.229**	.100
Guaranteed job/ standard of living	.133**	.224**	.255**	.229**	.257**	.241**	.252**	.243**
F	14.100**	15.508**	18.304**	20.706**	19.308**	35.164**	31.762**	13.178**
R ²	.100	.145	.207	.176	.175	.228	.274	.239
Adj. R ²	.093	.135	.196	.168	.166	.221	.265	.221

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

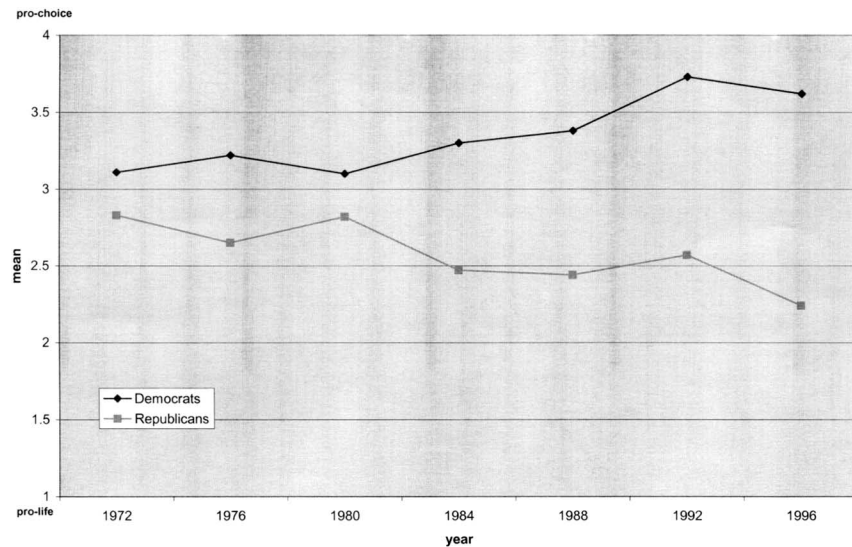


FIG. 3. Abortion attitudes of Democrats and Republicans among convention delegates: 1972–1996.

among both party activists and political elites. In context, it is clear that we are witnessing a mass issue evolution still in progress with no clear end in sight.

Second, Figure 4 underscores the crucial role that party activists play in the issue evolution process. Beginning with the Reagan presidency, campaign activists in both parties developed distinct and divergent positions on abortion with Democratic activists moving decisively in a pro-choice direction and Republican activists later becoming more pro-life. This polarization between party activists foreshadows the more muted differentiation that eventually develops between ordinary partisans.

Third and finally, Figure 4 shows that issue polarization occurs even sooner among convention delegates than it does among campaign activists. Indeed, as we have seen, even before *Roe v. Wade*, Democratic and Republican convention delegates had moderately differentiated positions on abortion, suggesting that they were shaping as well as reinforcing the evolving positions of their respective parties. Over time Democratic and Republican convention delegates become steadily more polarized over abortion so that by 1996 they are five times more divided than they were in 1972.

The growing partisan differentiation in abortion attitudes that we see among convention delegates tracks very closely the issue polarization that Adams

found among Republican and Democratic members of Congress during the same time period. Unfortunately, there are far too few time points in the two sets of data to determine whether members of Congress influenced convention delegates or vice versa. The probable answer is that both groups acted simultaneously to help create and then sustain this issue division between the parties. One can speculate that once this division became a permanent dimension of the American party system, it acted as an anchor preventing presidential candidates of either party—but perhaps especially Republicans—from moving in a more moderate direction.

We have seen that citizens' abortion attitudes have become more closely associated with their partisanship during the last three decades. The first row of Table 2 presents an overall picture of this changing relationship. This row shows the correlation between abortion attitudes and partisanship (measured on the 7-point scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican) for all the NES studies between 1972 and 2000 in which the NES survey included a measure of abortion attitudes. During the 1970s there was actually a small but statistically significant positive relationship between abortion attitudes and partisanship, indicating that a pro-choice position on abortion was associated with a stronger Republican partisan identification during this period. The first indication of a significant negative relationship between abortion attitudes and partisanship is found in 1984, but it is not until 1992 that the new alignment

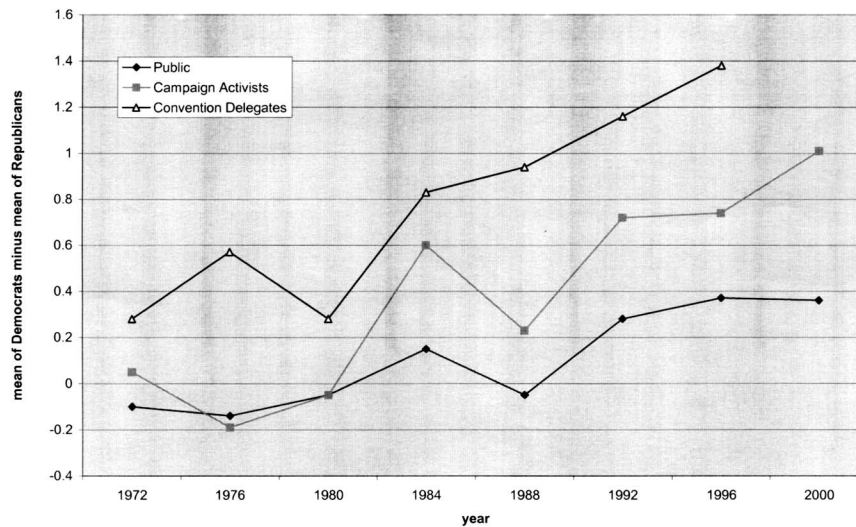


FIG. 4. Differences in abortion attitudes among convention delegates, campaign activists, and the public.

TABLE 2. Correlations of Abortion Attitudes with Party Identification, Political Ideology, and Party of Vote Choice

Variable		1972	1976	1978	1980 ^a	1980 ^a	1982
PartyID	corr	0.0577*	0.0628*	0.0857*	0.0107	0.0383	0.0586
	N	2575	1793	2122	1335	1515	1325
Lib/Cons Scale	corr	-0.1223*	-0.1574*	-0.1646*	-0.2546*	-0.2114*	-0.2298*
	N	1507	1265	1605	866	968	877
Presidential Vote	corr	-0.0667*	-0.0017		-0.018	0.0012	
	N	1547	1271		850	843	
House Vote	corr	0.0149	0.0352	0.0766	-0.0436	-0.0056	0.0727
	N	1303	1040	963	837	828	688
Senate Vote	corr	0.1260*	-0.0025	0.0436	-0.0755	-0.0698	0.0194
	N	772	767	531	583	583	524
Gubernatorial Vote	corr	0.1035	-0.0524	0.0733	-0.1997	-0.1544	0.061
	N	444	277	857	127	130	585

^aThe abortion question used in the NES changed in 1980; NES asked both versions of the question in 1980. The first column shows the response to the 1972–1980 question, and the second column shows the response to the 1980–2000 question.

* $p = 0.01$ level (two-tailed).

of abortion attitudes and partisanship becomes a permanent feature of American party politics.

If abortion has become a more partisan issue in the last several decades, has it also become more closely aligned with mass political ideology and been more closely associated with party voting in national and state elections during this period? Table 2 suggests an affirmative answer to both of these questions. The second row of Table 2 shows that even in the 1970s the pro-choice position on abortion was significantly associated with political liberalism but the strength of this relationship more than doubled between the 1970s and the 1990s (from an average correlation of $-.14$ to $-.31$).

Table 2 also shows that abortion attitudes have become increasingly associated with party voting during this period. This is true not only in presidential elections but also in Senate, House, and gubernatorial contests. For example, during the 1970s there was only one presidential election in which there was a significant correlation between abortion attitudes and party voting—a paltry $-.066$ in 1972. By contrast, this same correlation averages $-.25$ in the 1992–2000 presidential elections. Similarly, there is virtually no significant relationship between abortion attitudes and party voting in Senate, House, and gubernatorial elections during the 1970s and 1980s. However, this relationship is statistically significant for all House elections between 1990 and 2000 and all Senate elections beginning in 1992. Indeed, by the 2000 election there is a notable tendency for pro-choice voters to support Democratic candidates and

1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000
-0.0590*	0.0265	-0.002	-0.0346	-0.1169*	-0.1128*	-0.1493*	-0.1332*	-0.1462*
2122	2070	1964	1890	2369	1713	1662	1232	1731
-0.2319*	-0.1879*	-0.2073*	-0.2678*	-0.3069*	-0.3708*	-0.3574*	-0.3486*	-0.3216*
1516	1609	1411	1295	1776	1357	1298	1000	654
-0.1107*		-0.1124*		-0.2442*		-0.2719*		-0.2506*
1341		1182		1322		1014		1092
-0.0714	0.0312	-0.0735	-0.1393*	-0.1320*	-0.1358*	-0.1804*	-0.2375*	-0.2316*
1155	961	1044	780	1339	910	1014	543	886
-0.0229	-0.0906	-0.0472	-0.1065	-0.2006*	-0.2414*	-0.1796*	-0.2371*	-0.2919*
719	676	833	465	950	752	600	406	731
	0.0009		-0.0962*		-0.0947*		-0.2668*	
	861		733		738		503	

pro-life voters to vote for Republican candidates in both Senate and House contests. This is also true in gubernatorial elections, as the last row in Table 2 reveals. Until the 1990s there was no significant relationship between voters' abortion attitudes and their vote in gubernatorial elections, but such a relationship emerges clearly in the 1990s.

In sum, abortion has become a more partisan and ideologically defined issue during the last three decades. Partisans in the electorate now differ more sharply in their abortion attitudes, and their preferences on this issue increasingly affect their voting choices in national and state elections.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the issue of abortion has undergone a major partisan transformation during the last several decades. During this period Democrats and Republicans in both houses of Congress have become increasingly divided over the issue (Adams, 1997). Similarly, the parties' platforms have grown more differentiated in their treatment of abortion (Layman, 2001). When the issue of abortion was first introduced into each party's platform in 1976, both parties dealt with it in general and vague language. By 1984, however, the parties had taken clear and distinct positions on the issue. The Democrat's party platform of that year asserted that reproductive freedom was a "fundamental human right"; the Republican platform endorsed an unequivocal pro-life position stating that "the unborn child has a fundamental individual right to life which cannot be infringed." Since 1984, the parties' platforms have continued to

take markedly different stances on abortion, and the differences have become even stronger in recent elections.

Partisans in the electorate have also become more differentiated on abortion during the last several decades. Throughout the 1970s, ordinary Democrats were actually slightly more pro-life than their Republican counterparts. But beginning in the mid-1980s, Democrats became increasingly pro-choice and Republicans increasingly pro-life—a differentiation that grew steadily during the 1990s. Moreover, citizens' abortion attitudes became increasingly associated with party voting in presidential, Senate, House, and gubernatorial elections during this period and more closely aligned with political ideology.

Carmines and Stimson's research showed that political activists played a pivotal role in connecting the elite/mass partisan evolution of racial issues that dominated mid-twentieth-century American politics. The evidence presented here suggests that party activists may have played a comparable role in the more recent partisan evolution of the abortion issue. Specifically, our results suggest that party activists were in a strategic position to provide clear and consistent issue cues to the mass public. For not only did shifts in abortion attitudes occur much earlier among party activists than among partisans in the public but the degree of issue differentiation was sharper and more pronounced in the former than the latter.

Party activists are thus crucial to the issue evolution process. They, unlike members of the mass public, pay attention to the minor distinctions and subtle issue cues constantly generated by party elites striving for strategic political advantage. By sometimes responding to elite proposals, party activists act to sustain and extend elite polarization on contentious political issues. And by the public nature of their political activities, party activists send signals to an inattentive public about the nature of issue change occurring at the elite levels of party politics. Although we may be able to tell whether an issue evolution has occurred without examining party activists, to understand how it occurs we must examine this crucial set of political actors.

Acknowledgments. Carmines would like to thank the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Science for its financial support in the form of a fellowship where some of the research for this article was completed. Both authors would like to thank Mike Crow for his research assistance.

APPENDIX

This appendix provides the wording of the response options of the abortion question used in the various surveys of citizens and convention delegates. First, a word about the convention surveys. NES-sponsored delegate surveys were conducted from 1972 to 1992, except for 1976. Data for 1976 come from the 1980 survey, when the study went back and surveyed 1976 convention delegates. The data for 1996 are based on

delegate polls conducted by CBS News and the *New York Times*. Because of the differences in wording of the response options over time, and between mass and delegate surveys, it makes more sense to compare the differences between Democrats and Republicans rather than focus on the absolute positions of either Democrats or Republicans. The wording changes should have a greater affect on the absolute levels but should have less affect on the Democratic–Republican differences. See Herrera, 1992, and Miller and Jennings, 1986, for more details about the NES-sponsored delegate surveys.

The 1972 delegate survey had the following response options:

1. Abortion should never be permitted.
2. Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger.
3. If a woman and her doctor agree, she should be able to have a legal abortion.
4. Any woman who wants to have an abortion should be able to have one.

The 1976–1988 delegate surveys used the same response options as the 1972–1980 NES surveys:

1. Abortion should never be permitted.
2. Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger.
3. Abortion should be permitted if, due to personal reasons, the woman would have difficulty in caring for the child.
4. Abortion should never be prohibited.

In 1992, the convention survey switched to the wording of the response options used in the NES surveys from 1980 to the present:

1. By law, abortion should never be permitted.
2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger.
3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.
4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.

In 1996, the CBS/*New York Times* question had the following four options:

1. Abortion should only be permitted to save the woman's life.
2. Abortion should be permitted in such cases as rape, incest, and to save the woman's life.

3. Abortion should be permitted, but subject to greater restrictions than it is now.
4. Abortion should be permitted in all cases.

In 1980, as noted above, the NES mass survey asked separate abortion questions with slightly different wording of the response options. The correlation between responses is .714.

As one can see, the differences in the wording of the responses usually occur in the two intermediate options. To see if the differences in wording affected our results, therefore, instead of examining the means, we also compared the proportions of the samples that fell into each of the two extreme categories as well as the ratio of the proportions of the two extreme categories to each other. These alternative specifications had no effect on our results. They are available from the authors by request.

APPENDIX

TABLE A1. Differences in Means on Abortion Attitudes Between Democrats and Republicans, 1972–2000 as Depicted in Figures 1 and 2

	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000
Public—shown in Figure 1								
Dem-mean	2.4317	2.4506	2.736	2.8593	2.7112	3.0745	3.0107	3
Dem n	1054	699	625	803	703	859	654	607
Rep-mean	2.5327	2.5919	2.7851	2.7082	2.7591	2.7858	2.6427	2.6395
Rep n	612	446	349	586	548	607	459	441
significance	*	*	NS	*	NS	**	**	**
Campaign Activists—shown in Figure 2								
Dem-mean	2.8382	2.7963	2.8696	3.4118	2.9167	3.4112	3.1538	3.5
Dem n	136	108	46	102	72	107	65	56
Rep-mean	2.7876	2.9897	2.9242	2.8056	2.6867	2.6889	2.411	2.4918
Rep n	113	97	66	72	83	90	73	61
significance	NS	NS	NS	**	NS	**	**	**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Greg D. (1997). Abortion: evidence of an issue evolution. *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 718–737.
- Aldrich, John H. (1995). *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Buell, Emmett H., Jr., and Jackson, John S., III (1991). The national conventions:

- diminished but still important in a primary-dominated process. In Emmett H. Buell Jr. and Lee Sigelman (eds.), *Nominating the President*, pp. 213–249. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Carmines, Edward G., and Stimson, James A. (1989). *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fiorina, Morris P. (1999). Whatever happened to the median voter? Paper presented at the MIT Conference on Parties and Congress, Cambridge, MA.
- Herrera, Richard (1992). The understanding of ideological labels by political elites: a research note. *Western Political Quarterly* 45: 1021–1035.
- Kirkpatrick, Jeanne J. (1976). *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in American National Politics*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation and Twentieth Century Fund.
- Layman, Geoffrey (2001). *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- McClosky, Herbert (1964). Consensus and ideology in American politics. *American Political Science Review* 58: 361–382.
- Miller, Warren E., and Jennings, M. Kent (1986). *Parties in Transition: A Longitudinal Study of Party Elites and Party Supporters*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Nexon, David (1971). Asymmetry in the political system: occasional activists in the Republican and Democratic parties. *American Political Science Review* 65: 716–730.
- Shafer, Byron E. (1998). *Partisan Approaches to Postwar American Politics*. New York: Chatham House.