*Abortion: Evidence of an Issue Evolution**

Greg D. Adams, *Carnegie Mellon University*

Theory: Using Carmines and Stimson's *issue evolution* model of partisan change, I argue that the abortion issue has transformed the two major United States political parties and that this process follows a predictable pattern, as outlined by Carmines and Stimson.
Hypotheses: By applying the theory of issue evolution to abortion, I develop three hypotheses: 1) The reputation for each party's stance on abortion among party elites has grown clearer and more distinct over the last 20 years; 2) At the mass level, people have changed their party identification in a manner consistent with their attitudes on abortion; 3) The changes among party elites and masses are causally connected, with elite-level changes producing mass-level responses.
Methods: Simple time series analyses are used on two datasets, roll call votes on abortion in the United States Congress and public opinion polls from General Social Surveys, 1972–94.
Results: Democrats and Republicans shift dramatically on the abortion issue at both the elite and mass levels. Moreover, this change closely follows with the issue evolution model. The process unfolds gradually, and causality appears to run from elites to masses, rather than from masses to elites.

Introduction

One of the biggest questions that politicians, historians, and political scientists routinely study is the degree to which various issues determine the electoral fortunes of political parties. Often, the models used to answer this question have presumed that the effects of a cross-party issue are quickly realized, culminating in a dramatic shift among the electorate over the course of an election campaign. V. O. Key's (1955) seminal work on critical elections is perhaps the most famous of such models, and its impact on voting studies has been as enduring as it has been far-reaching.[1] Burnham (1970), Campbell (1966), and Sundquist (1973) led the way for count-

*This is a greatly revised version of a paper presented at the 1992 Midwest Political Science Association annual meetings. I would like to thank Jim Stimson for his patient support and guidance on this paper. Chris Fastnow, Nicole Krassas, Dena Levy, Peverill Squire, Tim Amato, and David Rohde also provided invaluable comments and encouragement. Some of the data used in this paper were made available through the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. Neither the collector of that data nor the Consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here. All data and documentation necessary to replicate the analyses are available from the author.

[1]Harold F. Bass, Jr. (1991) offers a useful outline, as well as one of the most extensive bibliographies, for the work stemming from realignment theory.

American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 41, No. 3, July 1997, Pp. 718–737

less scholars who expanded Key's ideas into part of a comprehensive framework for understanding changes in the party system. Soon, realignment theory became applied to other countries (Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984), different regions and states (Converse 1963; Petrocik 1987; Wolfinger and Arsenau 1978), and other levels and divisions of government (Campbell and Trilling 1980; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980).

But many have found the theory of critical election realignments to be hopelessly flawed. Critics have faulted the realignment literature for failing to define key terms, such as *critical election* and *realignment,* noting that every presidential election since 1964 has generated claims of a realignment (for a list of such claims, see Bass 1991; Sundquist 1983). Others have taken issue with the generalizability of a theory based on extraordinary historical events such as the Great Depression or the Civil War (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Silbey 1991). And finally, critics have argued that critical election realignment theory places far too much attention on short-term events, ignoring the possibility that partisan shifts may develop over the course of several elections, unfolding perhaps over decades instead of months (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

As an alternative to the classic realignment model, Carmines and Stimson (1981, 1989) have proposed the notion of *issue evolution* to describe party dynamics. An issue evolution can produce the same result as a realignment, but the process unfolds over a longer period of time, much like V. O. Key's secular realignment (1959). Under the theory of issue evolution, a few rare issues exist with the capacity to instill fundamental and permanent changes in the party system. Most issues are typically resolved, become irrelevant, or are passed through the policy cycle without a lasting impact on the political order. Every so often, however, a persistent issue arises that cuts across traditional party lines and stays salient for an unusually long time. If the issue remains on the public's agenda year after year and is "easy," requiring little outside knowledge or expertise, then the issue takes on a unique potential for producing a lasting shift in the party system.[2] When this possibility is realized and the parties have been transformed by such an issue, an issue evolution is said to have taken place.

Carmines and Stimson offer the case of racial politics during the mid-twentieth century as an example of an issue evolution. Prior to the 1950s and 1960s, Republicans, "the party of Lincoln," were typically more liberal on racial issues than Democrats, but over two or three decades, the roles reversed. Democrats became much more likely than Republicans to support government action to aid minorities, *and this became a key distinguishing feature between the two parties.* The change did not happen over-

[2]See Carmines and Stimson (1980) for a discussion of "easy" and "hard" issues.

night, and no critical election marks a point of transition. Instead of the static-disruption-static pattern posited by critical election models, the process evolves slowly over time. Carmines and Stimson believe that previous realignments may also have unfolded in the style of an issue evolution, but historical data are too sparse to test the theory.

The abortion issue, however, presents an ideal test to raise the theory of issue evolution beyond the case study of racial politics to a more general class of issues. Abortion is currently one of the most salient issues in the United States, and it has held this status of importance for more than 20 years. The debate crosses over traditional party lines and is easily understood, requiring no outside expertise or specialized knowledge to form an opinion. Abortion, then, has all the characteristics necessary for an issue evolution to occur. After a brief description of the issue evolution process, the remainder of this paper attempts to show that such a change is, in fact, already well underway.[3]

A Model of Issue Evolution

Two kinds of partisans participate in an issue evolution process: elites and masses. Elites are those actors who actively shape a party's reputation on various matters. These actors include the president, political appointees, candidates for major and minor offices, as well as political staff and volunteers, to list but a few of the more visible examples. A party's reputation on an issue is built through policy proposals, conventions, speeches, campaign ads, public demonstrations, letters to the editor, talk shows, and so on. The list is endless. For simplicity, though, this paper examines just one set of elite actors involved in the process—members of Congress. By voting hundreds of times each year, participating in debates, making public speeches, and offering interviews with the press, members of Congress are arguably the most consistently important and recognizable source of partisan cues. They are certainly not the only actors sending out party cues, but they are one of the most visible and easily documented sources of elite cues available.

The other kind of partisan group that participates in an issue evolution is the party masses. Party masses are much less active in the political process. For the most part, they are reactive, responding to the political cues and events that unfold around them, but not actively trying to shape them. As the masses observe political events and messages, they assimilate the party cues within the context of their own party affiliations. Often, party cues reinforce a person's party attachments, but when an issue crosses party

[3]Others, of course, have suggested earlier (though not demonstrated) that such a process may be taking place. See, for example, Ladd (1991), Shafer (1991), and Stimson (1991).

lines, the elite messages can undermine the person's loyalties. On most cross-party issues the parties' cues are muddled with mixed messages, and the effect of the cues is weak. As the elites become more unified within their respective parties, however, each party's message grows increasingly distinct and more potent. Eventually, those who consistently receive cues that do not conform to both their issue and party preferences find that they must reevaluate one or the other, and an issue evolution becomes a possibility.

For an issue evolution to occur over abortion, then, two things are necessary. First, elite party cues on the issue must be clear. As will be shown, this was not the case at the time of *Roe* v. *Wade,* but over time the party cues have become more distinct. Second, we should expect to see some kind of response to the elite cues at the mass level. Assuming that abortion is an important issue, it should affect people's partisanship as the parties become associated with one or the other side of the issue. Furthermore, according to the issue evolution model, the change should be gradual, since it takes time for the parties to establish a reputation on the issue and for the masses to perceive a difference between the two parties. Thus, it is not sufficient merely to point to an election or a regression on party identification. The evidence must show both that people have changed their party identification and that the change is progressive.

Changes in Elites

Congress provides an ideal place to look for changes in the party elites' positions on abortion. Members of Congress are not only some of the most important messengers of party cues, but their positions on issues can be well documented through remarks made in the public record and through numerous recorded votes that transpire as part of the legislative process. Although abortion has long been regarded as a political "hot potato," roll call votes on the issue extend as far back as 1973, the same year as the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe* v. *Wade.* Abortion debates have entered into a vast and diverse set of policy arenas, including Washington, D.C. appropriations, aid to developing nations, health insurance for government employees, military health services, and funding for a variety of social welfare agencies, to list a few examples. One might be tempted to argue that many of these votes dealing with funding abortions fall within the context of the traditional liberal/conservative debate over the size of government, but the vast majority of abortion disputes in Congress have been framed in the same way that they are framed by ordinary citizens. In Congress as elsewhere, the debate over abortion has tended to center around the rights of the unborn versus the rights of women to do with their bodies as they please. Thus, by examining congressional roll calls it is possible to infer

the degree to which each party's elites are unified on the abortion issue. The more unified each party's elites become, the more clearly the masses will perceive the issue in partisan terms.

Elite-Level Data

The data for elite-level opinions on abortion consist of 176 House and Senate roll calls taken from 1973 through 1994 (see Appendix).[4] Taken as whole, this is more than a sufficient sample to examine changes in legislative attitudes on abortion, but a few caveats are in order. In most years, each chamber held several abortion votes, but in the first few years of the series only a few votes were taken, sometimes in just one of the chambers. Between 1973 and 1975, for instance, a paltry five votes on the issue were recorded. After 1975, though, the data are more plentiful. It should also be noted that some abortion disputes are weighed more heavily in the data than others, since some disputes resulted in repeated roll calls. This was often the case when legislators strategically tried to make the most of open rule procedures. One might opt to remove the "redundant" votes, but because no two votes are exactly the same, selecting the most appropriate vote is not always straightforward. Thus, repetitive roll calls are included in this analysis. The results, however, are not significantly affected. Members of Congress have tended to vote consistently on abortion regardless of the specific arena of the debate, and removing votes that appeared to be redundant did not change the outcome of the analysis.

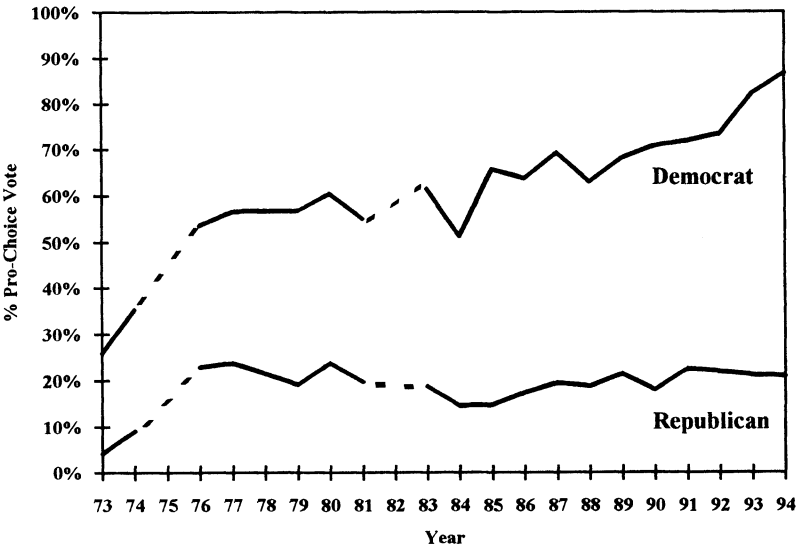
Analysis

Using the roll calls described above, I computed a yearly score for each party based on the proportion of pro-choice votes to total abortion votes cast for that year. Thus, the abortion score for Democrats in any particular year is given by:

$$\textit{Abortion Score (Dem)} = \frac{\textit{Pro-Choice Votes Cast (Dem)}}{\textit{Total Abortion Votes Cast (Dem)}}.$$

[4]Abortion votes where "pro-choice" and "pro-life" positions are unclear, such as on compromise proposals and procedural tactics, are not included. Evidence that a vote was not a "true" test of abortion attitudes comes from *Congressional Quarterly* descriptions and from outcomes where traditional opponents on the issue, such as Senators Helms and Harkin, vote in agreement. Note that votes on the so-called "gag rule" imposed on federally funded family planning clinics are not counted as abortion votes, since even some adamant pro-life legislators viewed the issue in terms of free speech and the sanctity of doctor-patient relations.

Figure 1A. Percentage of House Abortion Votes That Are Pro-Choice

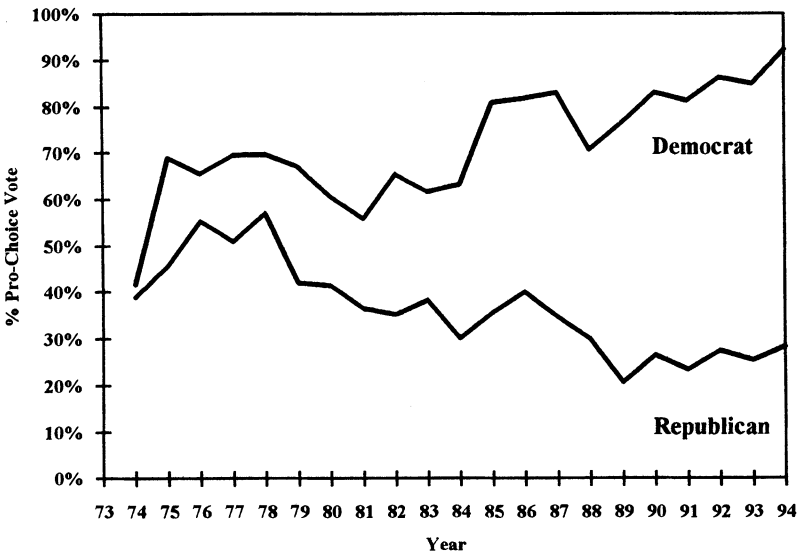


Figures 1A and 1B plot the scores for both parties in the House and Senate respectively. The two figures demonstrate a clear trend: Democrats have become increasingly more pro-choice on abortion, and Republicans, particularly in the Senate, have become more pro-life.[5] Thus, each party has grown internally more cohesive on the abortion issue, sending out clearer party signals to the electorate. Early in the series, the partisan cues on abortion were muddled. Up until 1979, for instance, Senate Republicans were split over abortion in about the same proportion as House Democrats. Looking across both chambers, abortion was not a particularly partisan issue. From 1979 on, though, the two groups diverge. Senate Republicans become increasingly more pro-life, while House Democrats grow more pro-choice.

One can infer from Figures 1A and 1B that the two parties—and their reputations on abortion—are drifting farther apart. A graph of this polarization is provided in Figure 2, which plots the differences between the parties' scores for the full Congress. As Figure 2 shows, Democrats and Republi-

[5]Oddly, House Republicans have consistently hovered around the 20% mark throughout the entire series. This relative stability is in stark contrast to the changes made by the Republicans in the Senate and the Democrats in both chambers. Why House Republicans would be so different from the other groups is a mystery.

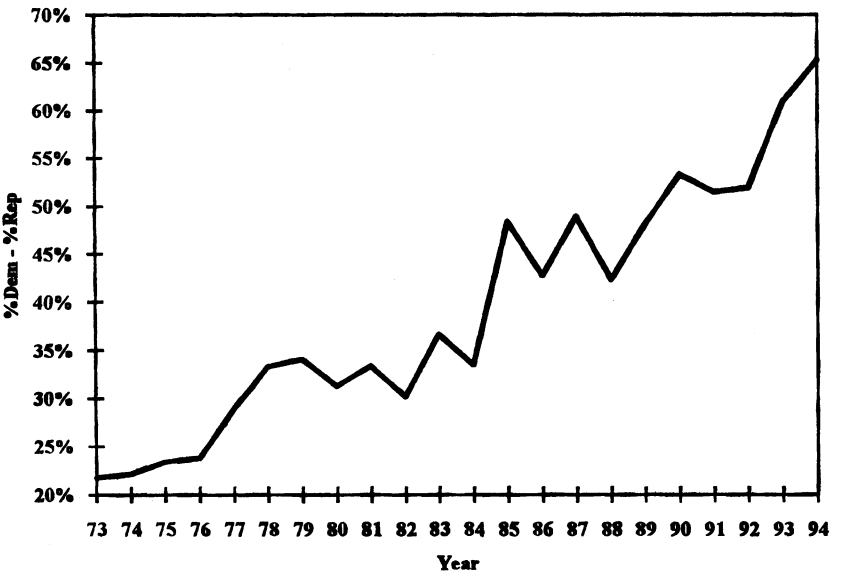
Figure 1B. Percentage of Senate Abortion Votes That Are Pro-Choice



cans were only moderately divided over abortion during the 1970s but became extremely polarized by the latter half of the 1980s. By the end of the series, over 80% of Democrats were voting pro-choice on abortion disputes, while the same percentage of Republicans were voting pro-life (resulting in a 65% difference between pro-choice scores). At least in Congress, abortion has evolved into a partisan issue, with each party dominating one side of the debate.

What accounts for the growing partisan split among elites? One possible answer is that members adapted to the expectations of their party's constituents in an effort to maximize their chances of reelection. Adherents to this argument could point to George Bush's evolution from an abortion "moderate" into an unwavering proponent of pro-life positions as evidence to their claims. But George Bush is more likely the exception that proves the rule. Vacillating on a highly visible and emotional issue such as abortion is politically risky, and one would be hard pressed to come up with the names of more than a half-dozen politicians who did so successfully. George Bush's notoriety for switching attests to the rare and conspicuous nature of publicly changing one's abortion beliefs. It is quite possible, and even probable, that some legislators have tried to lay low on the issue—particularly in the 1970s and early 1980s—and may have abstained when

Figure 2. Percentage Difference Between Congressional Democrats and Republicans Voting Pro-Choice

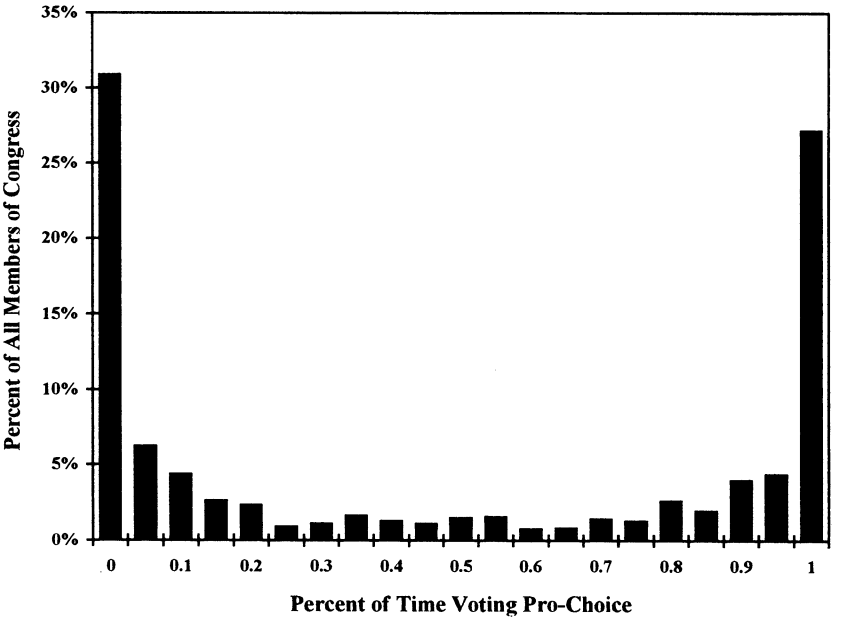


possible. But switching one's position on abortion does not seem a likely occurrence.

The evidence from congressional roll calls supports this claim. The histogram in Figure 3 shows the frequency distribution for legislators' lifetime voting record on abortion roll calls.[6] Note that the vast majority of legislators have voted consistently on the issue over 90% of the time. This is impressive, given that the measures voted on range from moderate to extreme in their abortion policies and that the votes occur under a wide range of policy contexts. Those legislators whose records fall somewhere between the pro-life and pro-choice extremes are not, for the most part, as interesting as one might expect. Many only voted on a handful of measures, giving unusually strong weight to a single "outlier" vote. Others seem to be true abortion moderates, voting one way and then another within each legislative session, but not moving toward either side of the debate over

[6]Because the House and Senate showed similar distributions, the two chambers have been combined to produce a single graph. Readers may note, however, that the Senate's distribution slightly favored the pro-choice position, while the House distribution weighed more heavily on the pro-life side.

Figure 3. Distribution of Individual Legislators' Abortion Votes Over Entire Career



time. At most, only a couple of members show any pattern that might reasonably be construed as switching on the issue. Thus, switching does not seem to be an important causal factor in the overall party changes among elites on abortion.

A more plausible candidate for explaining the shift in party positions lies in the change of each party's membership through retirements and turnovers in seats. The explanation is as follows: before abortion became a salient political issue, there was no reason to expect legislators within either party to be unified on the issue, simply because the connection between party and attitudes on abortion never entered into the electorate's mind when these legislators were first brought into office. Once abortion was thrust into the public spotlight, principally through *Roe* v. *Wade,* some legislators were advantaged by their position on abortion and others were disadvantaged. Suppose that because of the distribution of party activists, the abortion beliefs among each party's leadership, and other factors, pro-life Republicans were slightly more likely to win election than pro-choice Republicans, and pro-choice Democrats were more likely to win than pro-life Democrats, all else being equal. The difference could be small, maybe a

percentage-point difference in the probability of winning election. Such a difference could be so small as to be unrecognizable, even by the candidates themselves. But when accumulated over nearly 470 House and Senate seats up for election every two years, and then compounded across elections, the effect could be like interest in a savings account, growing larger every year. Moreover, there is no reason to expect the advantage to stay constant. As the two parties diverge on the issue, the difference between being a pro-choice or a pro-life candidate in a party would likely grow as interest groups and activists concerned with abortion gravitated to one of the two parties. Thus, even without elites acting strategically, the two parties could move apart and develop opposing messages on an issue such as abortion. Strategic elites, aware of the advantage of appealing to an active wing within their parties, could accelerate the process even more quickly.

Brady and Schwartz (1995) find compelling evidence that supports such a scenario, particularly for Republican Senatorial candidates. Through interviews with the Republican National Committee and members of Republican polling firms active during the years 1978–90, Brady and Schwartz discovered that pro-life groups in the Republican party effectively mobilized against Republican pro-choice candidates in the primaries, making it less likely that a pro-choice Republican would make it to the general election. But more work, both qualitative and quantitative, needs to be done, especially with respect to the House. Rohde (1991) and others have convincingly demonstrated an increase in overall party cohesion for the House during this same time period. It is possible that the votes on abortion are simply a part of this larger pattern, but the changes in the Senate and, as will be shown, the changes in the masses suggest that something unique is going on with respect to abortion. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that the party cues given by Congress have grown increasingly clear and distinct on the abortion issue.

Changes Among the Masses

In practically all studies of party alignments, the primary focus is on the "end product" of a partisan shift, namely, changes among the masses. As with previous studies, a shift among the masses is the locus here, too, but the *process* of such a shift merits equal attention. The theory behind issue evolution contends that changes in party identifications are gradual and so may not be readily recognized. Consequently, a simple comparison between the party masses at time t and at $t + 1$ may fail to uncover subtle movements among the masses. Alternatively, comparing the party masses at the beginning and the end of a long series can highlight dramatic shifts but miss how those shifts transpired. Most of the evidence presented here, therefore, amounts to displaying aggregate time series results for over 20 years of annual surveys. As such, the potential for committing an ecological

fallacy is present, though probably not overwhelming. Panel studies can (and do) provide some measure of protection against an ecological fallacy, but for the purposes of this study most panels are too short-lived. Thus, the results presented here are given with a degree of caution, and where possible I have tried to note important assumptions necessary for making meaningful inferences from the data.

Mass-Level Data

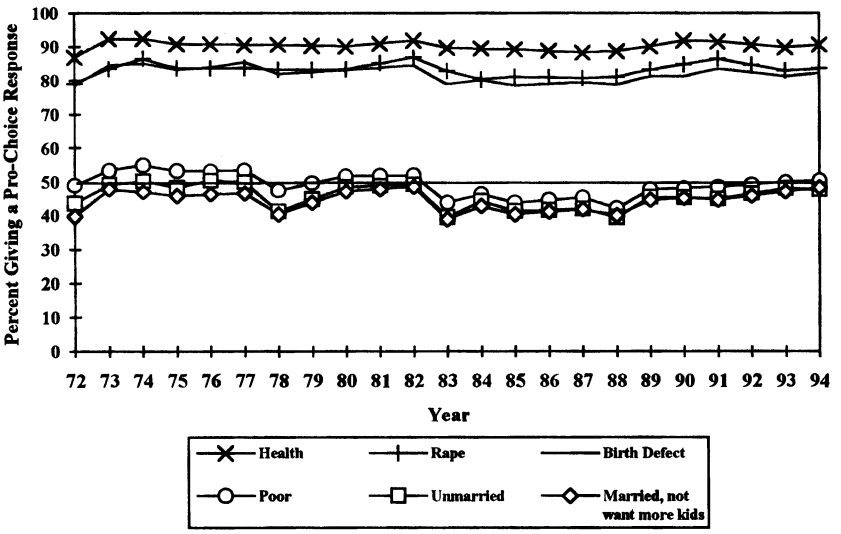
For almost every year since 1972, General Social Surveys (GSS) has asked respondents a fixed series of abortion questions, generating more than an ample dataset for longitudinal analyses.[7] Excluding minority oversamples used for other purposes, roughly 30,000 people were interviewed over the course of the series. Respondents were asked six questions probing their beliefs about a woman's right to a legal abortion under various circumstances. Scenarios included if the woman were raped, if pregnancy endangered the woman's health, if the baby were to be born with a serious defect, if the family were too poor to support another child, and if the woman, either single or married, did not want to bear the child.[8] Each response affirming a woman's right to an abortion was coded as pro-choice. The overall results for each of the questions are presented in Figure 4.

The series in Figure 4 reveal two important traits about abortion opinions. First, the responses to the six questions tend to cluster into two groups. On the aggregate, opinions on abortion for rapes, birth defects, and when the woman's health is in danger cluster into one group. Opinions on the more controversial uses of abortion—when the family cannot afford another child or when the woman, either single or married, does not want to bear the child—cluster into another group. The second, and perhaps more surprising feature of Figure 4, is that the marginals for the questions remain static over time. Aggregate opinions on abortion rights have remained essentially constant for over 20 years. One might argue that a slight downward trend exists for the three "controversial" questions, but the trend is at most slight. The consistency of the responses to all six abortion questions is atypical. Few, if any, other salient issues have remained so stable over the past 20 years. Opinions on social services, military spending, racial policies, and environmental protection, for example, have all experienced

[7]GSS did not conduct surveys in 1979, 1981, and 1992. Nor did GSS ask the abortion questions in 1986. Regrettably, these years must be interpolated for the series.

[8]The questions read: Please tell me whether or not *you* think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a *legal* abortion. . . a) If there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby? b) If she is married and does not want any more children? c) If the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy? d) If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children? e) If she became pregnant as a result of rape? f) If she is not married and does not want to marry the man?

Figure 4. Support for Abortion Rights Among Survey Respondents
Source: **General Social Surveys, 1972–94.**



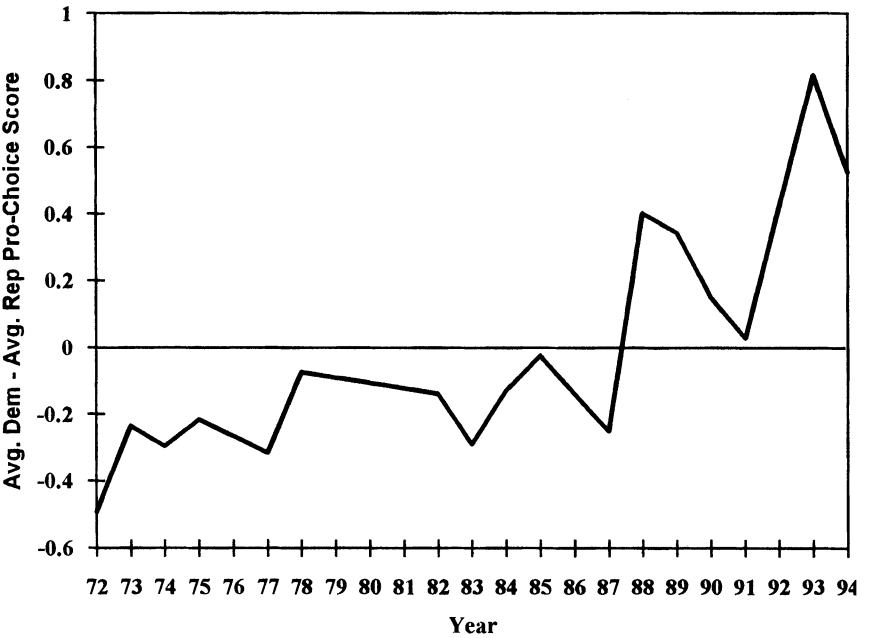
sizable swings over this same period (see, for example, Page and Shapiro 1992; Stimson 1991).

Though this stability of abortion attitudes is uncommon, it should not be surprising. Over the course of the CPS 1972–76 panel studies, only the issue of whether to legalize marijuana showed greater stability at the individual level (Converse and Markus 1979). As Converse and Markus note, given the particularly personal nature of the issue, one would not expect many people to change their minds on abortion. Unlike other issues, opinions on abortion are not particularly sensitive to new information or testimony from experts. The issue is moral, not technical. At the risk of making an ecological fallacy then, it appears that over time most people consistently hold onto their abortion beliefs. This result is important, because if it can be shown that the party masses change with respect to abortion, there is some basis for attributing the result to people changing their parties instead of their attitudes on abortion.

Analysis

Based upon the battery of six abortion questions, I created a simple, additive scale of each individual's commitment to a woman's right to an abortion. Each pro-choice response garnered a point on the scale, a nonre-

Figure 5. Difference Between Average Mass Republican and Democrat Pro-Choice Scores



sponse was worth half a point, and a pro-life response received no points. Thus, someone giving a pro-choice response to every question received a score of six, and someone giving a pro-life response to every question received a score of zero. Those who did not answer any of the six abortion questions were omitted. Though simple, the scale captures the ordinal, non-discrete nature of abortion attitudes and correlates near unity with a single-dimension (no rotation) factor score based on the six questions.

I then computed an average yearly abortion score for each of the two parties. Independents (those who classify themselves in the middle three groups of the survey's seven-point party scale) were not included in the results that follow. However, the inclusion of party-leaners did not appreciably change any of the proceeding results. As with the analysis of congressional partisans in the previous section, the primary focus of interest here is the *difference* between the two parties' abortion scores, which is shown over time in Figure 5. Negative values in the figure indicate years when Republicans were, on average, more pro-choice than Democrats, and positive values indicate years when Democrats were more pro-choice.

Perhaps surprising to some, the Republican masses were more pro-choice than Democrats over most of the series.[9] Only for the last few years have Democrats been the more pro-choice party, although the changes producing this result have been clearly underway for a much longer period. This finding, that Republicans were more pro-choice than Democrats up until the late 1980s, is especially odd in light of the findings in Figures 1–2, which showed congressional Democrats to be consistently more pro-choice than Republicans over this same time frame. It is indeed rare for the Republicans to be on one side of the Democrats at the elite level and at the other side of the Democrats at the mass level. Contradictions like this, particularly on such a salient and long-lasting issue, cannot continue forever. In this case, the contradiction eventually becomes resolved by the apparent shifts in party identification among the electorate.

How large is the shift among the masses? From Figure 5 it is impossible to tell. Over the entire series, the shift in the difference between the parties' means amounts to a full point on the seven-point abortion scale, but with the rise of independents and depending on the extremities of people switching parties, thousands of combinations could produce this result. Also, during the period examined, an entire generation passed away and was replaced by a new generation of survey respondents.[10] Without long-term panel data, it is impossible to know exactly how many people switched parties.

One way to get a better idea of the size in party shifts, though, is to study the party distribution within abortion attitude groupings, recognizing that the relative sizes of each group have not changed since 1972. In assigning survey respondents to pro-choice, moderate, and pro-life groups, I attempted to construct similarly-sized groups while taking advantage of natural and theoretical cut-points in the abortion scale. Considering each of these factors, I classified those who gave a pro-choice response to each of the six abortion questions as "pro-choice" (35% of the sample), those who gave three or more pro-choice responses as "moderate" (41%), and those who gave fewer than three pro-choice responses as "pro-life" (24%). These groupings, of course, are for analytical purposes and may not reflect the distribution of people who self-identify themselves as pro-choice, moderate, or pro-life.

Table 1 gives the relative partisan advantages for presidential vote and party identification over time for each group of abortion attitudes. The num-

[9]This finding is less surprising when one considers the traditional attachments of Southern Baptists and other pro-life groups to the Democratic party, as well as the visible pro-choice factions within the Republican party during the 1970s and early 1980s.

[10]Generational replacement by itself does not explain the findings in Figure 5. Breaking down the analysis by generational cohorts produces results similar to the results for the entire population, although some cohort groups change more dramatically than others.

Table 1. Partisan Advantage Among Abortion Attitudes by Year (Percent Responding Democrat Minus Percent Responding Republican)

	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992
Vote for President							
Pro-Life	5.3	−19.4	22.6	6.5	−28.4	−40.1	−18.6
Moderate	−6.8	−27.3	12.1	0.3	−26.3	−30.3	4.8
Pro-Choice	−10.9	−16.7	8.8	−1.8	−11.1	−8.7	29.7
Party Identification							
Pro-Life		34.8	26.8	16.0	16.8	−3.3	−17.7
Moderate		28.9	21.3	17.9	11.4	10.5	9.8
Pro-Choice		14.4	18.5	13.5	9.2	17.4	15.5

Source: General Social Surveys, 1972–94.

bers in the table indicate the difference between the percentage of the group identifying or voting with the Democratic party minus the percentage Republican, and so higher, positive numbers reflect a Democratic advantage. Consistent with the results in Figure 5, the patterns in Table 1 show pro-lifers to favor Democrats more than pro-choicers do at the beginning of the series, and that this relationship becomes reversed by the end of the series. Among those who recalled voting for president in 1968, most pro-lifers voted Democrat for Humphrey (by a five-point margin), while most pro-choicers voted Republican for Nixon (by an 11-point margin). Even in 1980, most pro-lifers chose Carter over Reagan, while pro-choicers slightly favored Reagan. A number of scholars have looked at the 1980 presidential elections and the years immediately following and concluded that abortion was not a factor in voting or party identification (see Granberg 1987; Granberg and Burlison 1983), but by focusing on a single election isolated in time, these scholars miss the importance of abortion during this period. Smith (1994) similarly does not find abortion to be significant in 1980, but by looking at subsequent elections he sees growing strength in the issue. By looking at an even longer time period, however, a slightly different story emerges. The early 1980s represent the middle stage of a party shift over abortion, when pro-life attitudes were changing from a positive correlation with the Democratic party to a negative correlation. The finding of a weak or nonexistent correlation in 1980 does not mean abortion was not a factor; it simply means that no party had a large advantage with a particular abortion attitude group at that time. By historical standards, this was an important departure from previous presidential elections, particularly the 1968 and 1976 elections, when each party did better among different abortion attitude groups.

The findings with respect to party identification in Table 1 are even more striking than the results for presidential vote. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, Democrats maintained a strong advantage over Republicans in party identification among all groups of abortion attitudes, but Democrats consistently performed best among pro-lifers and worst among pro-choicers. Even through 1984, the Democrats were strongest among pro-lifers (suggesting that changes in party identification lag behind changes in voting behavior). Since at least 1972, though, the Democrats' advantage among pro-lifers has steadily slipped, from a 35-point advantage in 1972 to an 18-point disadvantage in 1992. Like the population as a whole, the Democrats' advantage has also significantly and steadily slipped among moderates, though less dramatically. Only among the pro-choicers have the Democrats been able to maintain the advantage they held prior to *Roe* v. *Wade.*

It bears noting that no direct test of people changing their parties over abortion is made here. Though the evidence is strong, the long-term panel data required to definitively distinguish between people who change their party identification and those who change their attitudes on abortion simply do not exist. Also, I am not claiming that abortion is the only issue to have made an impact on the partisan composition of the electorate. It is, however, the only large-scale issue in which it has been shown that the party masses *switched* their preferences relative to each other in a gradual and predictable fashion. It is tempting to run a regression of various issues onto party identification to estimate the "strength" of abortion against other issues at certain times during the series, but that would be a mistake. Even if one could control for changes in question wordings over time for some of the issues, most issue preferences are endogenous to party identification (Campbell et al. 1960; Zaller 1992), and simultaneous equations bias would lead to wildly inaccurate or even misleading results (Page and Jones 1979). Regressions in this case could do worse than telling us nothing by providing estimates that are exactly opposite of the variables' "true" effects. Instead, simple statistical descriptions, couched with a degree of care obligatory to any analysis, may be the best that can be achieved.

Causality: Linking Elites with the Masses

The final step in showing an issue evolution is to demonstrate causality. The above results show that Democrats in both the Congress and the masses have become comparatively more pro-choice than Republicans. The task now is to establish that the two phenomena are linked: that changes in elites, resulting in a clearer party message, produce changes in the masses. Ideally, one could statistically demonstrate that a relationship between the two sets of actors exists and that the results meet some standard of signifi-

cance. A naive bivariate regression of mass party differences over abortion onto elite party differences would likely yield significant parameter estimates, but because both series clearly trend, the results could be spurious. Any of a thousand trending variables could produce similar results. Even when the trends are removed through differencing, however, the two series remain significantly correlated ($r = .40, p < .05$, one-tailed test). This result is encouraging, because it suggests that not only are the two parties growing further apart on abortion at both the elite and mass levels, but that larger shifts at the mass level generally coincide with larger shifts at the elite level.

First-order differences may not be the ideal procedure for these series, though, and with a longer time series it would be possible to model the process using a transfer function. This, in theory, would indicate the magnitude with which the masses respond to changes in elite cues and how these responses transpire over time. Such time series techniques first require identifying and estimating the temporal component of each series, however, and this process demands more from the data than can be provided with so few observations, some of which are interpolated. The paucity of data similarly cannot meet the demands of Granger causality tests, which could in principle test the statistical causal direction of the model (Freeman 1983). In short, all of the appropriate statistical techniques for testing the causal relationship between elites and masses require more than twenty-some observations can provide.

Logic, and some knowledge of time series data, build the strongest case for causality. Unlike much of economic data, which trend naturally over time, there is no *a priori* reason to suspect that the series for elite and mass party differences over abortion should move up or down. These series do not naturally trend. For most issues, one would not find any temporal pattern for the parties' polarization at either the elite or the mass levels, let alone both levels.

Why then should the two series for abortion trend upward? One interpretation might be that the masses are moving for some external reason and that responsive politicians seeking to maximize their votes follow along. But as the data have shown, the Republican masses were originally more pro-choice than the Democrats. If the members of Congress were truly following the lead of the masses on abortion, Democrats in Congress should have become *less* pro-choice, not more. Thus, members of Congress could not have been driven by the party masses. They may have been driven by advantages among party activists, but the masses as a whole cannot be attributed as the source of change. On the other hand, the masses move precisely in the direction of the partisan split in Congress over abortion, suggesting that, to the extent the mass and elite series are related, the causal

arrow must point from elites to masses. This finding conforms with Carmines and Stimson's (1989) evidence on the causal process with respect to race and is largely consistent with Hill and Hinton-Andersson's (1995) results on causality for policy liberalism.[11]

Conclusion

The evidence presented here is encouraging but not complete. Clearly, the two major parties in the United States are not the same parties that existed just over 20 years ago when it comes to abortion. Moreover, the process of this transformation closely follows the Carmines and Stimson model. The shift is gradual, with no single election precipitating the change, and the process appears to run from elites to masses. Those looking to understand party changes in the context of a classic realignment model are apt to overlook the process, since no one election seems to be key. Similarly, those looking at abortion during the middle of this process frequently miss the significance of the issue because they fail to notice how the issue's effect has changed from previous elections. By looking for earthquakes to describe changes in the political landscape, the effects of erosion and drift are easily overlooked, even though the end result can be at least as substantial.

Still, there is room for more research. Carmines and Stimson appropriately examine the role of party activists as part of the process in an issue evolution. Certainly similar work can be done with the party activists on abortion (for a start, see Brady and Schwartz 1995; Luker 1984). Research at the state level could also add further insight. Finally, the role of presidents and presidential campaigns needs to be addressed more fully. More than anyone, Ronald Reagan helped establish his party's signals on abortion. This cannot be dismissed as unimportant or inconsequential. Carter, many will recall, was by no means pro-choice, and this tended to weaken the party signals sent out by elites. Reagan and Bush, on the other hand, amplified the cues sent out by their party's elites. This study does not intend to negate the role of presidents but merely highlights the relationships between elites and masses more generally, taking advantage of the empirical opportunities derived from congressional voting records.

Manuscript submitted 28 September 1995.
Final manuscript received 12 April 1996.

[11]Hill and Hinton-Andersson find a reciprocal relationship between elites and masses generally, although in their model for party representation the relationship from elites to masses appears strongest. Furthermore, as the authors allude to in a footnote, sociocultural values may be more elite-driven than what they find for policy liberalism.

APPENDIX

Congressional Abortion Votes

Votes are listed by *Congressional Quarterly* roll call numbers.

House: **1973** H.183, 184. **1974** H.166. **1976** H.336, 340, 480. **1977** H.326, 466, 550, 595, 603, 675, 681, 690, 696, 701. **1978** H.381, 382, 584, 638, 790, 810, 815. **1979** H.270, 288, 312, 487, 550, 629, 630, 633. **1980** H.417, H.452. **1981** H.37, 171. **1983** H.168, 170, 334, 396. **1984** H.247. **1985** H.216, 246, 247. **1986** H.210. **1987** H.221. **1988** H.203, 307, 360. **1989** H.105, 205, 277, 278. **1990** H.201, 274, 342, 494, 523. **1991** H.109, 148, 149. **1992** H.115, 163, 458. **1993** H.60, 61, 64, 94, 97, 104, 106, 107, 108, 307, 309, 578, 580, 582. **1994** H.66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 157, 158, 159.

Senate: **1974** S.381. **1975** S.130. **1976** S.152, 342, 343, 520, 521. **1977** S.258, 259, 260, 262, 263, 336, 337, 582, 609, 614, 632, 633, 634. **1978** S.387, 413, 414. **1979** S.187, 188, 189, 223, 303, 304, 313, 351, 384, 404, 405. **1980** S.202, 441, 442, 447. **1981** S.132. **1982** S.340, 342, 343, 344. **1983** S.169, 335, 336, 339, 340, 341. **1984** S.202, 257. **1985** S.255, 274, 290, 291. **1986** S.263, 323. S.**1987** 289. **1988** S.8, 9, 232, 233, 266, 326, 327, 348, 359. **1989** S.186, 187, 188. **1990** S.68, 212, 252, 253, 266, 298. **1991** S.130, 131, 151, 177, 185. **1992** S.220. **1993** S.235, 290, 369, 370, 371, 372. **1994** S.112, 191.

REFERENCES

Bass, Harold F., Jr. 1991. "A Reader's Guide and Bibliography." In *The End of Realignment?,* ed. Byron E. Shafer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Brady, David, and Edward P. Schwartz. 1995. "Ideology and Interests in Congressional Voting: The Politics of Abortion in the U.S. Senate." *Public Choice* 84:25–48.

Burnham, Walter Dean. 1970. *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics.* New York: W. W. Norton.

Campbell, Angus. 1966. "A Classification of the Presidential Elections." In *Elections and the Political Order,* ed. Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Campbell, Angus, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter.* New York: Wiley.

Campbell, Bruce A., and Richard J. Trilling, eds. 1980. *Realignment in American Politics: Toward a Theory.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1980. "The Two Faces of Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 74:78–91.

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1981. "Issue Evolution, Population Replacement, and Normal Partisan Change." *American Political Science Review* 75:107–18.

Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson. 1989. *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Clubb, Jerome M., William H. Flanigan, and Nancy H. Zingale. 1980. *Partisan Realignment: Voters, Parties, and Government in American History.* Beverly Hills: Sage.

Converse, Philip E. 1963. "A Major Political Realignment in the South?" In *Change in the Contemporary South,* ed. Allan P. Sindler. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Converse, Philip, and Gregory Markus. 1979. "*Plus ca Change . . .* The New CPS Panel Study." *American Political Science Review* 73:32–49.

Dalton, Russell J., Scott Flanagan, and Paul Allen Beck, eds. 1984. *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Realignment or Dealignment?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Freeman, John R. 1983. "Granger Causality and the Time Series Analysis of Political Relationships." *American Journal of Political Science* 27:325–55.

Granberg, Donald. 1987. "The Abortion Issue in the 1984 Elections." *Family Planning Perspectives* 19:59–62.

Granberg, Donald, and James Burlison. 1983. "The Abortion Issue in the 1980 Elections." *Family Planning Perspectives* 15:231–8.

Hill, Kim Quaile, and Angela Hinton-Andersson. 1995. "Pathways of Representation: A Causal Analysis of Public Opinion-Public Policy Linkages." *American Journal of Political Science* 39:924–35.

Key, V. O., Jr. 1955. "A Theory of Critical Elections." *Journal of Politics* 17:3–18.

Key, V. O., Jr. 1959. "Secular Realignment and the Party System." *Journal of Politics* 21: 3–18.

Ladd, Everett Carll. 1991. "Like Waiting for Godot: The Uselessness of 'Realignment' for Understanding Change in Contemporary American Politics." In *The End of Realignment?* ed. Byron E. Shafer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Luker, Kristin. 1984. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Page, Benjamin I., and Calvin C. Jones. 1979. "Reciprocal Effects of Policy Preferences, Party Loyalties and the Vote." *American Political Science Review* 73:1071–89.

Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Petrocik, John R. 1987. "Realignment: New Party Coalitions and the Nationalization of the South." *Journal of Politics* 49:347–75.

Rohde, David W. 1991. *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shafer, Byron E. 1991. "The Notion of an Electoral Order: The Structure of Electoral Politics at the Accession of George Bush." In *The End of Realignment?,* ed. Byron E. Shafer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Silbey, Joel H. 1991. "Beyond Realignment and Realignment Theory: American Political Eras, 1789–1989." In *The End of Realignment?,* ed. Byron E. Shafer. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Smith, Kevin B. 1994. "Abortion Attitudes and Vote Choice in the 1984 and 1988 Presidential Elections." *American Politics Quarterly* 22:354–69.

Stimson, James A. 1991. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings.* Boulder, CO: Westview.

Sundquist, James L. [1973] 1983. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States.* Revised. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Wolfinger, Raymond E., and Robert B. Arseneau. 1978. "Partisan Change in the South, 1952–1972." In *Political Parties: Development and Decay,* ed. Louis Maisel and Joseph Cooper. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion.* New York: Cambridge University Press.