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Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate

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Scholars have long debated the individual-level relationship between partisanship and policy preferences. We argue that partisanship and issue attitudes cause changes in each other, but the pattern of influence varies systematically. Issue-based change in party identification should occur among individuals who are aware of party differences on an issue and find that issue to be salient. Individuals who are aware of party differences, but do not attach importance to the issue, should evidence party-based issue change. Those lacking awareness of party differences on an issue should show neither effect. We test our account by examining individuals' party identifications and their attitudes on abortion, government spending and provision of services, and government help for African Americans using the 1992-94-96 National Election Study panel study, finding strong support for our argument. We discuss the implications of our findings both for the microlevel study of party identification and the macrolevel analysis of partisan change.

The relationship between citizens' party loyalties and their orientations toward policy issues and other political objects has received considerable attention from political scientists. Some scholars contend that party identification is a deeply rooted psychological attachment (Campbell et al. 1960; Miller and Shanks 1996) or social identity (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002) that shapes policy preferences, but is largely exogenous to them. Others suggest that partisanship is largely an informational short cut (Downs 1957) comprised of a "running tally" of other political attitudes and evaluations (e.g., Achen 1992; Fiorina 1981). Though this discussion has spanned half a century and includes several seminal works, the debate continues.

In fact, the debate has intensified in recent years. The conventional wisdom about party identification developed over the course of the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s was that it was weakening (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1979; Norpoth and Rusk 1982), largely endogenous to other political evaluations (Fiorina 1981; Page and Jones 1979),

and increasingly irrelevant to American political behavior (Burnham 1970; Wattenberg 1984, 1998). However, recent work contends that mass partisanship has strengthened (Hetherington 2001), exerts a strong and growing impact on vote choice (Bartels 2000), is largely exogenous to short-term political evaluations (Green and Palmquist 1990; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), and plays a fundamental role in shaping other political evaluations (Bartels 2002; Miller and Shanks 1996).

Recent scholarship also reports a growing aggregate-level relationship between party identification and citizens' ideological orientations and issue positions (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Jacobson 2000; Levendusky 2005; Putz 2002). This development has made the question of what causes what—or, specifically, have individuals changed their policy preferences and ideologies in light of their partisanship, or have they changed their party ties to fit with their policy attitudes, or both?—increasingly relevant. Some scholars argue that the increasing connection between party identification

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and ideological orientations is “due almost entirely to respondents bringing their party identification into line with their prior ideological preference” (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 645), but others see partisanship playing a causal role. In particular, Layman and Carsey (2002) suggest that “conflict extension” in the electorate—the growing polarization of Democratic and Republican identifiers on distinct social welfare, racial, and cultural policy agendas—results from individuals changing their policy attitudes based on their party loyalties in response to elite-level party polarization. Thus, while the debate over the microlevel relationship between party identification and policy attitudes is itself important, it also has implications for our understanding of contemporary macrolevel partisan change.

In this article, we seek to move the microlevel discussion away from the relatively fruitless argument about whether party identification drives policy preferences or policy preferences drive party identification and toward a more productive discussion about the circumstances under which each of these processes should occur. We contend that partisanship and issue attitudes both cause changes in the other. However, the degree to which each orientation exerts a causal influence varies systematically as a function of the importance individuals attach to an issue and the degree to which they are aware of partisan differences on the issue. Specifically, issue-based changes in party identification should occur only among those individuals who are aware of differences between the political parties on an issue and find that issue to be important. Individuals who are aware of party differences on an issue but do not attach particular importance to it should bring their attitudes on it into line with their party ties. Those lacking awareness of partisan differences on an issue should show evidence of neither effect.

We test this argument by examining the relationship between party identification and attitudes toward policy issues in the three-wave panel study conducted by the National Election Study (NES) in 1992, 1994, and 1996. The analysis focuses on three policy issues—government spending and provision of services, government responsibility to help African Americans, and abortion—that are central to the three policy agendas associated with the recent partisan “conflict extension” (Layman and Carsey 2002). The findings provide strong support for our account of the microlevel relationship between party identification and policy attitudes. We discuss the implications of our findings for both the microlevel study of partisanship and macrolevel partisan change in the conclusion.

Microlevel Party Identification and Policy Attitudes

A vast literature examines citizens’ party identifications and their connections to other political orientations.¹ The predominant view of party identification in the early years of voting behavior research was provided by the social-psychological or “Michigan” model of electoral choice. Formulated by Campbell et al., the Michigan model emphasizes “the [prominent] role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes toward political objects” (1960, 135). For Campbell et al. (1960) and the work that has adopted their perspective (e.g., Goldberg 1966; Kelley and Mirer 1974; Miller and Shanks 1996), party identification is an “unmoved mover:” a deeply held psychological attachment that is (1) largely unchanging over time even as events change, and (2) a filter through which citizens view and interpret new political information. From this perspective, party identification shapes policy preferences and other political attitudes, but is largely unchanged by them.

This view has been challenged strongly by work contending that party identification is not “unmoved,” but instead is shaped by other political attitudes and evaluations. This argument, often called the “revisionist” perspective, is developed most fully in Fiorina’s (1981) portrayal of party identification as a “running tally” of citizen evaluations of other political objects and events and is formalized by Achen’s (1992) conceptualization of partisanship as a Bayesian updating, or learning, process. Building on Downs’ (1957; see also Key 1966) treatment of party preference as an information shortcut based on which party’s ideological and policy stands generally tend to be closest to those of the citizen, the revisionist perspective does not view party identification as a psychological or group attachment independent of citizens’ evaluations of contemporary politics. Rather, partisanship represents a summary of the political evaluations individuals have formed over time. While party identification might be quite stable from one election to the next, it also may change over time in response to policy preferences, candidate evaluations, evaluations of party performance, and even voting decisions (Brody and Rothenberg 1988; Fiorina 1981; Franklin 1984; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Jackson 1975; Page and Jones 1979; Markus and Converse 1979).

The revisionist view clearly supports the idea that individuals might change their party loyalties in response to their attitudes on policy issues, particularly the salient,

¹ See Fiorina (2002) for a recent review.

often emotional, and polarizing issues associated with periods of partisan change. While this stream of research acknowledges the possibility of some long-term component to party identification stemming from childhood socialization (Achen 2002; Fiorina 1981), that partisanship may shape expectations of future party performance (Fiorina 1981), or that party identification may cause policy preferences as well as be caused by them (Franklin 1984; Jackson 1975; Markus and Converse 1979; Page and Jones 1979), its general tenor is that partisanship is more a summary of other political attitudes than a shaper of them. Fiorina characterizes the revisionist view of party identification as “an evolving indicator of an individual’s relationship to the parties” (2002, 98). As Bartels notes, such a “running tally may be a convenient accounting device, but it is not a moving force in politics” (2002, 119). That, it seems to us, should be particularly true when the attitudes in question are deep-seated views on powerful issues related to partisan change, such as those we consider here.

In response to the revisionist view, recent work suggests that party identification may not be far from the concept laid out in *The American Voter*. In addition to the defenses by Miller (Miller 1991; Miller and Shanks 1996), the critique of the revisionist perspective on party identification has been most fully developed in the work of Green and his colleagues who show that, when random measurement error is corrected, party identification is almost entirely exogenous in the short-run to issue, candidate, and performance evaluations (Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). They reject Achen’s (1992) conceptualization of party identification as a Bayesian updating process (Gerber and Green 1998), suggesting that it is incompatible with the reality of partisan stability. Instead, they argue that party ties represent an attachment to a group similar to religious identification (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). In short, this work reaffirms the view of partisanship as a deeply rooted social identity that is independent of other political evaluations and to which most citizens hold firm.

Green and colleagues do depart from one key component of the Michigan perspective. They argue that Democratic and Republican identifiers update their political evaluations in similar ways, thus rejecting the idea that party identification serves as a perceptual screen which shapes the evaluation of new political information (Gerber and Green 1999; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002).² However, other recent work does contend that partisanship causes change in other political

evaluations. Zaller (1992), for example, contends that partisan predispositions regulate the flow of information from political elites to the mass public and shows that individuals often bring their own policy attitudes into line with those of their party’s leaders. Bartels (2002) offers even stronger support for the Michigan model, providing clear evidence of the effect of party identification in shaping political evaluations while arguing that the evidence Gerber and Green (1999) present of unbiased updating actually confirms that there is a partisan bias. Meanwhile, evidence on the recent strengthening of party identification and its impact on vote choice (Bartels 2000; Hetherington 2001) further highlights the role of partisanship as a causal force.

Finally, while the Michigan model emphasizes the idea that party identification is a “durable attachment not readily disturbed by passing events and personalities” (Campbell et al. 1960, 151), it does not rule out the possibility of issue-based change in party loyalties. In a passage acknowledging the possibility of party realignment, Campbell et al. suggest that when individuals feel particularly strongly about issues on which they differ with their party, “the pressure [may be] intense enough [that] a stable partisan identification may actually be changed” (1960, 135). The political attitudes most likely to create enough “pressure” that individuals may shift their party loyalties are deeply held attitudes on the emotional and polarizing issues associated with partisan change.³ Thus, while party identification may be the causal force in its relationship with most policy preferences, attitudes toward issues falling along the central fault lines that structure party conflict may lead to shifts in party ties for some citizens.

Toward a Broader Account of Party and Issue Change

We believe the microlevel literature on party identification supports this qualified Michigan model perspective. We

for example, “When people feel a sense of belonging to a given social group, they absorb the doctrinal positions that the group advocates” (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, 4)—suggests that party identification should shape policy attitudes, but they do not directly examine this.

³While Green, Palmquist, and Schickler emphasize party identification’s lack of responsiveness to policy attitudes and other political evaluations, they do acknowledge the possibility of issue-based changes in party ties in special circumstances (2002, 106–07, 158–61). However, they argue that a more likely explanation for partisan change is that individuals’ images of the social group identity of the parties change. Of course, it is possible that the issues associated with party transformations may help to change the social images of the parties for many citizens.

²It is unclear whether this also applies to policy attitudes. Their evidence for a lack of partisan bias in citizens’ updating processes focuses on evaluations of party performance and objective events, and not on issue positions. Meanwhile, some of their language—

are convinced of the stability of partisanship and its ability to color other political perceptions. However, deeply held views on issues may result in some issue-based change in party identification. In short, party identification is a prime mover of other political attitudes under typical conditions, but it is not an unmoved mover in all circumstances.

As a result, we argue that both party-based issue change and issue-based party change among individuals likely occurs, particularly on issues that clearly divide the parties. When party leaders, candidates, and platforms take distinct stands on these issues, it signals to citizens which views on these issues go with each party. This creates pressure for citizens to bring their party identification and views on these issues closer together. Some citizens will do so by altering their party affiliations, while others may move their issue positions closer to the stands of their party's leaders and platforms.

The key theoretical question is who should change their party identifications and who should change their issue preferences? The answer rests on two individual-level factors: awareness of party differences on the issue and the salience of that issue. In order for individuals to change either their party identifications or their attitudes on an issue in response to each other, they must first recognize that there are differences between the parties' stands on the issue. Past research has established that for there to be a relationship between policy issues and either aggregate partisan change (Carmines and Stimson 1989; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1987; Sundquist 1983) or individual voting behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Page and Brody 1972), parties and candidates have to take distinct positions on the issues and citizens have to be aware of these party differences. Individuals who do not recognize that the parties have taken divergent stands on an issue should not perceive any reason to bring their partisanship and their issue positions closer together, so they should have no cause to change either.

For individuals who are aware of party differences on an issue, the salience of the issue is critical. The literature on aggregate party change suggests that in order for issues to produce major electoral transformations, they must be highly salient to many, perhaps most, citizens (Carmines 1991; Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1983). At the individual level, the literature on issue voting indicates that the electoral impact of particular issues is greatest for those individuals who find them to be particularly salient (Brody and Page 1972; RePass 1971), while the idea of "issue publics" suggests that individuals who place considerable importance on a certain issue are likely to structure their political choices around that issue (e.g., Converse 1964; Krosnick 1990). Given the centrality and stability of party

identification, the only individuals who should change their partisanship on the basis of their views on issues are those who find the issues to be particularly salient. In contrast, those who are aware of party differences on an issue, but do not find the issue to be especially important, should respond by adjusting their views on that issue to be more inline with their party identification.

Assessing the Argument

We evaluate our account of the causal relationship between party identification and policy attitudes by examining attitudes on three issues: abortion, government spending and provision of services, and government's responsibility to help improve the social and economic position of African Americans.⁴ We examine these issues for three reasons. First, each one taps one of the three domestic issue agendas—cultural, social welfare, and racial—that lie at the heart of debate on contemporary partisan change and, particularly, the claim of "conflict extension" in party politics (Layman and Carsey 2002). In recent decades, the degree of party polarization at nearly all levels of politics on all three of these dimensions has either grown or remained stable and high: in

⁴The wording of the abortion question is: "There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? (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." The wording of the government services and spending question is: "Some people think the government should provide fewer services even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" The wording of the question on government help for blacks is: "Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks. (Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.) Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. (Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7.) And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about it?" In order to make the direction and scaling of each of these issue attitudes comparable to the seven-point party identification scale (ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican), we have coded each one to range from 1 for the most liberal position to 7 for the most conservative position.

the roll-call votes of Democratic and Republican members of Congress (Adams 1997; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Layman 2001; Rohde 1991), in the attitudes of both grassroots-level party activists and delegates to the parties' national conventions (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Carmines and Woods 2002; Saunders and Abramowitz 2004), and in the positions of the parties' mass electoral coalitions (Adams 1997; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Layman and Carsey 2002). That the relationship between citizens' party ties and their attitudes on these issues has changed recently makes these issues quite useful for assessing the extent to which party identification and policy preferences cause changes in each other. It also means that focusing on these issues should allow our microlevel analysis to shed light on the macrolevel partisan change process.

Second, because these issues have been associated with significant change in party politics, they provide a rigorous test of the idea that partisanship shapes issue positions for some people. The issues central to partisan change are supposed to be ones that generate highly emotional reactions from many citizens and on which individuals hold relatively strong views (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Sundquist 1983). Thus, citizens' attitudes on these issues are far more stable and resistant to external political forces than are those on most other political issues (Converse and Markus 1979). For example, Adams argues that "given the particularly personal nature of the issue, one would not expect many people to change their minds on abortion" (1997, 729). Carmines and Stimson (1980, 1989), meanwhile, identify government efforts to ensure equality for African Americans as a prototypical easily understood and emotion-laden issue. Government services and spending may not seem to be quite as "personal" or "emotional," but it is central to the social welfare issue agenda that was at the heart of the New Deal realignment and that still remains a key source of partisan division.

Third, these three issues are the only domestic issues that are included in each wave of the 1992-94-96 panel and for which our measures of salience and awareness of party differences are available. We measure awareness of party differences with the questions in the 1996 wave of the panel study that asked respondents to place the Democratic and Republican parties (in the case of government services and abortion) or their presidential candidates (in the case of government help for blacks) on the NES scales for these issues. Respondents are classified as being aware of party differences if they place the Republican party to the right of the Democratic party or Bob Dole to the right of Bill Clinton on the

issue.⁵ Our measure of salience is based on respondents' answers to questions in the 1996 NES that asked "How important was this issue to you?" for each of these three issues.⁶ Respondents who said that the issue was either "very important" or "extremely important" to them are classified as finding the issue to be salient.⁷ Respondents who said that the issue was either "somewhat important," "not too important," or "not important at all" are coded as not viewing the issue as salient. Based on these measures, we classify panel respondents as either not aware of party differences on the issue, aware of party differences but not viewing the issue as salient, or aware of party differences and finding the issue to be salient.⁸

The most direct way to determine whether individuals change their party identifications in response to their attitudes on an issue or change their issue attitudes in

⁵The 1996 NES did not ask respondents to place the two parties, only their candidates, on the help for blacks issue. However, in other work (Layman and Carsey 2002, footnote 4), we show that when NES respondents are asked to place both the parties and their presidential candidates on an issue, the relationship between party and candidate placements is very strong. With this measure, the following percentages of panel respondents are aware of party differences on the three issues: 76.1 on government services, 62.4 on abortion, and 67.2 on help for blacks.

⁶Ideally, we would like to measure the salience of and awareness of party differences on issues in the first wave of the panel rather than in the last wave. However, we cannot measure salience and awareness in 1992 for two reasons. First, and most importantly, the 1992 NES did not ask respondents to place the parties or their candidates on the issue of government help for blacks, or any racial issues. Second, the 1992 NES did not include the closed-ended questions on the importance of issues. We did conduct a separate analysis for the abortion issue in which we measured the salience of abortion with the open-ended questions in the 1992 NES about "the most important problems facing the country" and about respondents' likes and dislikes of the parties and their candidates (coding respondents as finding abortion to be important if they mentioned something related to the issue at least once in response to these questions). We also measured awareness of party differences on abortion in 1992 with respondents' placements of George Bush and Bill Clinton on the abortion scale. This analysis, using salience and awareness measures from 1992, produced results that were very similar to those shown here, and provided a nearly identical picture of the conditional effect of salience and awareness of party differences on the reciprocal relationship between party identification and abortion attitudes.

⁷With this measure of salience, we classify the following percentages of panel respondents as finding the three issues to be salient: 63.8% on government services, 68.5% on abortion, and 49.8% on help for blacks.

⁸On abortion, 37.6% of panel respondents are in the not aware category, 18.2% are in the aware/not salient group, and 44.2% are in the aware and salient group. On government services, 24.0% are not aware, 23.2% are in the aware/not salient group, and 52.9% are in the aware and salient category. On help for blacks, 35.4% are not aware, 30.1% are in the aware/not salient group, and 34.5% are in the aware and salient group.

response to their party affiliations is to use panel data to estimate the following structural equation model:

$$\text{Issue}_{it} = \alpha_1 + \lambda_1 \text{Issue}_{it-1} + \beta_1 \text{Party ID}_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{1it} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Party ID}_{it} = \alpha_2 + \lambda_2 \text{Party ID}_{it-1} + \beta_2 \text{Issue}_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{2it} \quad (2)$$

This extends Bartels' (2002) model of the influence of partisanship on citizens' updating of their political evaluations to propose "cross-lagged" effects between issue attitudes and party identification over time (e.g., Finkel 1995). The parameters connecting each variable at time t to its own previous value at time $t-1$, labeled λ_1 and λ_2 , capture the expected individual-level stability in a particular issue attitude and partisanship, respectively, over time. The parameter linking party identification at $t-1$ to issue attitude at t , labeled β_1 , captures the potential influence of previously held party attachment on current attitude on that issue. Since Equation (1) already controls for the effect of previous issue attitude on current issue attitude, β_1 can be viewed as measuring the impact of previous party identification on *change* in attitudes on that issue from $t-1$ to t . Similarly, the parameter β_2 in Equation (2) captures the influence of previous issue attitude on change in party identification from $t-1$ to t .

We model the relationship between issue attitudes and partisanship as reciprocal, but not simultaneous, for two reasons. First, unlike much of the individual-level party identification literature, we are less interested in whether partisanship is exogenous or endogenous to issue attitudes at a single point in time, and more interested in the effect of party identification on changes over time in issue attitudes and of issue attitudes on changes over time in party ties. The cross-lagged-effects model is more appropriate than a model of contemporaneous effects for examining this.⁹ Second, Finkel (1995) demonstrates that the cross-lagged model's applicability is not limited to discrete time processes of change: for example, party identification in 1992 affects change in issue attitudes between 1992 and 1994. The model remains appropriate even if we assume that the reciprocal effects between variables occur continuously over time.¹⁰ Under these circumstances, the

⁹Empirically, it turns out that the choice of a cross-lagged-effects model over a simultaneous-effects model is not of much consequence. We also estimated all of our models with contemporaneous effects between party identification and issue attitude in 1994 and 1996 (using the previous panel wave's value of the dependent variable as the instrumental variable in each equation), and the reciprocal effects between partisanship and policy preferences are very similar to the cross-lagged effects presented here.

¹⁰If the relationship between variables is continuous over time, then, if panel waves are equally spaced, the cross-lagged effects between

cross-lagged model "tends not to be misleading about the direction of causal influence" (Dwyer 1983, 352). We estimate this model using data from the three-wave panel study conducted by the National Election Studies (NES) in 1992, 1994, and 1996.¹¹

Issue Conversion and Party Conversion in the Mass Electorate

Having a three-wave panel allows us to estimate our model while correcting for measurement error in both party identification and each issue attitude. Failure to correct for such measurement error can lead to the appearance of changes in attitudes or orientations when no real change has occurred. Scholars report that both party identification (Green and Palmquist 1990) and issue attitudes (Krosnick 1991) are considerably more stable when measurement error is corrected than they appear to be when no corrections are made. The standard assumptions for the measurement errors and the structural disturbance terms are that the covariances between the measurement errors and the latent variables and between the measurement errors and the disturbance terms are all zero (Bollen 1989b; Finkel 1995). Because we have only one observed indicator for party identification and each issue attitude available in all three waves of the panel study, additional constraints are required for identification, and we employ a standard set of restrictions proposed by Wiley and Wiley (1970). We assume that the error variances of observed party identification are equal over time, that the measurement errors are uncorrelated with each other, and that the paths from latent party identification to observed party identification and from latent issue attitude to observed

different variables and the stability coefficients should be equal across panel waves (Finkel 1995). So, we restrict the cross-lagged effects between issue and party identification and the stability coefficients to be equal across the periods from 1992 to 1994 and from 1994 to 1996. We also estimated models that relaxed this equality assumption and the results are very similar to those presented here.

¹¹We use the 1992-1994-1996 panel study for three main reasons. First, it covers a period of time during which the level of party polarization on all three issues was sizeable and growing. The level of party polarization was 1.19 in 1992 and 1.44 in 1996 on the seven-point government services scale, .28 in 1992 and .37 in 1996 on the four-point abortion scale, and .84 in 1992 and 1.10 in 1996 on the seven-point help for blacks scale. Second, it has three waves of data, which allows us to correct for measurement error in party identification and issue attitude. Third, the other panel studies conducted by NES do not contain sufficient information to estimate our models for issues tapping all three domestic policy cleavages (e.g. there is no abortion question in the 1974 wave of the 1972-1974-1976 NES panel study).

issue attitude are all equal to one.¹² The latter constraint also ensures that latent party identification and issue attitudes have the same scales as their observed indicators (all ranging from 1, for most liberal or Democratic, to 7, for most conservative or Republican).¹³

The structural portion of the model reflects our cross-lagged model presented in Equations (1) and (2) using measures of party identification and each issue attitude at three points in time. This allows us to estimate the stability of partisanship and issue preferences as well as how each affects change in the other over time.¹⁴ We estimate the model separately for each of the three issue attitudes considered here.

Table 1 presents the estimates of the stability coefficients and cross-lagged effects in our models.¹⁵ Like past

¹²Green and Palmquist (1990, 878–79) impose these same restrictions. Wiley and Wiley (1970) do propose a single-indicator measurement model with correlated measurement errors over time. However, Palmquist and Green (1992; see also Achen 1983) show that the correlated-error, single-indicator model produces anomalous and unreliable results with only three waves of data. Our own estimation of such models with the 1992–94–96 NES panel confirms such a conclusion.

The assumption of noncorrelated measurement errors, while methodologically necessary, may have substantive implications. For example, positively correlated measurement errors for an issue attitude over time would upwardly bias our estimate of stability and reduce the possibility of party identification effecting change in it. However, if the stability of issue attitudes (or party identification) is overestimated, that makes it more, not less, difficult to find reciprocal effects between party identification and issue attitudes. As a check, we estimated models with multiple observed indicators of cultural issue attitudes (attitudes toward abortion, women's rights, and school prayer), social welfare issue attitudes (attitudes toward government services, government ensuring jobs and a good standard of living, and government providing health insurance), and racial issues (government help for blacks and preferential hiring and promotion of African Americans) both with and without correlated measurement errors over time. All results were very similar to those shown in Table 1. We focus only on abortion, government services, and help for blacks, and not general cultural, social welfare, and racial attitudes, largely to make our measures of policy attitudes comparable to that for partisanship, for which only one indicator is available.

¹³In order to identify the model, we also set the variance of all of the disturbance terms to one.

¹⁴Our statistical models also allow several demographic control variables—race (whites vs. nonwhites), gender, southern residence, age, income, education, and religious affiliation (all measured in 1992)—to affect change in both party identification and issue attitudes between 1992 and 1994 and 1994 and 1996. Religious affiliation is measured through dummy variables for the five major religious traditions in the United States (evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, black Protestant, Catholic, Jewish) and for secular (nonreligious) people. The assignment of affiliations to traditions followed coding schemes in the recent religion and politics literature (see Layman 2001).

¹⁵All analyses are based on only those 597 individuals who responded to all three waves of the panel study. For that set of

research, we find that when we correct for measurement error, party identification is highly stable over time. Its stability coefficients are greater than .9, indicating very little change in individuals' party identifications from one election year to the next. Also similar to past research (Converse and Markus 1979), we find that abortion attitudes are more stable over time than are attitudes toward other issues, such as government services and spending and government help for blacks. In fact, the unstandardized and standardized stability coefficients suggest that abortion attitudes are nearly as stable over time as is partisanship. However, attitudes toward all three issues are relatively durable, with stability coefficients of .7 or greater for each issue from one election year to the next.

Despite the enduring character of both party identification and policy attitudes, we do find that they have statistically significant reciprocal effects on each other over time. On all three issues, individuals with conservative attitudes in 1992 (1994) were more likely than individuals with liberal views to move their party identification in a Republican direction between 1992 and 1994 (1994 and 1996). At the same time, we also find that Republicans in 1992 (1994) were more likely than Democrats to convert to more conservative stands on all three issues between 1992 and 1994 (1994 and 1996). Even on issues as divisive and emotion-laden as abortion and racial equality, there is evidence of individuals bringing their attitudes into line with their party ties.¹⁶

Although statistically significant, none of the cross-lagged effects appears to be particularly large. A one-unit increase in identification with the Republican party leads to increases in conservatism (on seven-point scales) of .08 on abortion, .11 on government services and spending, and .07 on government aid to blacks. On average, strong Republicans (7 on the party-identification scale) convert in a conservative direction by .48 scale points more on

panel respondents, our analyses do not exclude missing values. We estimate our models using Amos 4.0, which computes full-information-maximum likelihood (FIML) estimates even in the presence of missing data (Andersen 1957). Wothke and Arbuckle (1996) describe the FIML procedure used by Amos and show that the estimates produced by it are more consistent and efficient than those produced by methods using pairwise or listwise deletion of missing observations.

¹⁶In fact, we estimated our model for all 16 of the policy issues that were asked about in each wave of the 1992–94–96 panel study. Party identification had a statistically significant effect on change in policy attitude for 15 of those 16 issues (prayer in the public schools was the one exception). Policy attitude had a statistically significant effect on change in party identification for 14 of the 16 issues (women's rights and defense spending were the two exceptions). We do not include these results because measures of awareness of party differences and issue salience are not available, but they are available from the authors upon request.

TABLE 1 Estimates of Measurement and Structural Coefficients in the Models of Cross-Lagged Effects Between Party Identification and Issue Attitudes

	Abortion	Govt. Services	Help for Blacks
<i>Factor Loadings^a</i>			
Latent Party ID → Observed Party ID			
1992	1.00 (.94)	1.00 (.93)	1.00 (.94)
1994	1.00 (.94)	1.00 (.93)	1.00 (.94)
1996	1.00 (.94)	1.00 (.93)	1.00 (.94)
Latent Issue Attitude → Observed Issue Attitude			
1992	1.00 (.90)	1.00 (.75)	1.00 (.83)
1994	1.00 (.90)	1.00 (.73)	1.00 (.81)
1996	1.00 (.90)	1.00 (.66)	1.00 (.77)
<i>Stabilities of Latent Variables^b</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Party ID	.92 (.89/.02)	.91 (.90/.02)	.92 (.90/.02)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Party ID	.92 (.94/.02)	.91 (.94/.02)	.92 (.95/.02)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Issue Attitude	.89 (.92/.03)	.70 (.75/.07)	.77 (.85/.05)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Issue Attitude	.89 (.89/.03)	.70 (.85/.07)	.77 (.87/.05)
<i>Cross-Lagged Effects Between Latent Variables^b</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Issue Attitude	.08 (.08/.02)	.11 (.19/.02)	.07 (.10/.02)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Issue Attitude	.08 (.08/.02)	.11 (.24/.02)	.07 (.12/.02)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Party ID	.05 (.05/.02)	.13 (.08/.03)	.06 (.04/.02)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Party ID	.05 (.05/.02)	.13 (.07/.03)	.06 (.04/.02)
<i>Summary Statistics (N = 597)</i>			
χ^2 (df = 57)	294.30	291.64	275.04
Δ_1^c/Δ_2^d	.98/.98	.98/.99	.98/.99
ρ_1^e/ρ_2^f	.94/.95	.94/.95	.95/.96

Source: 1992-1994-1996 National Election Study Panel.

Note: The entries are unstandardized coefficients. The numbers in parentheses are: standardized coefficients/standard errors. All observed indicators range from 1 (most liberal) to 7 (most conservative). The models were estimated using full information maximum likelihood estimation with missing values.

^aThe loadings of the latent variables on the observed indicators are all constrained to be equal to one.

^bStabilities and cross-lagged effects for pairs of variables in 1992 and 1994 and the same pair of variables in 1994 and 1996 are constrained to be equal to each other.

^cBentler and Bonett's (1980) normed fit index.

^dBollen's (1989a) incremental fit index.

^eBollen's (1986) relative fit index.

^fBentler and Bonett's (1980) non-normed fit index.

All factor loadings, regression weights, and χ^2 tests are significant at $p < .05$.

abortion, .66 scale points more on government services, and .42 scale points more on help for blacks than do strong Democrats (one on the party identification scale) over a two-year period. Meanwhile, a one-unit increase in opposition to abortion leads to an increase in Republican identification of .05 on the seven-point partisanship scale. So, individuals preferring that abortion never be allowed by law (seven on the abortion scale) only increase their identification with the GOP by .30 points more than do individuals who prefer that abortion always be allowed (one on the scale). One-unit increases in conservative attitudes on government services and help for blacks lead

to increases in Republican ties of .13 and .06, respectively. The difference in the growth of GOP ties between individuals with the most conservative and most liberal positions on these issues is .78 on government services and .36 on assistance to African Americans.

Of course, we would not expect these effects to be large. Party identification and attitudes toward some of the major policy cleavages in American politics should be, relatively speaking, deeply held and stable. Past research (e.g., Converse and Markus 1979) shows that partisanship and attitudes toward some of the policy issues examined here are more stable than most other political

orientations, and the stability coefficients in our models demonstrate the durable nature of party ties and these issue attitudes. It would be quite surprising if these orientations changed a great deal over a two-year period, particularly when random measurement error has been removed. Also, our estimates are for consecutive periods of only two years. Over a longer period, they represent more substantial changes in both party identification and policy attitudes.

Moreover, we are not suggesting that a critical-election realignment on these policy issues occurred during the period from 1992 to 1996. Rather, just as Carmines and Stimson (1989) argued about racial issues and Adams (1997) argued about abortion, we propose that there has been a gradual increase in party polarization on these issues over the last few decades, with a noticeable growth in polarization in the 1990s.

Finally, small changes at the microlevel can be associated with substantial change in the aggregate. Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson, for example, assert that even the very small amount of change in microlevel partisanship reported by Green and his colleagues is "quite consistent" with what they describe as "large" changes in aggregate partisanship (2002, 145). Even if individual-level changes that are small, if they move in the same direction, they can frequently add up to substantial change in the aggregate. Our findings clearly suggest that the recent increases in the aggregate-level relationship between party identification and policy attitudes occurred not just because people changed their partisan ties in response to their issue positions, but also because people changed their policy attitudes in response to their party affiliations.

The Conditional Effects of Awareness of Party Differences and Issue Salience

It is highly unlikely that party-based issue conversion and issue-based party conversion occur among the same individuals, particularly over the short two-year intervals we have considered. It is much more likely that some individuals change their party identifications because of their views on issues, other individuals change their policy attitudes because of their party affiliations, and others do neither. The question is: who does what?

We contend that the answer lies in the degree to which individuals are aware of party issue differences and find an issue to be salient. Citizens who are not aware of partisan distinctions on an issue have no reason to change either their partisanship or their policy attitude to fit with the

other. In contrast, citizens aware of the polarization of party elites and platforms on some aspect of public policy have received an elite-level signal that creates pressure for them to bring their own partisanship and policy attitudes into line with each other. Those who are aware of partisan differences on an issue but do not find the issue to be particularly salient should respond by changing their issue attitudes to more closely conform to their partisanship. It is only individuals who are aware of the distinctions between the parties and place considerable importance on the issue who should be likely to change their party identifications based on their issue preferences.

To test these hypotheses, we reestimate our models of cross-lagged effects between party identification and issue attitudes separately for each of these three groups. Table 2 presents the estimates of the structural portion of our model for each group, and the results are quite supportive of our hypotheses.¹⁷ Among individuals who are not aware of partisan differences on the issues, there is no evidence of changes in party identification to fit with policy attitudes or of bringing issue attitudes into line with partisanship. The only statistically significant effect of either party ties or issue positions on the other is the effect of partisanship in 1992 (1994) on change in attitudes on government services and spending between 1992 (1994) and 1994 (1996). However, this effect is negative, meaning that Republican identifiers were more likely than Democrats to grow more liberal on the issue. Thus, it appears that these individuals' ignorance of the parties' relative positions on policy issues immunizes them from pressure to adjust either their partisanship or their issues preferences in response to the other.

As expected, individuals who are aware that the GOP is more conservative than the Democratic party on an issue, but who do not find the issue to be particularly important, appear to change their views on the issue to bring them in line with their partisanship and not the

¹⁷To test whether the differences in the estimates of the structural parameters in our model are different across the three groups, we estimated the model simultaneously for all three groups two different times. The first time, we allowed all of the parameters in the model, including the structural parameters, to be different across the three groups. The second time, we constrained the structural parameters to be equal across the three groups. The difference in the chi-square goodness-of-fit statistics for the unconstrained and constrained estimations is itself distributed as a chi-square with degrees of freedom equal to the number of constraints imposed in the second estimation—in this case eight. A statistically significant difference between the two model chi-square statistics indicates meaningful differences in the structural parameters across the three groups. The difference in chi-square was significant for all three issues: government services and spending ($\chi^2 = 52.90$, $p < .001$), government help for blacks ($\chi^2 = 32.56$, $p < .001$), and abortion ($\chi^2 = 14.96$, $p < .10$).

TABLE 2 Estimates of Structural Coefficients in the Models of Cross-Lagged Effects Between Party Identification and Issue Attitudes by Awareness of Party Differences on the Issue and the Salience of the Issue (Salience measured in 1996 with closed-ended questions)

	Abortion	Govt. Services	Help for Blacks
<i>Not Aware of Party Differences</i>			
<i>Stabilities</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Party ID	.90* (.84/.05)	.88* (.90/.06)	.96* (.92/.05)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Party ID	.90* (.94/.05)	.88* (.87/.06)	.96* (.94/.05)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Issue Attitude	.79* (.89/.23)	.41 (.38/.28)	.67* (.76/.11)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Issue Attitude	.79* (.78/.23)	.41 (.54/.28)	.67* (.75/.11)
<i>Cross-Lagged Effects</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Issue Attitude	-.03 (-.03/.04)	-.11* (-.18/.05)	-.02 (-.03/.04)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Issue Attitude	-.03 (-.03/.04)	-.11* (-.24/.05)	-.02 (-.03/.04)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Party ID	.02 (.03/.03)	-.14 (-.08/.13)	-.08 (-.06/.05)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Party ID	.02 (.02/.03)	-.14 (-.08/.13)	-.08 (-.06/.05)
<i>Summary Statistics</i>			
(N)	(217)	(126)	(210)
χ^2 (df = 57)	150.33	86.74	128.64
$\Delta_1/\Delta_2/\rho_1/\rho_2$.97/.98/.91/.95	.97/.99/.92/.97	.98/.99/.93/.96
<i>Aware of Party Differences/Issue Not Salient</i>			
<i>Stabilities</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Party ID	.87* (.89/.05)	.95* (.96/.04)	.94* (.92/.04)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Party ID	.87* (.94/.05)	.95* (.93/.04)	.94* (.97/.04)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Issue Attitude	.94* (.85/.11)	.50* (.56/.15)	.61* (.70/.09)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Issue Attitude	.94* (.95/.11)	.50* (.78/.15)	.61* (.91/.09)
<i>Cross-Lagged Effects</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Issue Attitude	.08* (.10/.04)	.13* (.26/.03)	.08* (.12/.03)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Issue Attitude	.08* (.10/.04)	.13* (.39/.03)	.08* (.19/.03)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Party ID	-.002 (-.001/.05)	.06 (.04/.07)	.04 (.03/.05)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Party ID	-.002 (-.001/.05)	.06 (.03/.07)	.04 (.02/.05)
<i>Summary Statistics</i>			
(N)	(105)	(122)	(179)
χ^2 (df = 57)	112.91	101.54	122.01
$\Delta_1/\Delta_2/\rho_1/\rho_2$.96/.98/.88/.94	.97/.99/.92/.96	.98/.99/.93/.96
<i>Aware of Party Differences/Issue Salient</i>			
<i>Stabilities</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Party ID	.94* (.93/.02)	.92* (.92/.02)	.86* (.88/.03)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Party ID	.94* (.95/.02)	.92* (.94/.02)	.86* (.90/.03)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Issue Attitude	.94* (.97/.03)	.69* (.79/.07)	.78* (.87/.05)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Issue Attitude	.94* (.97/.03)	.69* (.72/.07)	.78* (.79/.05)
<i>Cross-Lagged Effects</i>			
1992 Party ID → 1994 Issue Attitude	.08* (.08/.02)	.22* (.39/.02)	.12* (.16/.03)
1994 Party ID → 1996 Issue Attitude	.08* (.08/.02)	.22* (.39/.02)	.12* (.16/.03)
1992 Issue Attitude → 1994 Party ID	.06* (.06/.02)	.17* (.11/.04)	.17* (.14/.03)
1994 Issue Attitude → 1996 Party ID	.06* (.06/.02)	.17* (.10/.04)	.17* (.14/.03)
<i>Summary Statistics</i>			
(N)	(255)	(278)	(205)
χ^2 (df = 57)	207.98	293.64	188.31
$\Delta_1/\Delta_2/\rho_1/\rho_2$.97/.98/.91/.93	.96/.97/.89/.91	.97/.98/.90/.93

Source: 1992-1994-1996 National Election Study Panel.

Note: The entries are unstandardized coefficients. The numbers in parentheses are: standardized coefficients/standard errors. All observed indicators range from 1 (most liberal) to 7 (most conservative). The models were estimated using full information maximum likelihood estimation with missing values.

*p < .05.

reverse. On all three issues, party identification has a statistically significant effect on attitude change, with Republicans being more likely than Democrats to convert to more-conservative views. This effect is at least twice as large—and in terms of standardized coefficients, well more than twice as large—as the influence of policy attitudes on change in party identification. For none of the three issues does the latter effect even approach statistical significance.

In contrast, individuals who are aware of party differences on an issue and do find the issue to be salient are much more likely to change their party identifications based on their issue attitudes. The impact of policy attitude on change in party identification is statistically significant for all three issues. The substantive effect of issue preferences on changes in party ties is much greater for these individuals than it is for citizens who are aware of partisan differences on an issue but do not attach much importance to the issue. For abortion and government aid to African Americans, the effect is more than four times as great for this group as it is for the “aware/not salient” group. For government services and spending, the effect is nearly three times as great.

Importantly, party identification does have a statistically significant effect on changes in attitudes toward all three issues even for those individuals who are aware of party differences on the issue and for whom the issue is relatively salient. To reiterate, we are focusing on particularly powerful issues: policy concerns that are central to fundamental partisan divisions, that have been at the heart of contemporary partisan change, and that, in some cases, are the very prototype of symbolic, easily understood, and emotion-laden issues. Even among those who find these issues to be particularly salient to them, we find continued evidence of party-based issue conversion. While issue-based party conversion appears stronger in this group, evidence of party-based issue conversion further demonstrates the powerful perceptual screen produced by partisanship.

Conclusion

Scholars have long debated whether partisanship drives issues preferences or whether issue preferences determine partisanship. In this article, our analysis of the 1992–94–96 NES panel provides evidence of both party-based issue change and issue-based partisan change. Whether either process occurs depends upon citizens’ awareness of party differences on a particular issue—only those who recognize a difference on an issue between the two parties

respond at all to pressure to bring their partisanship and issue preferences closer together. How those who are aware of party differences respond depends upon the salience of the particular issue to them. Among individuals for whom the issue is not particularly salient, party identification takes clear precedence and leads to changes in issue preferences. Among individuals who do find the issue to be salient, there is clear evidence of issue-based change in party identification, but there also remains some evidence of individuals changing their policy attitudes to fit with their party ties.

Our findings have implications for the study of both individual-level party identification and aggregate-level partisan change. That some citizens change their party ties based on their issue attitudes is consistent with the revisionist notion of individuals updating their partisan ties in response to other political evaluations. However, the fact that partisanship leads to changes in attitudes on issues like abortion, government provision of services, and government help for blacks for many citizens clearly runs counter to the idea that party identification is largely a summary of other evaluations. Our results demonstrate that party identification indeed serves as a perceptual screen that shapes attitudes toward policy issues for many citizens.

Overall, our evidence is consistent with the modified Michigan model foreshadowed by Campbell et al. (1960). This view acknowledges the possibility that political evaluations may place “pressure” on partisanship in special situations, but that otherwise partisanship colors how citizens view the political world. This is exactly what we find: issue-based party conversion on some particularly powerful, emotional, and polarizing issues only among individuals who are aware of party differences on the issue and who attach particular salience to it. Yet, even in this group, there is evidence of individuals changing their policy attitudes in response to their party affiliations. Furthermore, among those aware of party differences on an issue but for whom the issue is not salient, the only observable effect is of party-based change in issue attitudes. Thus, we view our findings as further confirmation that party identification is a “moving force in politics,” that tends to be moved itself only in special circumstances.

Our findings shed light on the aggregate-level partisan change process in at least two ways. First, it is clear that the growing polarization of the parties’ mass coalitions in contemporary American politics is not due only to individuals changing their party affiliations based on their issue attitudes and ideological orientations. Instead, the increase in party differences on cultural, racial, and social welfare issues has been due substantially to

individuals changing their policy preferences based on their party ties.

Second, the evidence that party identification effects changes in policy preferences for many individuals may help to explain why the parties' mass coalitions have become more polarized on each of these three distinct issue dimensions. This process of "conflict extension" (Layman and Carsey 2002) runs counter to the conventional wisdom in the literature that characterizes partisan change as "conflict displacement." Conflict displacement predicts that when a powerful new set of issues emerges on the political scene, cuts across the lines of the issues that currently define party conflict, and the parties' take polarized stands on it, that party polarization on that new issue dimension grows, leading to a decline in the differences between the parties' coalitions on the formerly dominant issue cleavage (Carmines and Stimson 1989; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1987; Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1983).

Underlying the macrolevel prediction of conflict displacement, it seems to us, is a view of microlevel partisan change that sees individuals changing their party ties in response to the new issues, rather than adjusting their issue attitudes based on their party attachments. The literature identifies several processes, all involving issue-based change in party ties, as driving increases in mass party polarization on a new issue dimension. These include current partisans switching to the party better representing their views on the new issues (Erikson and Tedin 1981; Sundquist 1983), the mobilization of new partisans based on the new issues (Andersen 1976, 1979; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980), or the replacement in the electorate of older voters by younger voters who are more likely to base their party loyalties on the new issues (Beck 1979; Carmines and Stimson 1989). Although some studies do recognize the possibility of existing partisans changing their policy attitudes during the partisan change process (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale 1980; Hurley 1989, 1991; Sundquist 1983), the major accounts of the aggregate partisan change process do not devote much attention to the possibility of party-based issue conversion.

If issue-based change in party identification were the dominant individual-level process producing aggregate-level party polarization on newly emerging issue agendas, then conflict displacement would be the likely outcome. If individuals do not adjust their views on issues based on their party attachments, then citizens who were cross-pressured on the new issues and older issues at the start of the period of partisan change will remain cross-pressured. Thus, as individuals increasingly choose party identifications based on the new issues,

the level of party polarization on the old issues should decline.

However, we have shown here that many people do change their minds on the issues associated with partisan change, and such change occurs in response to party identification. This creates the possibility of older and newer partisan conflicts existing side-by-side. If a substantial number of individual party identifiers bring their views on various issue agendas into line with their party's stands, then citizens' attitudes on previously cross-cutting policy dimensions will move closer into line with each other, and the parties' coalitions may grow more polarized on all of the agendas as predicted by conflict extension. This convergence of issue preferences, however, takes place only among a segment of the citizenry, so we would not expect mass issue attitudes in the aggregate to converge to a single left/right dimension.

In short, aggregate level predictions of conflict displacement appear to be inconsistent with our microlevel findings that some individuals change their issue attitudes in response to their party identifications, some do the reverse, and some do neither. That change is limited to only a segment of the electorate also raises a challenge to the contemporary ideological realignment thesis. However, our microlevel findings are consistent with aggregate-level conflict extension (Layman and Carsey 2002) where different policy dimensions remain distinct from each other, but mass party polarization increases—or at least remains stable at high levels—on all of them.

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