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PARTY POLARIZATION IN AMERICAN POLITICS: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences

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■ **Abstract** Recent commentary points to clear increases in ideological polarization between the major American political parties. We review the theoretical and empirical literature on party polarization and partisan change. We begin by comparing the current period both to earlier political eras and to theories of partisan change. We argue that in the current period the parties have grown increasingly divided on all the major policy dimensions in American politics—a process that we term conflict extension. We discuss various perspectives on increases in polarization between the parties in government, the parties in the electorate, and the parties' activists, and we consider the causal links between polarization at each of these levels. We consider whether American society itself, and not just the parties and their identifiers, has become increasingly polarized. Finally, we discuss the consequences of growing party polarization for American political life.

INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom long has held that there is relatively little ideological distance between the major American political parties. Although a good deal of formal-theoretic work suggests that convergence to the ideological center is the optimal electoral strategy within a two-party system (Downs 1957, Davis et al. 1970, Hinich & Munger 1994), that has not spared the American parties from a long line of pointed criticism for being nonprogrammatic, unprincipled, and ideologically indistinct.

Such complaints date back at least as far as the 1830s, when Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "What I call great political parties are those more attached to principles than to consequences, to generalities rather than to particular cases, to ideas rather than to personalities. . . . America has had great parties; now they no longer exist" (Tocqueville 1966 [1835], p. 161). In the early twentieth century,

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Lord James Bryce wrote, "[N]either party has any clean-cut principles, any distinctive tenets. . .the two great parties were like two bottles. Each bore a label denoting the kind of liquor it contained, but each was empty" (Bryce 1995 [1910], pp. 699, 706). In 1950, the Committee on Political Parties of the American Political Science Association lamented that "alternatives between the parties are defined so badly that it is often difficult to determine what the election has decided even in broadest terms," and called for more programmatic, cohesive, and "responsible" parties (American Political Science Association 1950, pp. 3–4). George Wallace provided the most memorable version of this complaint in 1968 when he argued that "there's not a dime's worth of difference" between the major parties.

In recent years, however, those who have called for the American parties to be more programmatic, cohesive, and ideologically distinct have begun to get their wish. Perhaps the dominant theme in observations about contemporary party politics is that the two major parties are growing increasingly "polarized," with the Republican Party moving in a conservative direction on nearly all major issues of public policy while the Democratic Party stakes out consistently liberal ground. *Washington Post* reporter David Von Drehle (2004) argues, "From Congress to the airwaves to the bestseller lists, American politics appears to be hardening into uncompromising camps." *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman (2002) contends, "Fundamental issues are at stake, and the parties are as far apart on those issues as they ever have been." Commentator George F. Will (2004) goes one step further, writing, "Never [has American] politics been more European, meaning organized around ideologically homogeneous parties. . . . [The 2004 election] continues—and very nearly completes—the process of producing a perfect overlap of America's ideological and party parameters."

Such sentiments are not limited to journalists and pundits. A growing body of empirical research shows that the parties in government, particularly those in Congress, are each growing more homogeneous in their policy positions, while the differences between the two parties' stands on major policy issues are expanding. Related to elite-level party divergence has been increasing ideological polarization among the parties' mass identifiers and activist bases.

This review addresses the scholarly literature on the recent growth of party polarization in the United States. We begin by discussing how recent party polarization fits into both American political history and theoretical accounts of party polarization in the partisan change literature. Although these perspectives point to party polarization on a single dominant policy dimension, we argue that the current parties have grown increasingly divided on all the major policy dimensions in American politics—a process that we term conflict extension (Layman & Carsey 2002a,b; Layman et al. 2005; see also Brewer 2005).

The remainder of the article focuses on the characteristics, causes, and consequences of ideological polarization among the parties' leaders and elected officials, their mass identifiers, and their activist bases. We also consider whether American society itself, and not just the parties and their identifiers, has become increasingly polarized.

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HISTORICAL, THEORETICAL, AND RECENT PERSPECTIVES ON PARTY POLARIZATION

Although the current spotlight on party polarization seems to suggest that it developed only recently, the fact is that the major American parties have been relatively far apart on some set of issues for most of our political history. The Federalists and Jeffersonian-Republicans were polarized over tariffs, the national bank, and, more generally, federal versus state and citizen power in the 1790s (Tocqueville 1966 [1835]). The Whigs and Democrats took up similar battles in the 1830s and 1840s (Gerring 1998). The Democrats and Republicans were polarized on slavery in the 1850s, agrarian and currency issues in the 1890s, the social welfare issues surrounding the New Deal in the 1930s, and civil rights in the 1960s (Sundquist 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1989).

What stands out in such an account of American political history is that the parties apparently have been polarized on only one major policy agenda at any given time (but see Gerring 1998). This is in keeping with the traditional view in the party realignment literature that party conflict is dominated by—and party coalitions take shape along—a single, dominant policy dimension. Thus, periods of party change are characterized by "conflict displacement," in which a new, crosscutting issue dimension emerges, the parties grow increasingly polarized on it, and the parties converge on the previously dominant line of cleavage (Schattschneider 1960, Sundquist 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1989, Clubb et al. 1990, Miller & Schofield 2003). Sundquist argues that "*the* characteristic that identifies a party realignment [is]. . .the displacement of one conflict by another" (Sundquist 1983, p. 13, emphasis in the original). Similarly, Schattschneider contends that a "shift from the [old] alignment to the [new] alignment means that the old cleavage must be played down if the new conflict is to be exploited" (Schattschneider 1960, p. 63).

A good bit of the literature on recent partisan change fits with this traditional perspective. It focuses on party polarization and the restructuring of party coalitions along the lines of new issue agendas that cut across the lines of the economic and social welfare agenda that emerged out of the New Deal. The first set of issues associated with recent partisan change addressed civil rights and racial equality (Sundquist 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1989, Huckfeldt & Kohfeld 1989). Carmines & Stimson (1989) point to an "issue evolution" in which the parties' elected officials, platforms, and activists grew increasingly polarized on civil rights issues in the 1960s and 1970s, leading the parties' mass coalitions to become increasingly polarized on racial concerns in response. The evolution of the racial stands of the two parties helped to trigger a long-term exodus of white southerners from the Democratic coalition (Sundquist 1983, Black & Black 1987) and the rapid movement by African-Americans into nearly unanimous identification with the Democratic Party (Abramowitz 1994, Leege et al. 2002).

The second set of issues centers on cultural and moral concerns and includes abortion, homosexual rights, and school prayer. Several scholars document an increase in party polarization on cultural issues from the 1970s through today

(Shafer & Claggett 1995, Adams 1997, Layman 2001, Leege et al. 2002, Lindaman & Haider-Markel 2002). Cultural polarization began in Congress, in party platforms, and among party activists, and then was translated into growing divisions between the parties' mass coalitions (Adams 1997, Layman 2001).

Related to the growth of party polarization on cultural issues has been a growing religious divide between the two parties. In contrast to the traditional cleavage between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, the contemporary divide pits religious "traditionalists" (individuals with orthodox religious beliefs and high levels of religious commitment) against religious "modernists" (individuals who are less committed to traditional religious beliefs and practices) and "seculars," or nonreligious people (Wuthnow 1988, 1989; Hunter 1991). In recent decades, the Republican Party's elites, activist base, and electoral coalition have become much more traditionalist, whereas their Democratic counterparts have grown more modernist and secular (Green et al. 1996, Jelen 1997, Kohut et al. 2000, Layman 2001, Layman & Green 2006).

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CONFLICT EXTENSION, NOT CONFLICT DISPLACEMENT

The two new issue agendas on which the parties and their coalitions have become more polarized over the past 40 years cut across the partisan cleavage created by social welfare issues. Because racial and social welfare issues raise a similar philosophical question—should the government take an active role in fostering social and economic equality among its citizens?—some scholars have argued that they are related policy dimensions (Carmines & Stimson 1989, Shafer & Claggett 1995). However, Democratic racial liberalism certainly divided and continues to divide the party's traditional coalition both in and outside the South (Huckfeldt & Kohfeld 1989, Carmines & Layman 1998). Meanwhile, the philosophical question behind cultural issues—should the government take an active role in promoting traditional notions of morality and social order?—is clearly different from that of the other two agendas, and cultural issue attitudes generally are seen as orthogonal to social welfare and racial attitudes (e.g., Shafer & Claggett 1995). At the mass level, studies of the structure of policy attitudes consistently have found that citizens' views on social welfare, racial, and cultural issues form distinct attitudinal dimensions (Abramowitz 1994, Shafer & Claggett 1995, Layman & Carsey 2002a). When the issues of race and culture first emerged at the elite level, they created larger intraparty divisions than interparty differences in Congress and among national convention delegates (Carmines & Stimson 1989, Adams 1997, Layman 2001).

The conflict displacement perspective suggests that increases in party polarization on racial and cultural issues should have coincided with a decline in party conflict on social welfare, and that the more-recent growth in cultural polarization also should have led to decreasing party differences on racial matters. However,

this has not happened. The degree of partisan divergence on the venerable social welfare agenda has remained as large as ever, and, by many accounts, has actually grown in recent years (Rohde 1991, Shafer & Claggett 1995, Layman & Carsey 2002a, Brewer 2005, Layman et al. 2005). Similarly, party differences on racial issues have continued to grow in the 1990s and 2000s (Carmines & Layman 1997, Layman & Carsey 2002a, Brewer 2005). In fact, party polarization has grown not only on domestic concerns, but also, since the Vietnam War, on defense and foreign policy issues (Aldrich et al. 1989, Shafer & Claggett 1995). In short, new partisan conflicts have not displaced old ones; party conflict has *extended* from older issues to newer issues.

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THE PARTIES IN GOVERNMENT

Although some scholars (Sinclair 1997, 2000, 2002; Edwards & Barrett 2000; Fleisher & Bond 2000a,b; Binder 2003; Pomper 2003) examine the effect of party divergence on the presidential-congressional relationship, and others note evidence of growing ideological polarization even in Supreme Court proceedings (Distlear & Baum 2001), the work on growing polarization between the parties in government has focused largely on Congress. The congressional literature demonstrates a growing homogeneity in policy positions within each party's caucus and increasing divergence between the two of them. The growth in partisanship and polarization in Congress has been documented with any number of different measures: the percentage of party votes (Fleisher & Bond 2000a, Stonecash et al. 2003), party unity scores (Fleisher & Bond 2000a, Sinclair 2002, Stonecash et al. 2003), interest group ratings of members' voting records (Stonecash et al. 2003), and NOMINATE scores of member ideology (Poole & Rosenthal 1997, 2001; Jacobson 2000; Fleisher & Bond 2004). There is also evidence of growing party polarization on congressional committees (Sinclair 2000, Aldrich & Rohde 2005) and in members' support for presidential initiatives (Edwards & Barrett 2000, Fleisher & Bond 2000b, Sinclair 2000).

One thing all these studies have in common is the finding or assumption that party conflict in Congress takes shape almost entirely along a single liberal-conservative cleavage. This suggests that racial and cultural concerns, which used to divide the parties internally more than externally, now have joined economic and social welfare issues as clear sources of interparty cleavage and intraparty homogeneity (Poole & Rosenthal 1997, Stonecash et al. 2003).

Causes of Party Polarization in Congress

The predominant explanation for the increase in party polarization in Congress focuses on electoral change. The most often identified culprit is the partisan realignment of the white South (Rohde 1991, Hood et al. 1999, Jacobson 2000, Weisberg 2002, Roberts & Smith 2003, Theriault 2003, Polsby 2005). As southern whites, particularly conservatives, have grown increasingly Republican, conservative

southern Democrats have disappeared from Congress, leaving behind a more uniformly liberal Democratic caucus. Meanwhile, Republicans, virtually nonexistent in the South in the 1950s, now hold a majority of southern congressional seats. Southern Republicans tend to be even more conservative than their nonsouthern counterparts and have also constituted most of the very-conservative GOP leadership in recent years.

Other researchers point to broader patterns of electoral and social change both in and outside the South. Several scholars demonstrate a significant increase in the ideological and policy differences between the two parties' congressional voters and mass coalitions (Jacobson 2000, 2005; Abramowitz & Saunders 2002; Pomper & Weiner 2002; Weisberg 2002; Fleisher & Bond 2004). Others focus on increasing discrepancies between typically Democratic and Republican districts along the lines of race, socioeconomic class, and urbanization (McCarty et al. 1997, Gimpel 1999, Stonecash & Mariani 2000, Gimpel & Schuknecht 2001, Stonecash et al. 2003). Still others reach beyond electoral developments, noting that social changes—such as increasing rates of Hispanic immigration, increasing income inequality, growing residential segregation along racial and class lines, and increasing residential mobility and self-selection—have contributed to increasingly different socio-demographic profiles for the two parties' constituencies (Gimpel 1999, Gimpel & Schuknecht 2001, Stonecash et al. 2003, Oppenheimer 2005). These changes, potentially exaggerated by recent redistricting (Carson et al. 2003, Theriault 2003), have produced electoral constituencies that are increasingly similar for members of the same party in Congress and increasingly divergent for members of different parties, thereby encouraging greater polarization.

A second main explanation for congressional party polarization focuses on party strategies within Congress and the power of party leaders. Several scholars contend that the rise of congressional partisanship results mainly from the increasing restrictiveness of congressional rules, the increasingly ideological character of party leaders, and the growing ability of majority party leaders to control the congressional agenda, committee assignments, and other key resources (Rohde 1991; Cox & McCubbins 1993; Sinclair 1995, 1997, 2000, 2002; Snyder & Groseclose 2000; Roberts & Smith 2003; Theriault 2003; Smith & Gamm 2005).

Aldrich & Rohde's well-known theory of "conditional party government" (Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Aldrich & Rohde 1997, 2000a,b, 2001, 2005) brings together the electoral and party leadership explanations (see also Cooper & Brady 1981; Brady 1988; Sinclair 1995, 2002). Like Fenno (1978), Aldrich & Rohde assume that members have both electoral and policy goals, but that reelection is their proximate concern. Thus, the electoral environment of the parties in Congress "conditions" the degree to which members are willing to cede authority to party leaders. When the policy interests of each party's constituencies are broad and diverse, members of Congress will be less willing to grant power to their party's leaders, preferring greater autonomy in order to better represent their respective districts. However, when each party's constituencies grow more homogeneous internally and more divergent from each other, members of Congress are more willing to give party leaders greater authority. That authority enables leaders to

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coerce or cajole moderate members to vote with the party, thus creating even higher levels of party polarization.

Although Aldrich & Rohde's account attaches considerable importance to legislators' ideological and constituency-based preferences, other scholars contend that legislative outcomes are driven entirely by these preferences. The most influential work is that of Krehbiel (1993, 1998) who contends that the increasing unity within the two congressional parties and the increasing polarization between them have little to do with partisan leadership or influence. These developments simply reflect a growing correlation between party and the preferences of members—due to growing preference homogeneity within parties and preference divergence between parties—and do not constitute evidence of party influence on members' behavior.

Despite Krehbiel's critique, a number of recent studies suggest that parties do influence congressional behavior. Roberts & Smith (2003) attribute increases in party unity in the 1980s and 1990s more to increases in party support from moderate members of both parties than to increases among conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats. Theriault (2003) and Fleisher & Bond (2004) show that increasing party polarization has resulted not just from member replacement but also from conversion: individual members moving toward more ideologically extreme voting records. This research supports the idea that leaders can pressure moderate party members to move closer to the ideological mainstream of their parties.

Other research suggests that congressional partisanship cannot be reduced simply to ideological preferences. Lee (2005) finds considerable party-line voting even on issues that have no identifiable ideological content—issues (such as "good government" causes; institutional rules and procedures; space exploration, disaster relief, and transportation programs; and distributive policies) on which it is not possible to identify the "liberal" and "conservative" positions. Rundquist & Carsey (2002) find similar partisan effects on the distributive politics of military procurement.

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THE PARTIES IN THE ELECTORATE

There is widespread agreement that the Democratic and Republican parties in the electorate have become more sharply divided on ideology and policy issues in recent decades (DiMaggio et al. 1996; Carmines & Layman 1997; Levine et al. 1997; Abramowitz & Saunders 1998, 2002; Jacobson 2000, 2005; Fleisher & Bond 2001; Layman & Carsey 2002a,b; Pomper & Weiner 2002; Weisberg 2002; Stonecash et al. 2003; Brewer 2005). However, a qualification is offered by Fiorina et al. (2005), who acknowledge that polarization between the parties in the electorate has grown, but contend that the growth has been exaggerated in popular and academic accounts.

Fiorina et al. are likely correct about exaggeration in some accounts of electoral polarization. However, many of the increases in partisan differences that Fiorina et al. show—particularly on abortion and homosexuality—are almost certainly

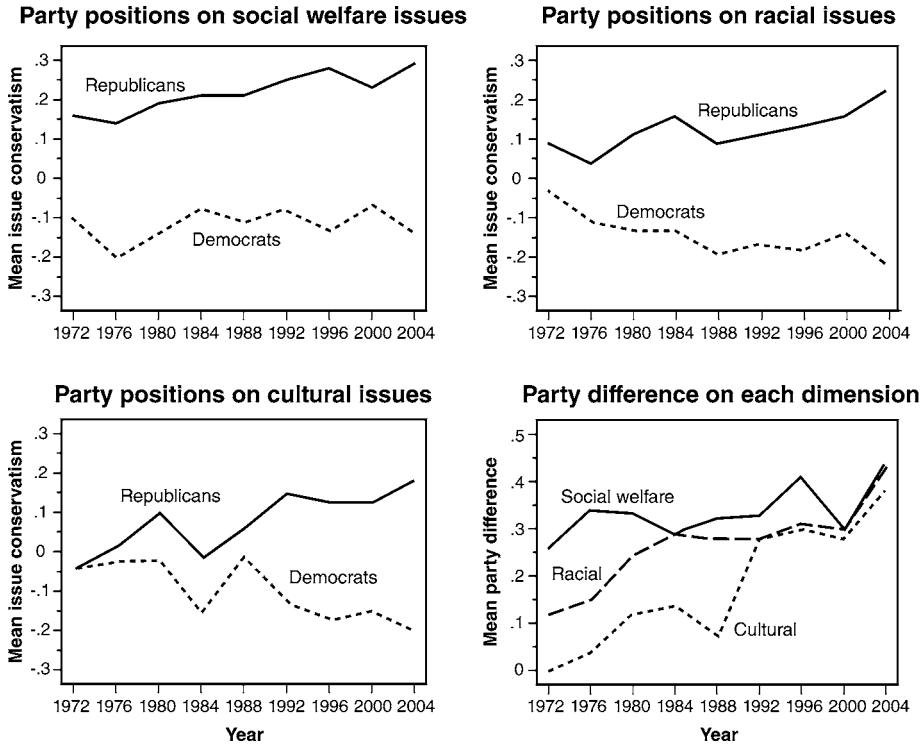

Figure 1 Polarization between the parties in the electorate on three issue dimensions, 1972–2004. Source: 1972–2004 National Election Studies. Party positions are the estimated means for each party on latent variables (ranging from −1 for the most liberal position to +1 for the most conservative position) from confirmatory factor analyses. See Layman & Carsey (2002a) for more empirical details. Party difference (*lower right panel*) is the Republican mean minus the Democratic mean.

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statistically significant. Moreover, our own estimates of partisan differences on social welfare, cultural, and racial issues in the National Election Studies (NES) conducted in presidential election years from 1972 to 2004 point to marked (and statistically significant) increases in mass party polarization (Figure 1, see Layman & Carsey 2002a for empirical details). Other scholars show similar increases (e.g., Abramowitz & Saunders 2005, Brewer 2005).

Theoretical Perspectives on Mass Party Polarization

Virtually all the literature on the growing ideological and policy differences between the parties in the electorate assumes that they have occurred in response to the increasing polarization of the parties in government. However, disagreement exists about the nature of the mass response. One perspective is the traditional

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"conflict displacement" view of partisan change (Schattschneider 1960, Sundquist 1983), discussed above.

A second, and increasingly popular, viewpoint is the "ideological realignment" argument, which is characterized by three basic findings or assumptions. First, it contends that the parties in the electorate have grown more polarized along ideological lines (Carmines & Stanley 1990, 1992; Levine et al. 1997; Abramowitz & Saunders 1998, 2002; Fleisher & Bond 2001; Putz 2002). Second, although most of this research does not directly examine the dimensionality of mass policy attitudes, it implicitly assumes that they have become structured along the same single liberal-conservative dimension that defines elite-level party conflict. It does so because it employs unidimensional indicators of mass ideology such as liberal-conservative self-identification or single indices combining attitudes toward various types of policy issues. Third, this view holds that there in fact has been an ideological realignment: Individuals are increasingly choosing a party affiliation based on their ideological orientations (e.g., Carmines & Stanley 1990, Abramowitz & Saunders 1998, Putz 2002). Most of this literature does not rule out the possibility of "partisan persuasion"—individuals changing their ideologies and policy attitudes to make them consistent with their party ties. However, Abramowitz & Saunders (1998, pp. 644–47) contend that growing ideological polarization is due far more to ideology-driven partisan change than to party-driven ideological change.

A third view is the "conflict extension" perspective (Layman & Carsey 2002a,b). This work establishes that attitudes toward social welfare, racial, and cultural issues have remained distinct and somewhat cross-cutting. However, as Figure 1 shows, the parties in the electorate have grown increasingly polarized on all three of these policy dimensions. We argue that conflict extension provides a more accurate view of the mass response to elite-level party polarization than do the conflict displacement and ideological realignment arguments.

The partisan change literature traditionally has focused on conflict displacement primarily because it has assumed that when party leaders take distinct stands on a new set of issues, individuals change their party ties in response to the new issues, rather than changing 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 new issues. These include current partisans switching to the party that better represents their views on the new issues (Erikson & Tedin 1981, Sundquist 1983), the mobilization of new partisans based on the new issues (Andersen 1979, Clubb et al. 1990), or the replacement of older voters by younger voters who are more likely to base their party loyalties on the new issues (Beck 1979, Carmines & Stimson 1989). Although some studies recognize the possibility of existing partisans changing their policy attitudes, the major accounts of aggregate partisan change do not devote much attention to party-based issue conversion.

There is, of course, a logical reason for this: The issues at the heart of partisan change are those on which people are least likely to change their minds. Unlike

most political issues, "realigning" issues arouse the passions of the mass public. They tend to be easily understood, to produce strong emotions, and to be associated with deeply held attitudes (Sundquist 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1989). Thus, it seems reasonable to assume, as Adams (1997) does on the abortion issue, that mass party polarization is "the result of people changing their parties instead of their attitudes" (p. 729).

If individuals do not adjust their views on issues based on their party attachments, then conflict displacement is the likely outcome. Citizens who were cross-pressured on the new issues and older issues—for example, individuals who are conservative on social welfare issues but liberal on cultural 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, a considerable amount of scholarship shows that party identification is at least as deep-seated and stable as are attitudes toward even the most powerful political issues (Campbell et al. 1960, Converse & Markus 1979, Green et al. 2002), that partisanship structures attitudes toward policy issues (Campbell et al. 1960), and that individuals often change their issue positions in response to changes in the stands of elites who share their political predispositions (Zaller 1992). Thus, individuals moving their own policy attitudes toward the more ideologically extreme positions of their party's leaders certainly should contribute to aggregate increases in party polarization (Layman & Carsey 2002a,b; Putz 2002; Carsey & Layman 2006). This creates the possibility of older and newer partisan conflicts existing side by side. If 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 together, and the parties' coalitions may grow more polarized on all the agendas.

The logical outgrowth of individuals bringing together their attitudes on distinct policy agendas would seem to be what the ideological realignment perspective assumes: the convergence of mass issue attitudes into a single left-right dimension. However, this has not happened, and mass attitudes toward social welfare, racial, and cultural issues (as well as defense and foreign policy issues) are likely to remain distinct for the foreseeable future. The likely reason for this, and thus the reason why we have witnessed conflict extension rather than unidimensional ideological realignment, is that the electorate's response to elite-level party polarization has been limited in three ways.

First, it has been limited to party identifiers. Zaller (1992) suggests that citizens are most likely to receive and accept political cues from elites who share their political predispositions. Thus, there is little reason to expect political independents to change their own policy attitudes in response to changes among party elites, and there is no evidence that they have (Layman & Carsey 2002a,b). Second, the mass response has been limited to those party identifiers who are aware of party differences on policy issues (Layman & Carsey 2002a,b; Carsey & Layman 2006). Unless partisans are aware that the two parties have clearly different positions on

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issues, there is no reason for them to move their own positions either toward those of their party or away from those of the other party. Third, party-based issue conversion is limited by the salience of issues to individual citizens. Although many partisans who are aware of party differences on an issue change their policy preference in response to their partisanship, Carsey & Layman (2006) find significant evidence of issue-based party conversion only among those individuals who are aware of party differences on an issue and find the issue to be highly salient.

Because the response of the mass electorate to the consistently liberal and consistently conservative policy alternatives increasingly presented to them by the two parties has been limited in these ways, citizens' issue attitudes in the aggregate remain separated into distinct policy dimensions. However, because some individuals have moved their own policy attitudes toward the consistently liberal or consistently conservative stands of party elites, the degree of polarization between the parties in the electorate has increased on all these distinct dimensions.

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"POPULAR" POLARIZATION OR JUST PARTY POLARIZATION?

Popular accounts increasingly suggest that increases in party polarization reflect a growing polarization of the broader society. They paint a picture of a society that is separated into "two Americas"—the "red" one supporting George W. Bush in both 2000 and 2004, and the "blue" one supporting his Democratic opponents in both elections—with vastly different religious orientations, values, lifestyles, and economies, each staring the other down in an increasingly bitter "culture war" (see Frank 2004 and Fiorina et al. 2005 for reviews of popular accounts of the "culture wars" and "two Americas.")

The academic argument that "culture wars" exist in American society is found most clearly in Hunter's (1991) book by the same title (see Wuthnow 1988, 1989 for similar, though less far-reaching, arguments). According to Hunter, the culture wars arise from two incommensurate philosophical "impulses," rooted in "different systems of moral understanding," which he labels "orthodoxy" and "progressivism" (pp. 43–44). Hunter recognizes that cultural conflict is more relevant and intense for religious and political elites and activists than for the general public, but he suggests that American religion, society, and politics all are growing more divided along orthodox-progressive lines.

Scholars have found that the culture-wars divide is important for party politics and political behavior (Green et al. 1996, Jelen 1997, Kohut et al. 2000, Layman 2001). That is especially true when religious experiences help link orthodox or progressive values to politics, when policy issues are logically connected to those values, and when parties and candidates emphasize their distinct positions on such issues (Layman & Green 2006). However, research focused more specifically on a societal culture war has uncovered very little support for the idea that American society—and not merely American politics—has become increasingly polarized

along religious, cultural, or ideological lines (Davis & Robinson 1996, DiMaggio et al. 1996, Williams 1997, Baker 2005, Fiorina et al. 2005).

There is little question that the extent of polarization in American society is often greatly exaggerated and that popular polarization does not necessarily underlie political polarization. However, the literature points to three caveats. First, in addition to assessing polarization from the standpoint of the entire nation, it is important to look for attitudinal differences between subgroups of the population, which may have real consequences for the degree of social consensus in American public culture (Abramowitz & Saunders 2005, Evans & Nunn 2005). For example, important ideological and policy differences exist between blacks and whites, men and women, rural and urban residents, and religious traditionalists and modernists (DiMaggio et al. 1996, Gimpel 1999, Kaufmann & Petrocik 1999, Kohut et al. 2000, Layman & Green 2006). Moreover, despite scholarly scoffing at the press's "red state–blue state" motif, Abramowitz & Saunders (2005) find some support for it. They report sharp religious, cultural, and ideological differences between the residents of states that George W. Bush won by six percentage points or more in 2004 and the residents of states that John Kerry won by the same margin.

Second, even if polarization between social groups has not increased over time, that does not mean those groups are not polarized (Evans & Nunn 2005). For example, Layman & Green (2003) show that the differences in cultural issue attitudes between seculars and committed evangelical Protestants have grown only slightly over time, but the differences were already quite substantial three decades ago.

Third, part of the explanation for the one instance of increasing polarization that is consistently reported in the societal polarization literature—the divergence of Democratic and Republican identifiers (e.g., DiMaggio et al. 1996)—is that some party identifiers are moving their own attitudes toward the very liberal or very conservative positions of their party's elites (Layman & Carsey 2002a,b; Carsey & Layman 2006). That means that the policy attitudes of at least some portion of the American citizenry are moving toward the ideological poles. As we have noted, such attitudinal divergence is likely to occur among a fairly limited portion of the populace, and the degree of difference is not likely to grow to that claimed in some popular treatments. However, a continued increase in the polarization of the parties' mass coalitions could be associated with some increase over time in popular polarization.

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CHICKENS AND EGGS: WHAT TRIGGERED THE INCREASE IN ELITE- AND MASS-LEVEL PARTY POLARIZATION?

The literatures on elite-level and mass-level party polarization face a "chicken and egg" problem (Jacobson 2000, Fleisher & Bond 2001). Research on the parties in government (Congress in particular) contends that the growing ideological divergence of the parties in the electorate is causing greater polarization among

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party elites. Meanwhile, the work on the growing divide between the parties' mass coalitions views elite-level party polarization as the causal factor.

Both perspectives are probably correct to some degree. The policy positions of the parties' elites help citizens determine "what goes with what" in terms of their own political and policy attitudes (e.g., Carmines & Stimson 1989, Zaller 1992), and the growing ideological divergence of the parties in government signals that Republican Party identification goes with consistently conservative policy attitudes, while Democratic Party identification goes with consistently liberal attitudes. At the same time, increasing ideological differences between the parties in the electorate encourage and reinforce more ideologically extreme policy stands by elected representatives. Thus, as Jacobson (2000) contends, the "relationship between mass and elite partisan consistency is inherently interactive" (p. 26). However, to understand both the current period of party polarization, and partisan change more generally, it is important to ask which of these came first, or whether some other factor triggered both processes.

If the choice for a catalyst is between party elites and the parties in the electorate, elites are the more likely culprit for three reasons. First, party elites play an important role in developing new political issues (Riker 1982, Carmines & Stimson 1989), and elite attention to issues generally increases their salience to the mass electorate (Schattschneider 1960). Meanwhile, the mass public's notoriously low levels of attention to and knowledge about politics make it a particularly unlikely trigger of political change (Converse 1964, Carmines & Stimson 1989).

Second, contemporary party polarization is characterized by the parties' leaders and coalitions becoming more consistently liberal or consistently conservative on political issues. Increased consistency in citizens' attitudes toward disparate issue agendas would be unlikely in the absence of elite-level cues. For example, there is no obvious reason why individuals who support tax cuts and reductions in social welfare spending also should oppose abortion rights except that those are all positions taken by most Republican leaders, candidates, and elected officials. For citizens to bring their attitudes on cross-cutting issue agendas into line with each other and with their party identifications, there must be some signal that these orientations should go together, and that signal is likely to be generated by party elites.

Third, the elite-level change predated the mass-level change (Jacobson 2000, Fleisher & Bond 2001). The initial increase in overall ideological polarization between the two parties occurred in the 1970s in Congress, but did not become evident in the electorate until the 1980s. Moreover, the realignment of the white South—the preeminent electoral explanation for the growth of congressional polarization—followed the development of clear differences on civil rights issues between the Republican and Democratic congressional parties and presidential candidates (Carmines & Stimson 1989, Jacobson 2000). The growing religious and cultural divide between the parties' mass coalitions occurred after increases in elite-level party differences on cultural concerns (Adams 1997, Layman 2001).

However, party elites also may be unlikely candidates for starting the process of partisan polarization. Spatial models of electoral competition consistently

point to the expectation of ideological convergence by parties and their candidates (Downs 1957, Davis et al. 1970, Enelow & Hinich 1990, Hinich & Munger 1994, but see Rabinowitz & MacDonald 1989). Within the partisan change literature, some scholars argue that political elites disadvantaged by the current political equilibrium—political "losers"—have incentives to promote new issues and to take polarized positions on them in an effort to disrupt the current political status quo (Schattschneider 1960, Riker 1982, Carmines & Stimson 1989). A compelling case can be made that, as minority party members, Republican elites in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s had strategic reasons to take extreme positions on both racial and cultural issues in order to divide the majority Democratic coalition (Carmines & Stimson 1989, Layman 2001). However, other scholars contend that elected officials, even of the minority party, tend to be averse to change. Having won elections under the current political equilibrium, they have little incentive to disrupt the status quo by pushing their party toward ideologically extreme positions on new issues (Carmines 1991). As Sundquist (1983) argues, "the established leadership of a party consists of politicians who are, by definition, the beneficiaries of the party system as it is" (p. 306).

In short, there are reasons to believe that neither elected officials and established party leaders nor the parties in the electorate led the recent charge toward greater party polarization. So, if neither the chickens nor the eggs, then who?

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Party Activists as a Mainspring of Party Polarization

A number of scholars have identified party activists, and recent changes in party politics that have increased their influence, as the principal catalysts for the recent growth in ideological polarization between the Democratic and Republican parties in government and in the electorate (Aldrich 1995; King 1997, 2003; Fiorina 1999; Jacobson 2000; Aldrich & Rohde 2001; Shafer 2003; Saunders & Abramowitz 2004; Fiorina et al. 2005; Layman et al. 2005). This is hardly surprising, since theoretical work on party and candidate policy positions long has argued that party activists help to pull parties and candidates away from the median voter and to create partisan differences on policy issues (Aranson & Ordeshook 1972; Aldrich 1983a,b, 1995; Chappell & Keech 1986; Shafer & Claggett 1995; Burden 2001; Miller & Schofield 2003).

The polarizing influence of party activists results from at least two factors. One is that American party nominees are selected not by a small group of party elites, as in most democratic societies, but in party primaries and caucuses. That means that candidates need the support of party activists, who are disproportionately represented in these contests, to secure nominations (Ranney 1972, Aldrich 1995, Fiorina et al. 2005). Party nominees also need activists' financial support and manpower in order to win general elections (e.g., Miller & Schofield 2003).

The second factor is that activists hold more ideologically extreme views than do ordinary voters or the rank-and-file members of their parties (Ranney 1972, Kirkpatrick 1976, Miller & Jennings 1986, Aldrich 1995, Crotty 2001, Fiorina et al.

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2005). Activists are also unlikely to compromise on those positions. Theoretical treatments tend to assume that activists are motivated primarily by their policy commitments (e.g., Aldrich 1983a). This has become more true over the past half-century as party "professionals" or "pragmatists," motivated by partisan victory and material gain, increasingly have been replaced by "amateurs" or "purists" motivated primarily by ideology and relatively unwilling to compromise on their policy goals to ensure party victory (Wilson 1962, Wildavsky 1965, Soule & Clarke 1970, Kirkpatrick 1976, Aldrich 1995, Fiorina et al. 2005).

Activists have been called the "dynamic element" in the partisan change process (Carmines & Stimson 1989, p. 90). They provide the basis of support for ideologically extreme positions on new issues, as well as for the strategic party politicians who champion such positions (Sundquist 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1989, Carmines 1991, Layman 2001, Miller & Schofield 2003). They also serve as opinion leaders in their communities, shaping the electorate's perceptions of the parties' policy positions (Carmines & Stimson 1989).

Although activists long have been a force behind party polarization and political change, there are two major reasons why they may have become especially important in the current period. First, recent changes in American party politics have increased the influence of issue-oriented activists. The proportion of activists driven by purposive incentives has grown. Furthermore, the presidential nominating process has become more open and participatory. Initiated mainly by the Democratic Party's reforms of its candidate selection process between 1968 and 1972, this openness has greatly increased the influence of issue-oriented activists over the selection of party candidates and the parties' policy agendas. There have been no comparable recent rules changes in congressional nominations, but the influence of activists in them still may have increased. Turnout in congressional primaries has declined substantially over the past 40 years, making party activists a disproportionately large share of these electorates (King 2003).

Second, activists themselves have grown noticeably more polarized along ideological and policy lines (King 1997, 2003; Jacobson 2000; Saunders & Abramowitz 2004; Layman et al. 2005). In fact, several studies suggest that the growth of partisan policy differences has been greater among activists than among the parties' mass identifiers (Fiorina 1999, Jacobson 2000, Saunders & Abramowitz 2004, Fiorina et al. 2005).

The Role of Party Activists in Partisan Conflict Extension

Our own argument about conflict extension in contemporary party politics also sees party activists as a central causal force. The participatory nominating process enables individuals who have ideologically extreme positions on a range of issue dimensions to exert considerable influence on party politics. Confronted with activist bases that represent extreme views on multiple types of issues, party candidates, leaders, and office holders may have strategic incentives to stake out extreme positions on these multiple agendas (Layman et al. 2005). Activists, in their roles

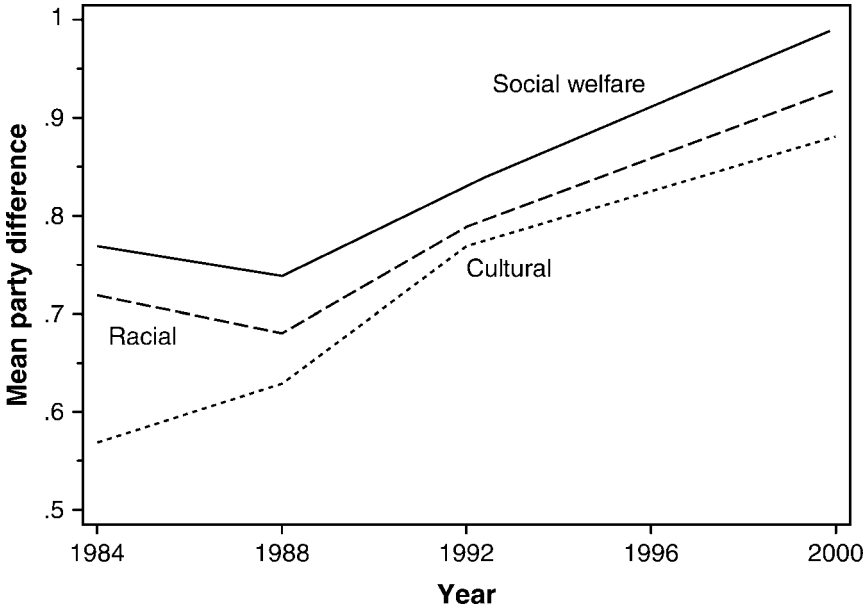

Figure 2 Polarization between Republican and Democratic activists on three policy dimensions, 1984–2000. Source: 1984–2000 Convention Delegate Studies. Party differences are the estimated differences in the means of all Republican and Democratic presidential campaign activists in each year on latent variables (ranging from –1 for the most liberal position to +1 for the most conservative position) from confirmatory factor analyses of policy attitudes (see Layman et al. 2005 for more empirical details).

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as grassroots-level opinion leaders, also help to make ordinary citizens aware of the parties' diverging positions on multiple sets of issues.

In fact, the empirical evidence points clearly to conflict extension among party activists over the past two decades. Figure 2 shows our estimates, using the Convention Delegate Study surveys of national convention delegates and presidential campaign activists (e.g., Kirkpatrick 1976; Miller & Jennings 1986), of the differences in the social welfare, racial, and cultural issue attitudes of Republican and Democratic activists in the presidential campaigns from 1984 to 2000 (see Layman et al. 2005 for more empirical details). Polarization between Republican and Democratic activists on social welfare, racial, and especially cultural issues grew markedly.

Our argument and evidence for conflict extension among party activists run counter to the conclusions reached by the two leading spatial accounts of activist-level partisan change: those of Aldrich (1983a,b, 1995) and Miller & Schofield (2003). Both of their models point to conflict displacement as the most likely consequence of activist change.

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Aldrich (1983a, 1995) argues that the decisions of individuals to become and/or remain party activists depend on the mean positions of current activists in each party relative to the individuals' positions in the issue space. In the single-dimension case, the process reaches an equilibrium at which there is a "party cleavage" with Democratic activists concentrated to the left of center and Republican activists concentrated to the right. When Aldrich (1983b) extends the model to a multidimensional policy space, he notes scenarios under which something like either "ideological realignment" or conflict extension may occur. However, the dominant prediction of his model is conflict displacement (pp. 87–92).

Miller & Schofield (2003) build on Aldrich's work by presenting a model of party conflict in a policy space with two main dimensions: economic issues and social issues. They assume that party candidates—who appear to be party nominees rather than candidates for party nominations in their account—play an active role in shaping the composition of a party's base of activists. Like Aldrich (1983b), Miller & Schofield argue that party conflict normally will be dominated by one of the two main policy dimensions. As a result, there are sets of disaffected potential activists who care more about the secondary dimension (e.g., social issues) than the dominant dimension (e.g., economic issues), but who lack a clear party home. This creates opportunities for parties to engage in what Miller & Schofield call flanking moves: moves to capture groups of activists on one side or the other of the second dimension. Such flanking maneuvers will eventually stimulate a countermove by the opposing party on the second dimension. If the second dimension becomes more salient than the first, then the parties will reorient themselves along this second dimension, and conflict on the first dimension will be suppressed. In other words, conflict displacement will occur.

We agree that the policy space is multidimensional and populated by clusters of potential activists with relatively extreme views on particular dimensions, and that parties and candidates have incentives to appeal to the various activist clusters. Why then do we expect party activists to contribute to conflict extension rather than to conflict displacement, and why has conflict extension among party activists occurred over the last few decades? We believe that several factors are important.

First, the participatory nominating process that now exists in both presidential and congressional politics means that a group of potential activists need not wait passively for a party to move in its direction. Also, in contemporary nomination politics, there is often competition among multiple candidates. Rather than all seeking the support of the same group of traditional party activists, some candidates may seek to appeal to groups of disaffected activists and bring these individuals into the party to support their candidacies. The end result may be ideologically extreme views on multiple policy dimensions becoming represented within a party's activist base.

Second, many activists care strongly about only a limited set of issues, behaving something like "issue publics" (Converse 1964, Krosnick 1990). Thus, when a group motivated by a new set of issues moves into a party (e.g., new Republican activists who are culturally conservative but moderate or liberal on economic

issues), it may not place much pressure on the party to soften its stand on older issues because the group does not attach much importance to those issues. Similarly, veteran activists who were attracted into party politics by older issues may not offer much resistance to a party's more extreme positions on newer issues because they do not care much about them. Thus, parties might be able to form coalitions of issue publics who care deeply about their respective sets of issues but remain largely indifferent to their party's positions on other issues.

However, such coalitions may be unstable in the long run if activists' attitudes on two (or more) issue agendas remain unrelated to each other. In order for there to be a stable outcome in which the parties' activists are polarized on multiple dimensions, there must be some process that helps bring the issue dimensions closer together for at least a segment of the activist population.

One possibility is activist replacement. There certainly are potential activists who hold ideologically extreme views on multiple policy dimensions and who may be attracted into party politics as the parties grow more consistently liberal and consistently conservative. Another possibility is conversion—as a party's positions on the multiple policy agendas grow more extreme, the views of its continuing activists may follow. A number of scholars show that attitudinal conversion plays an important role in activist-level partisan change (e.g., Miller & Jennings 1986, Layman & Carsey 1998), and Layman et al. (2005) find that both replacement and conversion have contributed to conflict extension among party activists.

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF PARTY POLARIZATION

Negative Consequences

Popular accounts of the recent increase in party polarization generally have portrayed it as damaging to American democracy. For example, former Republican National Committee chairman William E. Brock (2004) recently argued that party polarization is "dangerous, it's counterproductive and I think it represents an assault upon the constitutional premise of balance which has so graced the first two centuries of this republic. . . . [It] can lead only to stalemate." In an editorial soon after the 2004 presidential election, the *Washington Post* (2004) noted that "polarization is worrisome. . .it can condemn Congress to gridlock. . .[and] it can alienate citizens from their government."

A considerable amount of scholarly research and commentary agrees with this perspective. For example, several scholars contend that the growing ideological polarization of the parties has contributed to stalemate and frustration in the policy-making process. Binder (2003) and Jones (2001) show that party polarization in Congress is strongly associated with legislative gridlock and policy inaction. In fact, both of these scholars find that ideological divergence between the parties has a stronger negative effect on government's legislative productivity than does divided party control of government.

That suggests that party polarization may make policy making more difficult even when the same party controls the House, Senate, and presidency. Analyses of

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this possibility offer mixed assessments. On the one hand, both the "responsible parties" perspective (American Political Science Association 1950) and scholars reflecting the "conditional party government" thesis (Cooper & Brady 1981; Rohde 1991; Aldrich 1995; Sinclair 1995, 2000, 2002) suggest that ideologically cohesive parties can help to bridge the constitutional divides between the executive and legislative branches and between the two chambers of Congress. On the other hand, Fleisher & Bond (2000b) show that the growing ideological cohesion of the congressional parties has made support for presidential initiatives in Congress more predictably partisan, but the opposition party has become more cohesive in its resistance than the president's party has in its support. Others suggest that although increasing intraparty cohesion has made it easier for the majority party in the House to secure passage of its agenda, the minority party in the Senate has far more tools—such as filibusters and "holds" on legislation—for blocking majority initiatives, and has become increasingly apt to use them (Binder & Smith 1997; Sinclair 1997, 2000; Uslaner 2000).

There is no such ambiguity concerning the consequences of party polarization under divided government. The combination of divergent parties and divided party control tends to make interaction between the executive and legislative branches highly contentious and has a particularly deleterious effect on government's policy capabilities (Sinclair 1997, 2000; Fleisher & Bond 2000a).

Increased party polarization also receives much of the blame for a perceived decline in the civility of American political debate. This decline is evident not only in the increasingly strident and partisan nature of political discussion on radio, television, and the Internet, and in the growing degree to which political advertising attacks opponents (Sinclair 2002), but also in the halls of Congress. Jamieson & Falk (2000) find a sharp recent increase in uncivil speech on the floor of the House. Uslaner (1993, 2000) contends that although the Senate remains more civil than the House, it too has experienced a general decline in comity as polarization has grown.

At the mass level, numerous observers contend that party polarization has contributed to decreases in interest in politics and trust in government, to increases in alienation from politics, and ultimately to declines in party identification, political participation, and electoral turnout among American citizens, particularly those who occupy the political center (Dionne 1991, King 1997, Shea 2003, Fiorina et al. 2005). Possibly creating something of a vicious political circle, party polarization also may make political moderates more likely to support and vote to achieve divided government—the electoral outcome that makes the effects of party polarization on policy making particularly pernicious (e.g., Fiorina 1996).

Positive Consequences

Although the current level of party polarization does have negative ramifications for American politics, it remains somewhat ironic that political observers and political scientists have offered a primarily negative account of it. It is ironic because they have long argued that the parties should be more programmatic, ideologically

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cohesive, and distinct from each other on policy issues. As such arguments predicted, many of the consequences of divergent parties may be positive.

Party divergence may enhance the degree of policy representation in the American political process. Clearer policy differences between the parties and their candidates mean that citizens are better able to distinguish between candidates' issue stands and thus to cast policy-oriented ballots. This means that those candidates who are elected are more likely to represent the views of their constituencies. Furthermore, the greater ideological cohesion and discipline within the parties in government means that the winning party is more likely to act in a coherent way to enact the policy programs that it presents to voters during campaigns (e.g., Jacobson 2000, Burden 2001, Crotty 2001), making it easier for voters to hold the majority accountable. In fact, Pomper (2003) suggests that the United States is moving closer to a system of parliamentary government, with parties contesting elections on the basis of coherent policy programs and, once in office, pursuing the goals of their platforms as unified teams.

Evidence suggests that recent increases in party polarization have contributed to a strengthening of the parties in the electorate. There was a relatively sharp decline in the percentage of Americans claiming to strongly identify with one of the two parties from 1964 to 1976 (from 38% to 25% in NES data), and a smaller, but still noticeable, increase (from 8% to 14%) in the percentage of "pure" independents (those claiming not to be closer to one party or the other). Since then, further increases in the independent share of the electorate have resulted from marked growth in the percentage of citizens who are independent "leaners"—independents who see themselves as closer to one party than to the other—and comparable decreases in the percentage of individuals who identify with a party but claim to do so only weakly (e.g., Bartels 2000, Weisberg 2002). Because independent leaners are often more partisan in their political behavior than are weak party identifiers (e.g., Petrocik 1974), this may well indicate no further decline in the strength of mass partisanship since 1976.

Moreover, the past two decades have witnessed a resurgence in party identification and its role in shaping mass political behavior. The percentage of strong partisans has rebounded (to 33% in 2004) while the presence of pure independents has waned (to $<10\%$ in 2004). The degree to which citizens express positive affect toward one party and negative affect toward the other also has increased markedly (Hetherington 2001). Most fundamentally, the relationship between party identification and vote choice in both presidential and congressional elections has grown significantly stronger (Bartels 2000). Accordingly, and contrary to the idea that polarized parties increase ticket splitting, there has been a decline in the proportion of voters splitting their presidential and congressional tickets (Jacobson 2000, 2005; Burden 2001; Hetherington 2001). Hetherington (2001) argues that the resurgence of mass partisanship has not just coincided with the increased polarization of the parties in government but has been caused directly by it.

Party divergence also has contributed, by some measures, to an increase in the ideological sophistication of mass political orientations. Pomper & Weiner (2002)

find that the foundations of mass partisanship have become less affective and more cognitive—based less on parental party identification and more on recognition of partisan policy differences. Of course, the increasing connection between partisanship and policy attitudes may be due as much to partisan persuasion on issues as to issue positions shaping party ties (Zaller 1992, Carsey & Layman 2006). That may seem to make the link less "rational." However, if citizens' policy attitudes are being shaped by the consistently liberal or consistently conservative positions of Democratic and Republican elites, respectively, then those attitudes should grow more constrained and coherent. In fact, Layman & Carsey (2002a) show that awareness of party differences on multiple policy agendas is strongly related to the coherence of party identifiers' attitudes across those agendas.

It is also possible that some of the negative consequences associated with party polarization are not as negative as they seem. For example, Geer (2006) confirms the notion that as issue polarization between the parties increases, campaign advertising tends to grow more negative, focusing more on opponents' weaknesses. However, he finds that negative ads provide voters with more policy-based information than do positive ads. Thus, as issue differences between the parties grow, what also increases are not (necessarily) personal attacks on the character of opponents, but rather emphasis on those differences and where opponents' positions are wrong. This comports well with the increasingly conventional conclusion that negative campaigning tends to stimulate rather than deflate voter turnout (e.g., Jackson & Carsey 2006). Similarly, Sinclair (2002) argues that although party polarization has been accompanied by the "politics of personal destruction," one of its benefits is that "partisan battles contain considerable issue content, the fights in Congress are policy fights over issues important to real people" (p. 139).

Moreover, the 2004 election raises questions about the purported connection between party polarization and citizen withdrawal from politics. The presidential campaign pitted a highly conservative incumbent against a senator with very high ratings from liberal interest groups. The campaign involved strident rhetoric and concerted attacks from both sides, and it was associated with the most polarized party coalitions in recent memory (see Figure 1). However, it also produced the highest level of voter turnout since 1968 and the highest rates of participation in other campaign activities ever recorded in NES surveys (Abramowitz & Saunders 2005). Of course, one election does not establish a positive relationship between party polarization and citizen participation, but it does cast doubt on the existence of a negative one.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Whereas commentary on the major political parties in the United States traditionally has characterized them as centrist, "Tweedledee and Tweedledum" organizations, it now suggests that the Democratic and Republican Parties have become ideologically cohesive and highly polarized. We have argued that, contrary to the

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conventional wisdom, clear policy differences between the two parties are not new. What is new is that the parties' elites, mass coalitions, and activist bases have become sharply divided along the lines of multiple policy dimensions—a process we have termed conflict extension. Although the increasing policy differences between the parties in government and those between the parties in the electorate have exerted causal influences on each other, we have argued that neither party elites nor the mass electorate is likely to have started this process of growing polarization along multiple policy dimensions. A more likely culprit is the base of activists in the two parties. Policy-oriented activists have grown more prevalent in recent years and several factors have increased their influence in party politics. This has probably increased the incentives for party candidates and elected officials to take ideologically extreme positions on multiple policy agendas, which in turn has pushed the parties' coalitions toward more polarized positions on various issues.

The tremendous amount of scholarship devoted to parties and party polarization has expanded our collective knowledge in this area substantially, but much work remains. At least three areas are ripe for future research. First, as we have noted, there is little consensus in the literature as to the catalyst for the recent increase in party polarization or the causal links between different types of actors. Efforts to connect the parties' activists, elites, and citizen identifiers within a single, coherent theoretical model of partisan change are needed. They can borrow much from theories of party realignment and "issue evolution," which have developed such connections in the case of single policy dimensions (e.g., Sundquist 1983, Carmines & Stimson 1989). However, the multidimensional nature of contemporary party polarization adds additional layers of complexity, necessitating further theoretical development.

Second, several questions remain regarding the relationship (or lack thereof) between party polarization and popular polarization. If American society has not grown more polarized, as our parties and political discourse have, then why not? Is it because citizens hold stable centrist attitudes on political issues or (more likely) because most of them do not pay much attention to politics? Is the clear growth in polarization between Democratic and Republican identifiers beginning to lead to increases in the overall polarization of American society? Finally, are longstanding differences between subgroups of the population growing more relevant and intense, and thus potentially more damaging to levels of political and cultural consensus?

Third, we pointed to a number of perceived positive and negative consequences of party polarization, but research needs to verify direct causal links. It is possible that some of these consequences (e.g., the growing coarseness of political discourse, growing distrust in political institutions, the decline in voter turnout through 2002, the rebound in turnout in 2004) are merely coincidental to growing party polarization rather than necessary responses to it. Scholars should explore whether some of the positive developments accompanying increased party polarization can be encouraged and potentially institutionalized, and if some of the

negative developments can be minimized or averted. Particularly helpful would be comparative work at both the subnational and cross-national levels, where variations in policy, partisan, institutional, and cultural contexts may shape the beneficial or harmful consequences of party polarization.

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