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Polarizing Issues in the American Political Parties: Women In Party Platforms

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POLARIZING ISSUES IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL PARTIES:
WOMEN IN PARTY PLATFORMS

by

Hannah Vail

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of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
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Abstract

This thesis is designed to investigate the relationship between the rise of cultural issues in political discussion and growing levels of polarization in the American political system. Current research within the field proposes many causes, forces, and tactics behind this growth of polarization. The corresponding increase in the prevalence of cultural issues in American politics is one such proposed cause or symptom. This thesis will provide an expansion on existing research through an exploration of the relationship between increased polarization and increasing prevalence of cultural issues in the United States.

The focus of this thesis is on the relationship between polarization and cultural issues centered on women; issues such as abortion, access to contraception, women's role within the family and society, access to healthcare, discrimination based on gender, and equal pay. An analysis of American National Election Studies data was used to establish that polarization, as defined as increased differences in the policy stances of the party, and increased ideological sorting of the electorate into these parties, is in fact growing. Then, in order to investigate the relationship between polarization and women's issues, a content analysis of party platforms from 1952 through 2012 was conducted. Using the findings from the content analysis, the parties' positions on these topics were compared and analyzed for how and where they diverge and how they have changed over time. The data compiled indicate that a political secular realignment has led to an increase in polarization where women's issues are concerned.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In 2013 the federal government shut down for seventeen days in the face of congressional gridlock, costing the United States billions of dollars and placing millions of government workers on furlough (Office of Management and Budget 2013). In the face of events like this government shutdown, many Americans believe political polarization is a simple fact of political life in the United States of America. Compromise has become a term associated with weakness and candidates and elected officials are far more careful to toe the party line than ever before (Campbell 2006). It remains for Americans to determine if their country is in fact as polarized as it is perceived, and if so, why has it become so polarized?

There is some speculation that the rise of polarization can be linked to increased national attention on cultural issues within the political system. Cultural issues in politics are issues focused on the role of public morality and how people ought to live (Leege et al. 2002). Cultural issues have steadily become more numerous and more prevalent in modern American politics (Layman 2001). Cultural issues are often “easy issues,” famously defined by Edward Carmines and James Stimson (1980) as issues that are symbolic rather than technical, deal with policy ends rather than means, and have been on the political agenda for a long time which allows voters to be familiar with the issue. Common cultural issues that are currently debated in politics include abortion, gay rights, and women’s rights, all of which are easily understood issues that often provoke visceral reactions.

These issues are often associated with divisiveness. To many Americans, there are two types of people: conservative Americans who are religious, blue-collar workers that live in rural areas, and the liberal Americans who tend to be more educated, live in urban areas and have no religious affiliation (Frank 2004). These perceived differences in lifestyle are paralleled by perceived differences between liberal and conservative stances on cultural issues, which have grown exponentially in recent times. Meanwhile, political polarization has also been increasing steadily over the last forty years, particularly amongst elected officials. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate a connection between the growing prevalence of cultural issues in American politics and increasing political polarization.

The first objective of this thesis is to define polarization. The next is to determine whether, in the period of time between 1952 and 2012, polarization has increased in the United States. At this point, it must be determined whether polarization is linked to the growing prevalence of cultural issues in American political life. Finally, this thesis will establish that link by analyzing divergent positions taken by the parties in their platforms on cultural issues, specifically cultural issues relating to women.

This thesis will begin with a review of the literature available on culture wars and polarization to analyze the recent scholarship on the subject. The literature review will concentrate on proposed causes, forces and tactics behind cultural politics according to leading authorities in the field. Do these scholars consider polarization a deliberate strategy for the parties? Is the source of these conflicts the American people, activists or the political elite? Is there substance behind this cultural divide or is it merely a construct

of media sensationalism? Finally, has polarization been evident within the parties' stances on social issues?

To more fully answer that question, there must be an exploration of social issues within the parties' platforms. While it is tempting to take inflammatory statements by individual members of the party as representative of the party as a whole, a more accurate and representative picture of each party's stance on cultural issues can be provided by the party platforms. As the official mission statement of the party, the platforms provide a clear and accurate depiction on the party's stance as a whole on specific issues, and often an issue that is used as a plank within one party platform mandates a plank on the same issue in the opposing party's platform (Layman 2001). The clarity and symmetry of the Democratic and Republican party platforms make them a perfect source from which to measure issue stances.

The 2012 presidential election was rife with rhetoric concerning traditional "women's issues." From Democratic rhetoric on the "war on women," to Mitt Romney's odd statement during a debate about "binders full of women" to a renewed discussion about availability of contraceptives, it is clear that these issues are far from settled within the American context (Parker 2012). This thesis' original research will focus specifically on cultural issues centered on women, such as abortion, access to contraception, role within the family, access to healthcare, discrimination based on gender, and equal pay.

The study of the relationship between these issues and the American political parties will be accomplished through a content analysis of national party platforms from 1952 through 2012 for references to these issues, using a pre-determined set of code-words for content analysis. An objective outsider to the project will complete the same

analysis using the same criteria to ensure the findings are not arbitrary. Using the findings from the content analysis, data regarding the amount of space within the platforms reserved for these women's issues along with the ideological value of the individual statements will be compiled. These collected and analyzed data will provide information on the parties' stances on these issues, and how these stances have changed and diverged over time.

The collected data indicate that the parties have experienced polarization in the realm of women's between 1952 and 2012. The movement of the Republican party towards more conservative stances on women's issues has produced an increasing gap between the Republican and Democratic parties on these issues. The implications of these findings for the American political system along with likely causes for this phenomenon will be discussed and evaluated in the conclusions section.

This research is of great value and relevance to today's political science. Evidence of polarization between the two parties is abundant and shows no sign of reversing, from government shutdowns to gridlock to contentious and negative campaigns. Furthermore, political polarization impacts more than just the academic world; the most recent government shutdown cost the United States billions of dollars and resulted in the furlough of millions of government employees. This study provides empirical evidence that increased polarization is not merely a symptom of political posturing, but that it has substantive effects on the stances of the parties.

The far-reaching real world impact that political polarization has on the United States makes this thesis extremely significant. If a more thorough understanding behind the causes of polarization can be reached, then there is the potential to channel

polarization in a less destructive direction. A greater understanding of polarization will provide great benefits in understanding the challenges faced by today's political system.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

What is polarization?

For many people, the fact that today's politics are more polarized than they used to be is a foregone, obvious fact. However, amongst political scientists, the question of whether polarization has increased is far from settled. There are questions about whether the entire political system is polarized, or whether it merely exists amongst the political elites. If it is accepted that polarization has increased, there is debate about what is causing the increased polarization. To determine the answers to these questions, it is necessary to delve deep into the study of polarization and cultural politics.

The existence of the culture war was first introduced into academia by James Davison Hunter in 1992 in his book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law and Politics in America*. The dramatic title of this text reveals the extreme nature of how Hunter sees a culture war; two opposing forces clashing over major issues in American life. Inherent in this definition of the culture war is the concept of political polarization. Marjorie Hershey et al. define polarization in their piece, "Party Activists, Ideological Extremism, and Party Polarization," as; "The process of greater partisan and ideological division, and the bitter debate and gridlock that have accompanied it, is called *political polarization*," (Hershey et al. 2013: 76). To many the contentious politics of today have become the perfect representation of polarization.

However, some political scientists maintain that while incivility and gridlock are products of polarization, they are not adequate to measure or define political polarization. "It is the extremity and distance between responses, not in their substantive content, that polarization inheres," (DiMaggio et al. 1996: 693). Although the turbulent and

contentious debates are doubtless byproducts of polarization, it is the substantive distance between the policies and beliefs of the opposing political forces that determine whether society is truly polarized.

Providing a definitional standard for polarization is often a difficult and subjective task. As Justice Stewart once said regarding obscenity, “ I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it,” (Jacobellis v. Ohio). The same predicament often occurs to those attempting to establish some kind of bright-line test for polarization; it is easy to perceive, but much more difficult to define. Paul DiMaggio and his colleagues try to overthrow this kind of nebulous definition by establishing several criteria that must be present in the political climate in order to prove the existence of polarization.

According to DiMaggio et al. (1996), polarization can only be present if increased dispersion of political views, bimodality (lack of centrist views), and conflict closely associated to social identities exist. The absence of any one of these conditions would mean that polarization was not present in society. When DiMaggio et al. wrote in 1996, they asserted that the current political field did not meet this stringent definition of what constituted polarization, failing to meet their criteria.

In contrast, David Campbell of the University of Notre Dame contends that polarization can exist in two different forms. One is the bimodal form, which is included in the criteria mandated by DiMaggio et al.’s definition of polarization, where the population is split into two camps with little to no people holding the middle centrist views. While Campbell concedes that this is in fact not happening, he believes that

another form of polarization does exist today; an increase in sorting. “In the succinct phrasing of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to polarize means ‘to give unity of direction to.’ By this definition, Americans have clearly undergone a dramatic polarization over the last generation,” (Campbell 2006: 61). He argues that the Democratic and Republican parties are more unified and ideological today than ever before. “In recent years, however, American parties have become increasingly ideological... today conservative Democrats are a highly endangered species, while liberal Republicans are pretty well extinct,” (Campbell 2006: 61). This increase in party unity and subsequent partisanship is the nature of the polarization that is commonly perceived.

It is by this definition that Americans are more polarized today than they have been in the past. Americans have increasingly conflated their political ideologies and their party loyalty, and as a result there is less and less common ground between the parties. In today’s politics, the parties are far more likely to clash than to compromise.

Are we polarized?

Most researchers in the field of political science agree that at least at the elite level, American politics is increasingly polarized. “At the elite level, ideological differences between the parties are probably greater now than at any point in the past half century,” (Abramowitz 2010: 36). Morris Fiorina and his coauthors, however, combat the popular conception that polarization is growing among the masses in their acclaimed book, *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America*. Speaking of the normal person in the electorate, they say, “They are not well-informed about politics and public affairs, do not hold many of their beliefs very strongly, and are not ideological,” (Fiorina et al. 2005: 19). Fiorina et al. even go so far as to say, “There is little indication that voters are more

polarized now, or that they are becoming more polarized,” (Fiorina et al. 2005: 165). On all fronts, they contend that the average person is a centrist moderate.

Fiorina and his coauthors appear to arrive at their conclusions because their focus is on the existence of a culture war rather than merely the existence of polarization. Fiorina et al. (2005) mention that between 1972 and 2000, 60-75 percent of the electorate was polarized. Fiorina and his coauthors state that because polarization remained within the 60-75 percent range, the assertion that polarization is growing is false. Their dismissal of these statistics may stem from their research focus on cultural wars, rather than political polarization itself. Thus Fiorina and his coauthors dismiss 60-75 percent of the electorate being polarized as insufficient to constitute a culture war, rather than evaluating these statistics within the context of political polarization alone.

However, by their own admission, there is evidence that Fiorina and his coauthors ought to find these statistics significant. “Granted, in a majority rule electoral system 10 percentage point differences that occur in the neighborhood of 50 percent may be politically consequential,” (Fiorina et al. 2005, 76). While 60 percent of the electorate being polarized apparently does not meet Fiorina et al.’s standards for a culture war, these levels of polarization are still politically significant. An issue that polarizes even a small portion of voters quickly becomes politically significant in a climate where candidates aggressively pursue 10% of the vote and the margin of victory is often even slimmer. For Fiorina and his coauthors’ focus on culture wars, these high levels of polarization may not be notable, but they do indicate that these levels of political polarization are politically significant.

While Fiorina et al.’s conclusions are certainly influential, they are hardly

universally accepted. In their text, *Split; Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics*, Stonecash and Brewer (2007) strongly oppose Fiorina et al.'s contention that polarization exists only at the elite level, and their research points to significant divergences of public opinion not only amongst the political elites and activists, but also amongst the American public. Many political scientists join Stonecash and Brewer in their critique of Fiorina and his coauthors's analysis, but Fiorina remains one of the most widely read political scientists, and thus his conclusions shape the research done in the field.

What levels are polarized?

While Fiorina and his coauthors' theory that polarization is a phenomenon restricted to the elite in American politics is far from widely accepted, his conclusions shape the questions asked by scholars studying polarization. As a result of Fiorina et al.'s work, everyone in the field must consider and address at what level of society polarization exists. In Fiorina et al.'s world, the political elites drive polarization by presenting the voters with polarized candidates that make polarizing choices while governing (Fiorina et al. 2005). The centrist voter is then left with only polarized options. While compelling, this theory does not clearly explain why if the average voter is a moderate, polarized candidates are selected in the primary process over more moderate candidates. Nevertheless, Fiorina strongly believes that polarization is strictly an elite level phenomenon, and that the electorate is not polarized.

Alan Abramowitz, in his book *The Disappearing Center* in particular, challenges the premises that Fiorina bases his argument on. He argues that Fiorina's characterization of the average American as disinterested and uninformed about politics is an inaccurate

generalization, and that politically engaged citizens are not a fringe group, but rather a substantial portion of the electorate. “On a wide range of issues, rank-and-file Democrats and Republicans, like their elite counterparts, are more divided today than in the past,” (Abramowitz 2010: 37). He argues that polarization encompasses the entire political system, not merely the top echelons of society.

Understanding the role of party activists is crucial in analyzing these conflicting conceptions of mass polarization. Party activists are not the elected officials, but they are the ones that volunteer, go door to door, and often have a personal vested interest in a particular issue (Hershey et al. 2013). These people occupy a special place in the political system because those who show up to primaries, who volunteer at phone banks and go to political conventions, are the ones who care more about politics and political outcomes (Fiorina et al. 2005). These activists often have more extreme views that they care deeply about, which explains their high level of participation in the political realm. “The extremes are overrepresented and the center underrepresented,” (Fiorina et al. 2005). Due to their efforts and participation, they get a disproportionate share of the influence in political life.

Fiorina would probably label these individuals members of the political elite due to their influence, while Abramowitz would likely count them amongst the masses due to their non-professional involvement in politics. As Fiorina lumps the activists in with the elite, he views the electorate as unpolarized and even politically ignorant. Due to Abramowitz’s placement of the activists with the rest of the electorate, he views the electorate as more politically involved and therefore more polarized. These conflicting groupings may explain the disparate conclusions these scholars have reached.

In Geoffrey Layman's book *The Great Divide* (2001), he writes that although all levels of the American political system are polarized, issues are introduced at the elite level. Elites must see an advantage in adopting an issue, some strategic value that will allow them to win elections (Layman 2001). From there, activists and the public take up the issue, thereby polarizing the entire system. Marc Hetherington, agrees, stating, "Consistent with most theories of public opinion, these mass-level changes have resulted from elite behavior," (Hetherington 2001: 629). According to his studies, substantive differences in elite stances on issues provides the clarity necessary for the public to distinguish between the two parties ideologies (Hetherington 2001). Using these distinct, elite-level party differences, the electorate is then able to follow the political elites' lead and take similarly divergent stances on the issues.

Alan Abramowitz, on the other hand fundamentally disagrees. He contends that the increased polarization amongst the politically elites is merely a reflection of a polarized electorate. His analysis concluded that voters in individual districts were not less polarized than the representatives they elected (Abramowitz 2010). He argues that if elites were in fact the origin and driving force behind polarization, they would take more polarizing stances than their constituents, and as that is not the case, polarization cannot be said to originate with the political elite.

While there are obvious disagreements over the origin point of polarization and which levels of society are affected, there is a general agreement that at least political elites are becoming more polarized. By contrast, the subject of mass polarization remains hotly contested and will likely continue to be a subject of contention for some time based on individual definitions of what constitutes mass and elite politics.

Why are we polarized?

There are multiple theories about the causes of polarization. Some blame gerrymandering for ensuring essentially one party control over specific districts (Fiorina et al. 2005). By ensuring the opponent on the other side of the aisle has essentially no chance of winning, candidates face competition only within their own party. Furthermore, because a district is essentially composed of the constituency for only one party, candidates tend to worry about changes with extreme stands rather than a challenger from the middle. Thus candidates are pushed into taking more polarized positions in order to win elections.

However, acceptance of gerrymandering as the cause of polarization is hardly universal by those who study it. "...Partisan redistricting was not a major factor in the decline of marginal districts between 1980 and 2002 and that ideological polarization has increased among representatives from both marginal and safe districts," (Abramowitz 2010: 143). Abramowitz offers an alternative cause of polarization in population movement and ideological realignments. Race, gender, marital status, and religious commitment are the defining characteristics that are most likely to determine party identification, rather than the regional cleavages of the past (Abramowitz 2010). This realignment of party coalitions created parties that are more ideologically distinct and more easily identified as conservative and liberal parties.

Thomas Edsall contends in his book *Building Red America* (2006), that this increased polarization was not the result of natural forces in the electorate, but rather a deliberate strategy taken by the Republican party. "The Republican program is not the

expression of a broad public agreement. It is the agenda of a conservative elite expert in capturing support of a slender majority of the electorate and seizing control of the nation's political machinery," (Edsall 2006: 6). Recently, Republican political strategy, particularly in the election of George W. Bush, entailed reaching out to their base of support rather than to the independents in the middle of the political spectrum. "The tactics of polarization are ideal for increasing turnout- often via targeted efforts to inflame conservative anger points- whereas strategies of consensus and moderation function only to diminish the number of conservative ballots cast on election day," (Edsall 2006: 97). The right found that moving further to the right won elections, and embraced the far end of the political spectrum.

Thomas Frank continues this study of the politics of the far right by examining the counterintuitive principles that are now characteristic of the far right in his book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2004). He characterizes the far right as a movement he refers to as the "backlash." The backlash is the reactionary politics based on social cultural issues such as prayer in schools, abortion, and views on homosexuality. Frank concludes that the problem stems from an erroneous association in the minds of the American people between popular culture and politics. To the "Real Americans" who are the backbone of the backlash movement, the storm of political correctness and movement away from traditional religious values seen in the movies and the media is a direct result of the liberal politicians elected to office. As a result, these Conservatives with a capital C, overwhelmingly supplant these liberal politicians in favor of politicians who promise to deliver resistance to this abandonment of American values.

As Frank points out, this seldom works well for these voters. Members of the

backlash movement tend to be in the lower strata of the socioeconomic spectrum, while these politicians they support are overwhelmingly pro-business. As politicians do not in fact, control Hollywood or the media, and thus do not control the cultural messages being issued, little change is achieved on the issues voters really care about. Movies depicting pre-marital sex continue to be made, abortions continue to be performed and support for homosexuality continues to grow. The backlash thus sees itself locked in a losing war, which creates an impression that they are an oppressed class living under the yoke of the liberals who are not “Real Americans.” Meanwhile, the politicians supported by the backlash continue to enact measures that disadvantage their supporters by assisting the corporations and the wealthy through economic measures.

Other political scientists argue that Americans are more polarized as a result of conflict extension. The theory of conflict extension contends that throughout American history, politics have been characterized by conflict displacement. Conflict displacement states that historically, the parties have been polarized in only one major policy arena at a time, and when new contentious issues arose, the old polarizing issues would be pushed aside to make space for new debate on a new issue (Carsey and Layman 2014). Carsey and Layman, however, argue that the mechanism of conflict displacement has broken down in recent years, leading to conflict extension. As a result, Americans are polarized on multiple issues rather than the single-issue battlefields of the past (Layman et al. 2005).

Carsey and Layman further argue that this replacement of conflict displacement by conflict extension is due largely to the greater role of party activists in American politics since the 1960s.

Activists are more likely than elected officials and ordinary citizens to champion ideologically extreme positions on new issues and bring them into the party system, and changes in our party system have made it easier for activist groups to enter party politics, (Carsey and Layman 2014).

The democratization of the political nomination process has allowed party activists to bring more issues into the political discussion, thus making it close to impossible for parties to maintain conflicting positions on only one issue.

Still another cause of polarization is the increase in gamesmanship in politics today. Some have suggested that an element of partisan competition has entered politics, which redirects the focus from winning elections to beating the other party (Stonecash and Brewer 2007). This is a subtle distinction, but one that is significant. “Americans no longer vote primarily to satisfy a sense of civic duty; the primary motivation for voting today appears to be partisanship: Americans vote because they enjoy helping their party’s candidates to defeat the opposing party’s candidates,” (Abramowitz 2010: 86). The difference is not that voters have become more liberal or conservative, but that they see the other party as the enemy (Stonecash and Brewer 2007). A vote for a Democrat is now not simply a Democratic vote, it is a vote against Republicans.

Although Abramowitz is clearly referring to the electorate, that does not mean this partisanship exists solely at that level of the political system. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell once famously stated, “The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one term president,” (Herszenhorn 2010). In such an environment, it becomes easier to exploit differences between the parties, to increase the gamesmanship of politics, turning the focus from governing to winning. This drive to beat opponents is both an indication of polarization as well as a cause for its continuation.

A common factor often cited in increasing partisan polarization is the increase in media outlets and resulting variety of news coverage. “Cable television and the Internet liberalize the marketplace for media content by removing constraints on free choice, but in doing so they may also polarize democratic politics,” (Prior 2002). As Americans have more options from which to receive their political information, they tend to choose the content that most closely agrees with their own political views. This often leads to the cementation of political opinions and lowers the chances of seeing multiple sides of an issue.

These options that modern Americans are presented with are increasingly polarized in their content as a strategy to attract viewers. “Cable news is in the business of political niches. As such, they must give their partisan audiences their due, which is usually a combative interview with a vocal opposition political leader,” (York 2013: 4). York goes on to suggest that these polarized media options, often presented by cable news, gives viewers a perception that politics are much more combative and polarized than they are in reality (York 2013). “Media cultivation theory suggests that general adherence to one type of programming will create differing perceptions of American politics over time—straightforward and calm for network viewers, contentious and uncivil for cable viewers,” (York 2013: 5). By focusing on and emphasizing the contentious aspects of politics, the media enhances the perception that the political field is increasingly uncivil and polarized, and that portrayal may generate actual polarization in turn.

The result of all these polarizing forces is that many see people who disagree with them politically as fundamentally different from themselves. Thomas Edsall lists several non-political differences between partisans from the two parties, saying, “Republicans

and Democrats are separated by differences on a broad range of choices over consumer goods, religious participation, entertainment, and leisure activities.” (Edsall 2006: 41). The perception is that those that disagree politically also live fundamentally different lifestyles. Thomas Frank echoes this vision of an America divided not only politically, but by lifestyle in his book *What’s the Matter With Kansas?* The humble, working class, religious conservatives depicted in Frank’s book are the real Americans while the pretentious liberal intellectual elites are parasites that are subverting the country. The animosity created by these oversimplified world views of us versus them described by Edsall and Frank, leads to more divisive politics and to beliefs that political opponents are not only wrong, but have nothing in common with their political adversaries.

How do cultural issues play into polarization?

Cultural issues are the non-economic related issues, often concerning the role of morality in public life, such as abortion, gay marriage and school prayer.

Cultural conflict is best described as an argument on how we as a people should structure our lives. Thus, political conflict becomes ‘cultural’ when it involves disagreements about what the society and government prescribe and proscribe as the appropriate way of life (Leege et al. 2002: 254).

Cultural issues are often characterized as “easy issues,” or issues that need no special expertise to understand or form an opinion on. These issues have often been long unresolved and revolve around disagreements on the appropriate way of life (Leege et al. 2002).

That is not to say that there is a universal definition of what constitutes cultural politics and cultural issues. In *The Politics of Cultural Differences*, David Leege et al.

posit that cultural politics is a political strategy rather than a set of defined issues. They argue that cultural politics cannot be constrained to a specific set of issues such as abortion, gay marriage, etc., but that cultural politics is an approach that politicians employ to use these issues to the advantage of themselves and their party. In response to this strategy, voters either identify with the politician's cultural appeals or are repelled by them and defect to the other party. A voter's reaction to a cultural appeal is often predicted by the social group to which the voter belongs, and how that social group identifies with the cultural appeal.

Leege et al. identify three major arenas of cultural politics that have been employed by both parties since the New Deal. These particular issues are nationalism (as seen by American reaction to the Cold War), race, and religious conflict (particularly between issues of gender and traditional religious values). The study done in *The Politics of Cultural Differences*, rather than simply measuring which social groups voted for which parties, instead focused on how voters responded to cultural politics by either remaining loyal to their party, abstaining from voting, or defecting. This approach helps paint a far clearer portrait of how different demographics responded to issues of nationalism, race or religion. This approach also illuminates the secular realignments that have occurred in the time since the New Deal.

Recent realignments in the electorate may have influenced the prevalence of cultural conflict. Increasingly, party lines can be drawn not on regional differences but religious ones. The electorate is split today based primarily on religion; not between different sects of Christianity, but rather by religious commitment. "These individuals for whom religion is highly salient are increasingly likely to support the Republican

party, while those with low levels of religious salience are now more Democratic in their vote choice and partisanship,”(Stonecash and Brewer 2007: 158). Beyond being simply an excellent indicator of a person’s political affiliation, the fact that the electorate is currently split on religious-secular lines helps explain the growing significance of cultural politics.

Cultural politics, with its close association with the role of morality in public life, is often influenced by personal deeply held beliefs. “In short, the impact of traditionalist-modernist religious orientations on political behavior should be exerted principally through attitudes toward cultural issues and groups involved in politicized cultural conflicts,” (Layman 2001: 245). Leege et al. in *The Politics of Cultural Differences* agree that these are the debates that cause the major realignments because their very nature demands a firm position, rather than a flexible valence. The religious-secular cleavage explains why cultural issues are the most contentious, because it is on these issues that the electorate has split itself.

For many years, it was class that divided the electorate, not cultural issues. Jeffrey Stonecash and Mark Brewer in their text *Split; Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics* ask whether class related issues have been supplanted by the cultural issues rising in prevalence in today’s politics. They conclude that cultural issues are growing in significance, “...Democrats and Republicans differ on cultural issues, and the differences have grown so much over time that the divided between the parties can now be described as a chasm,” (Stonecash and Brewer 2007: 133). However, that is not to say that class related issues no longer are significant; they conclude that class issues have not been replaced by cultural issues, instead in today’s political climate, issues of class and culture

coexist and reinforce each other.

Thomas Carsey and Geoffrey Layman provide additional insight into why cultural issues have such a close relationship with polarization. They argue that when an individual holds political views at odds with the stance of their party, there is evidence that in some cases individuals adapt their issue stance to accommodate their party affiliation, and in other cases individuals change parties to accommodate deeply held issue stances (Carsey and Layman 2006). “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,” (Casey and Layman 2006: 474). In short, it is the personally significant, deeply held issue stances that motivate individual voters to sort themselves into a different party. Because cultural issues are often framed as questions of right and wrong, cultural issues are very likely to be one of the issues that determines whether an individual remains within their party or defects to another (Layman 2001).

Cultural politics are becoming more and more prevalent in today’s society. Cultural politics were relatively sparse in earlier American political life (Layman 2001). News coverage of cultural conflicts has increased drastically over the past forty years, with entire news channels devoted to covering a particular side in the cultural conflict (Layman 2001). Cultural issues lend themselves well to creating interesting news stories, because they tap into deep emotional responses for people as these issues are often framed as questions of right and wrong (Layman 2001). Thus, these issues demand uncompromising stances, making compromise more difficult as doing so can be seen as compromising on one’s values (Sharp 2014). Cultural issues lead to emotional and often

dramatic conflict that delights or infuriates spectators, which explains the growing prevalence of these issues in modern society; the shock, scandal and drama of the conflict fascinates and engages people.

Beyond just cultural politics' close association with religious commitment and deeply held beliefs, cultural issues are packaged by political elites in such a way as to polarize. Legee et al. (2002) and Edsall (2006) both suggest that in today's politics, politicians frequently use shorthand or political codewords that convey to voters where they stand on cultural issues. These codewords like "prochoice" or "traditional values" or "sanctity of marriage," serve as signals to the voters, giving them verbal phrases that represent a pantheon of beliefs to rally around. "These codewords remind loyalists of who the party is and is not. They give the faithful cognitive reinforcement sufficient to mobilize," (Legee et al. 2002: 262). These simple catchphrases reduce complex issues into sound-bites, reducing the ability to debate and truly discuss cultural issues on a meaningful level.

It has become abundantly clear that cultural politics has grown increasingly prevalent over the years. Everything from the nature of the split in the electorate, to the personal religious significance these issues invoke, to the way these issues are discussed creates polarization. These structural, personal, and presentation factors all ensure that cultural issues will continue to be a political battlefield between the right and left in the United States of America.

Where do traditionally female cultural issues stand in cultural politics?

Within the pantheon of cultural issues, the "traditionally female" issues loom large. "The extent to which a large number of wedge- that is, polarizing- issues touch upon the

subject of sexuality, suggests the profound hold that disputed visions of this topic, and of reproductive matters in general, have on voters and on political actors,” (Edsall 2006: 53). Issues such as abortion, access to contraceptives, role in the family and society, and equal pay for women all remain significant in modern political life.

Cultural issues are contentious because their very nature ignites the current political alignment that exists along religious/secular lines. Debates about abortion and contraceptives must automatically include discussion of sexual activity and of motherhood. Many argue that the battlefield that feminist issues are fought on is the result of a movement away from thinking of women as mothers first. “Expectations about motherhood and what women *should* feel are used against us in all different areas in our lives- particularly when it comes to controlling our bodies,” (Valenti 2007: 155). In Thomas Edsall’s text, he cites a quote by the creator of the birth control pill, Carl Djerassi, stating that his invention had “the biggest social implications of anything in science that you could do other than drop another atomic bomb,” (Edsall 2006: 163). As women have been given more options both in the workplace and in controlling the size of their families, society has been faced with social changes in the roles of women.

The social changes concerning the role of women have certainly been significant. In the mid twentieth century, women were expected to remain within the home and fulfill their roles as wife and mother rather than entering the workforce. Betty Friedan (2013) famously compared this way of life to that of a prisoner in a concentration camp, arguing that the role of a housewife was a limited and even dehumanizing role. Since Friedan originally wrote in 1963, women have increasingly been moving out of the home and into the workplace; women’s participation in the labor force grew from 34 percent in 1950 to

60 percent in 2000 (Toossi 2002). As more and more women entered the workforce, further cultural issues were gradually brought to light as women no longer were serving solely their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

Women in the workforce originally faced significant opposition. They were viewed as taking jobs away from more deserving men, and were often discriminated against within the workplace due to their gender. Betty Friedan observed,

It would be a great service to tell girls who plan to work in society to expect this subtle and uncomfortable discrimination- tell them not to be quiet and hope it all goes away, but to fight it. A girl should not expect special privileges because of her sex, but neither should she 'adjust' to prejudice and discrimination (Friedan et al. 2013: 310).

As an attempt to address these issues in the workplace, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which created a recourse and mechanism of enforcement for women facing gender discrimination in the workplace. (National Archives and Records Administration). Subsequent legislation such as the proposed Equal Rights Amendment and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act further expanded efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace ("Fifty Years After the Equal Pay Act"). The changing composition of the workforce combined with changing standards and regulation of behavior in the workplace by these laws created tensions between traditionalists and modernists. These tensions produced the introduction of women's role in the family and society, the origin of discussion of "family values," equal pay, and gender discrimination as political cultural issues.

Meanwhile, cultural issues concerning reproduction were brought into the arena

of mainstream American politics largely through judicial decisions. Landmark Supreme Court cases such as Griswold v. Connecticut and Roe v. Wade introduced issues relating to access to contraception and abortion as political issues (ACLU). Although it was these court cases in the 1960s and the 1970s that brought political attention to the use of contraceptives and abortions, these practices had been a part of thousands of women's lives throughout American history (Pollitt 1997). It was the legalization of contraceptives and abortion that brought this issue into a political context and evolved into a political cultural battleground between liberals and conservatives. Cultural issues related to reproduction are especially susceptible to cultural conflict and polarization because an individual's opinion on abortion and contraceptives is often closely related to their religious views, or lack thereof.

The immense social changes regarding the role of women in society have brought about a United States in which women are steadily moving to work outside the home and given more autonomy over their reproduction. Political tensions have formed as a result of these social changes. Traditionalists are uncomfortable with these changes, while secularists typically celebrate them. This conflict inspired countless catchphrases to encapsulate the movement; most commonly "family values." Referring to the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections, Legee et al. write, "When the new themes of internal threats to 'family values' were emphasized, Democrats retaliated with charges of theocracy and religious extremism," (Legee et al. 2002: 160). These sound-bites serve their desired purpose of encapsulating a broad, complex social change into a simple phrase, allowing everyone to make the same arguments easily.

Scholarship on the gender gap and its effect on American politics prove that

women's issues have significance in American political life beyond existence as a soundbite. The gender gap developed within the American electorate due to the movement of men away from the Democratic party towards the more conservative Republican party, while women are divided between the two parties, seemingly on the basis of religious commitment (Norrander and Wilcox 2008). As a result, today women are more likely to be Democrats and men more likely to be Republicans (Edsall 2006).

Brian Schaffner maintains that women's issues have a significant effect on American women's choice in party affiliation, while having little to no effect on men's party affiliation (Schaffner 2005). Accordingly, the utilization and discussion of gender issues can significantly influence elections, and the parties increasingly exploit that gender gap to further their electoral goals. "Ultimately, Democratic candidates who decide to target women are more likely to prime women's issues while Republicans will attempt to draw attention away from those topics and toward other issues," (Schaffner: 2005: 807). Due to the significant advantages or disadvantages women's issues can yield for the parties in elections, it is clear that these issues remain politically relevant today.

It is clear that there are some extreme political views and opinions on women's issues being voiced today. In 2012, Missouri Representative, Republican Todd Akin made headlines with his explanation of what constitutes a "legitimate rape," explaining in most cases "the female body has ways to shut the whole thing down," (Moore). Meanwhile, George Heartwell, Mayor of Grand Rapids, Missouri, stated at a fundraiser that "the forces of darkness," were seeking to cut off funding from Planned Parenthood (*Left of the Mark* 2012). It would be erroneous to assign these hyperbolic statements made by individuals to the majority of either the Republican or Democratic parties.

Statements from individual partisans cannot and do not represent the entire party.

Therefore, to clearly and accurately understand the two parties' stances on cultural issues relating to women, the party platforms provide the most accurate data.

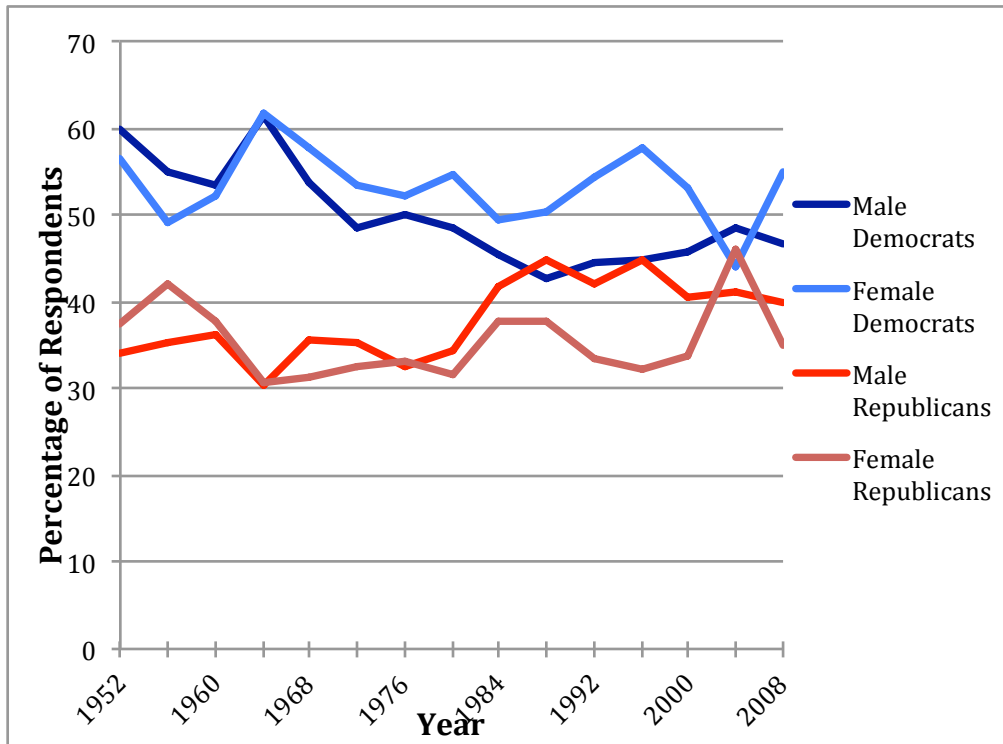
The party platforms provide the best information about the parties' cultural stands, because they serve as mission statements for the parties. "The platforms are the only official statements of the parties' issue positions," (Layman 2001: 112). Statements made in the platforms cannot be dismissed as outlier opinions, or the views of a lone radical in the way that statements from individuals can. Therefore, the platforms remain an excellent barometer for the stance of the partisans of that particular party. "If the parties' activists and electorate coalitions are becoming more polarized along religious and cultural lines, it is likely that their candidates and their platforms will take increasingly strong, uncompromising stances on these issues," (Layman 2001). Research in the field has indicated that these strong uncompromising stances on cultural issues are in fact occurring as time goes on. "The Republicans' stance on cultural issues was crystal clear, as was that of the Democrats. The 2004 offerings of the parties differed from each other as much as night differs from day," (Stonecash and Brewer 2007: 120). Therefore, in order to gauge whether polarization has increased in Democratic and Republican stances on women's issues, the party platforms must be examined.

Chapter Three: Methods and Results

This thesis' focus is on the relationship between polarization and the increase in discussion of cultural issues, particularly cultural issues relating to women from 1952-2012. This time frame was chosen due to the availability of American National Election Studies data regarding women and polarization during this period. This sixty-year period also provides an opportunity to see changes in polarization and discussion of women's issues over a significant period of time. The first objective of the project was to verify that polarization was in fact occurring in American politics. In order to accomplish this, an analysis of American National Election Studies data from 1952-2008¹ was conducted. This data demonstrated that polarization in American politics was increasing, not only amongst the political elite, but also amongst the electorate.

¹ The 1948-2012 ANES Cumulative data file is not yet available.

Figure 1: Party Identification



Source: The American National Election Studies: Cumulative Data File 1948-2008. THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

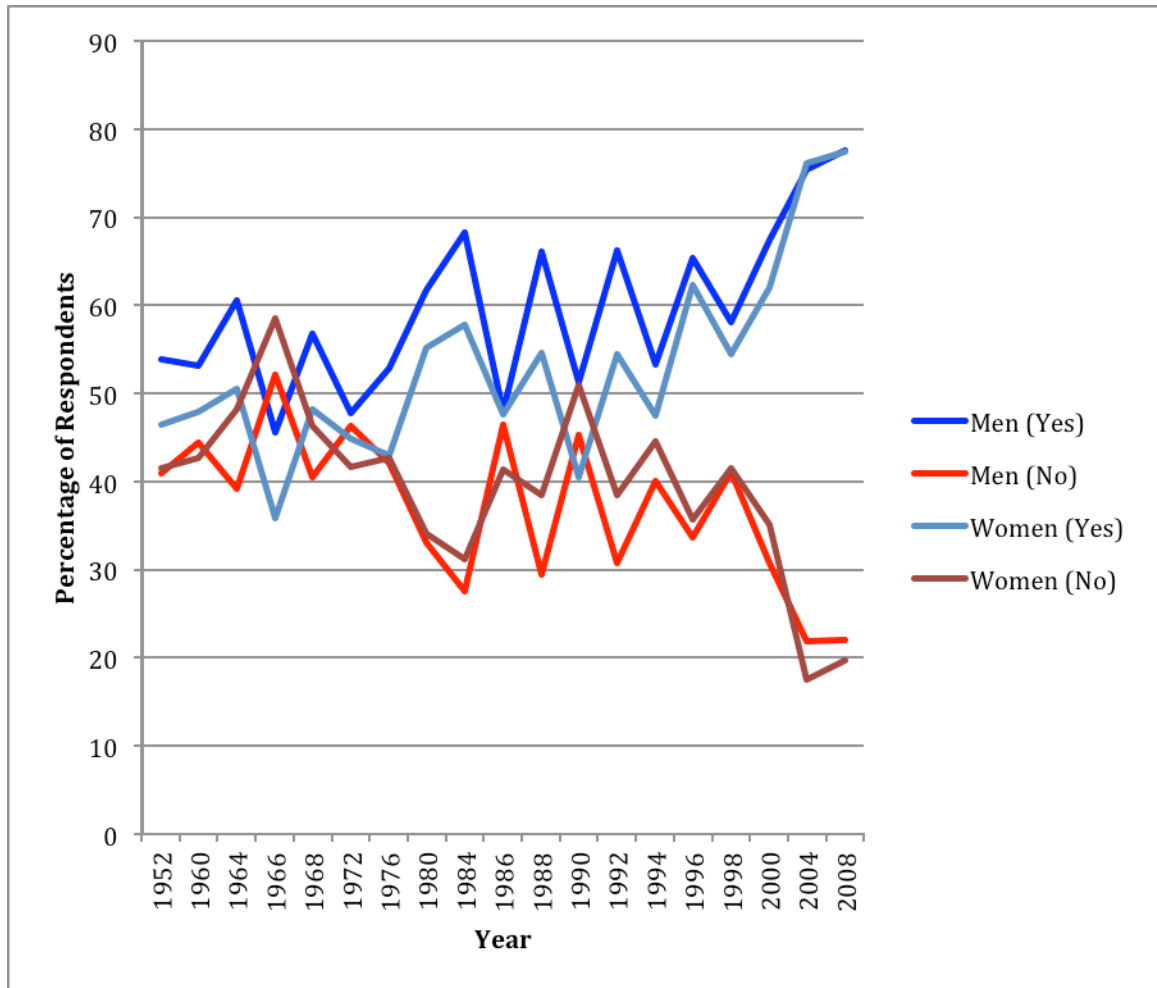
The data provided by this study on party affiliations of the electorate corroborated that polarization is occurring at all levels of society. In the nineteen fifties, the majority of the electorate identified as Democratic, with 30-40 percent of the electorate identifying as Republican. The mid-twentieth century was characterized by low levels of polarization as a result. However, as time passed, both parties' support in the electorate moved closer to the fifty percent range. This movement towards a fifty-fifty partisan split could be indicative of a movement towards greater polarization along party lines within the electorate.

Notably, the parties appear to be divided along gender lines. The Democratic Party is consistently supported by a higher proportion of women than men, and

conversely, the Republican Party is consistently supported by a higher proportion of men than women. These disparities also appear to be growing over time. The one discrepancy to these trends is exhibited in the data points for 2004; which may be explained in that the first election post 9/11 may have changed priorities and shifted party alliances. However, the 2008 data indicate that the 2004 election was more likely to be an outlier than a reversal in the gender coalitions within the parties. These data indicate that the choices in party affiliation made by men and women have been increasingly divergent from one another.

There are also signs that the electorate is responding to changes in the national parties' issue stances. As the parties become more polarized, their policy stances become farther apart from one another. These changes have not occurred in a vacuum, and the electorate responds to these changes and recognizes the transitions that are taking place in the American electorate. When asked the question, "Do you think there are any important differences in what the Republicans and Democrats stand for," the electorate clearly recognized that polarization was occurring. During the fifties, nearly half of respondents believed there was no difference between the parties. In contrast, by 2008 over 75 percent of respondents believed there were important differences between the parties. The similar decrease in the percentage of respondents who believed there was no difference between the parties demonstrates that the national political parties have become increasingly polarized, and that the electorate is acutely cognizant of this phenomenon.

Figure 2: Are There Differences Between the Parties?

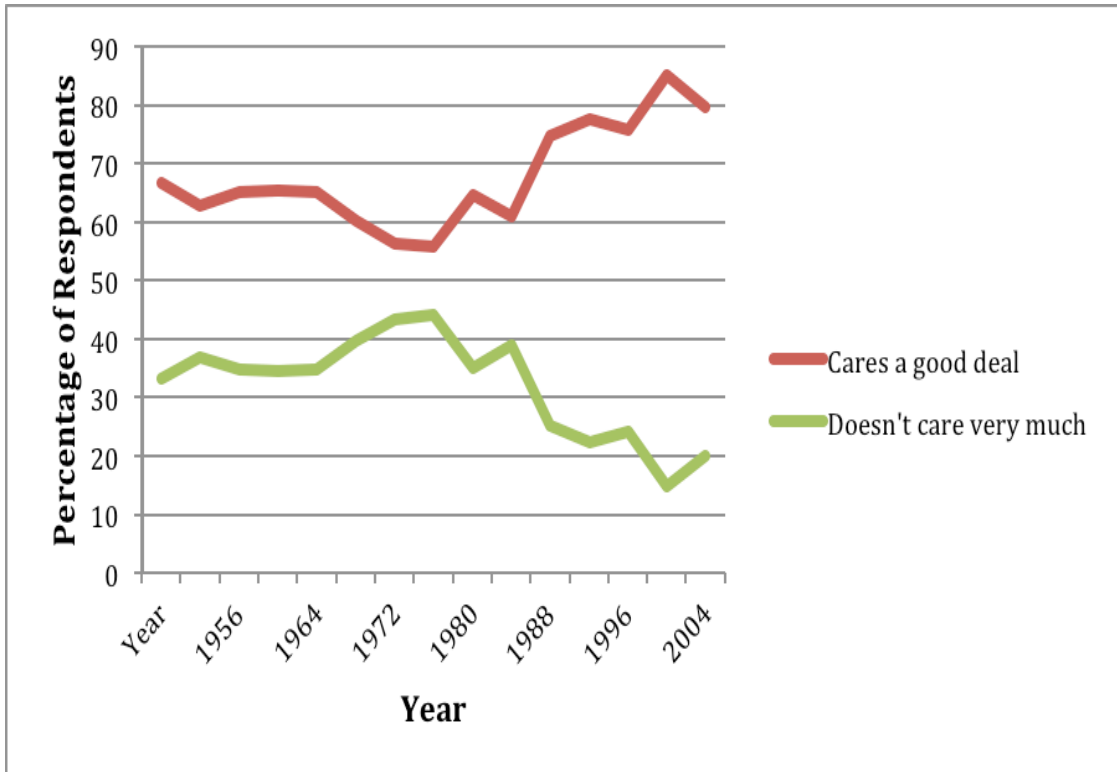


Source: The American National Election Studies: Cumulative Data File 1948-2008. THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

There is corresponding evidence that Americans have become more invested in the results of these elections. When respondents were asked whether they cared which party won the presidential election in 1952, about 66 percent of the respondents responded that they cared a good deal. Therefore a third of the electorate was uninterested in the outcome of the presidential election in 1952. By 2008, the percentage of respondents who did not care about the results of the presidential election had shrunk

to only 20 percent of respondents, showing a marked increase in the electorate's interest in the outcome of presidential elections

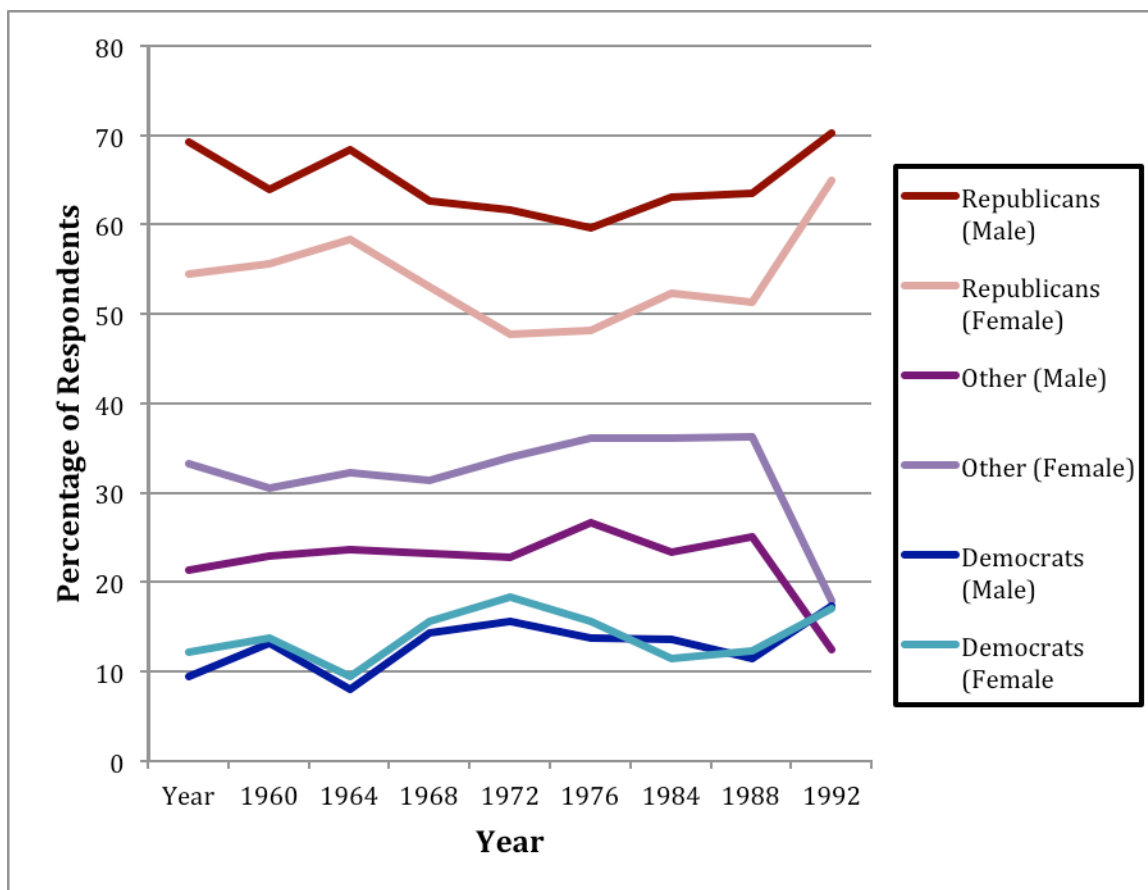
Figure 3: Does the electorate care which party wins Presidential Elections?



Source: The American National Election Studies: Cumulative Data File 1948-2008. THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

The analysis of the American National Election Studies Data also indicates that the increased perception of differences between the parties as well as increased interest in the outcome of presidential elections helps keep the electorate politically informed. Increasingly, respondents were able to accurately identify the Republican Party as more conservative than the Democratic Party. Additionally, respondents who responded that there was no difference between the parties or that they did not know which party was more conservative (both included under the response of “Other,”) declined dramatically.

Figure 4: Which Party is More Conservative on the National Level?



Source: The American National Election Studies: Cumulative Data File 1948-2008. THE ANES GUIDE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

The data provided by the American National Election Studies provide several indicators that polarization has occurred amongst the electorate over the past sixty years. The data show an electorate split evenly between two parties that is more invested in the outcomes of national elections and reports massive increases in differences between the parties. These changes all suggest that polarization has increased amongst the American public as well as within the political parties.

The ANES data provided strong indicators that polarization has occurred in American politics, but divulged few insights into whether this polarization was extended

to the parties' issue stances concerning women. In order to measure whether the issue stances on women's issues were also polarized, a content analysis of the national party platforms from 1952-2012 was conducted. The national party platforms are ideal for content analysis because not only are they the official mission statement of the parties, but they also provide elements of symmetry and continuity. Platforms are released every four years by each party, and often each party addresses the same issues in order to provide contrast between the parties. By focusing on women's issues, this thesis provides an analysis of a set of cultural issues that extends over the past sixty years, and encompasses several cultural conflicts in one overarching theme.

The content analysis focuses on women's issues such as: abortion, access to contraception, women's role within the family and society, access to healthcare, discrimination based on gender, and equal pay. For the purpose of this content analysis, I selected a series of cue-words related to these issues in order to identify portions of the platforms related to women's issues. When analyzing cultural issues, it is necessary to include numerous cue-words and phrases, because political parties often use phrases to represent an overarching issue. For example, the phrases "sanctity of life" and "right to choose" do not on their surface reference women's issues in any way, but to Americans, it is clear that they refer to the issue of abortion. These cue-words and phrases were then used to explore the proportion of party platforms devoted to women's issues over time, and the ideological content of these platforms.

Table 1: Cue-words

Women or woman when not “men and women”	Wife	Widow	Motherhood
Sex	Gender	Sexually/sexual	Unborn child or children
Abortion	Family planning	Contraceptives	Sanctity of life
Family values	Right to life	Homemaker	Female
Maternal	Pregnancy	Reproduction/ reproductive	Prenatal
Homemaker	Any sentence or clause that appears under a heading containing the word “Women”	Equal Rights Amendment	

Using these cue-words, the platforms were analyzed, and any sentence or clause containing one or more of these cue-words was selected. Sentences were used as the unit of selection because they provided the context in which the word had been used, and are therefore more informative than simply selecting the individual words. However, due to the large number of run-on sentences and lists contained within the platform, using sentences as a unit of comparison became unworkable. In many cases, a single sentence composed over a page or more, so comparing the number of sentences referencing women’s issues to the total number of sentences in the platform did not create a truly

representative picture of the space devoted to women’s issues in the platform. Therefore, the number of words in each selected sentence or clause was counted and compared to the total number of words within the platform in order to generate the percentage of each platform devoted to women’s issues.

Table 2. Percentage of Party Platforms Devoted to Women’s Issues (Primary Coder)

Year	Percentage of Republican platforms devoted to women’s issues (%)	Percentage of Democratic platforms devoted to women’s issues (%)	Difference Between parties
1952	0.48	1.74	-1.26
1956	0.47	0.7	-0.23
1960	0.66	0.5	0.16
1964	0.16	1.33	-1.17
1968	0.58	0.9	-0.32
1972	3.18	2.81	0.37
1976	2.69	1.81	0.88
1980	2.96	5.16	-2.2
1984	4.48	2.86	1.62
1988	2.34	4.81	-2.47
1992	1.78	2.8	-1.02
1996	3.37	4.18	-0.81
2000	3.13	2.22	0.91
2004	3.48	1.04	2.44
2008	3.19	4.24	-1.05

2012	2.6	5.08	-2.48
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In order to investigate the ideological content of the selected sentences, each sentence or clause was assigned a number representing an ideological value. Assigned values included liberal, conservative, neutral, and non-cultural (for portions of the platforms that reference women, but not in a cultural context).

Table 3. Ideological Coding Key

Ideology	Coding Value	Description
Conservative	1	Role for government in reproductive decisions, advocacy for more traditional gender roles, support for women remaining at home.
Liberal	-1	Movement towards greater equality between the sexes, expanding the role of women beyond the traditional roles, little government role in reproductive decisions.
Neutral	0	A statement regarding cultural issues that does not have an ideological connotation. Often a factual statement.
Non-cultural	/	An issue involving women that is not a cultural issue (e.g. pensions for veteran's widows, changing the tax code, changes to Social Security)

The assigned value for every sentence within the platform was then averaged in order to provide an ideological value for the platform as a whole on women's issues. Therefore a platform with an average closer to 1 would be conservative on women's issues, a platform closer to -1 would be more liberal on women's issues, and a platform with an average closer to 0 would be more neutral.

Table 4. Ideological Coding Results (Primary Coder)

Year	Republican Ideological Values	Democratic Ideological Values	Difference between the Parties
1952	-1	-0.8	-0.2
1956	-1	-0.5	-0.5
1960	-0.67	-0.5	-0.17
1964	-1	-0.77	-.23
1968	-1	-0.2	-0.8
1972	-0.58	-0.94	0.36
1976	-0.19	-0.6	0.41
1980	0.07	-0.83	0.9
1984	0.1	-0.76	1.76
1988	0	-1	1
1992	0.53	-0.91	1.44
1996	0.34	-0.44	0.78
2000	0.67	-0.68	1.35
2004	0.41	-0.83	1.24
2008	0.57	-0.66	1.23
2012	0.82	-0.72	1.54

These measures, while informative, do not have a high degree of reliability because they were produced by a single individual. They are therefore subject to

subconscious biases and are inherently subjective. To rectify this problem, a second coder was brought in and asked to do the same analysis, in order to establish a degree of inter-coder reliability (Manheim et al. 2002). This secondary coder was provided with the same cue-words and ideological values and asked to complete a second, independent content analysis of the party platforms spanning from 1952-2012.

Table 5: Percentage of Party Platforms Devoted to Women’s Issues (Secondary Coder)

Year	Percentage of Republican platforms devoted to women’s issues (%)	Percentage of Democratic platforms devoted to women’s issues (%)	Difference between the Parties
1952	0.48	1.88	-1.4
1956	1.2	0.49	0.71
1960	0.84	1.77	-0.93
1964	0.42	1.53	-1.11
1968	0.82	1.01	-0.19
1972	3.64	2.99	0.65
1976	2.96	2.35	0.61
1980	2.92	5.31	-2.39
1984	3.27	3.45	-0.18
1988	2.82	7.92	-5.1
1992	2.71	2.17	0.54

1996	2.71	4.13	-1.42
2000	3.08	3.82	-0.74
2004	4.12	2.38	1.74
2008	2.99	5.18	-2.19
2012	2.6	4.84	-2.24

There are slight discrepancies between the percentages obtained from the primary and secondary coders due to different interpretations of the coding instructions. The primary coder selected only sentences that mentioned women when the phrase selected was not part of the larger phrase “men and women.” The secondary coder selected sentences that mention women regardless of whether or not they were mentioned in conjunction with men. As a result, the secondary coder’s results contain some increased percentages for years that made liberal use of the phrase “men and women.”

Despite differing interpretations of coding instructions, both the primary and secondary coders results demonstrate drastic increases in the percentage of both parties’ platforms devoted to women’s issues. The proportion of Democratic platforms devoted to women’s issues nearly quintupled from 1952-2012, while the proportion of Republican platforms devoted to women’s issues almost tripled. Considering the vast scope and volume of issues discussed in party platforms, including non-cultural issues of immense significance such as national defense, foreign policy and education, an increase of this magnitude within a specific subset of cultural issues is impressive. As women’s issues are only one subset of issues amongst the many discussed in party platforms, this increase is

incredibly significant, and is representative of the increased attention paid by both parties to cultural issues relating to women.

The results from the primary and secondary coders show a high degree of agreement within the ideological results, with an average difference of only 0.1 on the ideological scale. There is a slight discrepancy between the results of the primary and secondary coders concerning the percentages of each platform devoted to women’s issues, due to the different interpretations of the coding instructions as discussed above. The average difference between the primary and secondary coders was 0.37%.

Table 6: Ideological Coding Results (Secondary Coder)

Year	Republican Ideological Values	Democratic Ideological Values	Difference Between the Parties
1952	-1	-0.83	-0.17
1956	-0.75	-1	.25
1960	-0.25	-0.4	0.15
1964	-1	-0.83	-0.17
1968	-1	0	1
1972	-0.97	-1	0.03
1976	-0.53	-0.54	0.01
1980	-0.22	-0.82	0.6
1984	-0.08	-0.68	0.6
1988	0.03	-1	1.03
1992	0.5	-1	1.5
1996	0.29	-0.64	0.93

2000	-0.14	-0.89	0.75
2004	-0.12	-0.67	0.55
2008	0.32	-0.93	1.25
2012	0.75	-0.95	1.7

The results of the content analysis reveal drastic changes in the parties' stances on women's issues. While the Democratic Party remains consistently liberal in their stances on women's issues, the Republican Party has experienced a complete ideological reversal in their approach to issues concerning women. In 1952, Republicans exhibited stances either as liberal or more liberal than the Democrats concerning women. By 2012, the Republicans had transitioned to the extreme conservative end of the ideological spectrum regarding women's issues and had accomplished this ideological turnaround within just a sixty-year period. In short, within the average baby boomer's lifetime, he or she would have witnessed a conservative revolution in the Republican Party's attitude towards women's issues. It is this drastic ideological movement to the right by the Republican Party that has precipitated the polarization of attitudes towards women's issues within the United States of America.

An examination of the text within the two parties' platforms supports the findings of the content analysis. This examination revealed that Democrats and Republicans took almost identical stands on women's issues from 1952-1964. The positions voiced in those platforms included brief statements of support for equal pay and the Equal Rights Amendment and against discrimination based on sex. This trend continued until 1968, when a change appeared in both platforms as the focus shifted from women in the workplace to women as wives and mothers. The Democrats emphasized prenatal and

maternal care, widow's pensions and the only mention of women working at all was this statement referencing mothers on welfare, "We favor permanent repeal of that restriction and of the provision requiring mothers of young children to work," (Woolley 2014). Meanwhile the 1968 Republicans confined themselves to support of widow's pensions and a vague statement about concerns for minorities.

The period from 1952-1968 marked a period of agreement for the parties concerning women's issues. They were unified in liberal stances on the few women's issues being discussed. The shift in focus in 1968 towards more traditional and non-controversial stances on women's issues may have been a precursor for the abrupt change in the parties' approaches to women in 1972, as well as an attempt at least on the Democrats' part to hold the party together in the face of serious divisions (Brown 2014).

In 1972, both parties rebounded from the decreased focus on women's issues in the previous election cycle with an explosion in the number of women's issues discussed in the party platforms. Likely a result of nomination reforms that opened the nominating process up outside of party leaders' control and to minorities (Brown 2014), the delegates chosen under these new rules expressed very strongly that more gender related issues should be discussed on the national political stage. Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to equal pay and the Equal Rights Amendment that they had omitted in 1968, while continuing to discourage discrimination based on sex. Both parties notably advocated for family planning for the first time, as well as promoting women's voices in government and politics. Issues such as job training, support for working mothers, Title IX, and commissions on the status of women were also supported and raised as issues within the 1972 platforms.

The GOP's only stances on women in 1972 that would be recognizable to modern Republicans were the support of women's freedom to remain at home or choose a career, and support for locally controlled daycare rather than daycare sponsored by the federal government. It is significant that even with the opening of the nominating process and a more diverse slate of delegates forming the Democratic Party platform, both parties maintained very liberal stances on women's issues, only broadening the previous stances taken by the parties. This suggests that in 1972, the parties were still not ideologically differentiated on women's issues, and that the ideological sorting defined by Campbell (2006) occurred after this point.

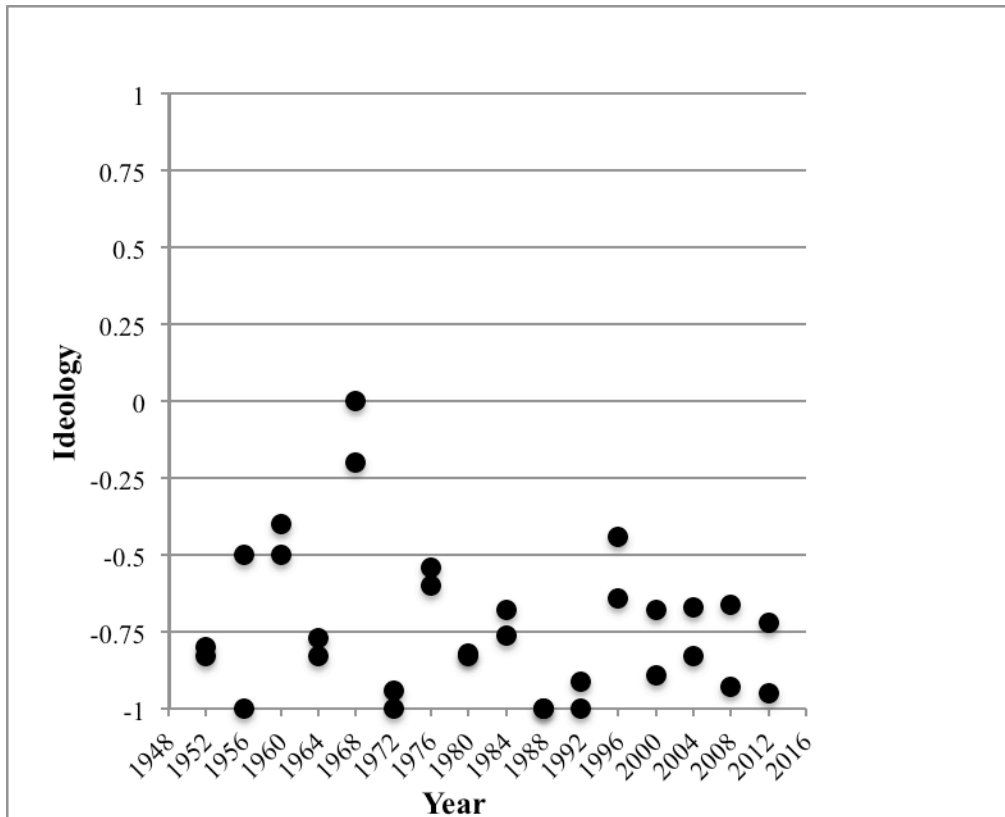
In 1976 the parties began to diverge, revealing two distinct trends. First, that the Democratic Party has remained consistently liberal on women's issues. In 1976, tentative language supporting abortion was included in the party platform. "We fully recognize the religious and ethical nature of the concerns which many Americans have on the subject of abortion. We feel, however, that it is undesirable to attempt to amend the U.S. Constitution to overturn the Supreme Court decision in this area," (Woolley 2014). As time passed, the Democrats strengthened their commitment to Roe v. Wade, and continued to take liberal positions on women's issues. As more of these issues entered mainstream political discussion, such as discouraging sexual harassment, encouraging women to enter science and technology fields, and equality within the military, the Democratic Party simply continued to take liberal stances on them.

While Democratic positions on women's issues experienced little ideological change, the way these issues were discussed within the platforms changed gradually over time. In 1984, Democrats used women's issues within their platform as a political cudgel,

painting incumbent President Reagan as anti-women. The 1984 Democratic platform asked “If, Mr. Reagan is reelected, who would protect women and minorities against discrimination?” (Woolley 2014). While these concerns may have been real for some Democrats, it is clear that women’s issues were used as a political tool during this period.

The language used in Democratic Party platforms demonstrates consistent liberal tendencies concerning women’s issues. The compiled results of the primary and secondary coders’ content analysis provide evidence to support this trend. Although there is some fluctuation, no platform from the Democratic Party receives an ideological score higher than zero, staying firmly in the liberal range within the 1952-2012 time period.

Figure 5: Democratic Ideology in Party Platforms



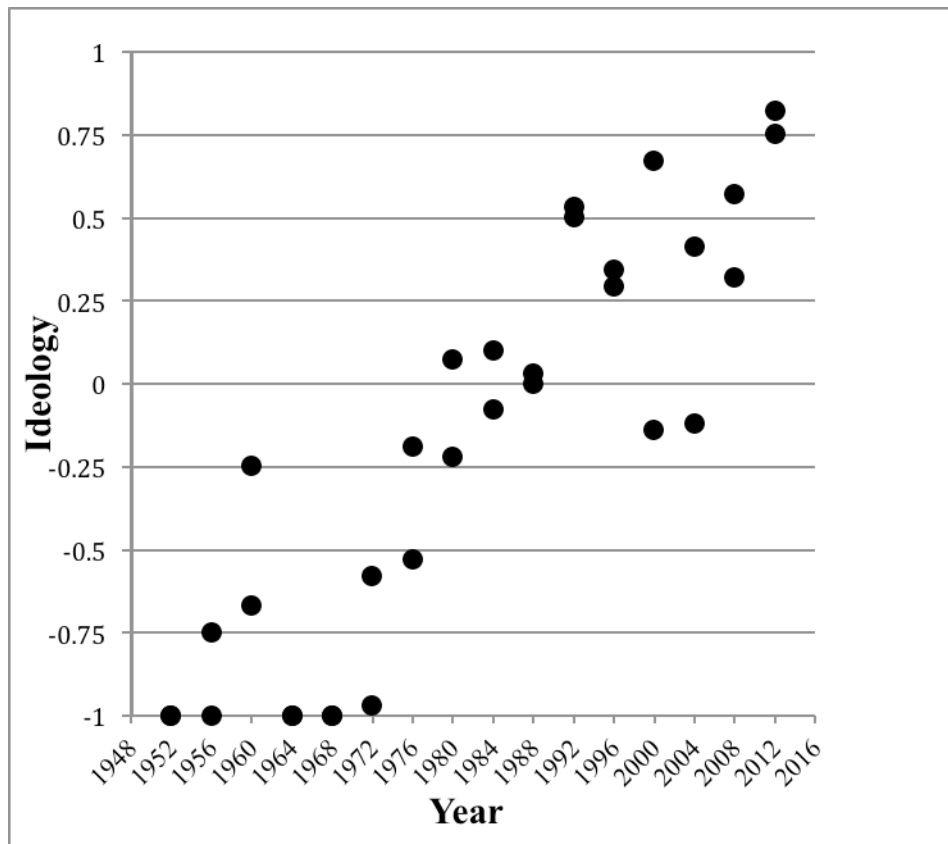
The other distinct trend that emerged in 1972 was the steady movement of the Republican Party towards more conservative stances on women's issues. While the Democrats tentatively supported abortion in 1976, Republicans tentatively opposed it. "The Republican Party favors continuance of the public dialogue on abortion and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right of life for unborn children," (Woolley 2014). As time passed, the Republicans solidified their opposition to abortion while contributing new rhetoric to the debate, such as "human life amendment," "unborn children," and "sanctity of life." All are phrases that became increasingly common in more recent Republican platforms.

The nineteen eighties were a transformative time for the Republican Party. Early Republican support for women's issues such as pay equity and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment gradually gave way to concern about "family values." This phrase was introduced into the American vocabulary of the Republican 1976 platform and articulated a concern regarding women related issues and changes to the status quo that many Americans felt. Family values became the overarching theme for the Republican platforms for the remainder of the century. That one phrase allowed the party to encapsulate the entire Republican agenda on cultural issues into one voter-friendly phrase. Family values embraced the image of the traditional nuclear family, with traditional male and female roles for the parents, as well as a reinforcement of Christian beliefs. Family values became the perfect sound-bite, encapsulating an entire pantheon of cultural political issues in one easy term, while simultaneously evoking a sense of political nostalgia for an earlier, more traditional time.

Family values also became a winning issue for the Republican Party. As years passed, issues such as the “maternalization of poverty,” concern about the dissolution of the American family, support for homemakers, parental notification, and abstinence education were all raised in Republican platforms. The increasingly conservative stances taken on these new cultural political issues gradually moved the Republican Party to the right of the political spectrum on women’s issues.

However, Republican Party platforms did not shift ideologically purely on the basis of these new issues. Republicans were the first major political party to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment, but in 1984, the ERA plank was dropped from Republican platforms for good. The GOP 1984 platform also went on to say, “ President Reagan believes, as do we, that all members of our party are free to work individually for women’s progress,” (Woolley 2014). This statement is a clear signal that legal advancements for women, while perhaps a goal for individual Republicans, was no longer a goal of the Republican Party. The 1988 Republican platform further expanded on this issue, saying, “But legal rights mean nothing without opportunity, and that has been the hallmark of Republican policy,” (Woolley 2014). Republicans’ new conservative stances on women led them to shift the focus in gender issues to their current area of strength, their economic policy. The modern Republican Party would be unrecognizable to Republicans from the 1960s who advocated for equal pay, the Equal Rights Amendment, and job training for women. The compiled results from the primary and secondary coders’ content analysis support the dramatic shift in Republican ideology on women’s issues from liberalism to conservatism.

Figure 6: Republican Ideology in Party Platforms



These two distinct trends exhibited by the two parties demonstrate that significant levels of polarization are occurring within the American party system on women's issues. The results of the content analysis undertaken for this study indicate that women's issues are exponentially more prevalent within the parties' political agenda and that the stances taken on these issues by the two parties have become drastically different from one another. While initially there was little substantive difference between the Democratic and Republican party on these issues, as time has passed, the Republicans have increasingly moved to differentiate themselves from the Democrats by taking more and more conservative stances on issues such as abortion, equal pay, access to contraceptives, and a woman's role in society. This almost unprecedented ideological reversal on

women's issues by the Republican Party is the cause of the growing rift between the parties on these matters. This shift is the origin of the intense political polarization on women's issues that exists in today's political climate.

Chapter Four: Conclusions

The collected data from the American National Election Studies show that polarization is increasing in the United States of America. Polarization is not an elite phenomena, it is the current reality of every American's political life. Political polarization may have stemmed from the political elites, but it has fully spread and been embraced by all levels of society. Today, a greater percentage of Americans believes that there are major differences between the two parties, and are better able to correctly identify those ideological differences. The movement of women voters into the Democratic Party and male voters into the Republican party may be a sign that cultural issues relating to women may be informing Americans' party affiliation choices and affecting polarization.

The depth and extent of polarization has been assisted by a myriad of factors enabled by modern technology. The rise of the Internet and cable news stations introduced America to the 24 hour news cycle, to the sound-bite, to the ideologically based news channels (Prior 2013). The Internet provided an arena in which everyone who had a political opinion had a platform on which to make it heard. Meanwhile, the 24 hour news channels fueled themselves on political controversy and polarization, dissecting and replaying every controversial political development (York 2014). As a result, today Americans have more access to political information, and more specifically, political information that conforms to their own views.

Political reforms have also opened up the political system to the average American, becoming increasingly more inclusive over the past sixty years. The McGovern-Fraser reforms implemented as a response to the disastrous Democratic

National Convention of 1968 issued several recommendations that were adopted by the Democratic Party, and then partially implemented by the Republican Party (Brown 2014). As a result of these changes, presidential nominees were chosen by state primaries and caucuses rather than by delegates chosen by party elites (Brown 2014). This, along with the Democratic policy of ensuring the selection of delegates representing minority groups within the population, brought far more Americans into the political process and gave a larger segment of Americans a voice in American politics. The McGovern-Fraser reforms allowed the average American the opportunity to become more involved and invested in the political process, as well as allowing party activists more influence in the party and the party issue (Hershey 2014). This development allowed for more ideologically extreme stances and viewpoints along the political spectrum to be expressed and heard in the arena of American politics, contributing to polarization.

The content analysis undertaken in this study has demonstrated that polarization has occurred specifically within the parties' positions on women's issues. While the Democratic platforms fluctuated within the liberal to moderate range over the sixty-year span, the Republican platforms' ideology traced a very different trajectory. Beginning with extreme liberal positions in the fifties, the Republican platforms began a steady movement to more and more conservative positions, until 2012, when the Republican Party was located at the extreme conservative end of the political spectrum. These results indicate that polarization on women's issues has occurred in the United States, but rather than being the result of both party's seeking more extreme views on the subject, it is the result of the Republican Party's fundamental shift on their gender related policy positions.

There are several factors that likely played a role in the shift in Republican positions. One factor is that in 1952, there were far fewer women's issues being discussed in the national political arena. The mid twentieth century was characterized by liberal stances by both parties concerning women's issues, but those issues formed a negligible portion of the platforms, and the only issue discussed was the issue of equal pay for women. As time passed and more women's issues entered the political mainstream, the Republican Party gradually began differentiating itself from the Democratic Party by taking increasingly conservative stances on issues like contraceptives, abortion, and a woman's place in society, as these issues surfaced into the national consciousness. As more and more political cultural issues entered the political mainstream, they brought into existence more issues for the parties to divide over.

Furthermore, the results of this study support the theory that political realignments are the cause of the polarization affecting the American political system. The mid twentieth century is marked by white southerners who previously affiliated with the Democratic Party gradually shifting their support to the Republican Party in the face of Democratic support of the civil rights movement. With new coalitions within the parties, new areas of conflict that had previously been moderated by the wide ideological variety within each party came to the forefront. The Southern Democrats' shift in party affiliation marked a fundamental alteration in the coalitions composing the political parties. While previously party affiliation was closely connected with regional concerns, this shift formed parties united by ideology (Abramowitz 2010). While the previous party alignments encompassed wide ranges of ideology, the current party alignment is solidly defined by ideological beliefs, leading to polarization. The increased conservatism in

Republican stances on women's issues could be indicative of that shift towards ideological unity, and a new focus on issues that are ideologically and religiously relevant, such as gender related issues (Layman 2001).

The content analysis results could also be indicative of conflict extension within the parties. The gradual polarization of the parties on these women's issues would be compliant with the broader picture of conflict extension, in which multiple issues become more and more polarized, rather than one major polarized issue dividing the parties. However, as this project focuses solely on gender related issues, a broader survey of the parties' stances on a variety of issues, both cultural and fiscal would be necessary to determine whether conflict extension is in fact occurring.

The sharper increase in conservatism on gender issues that the Republican Party displayed following the turn of the century can also be a result of the party's recent election strategies. In the new millennia, the Republican Party discovered that embracing polarization could lead to electoral success. Conventional wisdom held that the two parties should take relatively moderate stances that allowed them to compete for moderate independent voters. Karl Rove and Republican strategists upended this logic in the 2000 presidential election when instead of reaching out to the middle, they decided to move to the right and embrace their base (Edsall 2006). That proved to be an electorally sound strategy, and empowered the parties to endorse candidates that took more ideologically extreme positions, further contributing to the political polarization already in existence due to the new party coalitions. The increased polarization exhibited in the content analysis results of this project, particularly in the twenty-first century, is a

symptom of the Republicans' willingness to focus on their base rather than reach out towards the center.

While there are several logical causes for polarization within the parties concerning women's issues, the relationship between political polarization and cultural issues in general is more nebulous. It appears unlikely that polarization increases the discussion of cultural issues or vice versa in a strictly causal relationship. It seems more likely that political polarization and political cultural issues exist in a feedback loop, each relying symbiotically on the other. As parties realign on religious lines (Layman 2001), it is natural that cultural issues that are closely related to religious beliefs come into a sharper focus. These issues cause emotions to flare, alienating one side from the other and increasing polarization. Each side also seeks further cultural issues that comply with their deeply held beliefs to pummel the other side with, and to use as a political weapon. Cultural issues thus evolve from the initial flashpoint in the conflict to a weapon used by both sides. It is for this reason that political polarization and cultural issues are so closely intertwined, both in public perception and in reality.

Having established that political polarization exists today in American society, it is necessary to discuss whether it has positive or negative effects for the United States. Polarization is commonly perceived to be vastly detrimental to the American political system. Political shutdown, partisan gridlock and the 112th "Do-Nothing" Congress are all commonly cited as negative results of polarization. However, as Layman (2001) and Brewer and Stonceash (2007) have articulated, polarization is not an inherently detrimental phenomena. Polarization provides the electorate with clear choices, choices that may not have been available to Americans during the 1950s when political

polarization was extremely low. Furthermore, as the ANES data indicate, polarization can also produce a more politically informed electorate as a result of the parties' ideological polarization. Allowing more voices in the marketplace of political ideas increases the choices available to voters and forces the parties to compete and debate for votes, which is a substantial benefit provided by political polarization.

However, this beneficial aspect does not erase the negative effects of polarization. At some point, healthy polarization devolves into partisan warfare, and any increased choice experienced by the voter is negated by the fact that their elected officials are incapable of accomplishing anything once they have been elected (Theriault 2014). An ideal political system would be one that is polarized enough to provide the electorate with choices, but not so polarized that it renders the political and legislative mechanisms of the United States ineffectual. Whether this "happy medium" solution can be reached through an increased focus on the few areas of agreement that remain to the two parties remains to be seen. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, the electorate today is provided with a significant choice in the arena of women's issues by the issue stances of the Republican and the Democratic parties.

There is little evidence that political polarization will be decreasing in the future. Polarized politics yields electoral wins for the parties, and ratings for news outlets. Within the narrower focus of polarization on issues relating to women, there is a slightly more hopeful outlook. The Democratic Party, which has maintained consistent policy stances on women's issues for over sixty years now, is unlikely to shift to more moderate positions. However, following their loss in the 2012 presidential election, the Republican Party has acknowledged that outreach to women voters is both a

necessary and desired goal for the future of the party (“Growth and Opportunity Project” 2014). These encouraging signals by Republican leaders may not be translatable into action as a party as a whole however. The coalitions of religiously committed voters that comprise the modern Republican Party are unlikely to support any changes in Republicans’ stances on abortion, or similar women’s issues that are closely tied to religious beliefs. Additionally, as long as Republican politicians continue to make problematic comments about women, as former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee recently did concerning women’s libidos and contraceptives, it is unlikely that voters will identify the Republican Party as a party that has a real commitment to altering their stances on women’s issues (Bassett 2014). Therefore, it appears that polarization, both in general and in relation to women’s issues is unlikely to change in the near future.

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