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Do Abortion Attitudes Lead to Party Switching?

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The notion that issues and ideology can move partisanship remains controversial. The authors explore the stronger claim that issues can lead people to switch political parties and whether the effect of abortion attitudes is asymmetrical (i.e., abortion attitudes may influence party switching in only one direction). They show that in several short-term National Election Studies panels, pro-life Democrats were significantly more likely than other Democrats to become Republicans, but pro-choice Republicans were not likely to become Democrats. However, using panel data over a long time frame, 1982 to 1997, the authors also demonstrate that the cumulative effect of abortion attitudes led pro-life Democrats and pro-choice Republicans to switch parties.

Keywords: party identification; abortion; party switching; changes in party identification

During football season, discussions of upcoming games are frequently pitched as a clash between the "irresistible force" and the "unmovable object." Academic discussions of the relationship between partisanship and deeply held political views use different words but paint a similar picture. Partisanship is the unmovable object, a stable orientation inherited through socialization and reinforced through social identity networks. Yet some issues are also deeply rooted in central moral and religious values and reinforced by social identities and are used by political elites to mobilize support. What happens when the irresistible force of a deeply held political issue clashes with the unmovable force of partisanship?

The relationship between partisanship and strongly held political attitudes has been the subject of debate for nearly fifty years. *The American Voter* argued that partisanship was a deeply held, enduring psychological attachment that influenced attitudes toward candidates and issues (Campbell et al. 1960). But a revisionist literature in the 1980s and 1990s suggested that partisanship was more malleable and that individuals might alter their partisanship based on campaign events (Allsop and Weisberg 1988), economic conditions and evaluations of the president (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989), ideology, parents' political activity and age (Clark et al. 1991), and retrospective evaluations of the economy (Fiorina 1981).

More recently, a series of studies by Donald Green and colleagues (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994) argued that party identification is a deeply rooted social identity, similar to ethnic and religious identities, that is relatively impervious to outside forces. They charge that previous studies that showed that partisanship responded to issues and candidates were the result of measurement error and that once measurement error is controlled for, party identification is largely unchanged by issue positions.

Even the most ardent proponents of partisanship as an unmovable object acknowledge that issues *can* at times influence partisanship. Campbell et al. (1960, 135) suggested that issues that are inconsistent with partisanship can "exert some pressure on the individual's basic partisan commitment. If this pressure is intense enough, a stable partisan identification may actually be changed." And Green and Palmquist (1994, 456) acknowledge that "some dataset yet unanalyzed may turn up evidence of micropartisan adjustment in response to issues, candidates, performance, or voting behavior."

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561

But other research continues to suggest that positions on issues can over time influence partisanship. Several studies have argued that ideological identities can influence partisan ones. Putz (2002) shows that individuals adjusted their partisanship in the early to mid-1990s to bring it more in line with their ideology. More broadly, Abramowitz and Saunders (1998) argue that the increasing correlation between ideology and partisanship over time is almost entirely because of citizens adjusting their partisanship to match their ideological positions. But can specific issue positions cause individuals to change their partisanship?

Party Identification and Abortion Attitudes

If any issue attitude could play the role of "irresistible force," it is abortion. The issue has transformed ordinary Americans into extraordinary activists (Maxwell 2002; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). It has produced collective action of unusual intensity and duration, inspiring mass demonstrations and violence in isolated incidents. Abortion attitudes influence vote choice in presidential, Senate, and gubernatorial elections, even when the conventional wisdom suggests that "it's the economy stupid" (Abramowitz 1995; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1994a, 1994b; Cook, Wilcox, and Hartwig 1993).

Yet in the aggregate, the public holds an ambivalent and collectively moderate position on abortion (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992). This ambivalence comes from conflicting values; many Americans value both an emergent fetal life and women's moral autonomy (Alvarez and Brehm 1995). To the question of whether abortion should be allowed by law, the median voter replies "it depends"—on the reasons the woman is seeking the abortion, on the timing of the abortion, and even on the procedures used (Norrander and Wilcox 2002).

Adams (1997) chronicles the "issue evolution" of the abortion issue, from one pitting well-educated and more-secular citizens against those with less education and more religiosity to one that divided partisans. Pro-life and pro-choice activists used party nominations to replace abortion moderates with candidates who held more extreme positions. Over time, the voting behavior of members of Congress diverged on abortion along party lines, and subsequently the correlation between partisanship and abortion attitudes began to rise in the general public. Carmines and Woods (2002) suggest that the polarization occurred among other sets of activists, including convention delegates and those who are intermittently active in campaigns.

The issue evolution of abortion and partisanship has been dramatic: over the 1970s, the correlation between abortion attitudes and partisanship in the General Social Survey was .07; in 2004 it was −.24.[1] A growing convergence of partisanship and abortion attitudes could come about in several ways. First, new cohorts of voters with consistent attitudes may have replaced older voters who were conflicted. Second, as parties sent increasingly clear signals, partisans may have been persuaded and adjusted their abortion attitudes to meet their partisanship (Zaller 1992; Layman and Carsey 1998; Layman and Carsey 2002).

But it is also possible that some citizens changed their partisanship to fit their abortion attitudes. Adams (1997) suggests but does not demonstrate that individuals adjusted their partisanship to fit their abortion attitudes. He argues that long-term panel data would be needed to determine the causal ordering. Using shorter-term panels, Carsey and Layman (2006) show that both processes took place during the 1992–94–96 panel survey. Those respondents whose abortion positions are the most salient are likely to adjust their partisanship to fit with their views on abortion, and those with less salient abortion attitudes are likely to be persuaded by their party's position on the issue.

Carsey and Layman (2006) show that abortion attitudes lead to changes in partisanship along the traditional 7-point National Election Studies (NES) scale. The effects of abortion on partisanship overall in this brief period are relatively small. Indeed, they conclude that those who believe that abortion should never be allowed increase their Republican identification just 0.3 points more on the 7-point partisanship scale than individuals who believe abortion should always be allowed.

But political professionals are convinced that abortion attitudes not only influence the strength of partisan attachments but also lead to party switching. Thus, we are not interested in whether abortion moves citizens from weak to strong Republicans or from weak Republicans to independents. We seek to determine whether the "irresistible force" of the abortion issue moves some citizens from being Republicans to Democrats, and vice versa. In this article, we explore the role of abortion attitudes on party switching during the past two decades at the individual level.

We examine this question differently for those who begin as Republicans and those who begin as Democrats, for there is no reason to believe that the impact of abortion on partisanship is symmetrical. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that the impact of abortion on partisan attachments might be asymmetric.

There is evidence that pro-life activists have more intense preferences and assign the issue higher salience (Scott and Schuman 1988, 785), suggesting that pro-life Democrats may be more likely to change parties than pro-choice Republicans. But it may well be that the power of abortion to move partisans has also varied with time, perhaps moving pro-life Democrats first but eventually moving pro-choice Republicans. If partisanship is indeed rooted in deeply held social identities, then as the Republican party became increasingly linked with social groups such as pro-life forces and the Christian Right, pro-choice Republicans may have eventually found themselves closer to Democratic networks than those who are linked with the GOP.

Data and Method

To assess the effect of abortion attitudes on changes in party identification, we rely on two data sources that span broad time frames. First, we use NES short- and medium-term panel studies from the early 1990s, when partisan elites began to diverge in their positions on abortion, through 2004. We use data from panels that span the following years: 1990–91–92, 1992–93–94, 1992–94–96, and 2000–02–04.

The NES panel data have the advantage of allowing us to explore the impact of abortion attitudes on partisanship in distinct periods, but the data have one significant disadvantage. By slicing the period when abortion attitudes were increasingly lining up with partisanship, these short-term panels ignore the cumulative impact of abortion attitudes on party identification. Because the increasing alignment between partisanship and abortion attitudes has been gradual, it is unlikely that a large number of individuals will shift their partisanship in any four-year period, much less the shorter panels that are over a two-year span. It is likely that any short-term panel will include some respondents who have altered their partisanship to fit their abortion attitudes, and some may do so later. Thus, the short-term panels substantially underestimate the cumulative impact of abortion attitudes on partisanship.

For a longer-term perspective, we use the Youth–Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1982–97, which interviewed a cohort of individuals born in the late 1940s (Jennings et al. 2005).[2] This data source, in contrast to the relatively short-term NES panels, provides us with a unique opportunity to understand the long-term effects of abortion attitudes on changes in party identification over the course of most of the period in which political elites polarized in their positions on abortion.[3]

We take a distinct methodological approach in attempting to understand how a political issue attitude affects changes in party identification. Our dependent variable is party switching over the course of a panel, from Republican to Democrat or from Democrat to Republican. Instead of using a single model that combines party switching in both directions, we provide separate models for changes in party identification. Using 2000–02–04 as an example, we run models comparing individuals' party identification between 2000 and 2002, between 2002 and 2004, and between 2000 and 2004. We have two models for each pair of panel waves—one for individuals who identify as a Republican in the first wave of each pair of years and another for individuals who identify as a Democrat in the first wave of each pair of years. Therefore, in three wave NES panels, there are six models including each 2 year panel and the entire 4 year panel. By extension, in two-wave panels such as the Youth–Parent Socialization Study, 1982–97, there are two models.

We code one set of dependent variables for individuals who begin any pair of panel waves as a Democrat and then switch to the Republican party in the subsequent wave as 1; individuals who begin any pair of panel waves as a Democrat and remain a Democrat in the following wave are coded as 0.[4] Those who are pure independents in either wave of the panel are excluded from the analysis; independent leaners are coded as partisans.[5] We code the second set of dependent variables for individuals who begin any pair of panel waves as a Republican and then switch to the Democratic party in the second wave as 1; individuals who begin any pair of panel waves as a Republican and remain a Republican in the following wave are coded as 0.

Accounting for Measurement Error

Most studies use the Wiley and Wiley (1970) structural equation modeling procedures for accounting for measurement error in panel data (Carsey and Layman 2006; Green and Palmquist 1990, 1994; Putz 2002). Instead, we use generalized linear models with covariate measurement error, specifying a logit link to the dichotomous dependent variable, to account for measurement error in the lagged measure of the party identification.[6] Unlike the structural equation modeling procedures of Wiley and Wiley, generalized linear models with covariate measurement error allow for estimation when just two waves of panel data exist.[7]

We use the procedure for running generalized linear models with covariate measurement error developed by Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles (2003).

This approach allows us to directly input the measurement error variance for the exogenous variable (Carroll, Ruppert, and Stefanski 1995; Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2003). Although prior research reports estimates of the measurement error variance of partisanship, these are usually based on 7-point or 3-point scales. Therefore, we generate estimates of measurement error variance of the strength of partisanship using the Wiley and Wiley (1970) method for the three-wave panels that we use in this article.[8] Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles (2003, 4) "consider this 'plugging in' approach most useful as a sensitivity analysis to investigate how the parameter estimates change for different values of the assumed measurement error variance. Of importance, this allows us to assess the impact of the implicit assumption of perfectly measured covariates in generalized linear models." Thus, we run our models of changes in party identification across a range of potential values of measurement error variance, but this had little impact on the results.[9]

Measuring Potential Influences on Switching Political Parties

The key independent variable in our article is abortion attitudes. The measure of abortion attitudes in both the NES and Youth–Parent Socialization Panel Study is worded as follows:

There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? You can just tell me the number of the opinion you choose.

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

Given this coding, our expectation is that individuals with lower scores on the abortion attitudes question who initially identify as Democrats are more likely to defect to the Republican party. In contrast, the likelihood of Republicans defecting to the Democratic party should increase for Republicans with higher scores on the abortion attitude question. As noted above, we expect abortion attitudes to more consistently affect

changes in partisanship for pro-life Democrats than pro-choice Republicans, but this may vary over time.

To properly assess the effect of abortion attitudes on changes in party identification, we control for a number of political attitudes and demographic characteristics that are also associated with changes in party identification.[10] We account for lagged measures of individuals' partisan strength; stronger partisans are less likely to defect to the opposing party (Green and Palmquist 1994). We measure the strength of partisanship using a single indicator of the strength of partisanship defined as 0 (*independent partisan*), 1 (*weak partisan*), or 2 (*strong partisan*).

Another potential influence on changes in partisanship is ideology (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Bowler, Nicholson, and Segura 2006; Miller and Shanks 1996). Miller and Shanks (1996) consider ideology to be representative of a number of issue attitudes that individuals have about politics, and thus including a control for ideology is a proxy for a range of other issues. We use the 7-point measure of ideology that ranges from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 7 (*extremely conservative*). It is worth noting, however, that if a significant number of individuals adopt ideological identifications based on their abortion attitudes, controlling for ideology will artificially lower our estimates of the effect of abortion on party switching.[11] In the NES studies, we also control for retrospective evaluations of the economy, which has been shown to be a predictor of partisanship (Fiorina 1981).[12] Responses range from viewing the economy as having gotten much better over the past year (1) to much worse over the past year (5). While other issue attitudes may influence whether individuals switch parties, retrospective economic evaluations is the only issue attitude that has been shown to effect changes in partisanship and is asked consistently in NES panels.[13]

We include a host of demographic variables that may effect changes in partisanship. We include a dummy variable for respondents living in the South since Southern Democrats have defected in large numbers to the Republican party (e.g., Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Lublin 2004). We include a measure of gender because "men have been more willing than women to leave the Democratic party and enter the Republican party" (Norrander 1999, 574). We include age and age squared in our models of changes in partisanship because of indications that as younger citizens mature they initially increase in their likelihood of altering their partisanship; however, this effect inverts after age twenty-five (Franklin 1984).[14] Education, measured as 1 for those with a college degree and 0 otherwise, is added to the

Table 1
Estimates of the Effect of Abortion Attitudes on Switching Political Parties in National Election Studies Panel Data Sets: 1990–91, 1991–92, 1990–92

	Democrats in Initial Panel Wave			Republicans in Initial Panel Wave		
	1990–91	1991–92	1990–92	1990–91	1991–92	1990–92
Independent variables						
Abortion attitude$_{1990}$	–0.06	–0.43**	–0.38**	–0.82	0.47**	–0.01
	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.49)	(0.26)	(0.25)
Ideology$_{t-1}$	0.42**	0.57***	0.48**	–1.02**	0.03	0.01
	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.41)	(0.25)	(0.27)
Strength partisanship$_{t-1}$	–3.48***	–1.37**	–2.18***	–5.51**	–2.81***	–3.01***
	(0.96)	(0.64)	(0.78)	(3.22)	(1.10)	(1.01)
Retrospective sociotropic$_{t-1}$	–0.41	–0.48	–0.29	–1.21	0.82**	0.20
	(0.31)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.66)	(0.37)	(0.32)
Region$_{t-1}$	0.60	–0.35	0.68	–0.18	1.07*	0.86
	(0.70)	(0.79)	(0.53)	(1.33)	(0.71)	(0.71)
Gender	0.98**	1.29**	0.74*	0.30	–1.05**	–0.86**
	(0.49)	(0.56)	(0.47)	(0.78)	(0.63)	(0.52)
Age$_{t-1}$	–0.14	–0.08	–0.05	–0.15	–0.22**	–0.17**
	(0.13)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.09)
Age$_{t-1}$ × age$_{t-1}$	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.002**	0.001*
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education$_{t-1}$	–0.10	–0.90	–0.59	–0.24	0.92*	0.76*
	(0.59)	(0.67)	(0.56)	(1.19)	(0.58)	(0.51)
Race	–0.61	—	–1.99**	—	—	—
	(1.06)	—	(1.08)	—	—	—
Constant	3.64	0.81	1.14	11.07	1.39	3.84*
	(2.96)	(2.11)	(2.35)	(5.70)	(2.35)	(2.45)
Number of observations	367	282	370	294	255	278
Log likelihood	–447.74	–365.71	–463.55	–311.19	–320.05	–340.42

Note: The dependent variables for the model Democrats in initial wave are coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in the initial wave and identify with the Republican party in the subsequent wave and 0 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in both waves. The dependent variables for the model Republicans in initial wave are coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in the initial wave and identify with the Democratic party in the subsequent wave and 0 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in both waves.

These estimates are obtained by using generalized linear covariate measurement error models (Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2003) that specify measurement error variance of the lagged value of strength of partisanship at 0.299.

*$p < .075$, one-tailed. **$p < .05$, one-tailed. ***$p < .01$, one-tailed.

model because individuals with a college degree may be less likely to accept partisan messages that conflict with their current partisanship (Zaller 1992); thus, they should also be the less likely to switch parties. Last, we control for race, coding the variable 1 for African Americans and 0 otherwise, because the partisanship of African Americans is distinctly stable (Stanley and Niemi 1999) and because abortion attitudes appear to be less salient to African American partisanship and voting behavior (Scott and Schuman 1988).

Results

Our results suggest that an important issue evolution has taken place around the abortion issue. As political elites polarized on the abortion issue starting in the mid-1980s and continuing throughout the 1990s,

the mass public began to pick up on this divergence and started switching political parties accordingly. The 1990–91–92 NES panel study occurred soon after the *Webster* decision and overlapped the Court's decision in *Casey v. Pennsylvania*, which upheld *Roe* but further allowed states to regulate abortion. *Casey* signaled to pro-life forces that changes in Supreme Court personnel would be needed to reverse *Roe*, but it also reminded pro-choice activists that *Roe* was endangered. In the 1991–92 waves (see Table 1), which overlapped the *Casey* decision, abortion attitudes led to significant party switching in both directions. For Democrats but not Republicans, there was a statistically significant effect in the overall 1990–92 panel.

In the mid-1990s NES panels (see Table 2), pro-life abortion attitudes pushed Democrats to the Republican party in 1993–94, and this was also significant for the

Table 2
Estimates of the Effect of Abortion Attitudes on Switching Political Parties in National Election Studies Panel Data Sets, Mid-1990s: 1992–93, 1993–94, 1992–94, 1994–96

	Democrats in Initial Panel Wave				Republicans in Initial Panel Wave			
	1992–93	1993–94	1992–94	1994–96	1992–93	1993–94	1992–94	1994–96
Independent variables								
Abortion attitude$_{t-1}$	–0.55	–0.60**	–0.68***	0.16	0.14	–0.14	0.01	0.27*
	(0.43)	(0.31)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.31)	(0.18)
Ideology$_{t-1}$	0.21	0.29*	0.15	0.22	–1.04***	–1.10**	–0.66***	–0.09
	(0.26)	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.27)	(0.37)	(0.41)	(0.26)	(0.24)
Strength partisanship$_{t-1}$	–2.98**	–3.97***	–2.28***	–4.71**	–1.91**	–5.27***	–2.27**	–2.11***
	(1.39)	(1.68)	(0.91)	(1.41)	(1.04)	(2.32)	(0.99)	(0.68)
Retrospective sociotropic$_{t-1}$	–0.48	0.33	–0.10	0.03	0.91***	0.24	0.42*	0.02
	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.29)	(0.34)	(0.32)	(0.64)	(0.26)	(0.21)
Region$_{t-1}$	0.41	1.00*	0.35	1.64***	1.10*	1.16	1.09**	–0.24
	(0.66)	(0.69)	(0.54)	(0.64)	(0.73)	(0.87)	(0.54)	(0.42)
Gender	0.19	1.87***	0.12	–0.55	0.67	–1.62	–0.42	–0.41
	(0.65)	(0.69)	(0.50)	(0.65)	(0.69)	(1.15)	(0.55)	(0.38)
Age$_{t-1}$	–0.003	0.06	–0.06	–0.10	0.22**	–0.43**	–0.03	0.02
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.21)	(0.09)	(0.07)
Age$_{t-1}$ × age$_{t-1}$	–0.001	–0.001	0.001	0.001	–0.002**	0.004**	0.001	–0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education$_{t-1}$	1.01	–0.65	0.21	0.40	–0.31	2.62**	–0.51	–0.54
	(0.73)	(0.80)	(0.61)	(0.73)	(0.72)	(1.39)	(0.65)	(0.44)
Race	1.23	—	0.34	0.29	—	—	—	—
	(0.89)	—	(0.60)	(0.82)	—	—	—	—
Constant	1.74	–1.28	3.33	0.63	–6.27**	11.75**	1.05	–0.56
	(3.51)	(2.84)	(2.87)	(2.84)	(3.50)	(6.24)	(2.18)	(1.95)
Number of observations	199	267	229	411	211	242	232	435
Log likelihood	–262.15	–346.12	–322.60	–498.48	–273.65	–275.19	–314.82	–597.82

Note: The dependent variables for the model Democrats in initial wave are coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in the initial wave and identify with the Republican party in the subsequent wave and 0 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in both waves. The dependent variables for the model Republicans in initial wave are coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in the initial wave and identify with the Democratic party in the subsequent wave and 0 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in both waves.

These estimates are obtained by using generalized linear covariate measurement error models (Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2003) that specify measurement error variance of the lagged value of strength of partisanship at 0.301; the 1994–96 models specify a measurement error variance at 0.323. The 1993–94 model of Republicans in the initial panel wave is estimated with measurement error variance at 0.15 because that is the maximum estimate at which the model would converge.

*p < .075, one-tailed. **p < .05, one-tailed. ***p < .01, one-tailed.

full 1992–94 panel. These effects were large and quite significant. In the 1994–96 panel, pro-choice Republicans were more likely to become Democrats. This effect was substantively smaller, but it occurred over the period when Republicans first introduced legislation to ban intact dilation and extraction abortions, popularly referred to as "partial-birth" abortions.[15] It is worth noting that although abortion attitudes played a smaller role in moving Republicans to Democratic identification than vice versa, ideology played a strong role in Republicans changing parties. We suspect that many Republicans in the 1990s began to adopt moderate ideological identifications in part as a signal of their positions on social issues

such as abortion. However, simply removing ideology from the models does not lead to abortion having a more frequent effect on whether pro-choice Republicans defected to the Democratic party.[16]

Taken together, these data show that the mid-1990s was a time when abortion attitudes influenced partisanship. During this same period, party elites' positions on abortion continued to polarize (Adams 1997). The cumulative effects of Webster and Casey also may have pushed citizens to consider their partisanship in relation to their positions on abortion (for a general discussion of court cases and abortion attitudes, see Franklin and Kosaki 1989; Wlezien and Goggin 1993; Johnson and Martin 1998). In addition, studies

Table 3
Estimates of the Effect of Abortion Attitudes on Switching Political Parties in
National Election Studies Panel Data Sets, 2000s: 2000–02, 2002–2004, 2000–04

	Democrats in Initial Panel Wave			Republicans in Initial Panel Wave		
	2000–02	2002–04	2000–04	2000–02	2002–04	2000–04
Independent variables						
Abortion attitude$_{2000}$	−0.41*	−0.33**	−0.27	−0.19	−0.13	0.25
	(0.25)	(0.19)	(0.30)	(0.37)	(0.25)	(0.31)
Ideology$_{t-1}$	0.23	0.68***	0.81***	0.31	−0.64***	0.02
	(0.19)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.53)	(0.18)	(0.31)
Strength partisanship$_{t-1}$	−1.36**	−1.26***	−2.28***	−2.94**	−0.78	−2.86***
	(0.60)	(0.51)	(0.91)	(1.37)	(0.67)	(0.91)
Retrospective sociotropic$_{t-1}$	0.10	0.21	0.19	0.04	0.55*	−0.24
	(0.25)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.39)	(0.35)	(0.26)
Region$_{t-1}$	0.16	0.15	−1.38*	−0.71	0.37	0.16
	(0.70)	(0.69)	(0.90)	(0.91)	(0.52)	(0.65)
Gender	−0.44	0.24	−0.94*	−0.39	−0.13	−0.62
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.60)	(0.69)	(0.53)	(0.57)
Age$_{t-1}$	0.01	−0.07	0.14	0.26*	0.02	0.10
	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.18)	(0.10)	(0.13)
Age$_{t-1}$ × age$_{t-1}$	−0.001	0.001	−0.002**	−0.003**	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	0.001	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Education$_{t-1}$	−0.23	−0.41	−0.82	1.00	−0.18	−0.33
	(0.52)	(0.60)	(0.58)	(0.81)	(0.54)	(0.56)
Race	—	0.17	0.39	—	—	—
	—	(1.07)	(1.24)	—	—	—
Constant	0.72	−0.99	−2.85	−7.86**	−2.29	−3.72
	(2.48)	(3.08)	(2.78)	(4.78)	(2.99)	(3.26)
Number of observations	266	348	269	301	367	301
Log likelihood	−354.67	−481.02	−348.32	−386.80	−473.78	−383.40

Note: The dependent variables for the model Democrats in initial wave are coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in the initial wave and identify with the Republican party in the subsequent wave and 0 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in both waves. The dependent variables for the model Republicans in initial wave are coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in the initial wave and identify with the Democratic party in the subsequent wave and 0 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in both waves.

These estimates are obtained by using generalized linear covariate measurement error models (Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2003) that specify measurement error variance of the lagged value of strength of partisanship at 0.253.

*$p < .075$, one-tailed. **$p < .05$, one-tailed. ***$p < .01$, one-tailed.

have shown that abortion attitudes drove vote choice after these Supreme Court decisions (Abramowitz 1995; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1994a, 1994b).

Table 3 shows data from the 2000–02–04 NES panel. In each model in Table 3, pro-life attitudes affected whether Democrats became Republicans, but pro-choice positions did not lead Republicans to defect to the Democratic party. Taken together with the data in earlier tables, this confirms the asymmetrical impact of abortion attitudes on party switching. In only two panels (1991–92 and 1994–96) were pro-choice Republicans likely to change parties, but in six of ten NES panel pairs there was a significant pattern of pro-life Democrats becoming Republicans.

Pro-life attitudes may have had a statistically significant effect on Democrats' decision to switch parties,

but was this effect substantial? Carsey and Layman (2006) find significant effects of abortion attitudes on changes in the 7-point scale of party identification but show that large changes in abortion attitudes had only a slight effect on partisanship.[17] Our findings in Tables 1 through 3, especially Table 2, which analyzes many of the same NES panel respondents that Carsey and Layman (2006) examined, suggest that this small overall effect stems from the fact that abortion attitudes were moving only Democratic party identifiers. We provide Figure 1 to show the sizeable substantive effects of different abortion attitudes on the likelihood of Democrats switching to the Republican party. Figure 1 shows the mean probability that a Democrat became a Republican from one panel wave to another across two possible abortion attitudes.[18]

Figure 1
Democrats Becoming Republicans in National Election Studies Panel
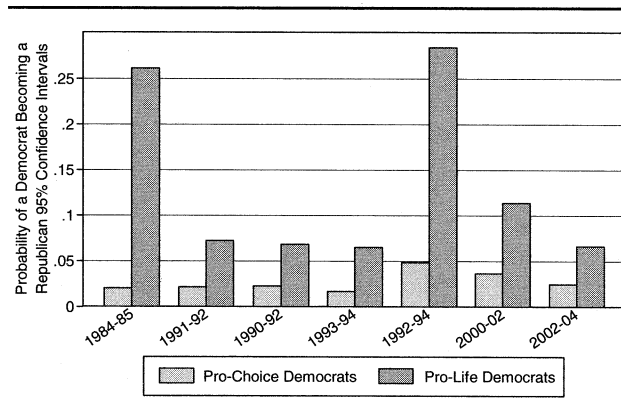
On average, pro-life Democrats were 10.8 percentage points more likely to switch parties than were pro-choice Democrats; seen differently, on average, pro-life Democrats were 4.6 times more likely to switch parties than were pro-choice Democrats. Clearly, abortion attitudes had a large, noticeable effect on the likelihood that a Democrat defected to the Republican party.

We have stressed the fact that in relatively short-term NES panels, an imbalance between abortion attitudes and partisanship was far more likely to influence Democrats to defect to the Republican party than vice versa. The two models in which abortion attitudes led to defections from GOP partisanship both overlap significant events that might have shaken the confidence of pro-choice Republicans that abortion rights were protected—the *Webster* decision and the introduction of legislation to ban "partial-birth" abortions. Thus, it may be that the asymmetry of the abortion issue resulted in part from the *Roe* decision that protects abortion rights. If we had available panel data surrounding the *Webster* decision, we might see an even larger impact.

Yet it is also possible that the impact of the abortion issue on pro-choice Republicans was larger than these short-term panels suggest. Perhaps the pattern of small changes accumulated to a more significant effect over a longer period. We address this possibility with the Youth–Parent Socialization Study, 1982–97.

The Youth–Parent Socialization Panel data (see Table 4) show that over a fifteen-year period, abortion attitudes played a major role in party switching from both parties. This result leads to an important deviation from our initial hypothesis that abortion attitudes were more likely to affect pro-life Democrats than pro-choice Republicans. In the short-term a prominent and emotional political issue, such as abortion, may serve as a

stronger source of dissonance (e.g., Festinger 1957; Heider 1958) for one set of party identifiers, but over the long-run this dissonance wears on both sets of partisans. Across a sufficiently long period, these individuals will sort themselves into the appropriate political party.[19] Alternatively, the effect of abortion attitudes on party switching for pro-choice Republicans may have simply been stronger on the particular cohort, those born in the late 1940s, than on the many other cohorts sampled by NES panels.

Supporting this position, that long-term effects on partisanship may be distinct from short-term effects, is the difference between the short-term and long-term effects of some other variables in our models of changes in party identification. For example, living in the South and gender did not have consistent significant effects in our NES panel models; however, past research at the aggregate level has suggested that both of these variables should effect changes in party identification. Across an extended period of time, 1982 to 1997, in which social identities within the political parties transformed and the polarization of party elites accelerated, living in the South and gender influenced the decision of whether to switch political parties. Specifically, being from the South had an asymmetric effect on party switching—it affected only whether Democrats became Republicans—and gender had a symmetric effect of party switching by influencing whether Democrats became Republicans and whether Republicans switched to the Democratic party.

These findings are critical for future analyses of changes in party identification. They highlight a limitation of testing theory primarily based on short-term panels; therefore, these results should serve to raise awareness of the value of collecting long-term panel data. Indeed, attempting to uncover changes in identities as stable as party identification over two- to four-year spans of time requires that those effects be exceedingly powerful. It is not that those effects cannot be found in short-term analyses—we show that abortion attitudes effected changes in partisanship in short-term panels—rather, the long-term picture of what affects psychological constructs that are fundamental to social and political identities may be critically different from what influences them in a relatively brief time frame.

We provide Figures 2 and 3 to highlight the fact that these variables, which affected partisanship in the long term, not only are statistically significant but also had large substantive effects. The left-most confidence interval in Figure 2, the baseline, is the probability that the average Democrat switched to the

Table 4
Estimates of the Effect of Abortion Attitudes on Switching Political Parties in the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1982–97

	Democrats in 1982	Republicans in 1982
Independent variables		
Abortion attitude$_{t-1}$	–0.27**	0.43**
	(0.14)	(0.24)
Ideology$_{t-1}$	0.35***	–0.34**
	(0.12)	(0.18)
Strength partisanship$_{t-1}$	–1.43***	–0.33
	(0.55)	(0.57)
Region$_{t-1}$ (South vs. non-South)	0.92***	–0.15
	(0.33)	(0.43)
Gender	0.77***	–0.63**
	(0.28)	(0.34)
Education$_{t-1}$	–0.29	0.13
	(0.29)	(0.35)
Race	–2.44**	—
	(1.06)	—
Constant	0.73	–1.33
	(0.79)	(1.16)
Number of observations	378	311
Log likelihood	–508.13	–417.71

Note: The dependent variable for the model Democrats in 1982 is coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in 1982 and identify with the Republican party in 1997 and 0 for individuals who identify with the Democratic party in 1982 and 1997. The dependent variable for the model Republicans in 1982 is coded 1 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in 1982 and identify with the Democratic party in 1997 and 0 for individuals who identify with the Republican party in 1982 and 1997. These estimates are obtained by using generalized linear covariate measurement error models (Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal, and Pickles 2003) that specify measurement error variance of the lagged value of strength of partisanship at 0.356.
$*p < .075$, one-tailed. $**p < .05$, one-tailed. $***p < .01$, one-tailed.

Republican party from 1982 to 1997. The baseline Democrat is specified to be pro-choice, liberal, weak Democrat, not from the South, female, without a college degree, and white. The probability of the average Democrat defecting to the Republican party was 5.7 percent. From this base, we alter different independent variables that subsequently increase the probability of switching political parties. For example, the probability that a pro-life Democrat switched parties, who had all of the other characteristics of the average Democrat, was 12.2 percent. In other words, all else equal, a pro-life Democrat was 2.1 times more likely to switch parties. Effects of ideology and gender were also strong, with the probability of defection to the Republican party at 19.2 percent for conservative Democrats and 11.3 percent for male Democrats.[20] The next four confidence intervals in

Figure 2 demonstrate the effect of changing various combinations of these independent variables. For example, the confidence interval in Figure 2, labeled "pro-life, conservative, female," illustrates that altering the abortion attitude and ideology of a Democrat can increase the probability that a Democrat defected to the Republican party to 33.8 percent. A pro-life, conservative male from the South was more than 50.0 percent likely to switch from the Democratic to the Republican Party over the course of the panel.[21]

Figure 3 shows comparable data for Republicans switching to the Democratic party. The baseline Republican is specified to be pro-life, conservative, weak Republican, not from the South, male, and without a college degree. The probability of this average Republican defecting to the Democratic party was 3.3 percent—that is, over the course of the panel, average Democrats were more likely to defect to the Republican party than typical Republicans were to switch to the Democratic party. Holding all else constant, a pro-choice Republican was 10.2 percent likely to become a Democratic party identifier. That is, a pro-choice Republican was 3.1 times more likely to switch parties. Ideology, however, had an even larger effect on the likelihood that a Republican switched parties. The probability that a liberal Republican switched parties was 13.5 percent. In contrast to the large effect of ideology, gender alone had a limited effect in increasing the probability that a Republican switched parties. A female Republican was just 5.8 percent likely to switch political parties from 1982 to 1997. To compare the compound effects of these independent variables, we again change their values in the four subsequent confidence intervals. For example, the odds of a pro-choice, liberal Republican man becoming a Democrat were approximately 30 percent; for a pro-choice liberal woman, the odds increased to approximately 45 percent.

Conclusions

Our findings lend support to those who claim that strongly held issues can move partisanship. However, given that abortion is central to and strongly connected with individuals' social identities, we view these results as confirming, not conflicting with, Green, Palmquist, and Schickler's (2002) position that partisanship is an extension of deeply held social identities. Indeed, we conclude that the abortion issue not only moved people along the 7-point party identification scale but also led some to actually change parties, but it could do so only because it is fundamental to

Figure 2
Democrats Becoming Republicans, 1982–97

Individual Characteristics
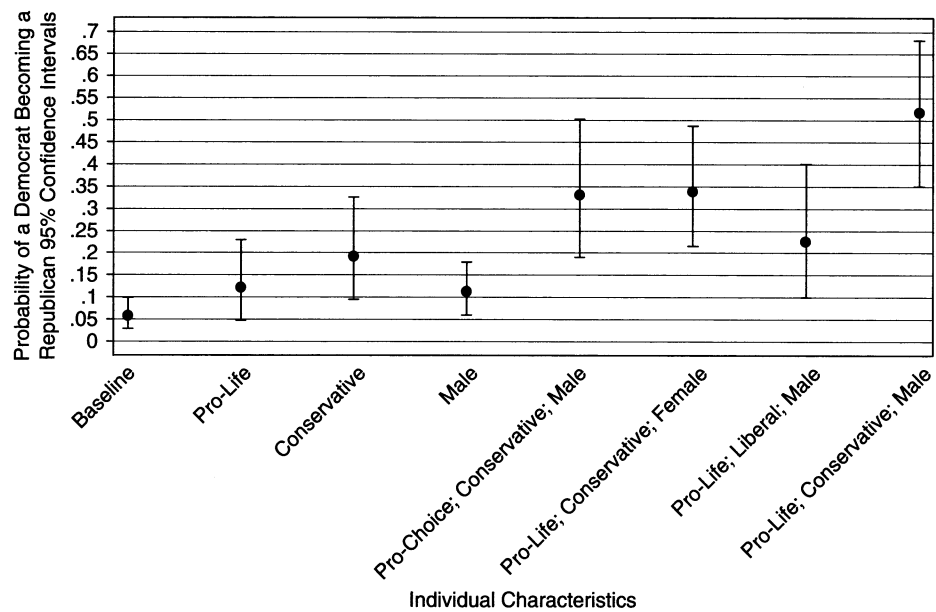
Note: Baseline individual is pro-choice, liberal, weak Democrat, not from the South, female, without a college degree, and White.

Figure 3
Republicans Becoming Democrats, 1982–97

Individual Characteristics
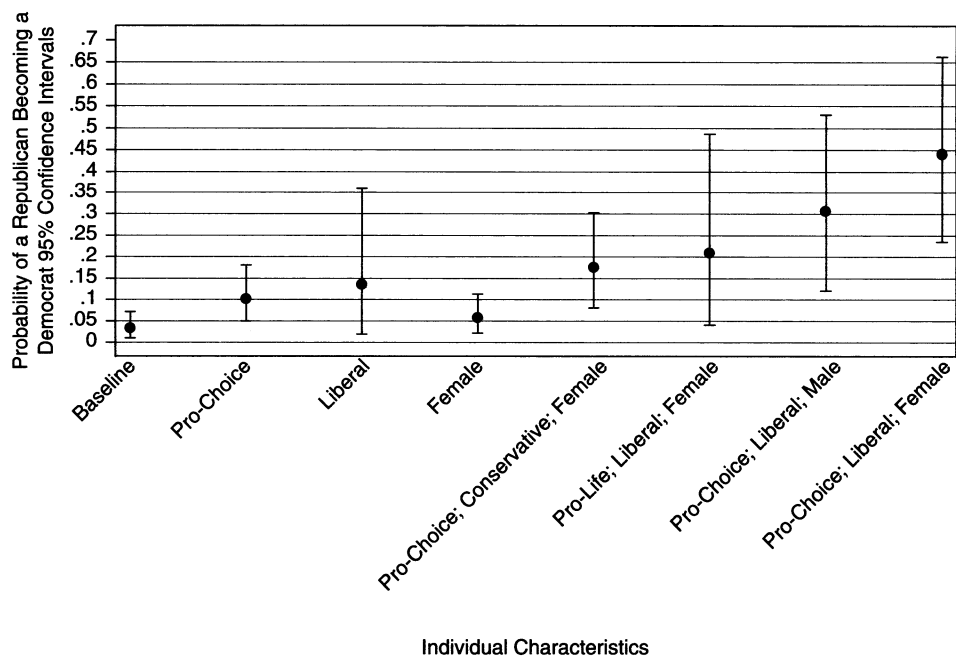
Note: Baseline individual is pro-life, conservative, weak Republican, not from the South, male, and without a college degree.

citizens' social identities. With measurement error controlled, the unmovable object does move in response to the irresistible force. This is true even controlling for ideology, region, gender, and race—all key elements in the story of Southern partisan realignment. The effect is asymmetrical; pro-life Democrats were far more likely to switch parties in the short-term NES panels.

These results fit with the conventional understanding that abortion attitudes are more salient to pro-life citizens. There may be something inherently asymmetrical about the abortion issue, but it is also possible that pro-choice Republicans have felt at least somewhat secure about the freedom to choose since it has largely been protected by the Supreme Court since *Roe*. If *Roe* were overturned, this might well change. We did observe significant effects of abortion attitudes on party switching around the key political events, and both events would have served to undermine confidence that abortion rights were secure in the long run.

Over the longer term, we find evidence that abortion attitudes move partisanship in both directions. The socialization panel shows that over a fifteen-year period, 1982 to 1997, abortion is associated with significant party switching among pro-life Democrats and pro-choice Republicans, at least for the cohort born around the late 1940s. In this longer-term panel, the effects of abortion attitudes on partisan switching are almost equal. This result is important, for it suggests that over longer periods, party switching has been a sorting of partisans from both sides of the abortion issue.

But the results are also somewhat inconsistent with those from the NES panels, which show a clear asymmetry. We are not certain why the socialization panel shows equal levels of party switching but the NES does not, but we offer three possible explanations. First, it is important to remember that the strongest results for Democratic defections to the GOP were in the 2000–02–04 panel, which is a period after that of the Youth–Parent Socialization Panel. Thus, if the socialization panel had extended through 2004, pro-life abortion attitudes may have had a larger effect on the defections of the Democrats to the Republican party.

Second, the NES panels do not cover all years and, most important, do not cover the period from 1988 through 1990, when the *Webster* decision led to a sharp increase in pro-choice sentiments in most surveys (Wlezien and Goggin 1993; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). Thus, it is possible that by chance the years in which the NES conducted panels are years with greater switching to the GOP than from the party.

Third, the socialization panel includes a single cohort over a long period of their lifespan, but we know that most changes in party identification occur early in life. Therefore, abortion attitudes may have a symmetric effect on party switching for this particular cohort, but for other cohorts the effect is not symmetric. Other studies have shown that the 1960s generation has

been more pro-choice over its lifespan than generations that came after (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992). Thus, the pro-choice perspective for this cohort may be disproportionately strong in pushing Republicans toward the Democratic party.

Like abortion attitudes, ideology also accounts for party switching in both directions. Future research should explore the role of ideology in partisan change. For our purposes, it is worth remembering that ideology is both a source of and a result of abortion attitudes, making the causal sequence more complex.

Our results do not imply that partisanship is unstable and easily moved by short-term forces. In fact, our results show that even the most pro-life Democrats or pro-choice Republicans are much more likely to remain with their current party than they are to defect to the opposing party. Moreover, abortion is a unique issue in American politics; it is difficult to think of many other issues that would rival it in the capacity to influence partisanship. It is truly a long-term force rather than a short-term issue. But our results clearly demonstrate that partisanship moves when parties send clear signals on issues about which many in the public care deeply.

Notes

1. Even though the relationship between abortion and party identification has increased, many people still hold dissonant identities. Abortion may simply not be an important issue for some, and others may simply not realize that an underlying conflict exists.

2. Even if we were interested in the long-term effects of abortion attitudes on changes in party identification prior to the 1982, we could use earlier panel waves of the Youth–Parent Socialization Study (i.e., 1965 and 1973) because neither of the previous waves ask a question about abortion attitudes. Also, the 1980s National Election Studies (NES) panel does not have enough respondents to model their behavior with much confidence.

3. We use only the youth portion of the Youth–Parent Socialization Study because only the youth are re-interviewed in 1997. The initial sample size in 1965 among the youth is 1,669, and the 1997 sample size is 935. We looked at the distribution of a number of demographics (race, gender, region, and religious denomination) from 1965 to 1997, and there is usually less than a one percentage point difference in the proportion of representation among any of these categories. Therefore, panel attrition does not appear to be a problem.

4. We coded leaners as partisans because their behavior is strikingly similar to that of other partisans (Keith et al. 1992). However, we did examine the models in excluding all leaners. In the NES models, the number of times that abortion is significant drops from eight to five. Given that these models allow for only the largest type of party switching (i.e., weak or strong Democrat to weak or strong Republican, or vice versa), the results support our findings. Furthermore, the results for the Youth–Parent Socialization panel remain unchanged when excluding all leaners. One should also note

that because our method splits party switching into two sets of models (Republicans becoming Democrats and Democrats becoming Republicans), the sample sizes in our models are occasionally close to 200, and by also dropping all leaners, modeling party switching becomes somewhat difficult because the sample sizes are very low.

5. We do not account for switching to and from the pure independent category. We attempted to run separate models of changes in party identification for pure independents, but the sample sizes in the panels of pure independents are far too small to run models that generate reliable maximum likelihood estimates.

6. Because our dependent variable is party switching, we need only to control for individuals' strength of identification with a party because independent partisans are more likely to switch parties than are weak partisans who themselves are more likely to switch parties than are strong partisans (e.g., Green and Palmquist 1994). The frequency of party switching is high enough that we do not use rare events logit (King and Zeng 2003).

7. The Wiley and Wiley (1970) method, which constrains the measurement error variance to be equal across each wave of the panel, provides a just identified model for three waves of panel data. However, when only two waves of panel data exist (i.e., there are only two manifest measures of party identification), the structural equation model is underidentified and cannot be estimated. Goren (2005) provides structural equation models that are estimable with only two waves of panel data, but that method requires the incorporation of an additional manifest variables to represent the latent partisanship variable—Republican and Democratic feeling thermometers in Goren's (2005) research.

8. The values of measurement error variance for the strength of partisanship range from 0.253 to 0.323 in the NES panels, and the reliability of the strength of partisanship ranges from 0.602 to 0.738. We also generated separate estimates of measurement error variance (0.356) and reliability (0.538) for the Youth–Parent Socialization panel. A figure illustrating our Wiley and Wiley (1970) structural equation models, which estimates measurement error variance for the strength of partisanship, and a table with the corresponding results are available on request.

9. We re-ran the models by shifting the value of measurement error variance 1.645 standard deviations above the estimate. These results, in which the significance of abortion attitudes is altered only once (Republicans becoming Democrats from 1994 to 1996), are available on request.

10. In addition to the controls presented in our results, we also estimated models controlling for two religious affiliations, Evangelical and Catholic. These variables have no effect on our results. We also examined controlling for attendance at religious services. Because religious attendance was significant in just three of the twenty NES panel models, we omit it from the models. Abortion attitudes were still significant in four of the ten NES models of Democrats switching to the Republican party after controlling for religious attendance despite the high correlation (about 0.40) between these two variables.

11. In removing ideology from the models, abortion becomes significant (where it was previously insignificant) for Democrats becoming Republicans in 1992–93, 1992–96, and 2000–04. Removing ideology has no effect on the significance of abortion on whether Republicans became Democrats in any of the panels.

12. Unfortunately, the Youth–Parent Socialization Panel Study does not include a measure of retrospective economic evaluations.

13. We also examined the possibility of using a host of other issues attitudes such as attitudes toward gay rights, the federal government's assistance to blacks, and perceptions of which party is better able to

handle the economy instead of ideology. Many of these issues matter, but they do not alter the significance of abortion attitudes.

14. We exclude age and age × age from the Youth–Parent Socialization models because the youth in this panel data set are all roughly the same age. We also ran models using a dummy for age to capture the curvilinear its effect, but we found no significant effects. This may result simply from the small number of younger people sampled in any particular NES survey.

15. The effect of abortion attitudes on Republicans becoming Democrats from 1994 to 1996 disappears when raising the measurement error 1.645 standard deviations above the mean estimate.

16. Also, the lack of a significant effect of abortion attitudes on Republicans switching parties is not simply a function of a higher correlation between ideology and abortion attitudes among Republicans. On average, the correlation between ideology and abortion attitudes was higher for Democrats (–.27) than for Republicans (–.21).

17. Specifically, Carsey and Layman (2006, 471) show that "a one-unit increase in opposition to abortion leads to an increase in Republican identification of .05 on the seven-point scale. So, individuals preferring that abortion never be allowed by law (seven on the abortion scale) only increase their identification with the GOP by .30 points more than do individuals who prefer that abortion always be allowed (one the scale)."

18. These probabilities are generated using simulations similar to Tomz, Wittenberg, and King's (2003) Clarify program. Values of the other independent variables in the models are set to their medians and, when appropriate (e.g., age), their mean.

19. We also agree with the proposition that partisanship affects issue attitudes (e.g., Bartels 2002; Campbell et al. 1960; Carsey and Layman 2006), but we focus on the extent to which issue attitudes affect partisanship.

20. To keep Figures 2 and 3 comparable, we omit separate confidence intervals for those from the South and African Americans. All else equal, Southern Democrats had a 13.3 percent probability of switching parties. In other words, the effect of being from the South on the likelihood of a Democrat defecting to the Republican party from 1982 to 1997 was roughly equivalent to the effect of a Democrat holding a pro-life attitude. African American Democrats had just a 1.0 percent chance of becoming Republicans.

21. There were not a large number of pro-life, conservative, male Democrats in 1982, but there were more than one might think—8.2 percent of non-Southern Democrats were pro-life, conservative males in 1982.

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