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Author(s): GEOFFREY C. LAYMAN, THOMAS M. CARSEY, JOHN C. GREEN, RICHARD HERRERA and ROSALYN COOPERMAN

Source: *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (May 2010), pp. 324-346

Published by: American Political Science Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40863723>

Accessed: 22-02-2018 16:45 UTC

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Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics

GEOFFREY C. LAYMAN *University of Notre Dame*

THOMAS M. CARSEY *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

JOHN C. GREEN *University of Akron*

RICHARD HERRERA *Arizona State University*

ROSALYN COOPERMAN *University of Mary Washington*

Party activists have played a leading role in “conflict extension”—the polarization of the parties along multiple issue dimensions—in contemporary American politics. We argue that open nomination systems and the ambitious politicians competing within those systems encourage activists with extreme views on a variety of issue dimensions to become involved in party politics, thus motivating candidates to take noncentrist positions on a range of issues. Once that happens, continuing activists with strong partisan commitments bring their views into line with the new candidate agendas, thus extending the domain of interparty conflict. Using cross-sectional and panel surveys of national convention delegates, we find clear evidence for conflict extension among party activists, evidence tentatively suggesting a leading role for activists in partisan conflict extension more generally, and strong support for our argument about change among continuing activists. Issue conversion among activists has contributed substantially to conflict extension and party commitment has played a key role in motivating that conversion.

Growth in issue polarization between the Democratic and Republican parties is a dominant feature of contemporary American politics. “Fundamental issues are at stake,” writes *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman (2002), “and the parties are as far apart on those issues as they ever have been.” Similarly, Ronald Brownstein observes that “the parties today are becoming less diverse, more ideologically homogeneous, and less

inclined to pursue reasonable agreements” (2007: 11). Political scientists confirm that the policy gap between Democrats and Republicans, both in government and in the electorate, has become wider in recent decades (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998, 2008; Black and Black 2007; Brewer 2005; Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Rohde 1991; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003; Jacobson 2000).

Polarized parties do not make the current era unique—the major parties have been polarized on some set of policy issues throughout much of American history (e.g., Gerring 1998; Sundquist 1983). What differs is the number of issue dimensions on which they are polarized. Leading research contends that party conflict is dominated by a single policy dimension. Thus, when partisan change occurs, it takes the form of *conflict displacement*, in which the parties polarize on a new cross-cutting issue agenda and converge on the previously dominant line of cleavage (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Miller and Schofield 2003; Sundquist 1983). Sundquist contends that “conflict displacement . . . is the characteristic that identifies a party realignment” (1983: 13), whereas Miller and Schofield argue that there currently is an “inevitable party dynamic . . . increasing the polarization of the two parties along the social dimension, while decreasing the economic policy differences between the two parties” (2008: 446).

In recent years, however, partisans in government and the electorate have grown increasingly polarized on multiple major policy dimensions—not just the newer “cultural” issues such as abortion and gay rights, but also the racial and civil rights issues that emerged in the 1960s and the economic and social welfare issues that originated with the New Deal (Brewer and Stonecash 2006; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006). Republicans have become more consistently conservative on all these dimensions, whereas Democrats have grown more consistently liberal. Layman and Carsey

Geoffrey C. Layman is Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Notre Dame, 217 O'Shaughnessy Hall, Notre Dame, IN 46556 (glayman@nd.edu).

Thomas M. Carsey is Pearsall Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599 (carsey@unc.edu).

John C. Green is Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University of Akron, 223B Olin Hall, Akron, OH 44325 (green@uakron.edu).

Richard Herrera is Associate Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University, Coor Hall, 6th Floor, Tempe, AZ 85287 (richard.herrera@asu.edu).

Rosalyn Cooperman is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Affairs, University of Mary Washington, 1301 College Avenue, Fredericksburg, VA 22401 (rcooperm@umw.edu).

Previous versions of this article were presented at the University of Maryland, University of North Carolina, University of Notre Dame, Stanford University, Indiana University, and the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association. The authors thank everyone who attended those presentations for helpful feedback. We thank John Aldrich, Jim Guth, Frances Lee, Michael MacKuen, and the anonymous reviewers and co-editors of the *American Political Science Review*. We are very grateful to Anne Cizmar and Ozan Kalkan for generous research assistance. Finally, we thank the Ray C. Bliss Institute for Applied Politics at the University of Akron, Arizona State University, Florida State University, University of Maryland, and University of Mary Washington for providing the funds necessary to conduct some of the surveys used in the article. Any errors or problems that remain are the responsibility of the authors alone.

(2002a, 2002b) label this process *conflict extension* and identify party activists as the driving force behind it.

In this article, we provide a theoretical and empirical account of how multidimensional party issue conflict develops. We argue that conflict extension results largely from the interplay between ambitious politicians, a participatory nomination process, and the incentives and commitments of party activists. In today's parties, office-seekers compete for party nominations by vying for the support of diverse activists. That competition, and the ease with which activists with different issue concerns can participate in the process, encourage candidates to take polar positions on multiple issue dimensions. As such candidates grow more prevalent and become the standard bearers of their parties, activists and voters with strong commitments to the party may bring their own issue positions into line with the noncentrist stands of the candidates and their active supporters. The result is an extension of partisan conflict to multiple issue dimensions.

Because party activists are not the only possible cause of conflict extension, we begin by considering other catalysts: changes in the parties' mass coalitions, party leadership in Congress, societal disruptions, and ideological entrepreneurs packaging together diverse policy positions. We argue that even if these other factors contribute to conflict extension, party activists still play a critical role.

Our discussion then proceeds in four parts. First, we explain how the interaction between activists and candidates within a participatory nomination system paves the way for conflict extension. Second, we discuss the processes of individual-level change that produce conflict extension among activists. Third, we employ surveys of delegates to national party conventions from 1972 to 2004 and data over the same time period on the parties in Congress and the electorate to examine the development of conflict extension among activists and its broader consequences for partisan change. Our evidence demonstrates that conflict extension has occurred among activists and suggests that activist polarization may have instigated increases in partisan issue polarization in Congress and in the mass public. Fourth, we use a panel survey of convention delegates from 1992 to 2000 to examine issue change among individual activists and assess our argument about how party commitment structures such change. We find that issue conversion among activists has contributed significantly to conflict extension and that this conversion has been greater for activists with higher levels of party commitment.

PARTY ACTIVISTS AND THE POSSIBLE CAUSES OF CONFLICT EXTENSION

A number of political scientists share our view that the expanding role of issue-oriented activists in party politics has been a catalyst for the growth of partisan issue polarization (Aldrich and Rohde 2001; Fiorina, with Abrams and Pope 2005; Jacobson 2000). However, scholars have suggested other causes of polarization,

and some of these—change in the parties' mass coalitions, party leadership in Congress, and developments outside of party politics—also may encourage conflict extension.

The most common explanation for greater policy differences between the parties in government is change in the mass electorate. For a variety of reasons—party realignment in the South (Aldrich 1995; Polsky 2005; Rohde 1991); more effective partisan redistricting (Carson et al. 2007; Theriault 2008); and increases in Hispanic immigration, income inequality, racial and class segregation, and residential mobility (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2001; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003)—the parties' mass coalitions have grown increasingly dissimilar. This encourages greater party polarization in government (Fleisher and Bond 2004; Jacobson 2000), and may stimulate conflict extension. For example, partisan change in the South has made southern whites, a group with conservative views on race, culture, and social welfare (Black and Black 1987), a larger component of the GOP coalition and African Americans, who have liberal views on a variety of issues, more important among Democrats.

Others contend that party leaders in Congress—using more restrictive rules, exerting greater control over the congressional agenda and committee assignments, and devoting more resources to party efforts—have pushed congressional party polarization beyond what would result just from the differences between the parties' constituencies (Aldrich 1995; Rohde 1991; Sinclair 2006; Theriault 2008). In fact, Cox and McCubbins's (1993, 2005) "procedural cartel theory," with its focus on agenda control, suggests that party leaders may initiate increases in party polarization by restricting congressional voting to issues on which the two parties are unified internally and divergent from each other (see also Lee 2009). Using rules, committee assignments, and agenda control in a more partisan way also may spur conflict extension, increasing party conflict in areas where there is not much conflict outside of Congress.

A third possibility is that exogenous shocks to the political system—wars, crises, or social movements—may force new issues onto the political agenda (Carmines and Stimson 1989) and may increase issue polarization in the larger society, perhaps causing the parties to follow suit (Sundquist 1983: 328). Such events may help extend party conflict to new issues, much as the civil rights movement helped bring the parties' racial issue positions in line with their social welfare stands (Carmines and Stimson 1989). Noel (2006) suggests that another external spark for partisan change is political intellectuals outside of the party system putting diverse issue positions together into new ideological packages. Conflict extension may be spurred by these ideologues bringing new issues into existing philosophies, as they may have with abortion in the 1970s (Noel 2006).

Although change in the parties' mass coalitions, party leadership in Congress, external disruptions, and ideological elites all may contribute to conflict

extension, these processes leave ample theoretical space for activist influence. Party activists help to nominate and elect the legislators who set party agendas in Congress (Jacobson 2000), and they play a key role in nominating presidential candidates (Cohen et al. 2008), whose positions serve as important cues for party voters. The partisan change literature also suggests that when crises or major social changes create new political issues, activists generally are the first political actors to champion distinct positions on them (Sundquist 1983; Carmines and Stimson 1989). Similarly, Noel (2006) argues that ideological entrepreneurs shape party agendas through their influence on activists, who in turn control party nominations. Thus, although many political actors affect party agendas, none can claim influence that is independent of party activists.

POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY ACTIVISTS, AND THE MACRO-LEVEL FOUNDATIONS OF CONFLICT EXTENSION

To understand how change among party activists contributes to conflict extension, we need to consider the political incentives of activists, the organizational structure of party politics, and how these factors combine to shape the parties' policy positions. The leading view of parties in political science is that parties are groups of people focused mainly on winning political office. This "office-seeking" view of parties can be traced to Downs's assumption that "a political party is a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election" (1957: 25; see also Schumpeter 1942: 269–83, chaps. 21–2). Aldrich reaffirms the centrality of office seekers, arguing that "the major political party is the creature of the politicians, the ambitious office seeker and office holder" and is created and maintained in order to advance their goals (1995: 4; see also Cox and McCubbins 1993, 2005; Rohde 1991; Schlesinger 1991). The ambitions of office seekers may be broader than just winning elections, but electoral success is the central objective.

The office-seeking view implies that the parties will take issue stands that maximize their chances of winning. For many scholars, this means positions as close as possible to that of the median voter, minimizing policy differences between the parties (e.g., Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook 1970; Downs 1957). In classic studies of partisan change, it has meant that parties strive to limit party conflict to a single dominant policy dimension, and suppress new policy dimensions that might divide their electoral coalitions (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Riker 1982; Sundquist 1983). When a new, cross-cutting issue agenda emerges, the parties initially downplay it and adhere to the center on it. If they eventually do take distinct positions on the new issues, they then move to the center on the old issues that now threaten to split their newly formed power bases. As Schattschneider argues, "the old cleavage must be played down if the new conflict is to be exploited" (1960: 63).¹ In short,

parties of office seekers should seek to avoid noncentrist positions on multiple issue agendas, and partisan change should result in conflict displacement.

However, in a wide-ranging critique of party realignment theory, Mayhew (2002) casts doubt on the historical accuracy of the conflict displacement perspective. He questions the idea that national politics is normally dominated by a single, hegemonic dimension, highlighting Gerring's (1998) evidence that the parties have differed on multiple issue agendas throughout their history. Mayhew also employs Gerring's evidence to argue that the periods generally considered to be realigning eras do not coincide with clear shifts in the policy cleavages between the major parties.

If partisan change has not typically been defined by conflict displacement, it may be because political office seekers require assistance from activists who seek political benefits other than just winning elections—public policies or professional benefits, for example—in order to win party nominations and general elections. Numerous scholars highlight the constraints that party activists place on the policy positions taken by candidates and parties (Aldrich 1995; Maskett 2007; Miller and Schofield 2003, 2008; Schlesinger 1991). These activists may push the parties toward extreme stands on multiple issues if two conditions are met. The first is that activists are motivated by policy goals and thus advocate noncentrist positions on the policies that motivate them. The other is that the parties' nomination processes are open to diverse actors other than those currently controlling the party agenda, thus giving issue activists more influence over the selection of party candidates and party issue positions.

In contemporary party politics, both of these conditions are clearly met. The 1950s and 1960s saw sharp increases in the partisan involvement of "amateur" or "purist" activists motivated more by policy goals than by material or electoral goals (Wildavsky 1965; Wilson 1962). Then the parties' reforms of presidential nominations in the 1970s—initiated by the Democrats, but mirrored substantially by the Republicans—significantly enhanced the influence of amateurs in both parties. They did so by creating a participatory process in which candidates seek nominations in primaries and caucuses, where issue activists are disproportionately represented (Aldrich 1980, 1995; Polsby, 1983). With the nomination process thus opened up, candidates who lack support among activists supporting the current party agenda have an incentive to reach out to other activists with other agendas.

Consider the case of presidential nominations. Most open contests feature multiple candidates vying for a party's nomination. Because candidates within a party generally have similar stands on issues that

¹ The minority party may have incentives to champion cross-cutting issues in order to split the majority party's coalition (Carmines and

Stimson 1989; Miller and Schofield 2003; Riker 1982). However, as Carmines notes, "party leaders, even if they are part of the minority, receive a variety of material and symbolic benefits" (1991: 76) and thus have a stake in maintaining the dominant issue cleavage. Thus, the leaders of both parties have a "powerful incentive to suppress or avoid any new crosscutting issue that threatens the party's unity" (Sundquist 1983: 307).

traditionally have separated the two parties, an effective nomination strategy may be to raise new issues that attract new constituencies into the process. As Aldrich argues, nomination candidates “will not emphasize issues on which their opponents are known to have similar positions. . . . Each candidate will attempt to raise the salience of ‘his’ issue” (1980: 174). Thus, open nominations encourage candidates to attract activists with noncentrist positions on a range of issues into party politics.

The cultural issue dimension provides some good examples of such strategic behavior. Consider George McGovern in 1972. Lacking support from the party’s dominant urban and labor wing, McGovern looked to young antiwar and New Left activists as potential supporters and thus needed to appeal to their culturally liberal sensibilities. He “had to recruit his army and its troops from the most extreme of the peace groups and the young of the campus—and if their cultural values were not majority cultural values, nonetheless tactic demanded he pursue them” (White 1973: 115).

Strategic imperatives also played a role in the Republican party’s move to the cultural right in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Trying to wrest control from the GOP’s moderate–liberal wing and secure the 1980 presidential nomination for Ronald Reagan, the economic conservatives in the party’s “New Right” wing tried to attract culturally conservative evangelical Christians into Republican politics. New Right strategists encouraged evangelical pastors to form political organizations (Oldfield 1996), while Reagan and other GOP leaders appealed to evangelicals’ views on cultural issues like abortion and school prayer. As conservative operative Paul Weyrich noted, “The New Right is looking for issues that people care about and social issues, at least for the present, fit the bill” (quoted in Reichley 1987: 79).

Once multiple groups of activists, each with noncentrist views on different issues, come into a party, office seekers have incentives to take ideologically extreme positions on all of those issues in order to appeal to them. Recent political history is replete with examples of presidential candidates moving their stands on key issues toward the desired positions of their parties’ activists. These include Lyndon Johnson’s movement toward racial liberalism in the late 1950s (Cohen et al. 2008: 119–22; Evans and Novak 1966: 137), the shift of George H.W. Bush from a pro-choice position on abortion during his unsuccessful bid for the GOP nomination in 1980 to a pro-life stance in his successful 1988 campaign (Karol 2009: 66–68), and Jesse Jackson moving from a staunch pro-life stance in the 1970s to a pro-choice position during his Democratic presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988 (Karol 2009: 71).

Activist influence may be even stronger if, rather than coalitions of office seekers, parties are broad coalitions of “interest groups, social group leaders, activists, and other ‘policy demanders’ working to gain control of government on behalf of their goals,” as recent research contends (Cohen et al. 2008: 6). From this perspective, party nominations are decided through negotiations between various kinds of activists in search of

a candidate who is satisfactory to all wings of the party (Cohen et al. 2008). If winning nominations means appealing to all major sets of policy demanders in a party, then the successful candidates are likely to be those who stake out noncentrist positions on multiple policy dimensions.

THE MICRO-LEVEL FOUNDATIONS OF CONFLICT EXTENSION

Conflict extension, as theorized in this article, cannot occur unless activists are willing to accommodate one another’s most important policy preferences by including them in the party agenda. We have suggested, more strongly, that some activists may even internalize the key positions of candidates and other activists. Other scholars maintain that activists are unwilling to make such accommodation.

Policy Commitment, Fixed Policy Preferences, and Conflict Displacement

In Aldrich’s (1983a, 1995) model of party activism, individuals decide to become and/or remain party activists based on the proximity of their issue preferences to those of each party’s current activists. If such decisions occur in a policy space with two cross-cutting dimensions, a growth in the polarization of party activists along one dimension is accompanied by party convergence on the other dimension (Aldrich 1983b: 87–92). Miller and Schofield (2003, 2008; Schofield and Miller 2007) make a similar argument. For them, partisan change is triggered by candidates engaging in strategic “flanking” moves to capture groups of potential activists who have noncentrist positions on the second dimension but not on the first, but the result is the same—parties normally polarized on only one dimension at a time.

The expectation of conflict displacement by Aldrich and by Miller and Schofield appears to derive from two assumptions. First, they assume that activists are motivated solely by their policy preferences: they become involved in and remain involved in a party only if its policy positions and those of its candidates are relatively close to their own. The second assumption is that activists’ preferences on all major policy dimensions are fixed. People whose political commitments are based entirely on their policy goals should not change their positions because the stands of candidates or other activists are changing. As Miller and Schofield contend, “warring activists of different stripes are not generally willing to make ideological sacrifices in the interest of the parties’ candidates” (2008: 445).

Two circumstances follow from activists having fixed positions on each issue dimension. First, changes in the aggregate positions of the two parties’ activist corps must result entirely from changes in individuals’ participation decisions—from some activists dropping out of party activity and being replaced by new activists with different views. Second, cross-cutting issues will remain cross-cutting over time. Thus, if there are two

cross-cutting issue agendas, then increased polarization on one should reduce polarization on the other. In short, party activist change should result in conflict displacement.

There are limited scenarios under which replacement among activists with fixed policy preferences might produce at least a temporary pattern of conflict extension. For example, if parties stake out extreme views on multiple issue dimensions, activists who are cross-pressured or who hold moderate views on those dimensions might drop out and be replaced by newly mobilized individuals with consistently extreme views on both dimensions. Parties also may form coalitions of single-issue activists. Such individuals with noncentrist attitudes on only one set of issues may not drop out of the party when it takes extreme stands on other issues if only the first dimension is important to them.

However, parties and their candidates are unlikely to take extreme stands on multiple issue dimensions over the long run unless the number of consistently liberal or consistently conservative citizens mobilized by such stands is large enough to offset losses among activists with extreme views on only one of or neither of the dimensions (Aldrich 1983b; Miller and Schofield 2003). Moreover, if parties are merely “marriages of convenience” among unrelated issue publics, they could be fractured easily as some groups of activists leave the party or as the other party tries to attract dissident activists. Indeed, Miller and Schofield encourage the contemporary Democrats to do just that, saying, “The best Democratic response to the increasing power of social conservatives in the Republican Party must be to seek the support of the social liberals who are increasingly disaffected” in the GOP (2008: 444).

Ideology-based Conversion and Conflict Extension

Sustained conflict extension becomes more likely if activists’ policy preferences are not fixed—if activists can change on policy issues, bringing their own views closer to the ideologically extreme positions taken by party leaders and fellow activists. Such conversion by activists allows the aggregate positions of Democratic and Republican activists to grow more polarized on multiple issue dimensions. Accordingly, several scholars show that conversion among continuing activists contributes substantially to aggregate partisan change (Miller and Jennings 1986; Rapoport and Stone 1994; Stone 1991).

One source of such conversion may be activists’ ideological frameworks. Converse (1964: 224–30) showed that activists are much more likely than ordinary citizens to organize their policy preferences in an ideologically coherent manner (see also Herrera 1992; McClosky, Hoffmann, and O’Hara 1960). Thus as new sets of policy issues arise, activists may bring their positions on them into line with their abstract ideological structures.

A problem with an ideology-based explanation for attitudinal conversion and conflict extension is that not

all issues fit easily within existing ideological frameworks. For example, the guiding principle of American conservatism since the New Deal era has been support for limited government, but the conservative position on the newer cultural issues supports a stronger role for government in promoting traditional values. Thus it is not clear that Republican party activists would move toward greater cultural conservatism simply because they have conservative ideologies and conservative views on other issues.

However, ideological constraint on disparate issue dimensions is more likely if, as Converse suggests, it results not just from “idea-elements go[ing] together . . . for more abstract and quasi-logical reasons,” but also from social diffusion, or elites or creative thinkers putting positions on various issues—such as social welfare and cultural issues—together into “packages” that are consumed as “wholes” by activists and voters (Converse 1964: 211). For Noel (2006), such diffusion is initiated by intellectuals who package various issue positions into new ideologies and sell their new packages to political activists.

Party-based Conversion, Party Commitment, and Conflict Extension

We suggest that the social development and diffusion of ideological constraint occurs within parties. Party loyalty and commitment are widespread among active partisans (Conway and Feigert 1968; Miller and Jennings 1986), even those motivated principally by policy (Abramowitz, McGlennon, and Rapoport 1983; McCann 1995). As McClosky, Hoffman, and O’Hara observe, this “party spirit” motivates activists “not only to belong to a party appropriate to their beliefs, but to accept its doctrines” (1960: 421). Thus, as party leaders, candidates, and other activists begin to take extreme stands on new issues, many activists may adopt more consistently extreme views themselves. That does not necessarily mean that these activists will change their positions uniformly on each issue dimension. Just as with “issue publics” in the mass electorate (Converse 1964; Krosnick 1990), activists are likely to care more about some issues than others, and their attitudes may be less malleable on issues that are more salient to them. However, activists with high levels of party commitment should be inclined to accept the ascendant positions of their party, bringing their views on most issue dimensions closer to those positions.

Party commitment among activists has instrumental, social, and psychological components, and each of these facets may spur activists to embrace the ascendant issue positions in their parties. Many activists realize that the best, and sometimes only, way to achieve their political goals is through one of the two major parties. Having cast their lot with a particular party, they understand that they may best advance within the party and further their own agendas by supporting the party, its candidates, and its overall policy agenda (e.g., Stone and Abramowitz 1983). Party involvement also entails and sometimes is triggered by personal ties to

other active partisans (e.g., Conway and Feigert 1968; McClosky, Hoffmann, and O'Hara 1960). These connections may create social pressures to support the issue agendas of one's co-partisans. Finally, although activists' connections to their parties are more complex than the psychological attachments that define mass party identification (Campbell et al. 1960), most activists do have strong subjective loyalties to their parties (e.g., Miller and Jennings 1986). Such loyalties may serve as a perceptual filter, leading activists to prefer the positions taken by the candidates and other activists in their party to the positions taken by the other party.

Conversion by party-committed activists toward the ascendant policy positions in their parties should mean that more activists will hold extreme views on multiple issue dimensions and that activists' attitudes on various issues will grow more closely related in the aggregate. In other words, such conversion should make it more likely that conflict extension will occur.

Party Asymmetries in Conflict Extension and the Effects of Party Commitment

Spatial models of party activists generally predict that issue change will be symmetrical across the two parties. However, if conflict extension results in part from party-committed activists altering their issue positions in response to specific changes among party candidates and fellow activists, then change need not be symmetrical. It is the interaction between candidates and activists within party nomination processes that starts the process of conflict extension. For a variety of reasons (e.g., candidate quality and funding, the presence of incumbents, other political events), strong candidates with consistently extreme policy positions and activist groups advocating consistently extreme positions simply may emerge in one party before they do in the other party. In fact, although George McGovern's nomination brought a wave of activists with liberal positions on race, welfare, and cultural issues into the Democratic party in 1972 (Kirkpatrick 1976), Ronald Reagan, with his consistently conservative issue positions, did not win the GOP presidential nomination until 1980, and the Christian Right, with its staunch cultural conservatism, did not become a major influence in Republican nomination politics until the late 1980s (Wilcox and Larson 2006). Thus, in more recent years, the factors pushing activists toward consistently extreme positions may have been stronger in the GOP than in the Democratic party.²

² This comports with evidence that GOP candidates and office holders have moved right more than their Democratic counterparts have moved left in recent years (Hacker and Pierson 2005; Sinclair 2006; but see McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). Another reason that party commitment and its relationship with issue conversion may be stronger among Republicans than Democrats may be differences in the political cultures of the two parties. Freeman asserts that the Democratic party is "pluralistic and polycentric" (1986: 329), with activists' primary loyalties often lying with the groups or causes that they represent rather than with the party, whereas the GOP is a more hierarchical party in which "activists are expected to be good soldiers who respect leadership

ANALYSES AND EXPECTATIONS

To assess these ideas and arguments, we conduct a number of different analyses. First, we examine changes over time in the level of polarization between Democratic and Republican activists on three major issue agendas: social welfare, racial, and cultural issues. We expect sustained or increased party polarization on all three. We also assess the degree to which change has been asymmetrical across the two parties, expecting that recent increases in consistent conservatism in the GOP have been more pronounced than increases in consistent liberalism among Democrats. Moreover, we evaluate the claim that party activists play a leading role in conflict extension by examining patterns of polarization over time among activists alongside those for party office holders and the parties' mass coalitions.

Second, we evaluate the contributions of activist replacement and issue conversion to increases in party polarization on all three issue dimensions, expecting conversion to have played a key role. Third, we appraise whether increases in partisan issue polarization have been accompanied by growing levels of constraint in activists' attitudes toward the three issue agendas, and, again, we expect issue conversion to play a major role. Fourth, we assess the degree to which issue conversion among party activists has been party-based or based in activists' ideological frameworks. We expect that party affiliation is related to issue conversion even while allowing for the possibility of ideology-based conversion.

Finally, we assess the effect of party commitment on issue conversion among continuing party activists. We expect that party-committed activists should be more likely than other activists to convert toward the dominant policy positions of their party, and that the effect of party commitment should be stronger in the GOP than for Democrats.

CONFLICT EXTENSION AND GENERAL INCREASES IN PARTY POLARIZATION

Although our account of partisan issue change highlights conflict extension, there is a burgeoning literature on the growth of party polarization more generally, even on longstanding issue dimensions such as social welfare (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Stonecash, Brewer, and Mariani 2003). Thus, it is important to note that our theory simply predicts that as the parties' activists grow more polarized on newer policy dimensions such as cultural issues, party differences on older dimensions such as social welfare will not diminish. It does not require that increased polarization on newer issues will necessarily be accompanied by greater divergence between party activists on older issue dimensions or by a general growth in party polarization.³

and whose only important political commitment is to the Republican party" (1986: 339, 346).

³ Consider, for example, issue conversion among continuing Republican activists. Our account suggests that long-time activists

However, increases in party polarization on both newer and older issue agendas are consistent with our argument. If a party's candidates, office holders, or new activist groups stake out positions on older issues that are more extreme than the party's traditional stands, then our account of individual activist behavior suggests that continuing party activists may move their views on the older issues in a more extreme direction, whereas party involvement may grow more attractive to potential activists with more extreme views on those issues. Of course, increased party differences on the whole range of policy agendas is certainly more consistent with our conflict extension theory than with the conflict-displacement perspective on partisan issue change.

DATA

To evaluate our hypotheses, we turn to the Convention Delegate Studies (CDS), a series of surveys of Democratic and Republican national convention delegates and presidential campaign activists from 1972 to 2004. The CDS surveys from 1972 to 1992 were conducted by Warren E. Miller and other scholars.⁴ We conducted the 2000 CDS and modeled it after the earlier CDS surveys. It included both a cross-sectional survey of 2000 convention delegates and a panel survey of respondents to the 1992 CDS.⁵ We also conducted the 2004 CDS, which combined an online survey and a mail survey of delegates to the 2004 party conventions.⁶

motivated by social welfare conservatism may convert toward more-conservative cultural issue positions as such positions grow more prevalent within the party, whereas newer culturally conservative Republicans may become more conservative on social welfare now that they are active in the GOP. It does not suggest that social welfare conservatives should become even more conservative on social welfare or that culturally conservative activists should move their social welfare views to the right of the party's longstanding positions.⁴ See Herrera (1992), Layman (2001), and Miller and Jennings (1986) for more details about each of these surveys. No CDS survey was conducted in 1976 or 1996.

⁵ Like all of the earlier CDS surveys, the 2000 CDS was a mail survey. For the cross-sectional portion of the study, we mailed surveys to all of the delegates to the 2000 Democratic and Republican national conventions for whom we had correct address information (4,284 Democrats and 2,049 Republicans). Our response rate was 39%, which is comparable to response rates for earlier CDS surveys. For the panel study, we mailed surveys to 1,888 respondents to the 1992 CDS for whom we had correct address information, and our response rate was 48%, resulting in a panel of 911 respondents. Some of the respondents in the panel were also delegates to the 2000 conventions and are included in the 2000 delegate cross section, so that we have data on 1,907 delegates to the 2000 Democratic convention and 985 delegates to the 2000 Republican convention. There are more Democrats than Republicans in our sample because there were roughly twice as many delegates to the Democratic National Convention as there were to the Republican National Convention in 2000.

⁶ We sent e-mails to all of the 2004 national convention delegates for whom we had valid e-mail addresses (2,730 Democrats and 605 Republicans), asking them to participate in our online survey. Our rather low response rates—21% among Democrats and 22% among Republicans—resulted in samples of 578 Democratic delegates and 134 Republicans. Because of the very small Republican sample, we conducted a follow-up mail survey of GOP delegates, and we received an additional 260 completed surveys. Despite the different

The CDS are particularly appropriate for this analysis because they are the longest-running set of surveys of American party activists, because the 1992–2000 panel study allows us to examine individual-level replacement and conversion processes, and because national convention delegates are among the most active and visible participants in party politics. These surveys also allow us to examine a group of activists that is a bit broader than just the delegates to a particular year's convention. Because the 1980, 1984, 1988, and 2000 CDS surveys all included panel components, they surveyed many individuals who, although delegates to earlier conventions, were not delegates to that year's convention, but were active in its presidential campaign. Our analysis focuses on this larger set of presidential campaign activists.

PARTISAN CONFLICT EXTENSION FROM 1972 TO 2004

In this section, we assess our aggregate-level claims that conflict extension should have developed among party activists in recent years, that issue change should have been asymmetrical across the two parties, and that party activists have helped to encourage conflict extension among the parties in government and in the electorate. We evaluate these assertions in order.

Party Polarization in Activists' Policy Attitudes

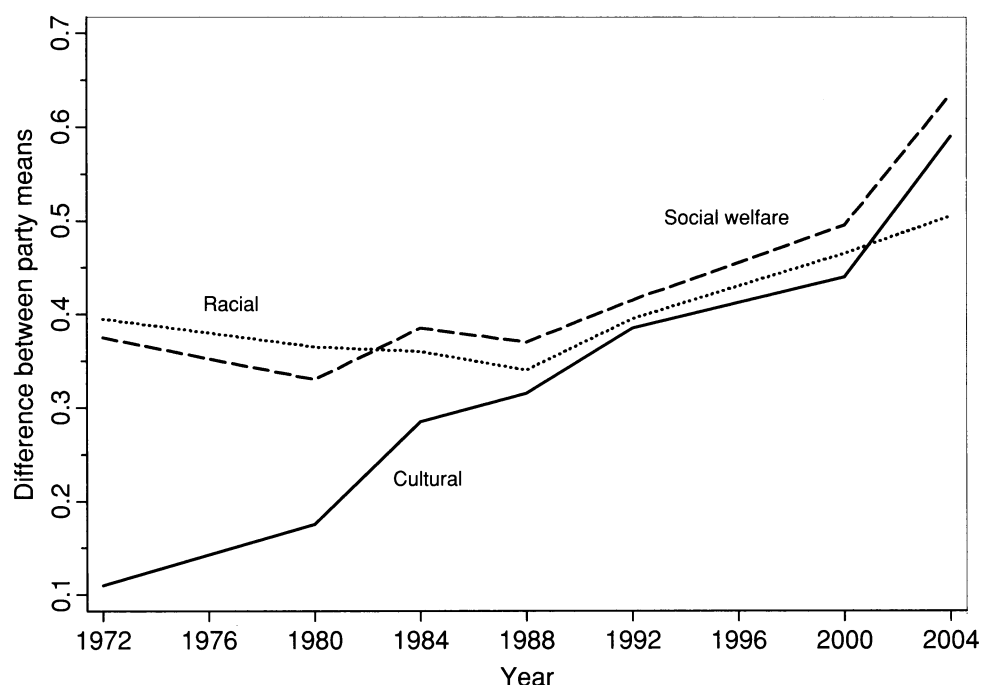
To gauge changes over time in the level of policy polarization between Democratic and Republican activists, we estimated structural equation models of the impact of party on activists' attitudes toward all of the social welfare, racial, and cultural issues included in the cross-sectional CDS surveys from 1972 to 2004.⁷ Due to inconsistency in the questions asked in the various CDS surveys, we use a different set of issues for the analysis in each year.⁸ Thus, comparisons over time should be viewed with some caution.⁹ Each year's

(and mixed) format of this study and its rather low response rates, the distribution of basic demographic and political variables in the 2004 CDS is, for both parties, quite similar to those in the 2000 CDS and in the surveys of 2004 national convention delegates conducted by CBS and the *New York Times*.

⁷ We estimate our models using Amos 4.0, which computes full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimates even in the presence of missing data (Andersen 1957).

⁸ See Appendix A for a list of these issues.

⁹ There are, however, two factors that suggest that the changes in polarization that we show are not due only to the different issue items across the years. First, there is no discernible pattern over time in either the variances of our items or their correlations with each other. The average variance across our items is 0.11 in 1972, 0.12 in 1984, 0.12 in 1992, and 0.13 in 2004. The average paired correlations between social welfare indicators are .20 in 1972, .55 in 1984, .51 in 1992, and .58 in 2004. For racial issues, they are .68 in 1972, .59 in 1984, .62 in 1992, and .51 in 2004. For cultural issues, they are .35 in 1972, .53 in 1984, .51 in 1992, and .52 in 2004. Second, there are clear increases in party polarization on the issues for which we do have questions with identical or similar wording over significant periods of time. For example, the difference between Republican and Democratic activists was 0.33 in 1988 and 0.41 in 2004 on government

FIGURE 1. Polarization between Republican and Democratic Activists on Three Policy Dimensions, 1972–2004

Source. 1972–2004 Convention Delegate Studies.

Note: Party differences are the estimated differences in Republican and Democratic means on latent variables (ranging from 0 for the most liberal position to 1 for the most conservative position) from confirmatory factor analyses of policy attitudes.

analysis includes a confirmatory factor model in which social welfare, racial, and cultural issue attitudes compose separate latent variables,¹⁰ and we allow a dummy variable for party (coded 1 for Republicans) to affect each of those variables. The coefficients on the party dummy indicate the difference between party means on each dimension.

Figure 1 shows these estimated party differences. In 1972, the differences between Democratic and Republican activists on social welfare and racial issues were already quite large, but the parties' activists were much less polarized on cultural issues.¹¹ The gap on cultural issues between Republican and Democratic activists grew rapidly and substantially between 1972 and 1988. In keeping with our conflict extension argument, party differences on the older social welfare and racial agen-

das showed no signs of decline.¹² In fact, polarization on all three issue dimensions has grown since 1988.¹³

Asymmetric Partisan Change

Have the recent increases in party polarization on social welfare, racial, and cultural issues been driven more by an increase in consistent conservatism among Republican activists than by growth in consistent

help for blacks, 0.39 in 1988 and 0.50 in 2004 on federal spending on child care, 0.38 in 1988 and 0.48 in 2004 on spending on aid to public schools, and 0.19 in 1988 and 0.38 in 2004 on spending on programs that assist blacks. Abortion was the only issue asked about in all of the CDS surveys, and four fairly similar response options were provided in all of the surveys. Party polarization on abortion was 0.09 in 1972 and 0.49 in 2004.

¹⁰ The one exception to this is in 1980, when there were only one indicator of social welfare attitudes and one indicator of racial attitudes. For all of the other years, and for cultural attitudes in 1980, we take into account measurement error in each observed indicator. To provide a scale for the latent variables, we constrain the factor loading for one observed indicator to be equal to one. All observed indicators are coded to range from 0 (most liberal) to 1 (most conservative).

¹¹ The difference between the party means is significant ($p < .001$) on each issue dimension in each year.

¹² Before we estimated the party polarization model in each year, we estimated three different measurement models: one with all of the issues loading on a single latent variable, one with all of the social welfare and racial issues loading on one factor and the cultural issues forming a separate factor, and one with racial, social welfare, and cultural issues all loading on separate factors. Although the correlations between the three factors are generally quite strong, the χ^2 difference test—the difference between the overall fit for a model with more latent factors and that for a model with fewer latent factors (Kline 1998)—indicates that a three-factor solution explains a significantly ($p < .001$) larger proportion of the variance in observed policy attitudes than does a one- or two-factor solution in each year. Thus, what is occurring is not growing polarization along a single ideological dimension, but conflict extension—party polarization growing on newer issue dimensions, while not subsiding on older dimensions.

¹³ To test whether the changes over time in levels of party polarization on the three issue dimensions were statistically significant, we constrained the level of polarization on a particular issue dimension in 2004 to equal the level of polarization on that dimension in 1972, and computed the χ^2 difference test for the goodness of fit of the constrained and unconstrained models in 2004. Each of those χ^2 difference tests was highly significant ($p < .0001$), indicating that party polarization grew significantly on each of the three issue dimensions.

liberalism among Democratic activists? To answer that question, we took each CDS respondent's mean position on all of the cultural, racial, and social welfare issues in each year. Then, defining "liberal" positions on each dimension as all values below 0.5 on the zero-to-one scales and "conservative" positions as all values above 0.5, we computed the percentages of Democratic and Republican activists in each year with liberal positions on all three issue agendas, with conservative positions on all three agendas, and with cross-pressured or moderate positions on the three agendas.

Figure 2 displays these percentages over time. As earlier work suggests (e.g., Kirkpatrick 1976), Democratic activists were already quite consistently liberal in 1972, when a majority of them supported the staunch liberal George McGovern for president. Nearly 63% of Democratic activists had liberal positions on each of the social welfare, cultural, and racial issue agendas. Consistent liberalism had dropped sharply by 1980, when the party renominated moderate Democratic president Jimmy Carter. However, it rebounded in 1984 and rose even further in 2004.

In contrast, nearly 72% of Republican party activists in 1972 were in the cross-pressured or moderate category. Over the next three decades, uniformly conservative positions increased sharply. Importantly, the growth of consistent conservatism in the GOP has not resulted only from the increase in cultural conservatism among Republican activists. The party's active base has indeed grown much more conservative on cultural concerns since 1972, but it also has turned sharply rightward on social welfare.¹⁴

Figure 2 makes it clear that the main force behind partisan conflict extension in recent years has been the sharp growth in the presence of consistently conservative Republican activists. However, that is not because Democratic activists have clung to the ideological center, but, at least in part, because a large percentage of them already had consistently liberal stands when our time series began.

Party Polarization among Activists, in Congress, and in the Electorate

To gauge the extent to which conflict extension among activists has helped to spark conflict extension in other political spheres, Figure 3 shows the level of party polarization on social welfare, racial, and cultural issues between members of Congress, activists, and mass party identifiers in presidential-election years—the only years in which we have data on activists—from 1972 to 2004.¹⁵ The activist series have been taken

directly from Figure 1.¹⁶ The mass series have been taken from Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz (2006), who computed levels of party polarization with the American National Election Studies (NES) using the same method we used for activists. The congressional series are based on the roll call votes cast on social welfare, racial, and cultural issues in the U.S. House and Senate in presidential-election years from 1972 through 2004. We computed the difference between the mean proportions of Republican and Democratic members of each chamber voting on the conservative side of all votes within a particular issue domain in a given year, and averaged those differences in the House and the Senate.¹⁷

Because all of these measures are based on different questions and specific issues and all have different metrics, we standardized all of them to have means of 50 and standard deviations of 25. That allows us to compare the trends in each series, but, of course, prevents us from comparing levels of party polarization across the three series.

We do, however, have one issue on which it is possible to make stronger comparisons: abortion, the only issue included in all of the CDS studies. To make our measures of party polarization on abortion among activists and citizens as comparable as possible to the congressional measure, we computed the percentage of each party's members taking the pro-life side on abortion and then took the difference between the pro-life percentages of Republican and Democratic activists and identifiers.¹⁸

Although our very small number of time points makes it difficult to ascertain any causal patterns,

start the process by themselves. Activists might mobilize themselves into party politics and provide the initial spark for conflict extension, but that spark also might come from strategic office-seekers, who take extreme stands on a new issue dimension to attract new sets of activists into the parties. Another reason is that our data include only nine time points with four years between each two consecutive points. If issue change at one level of the party system does respond to change at another level, the response should take less than four years to develop, and thus may appear as simultaneous change in our presidential-election-year data.

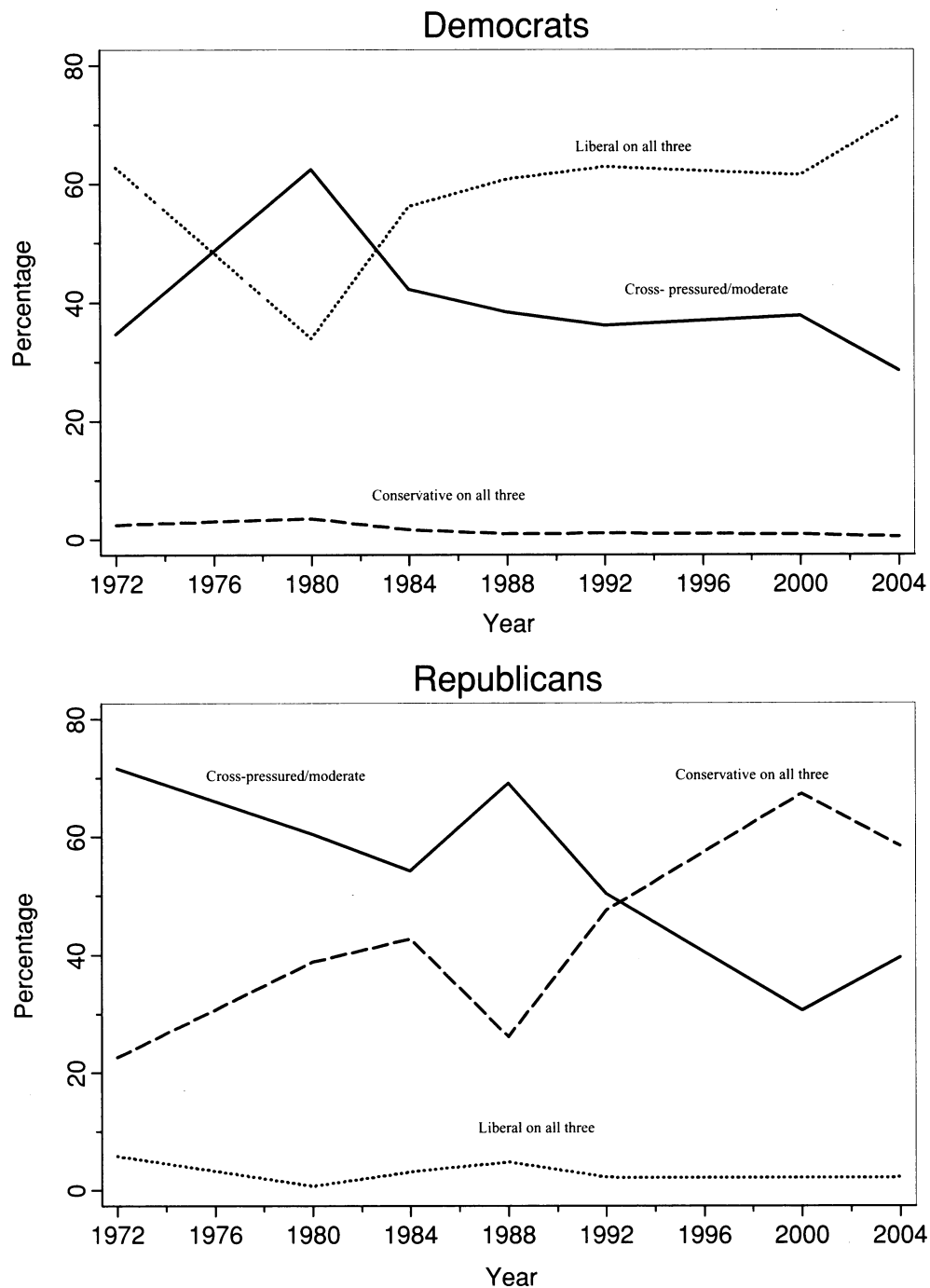
¹⁶ Because the CDS surveys were not conducted in 1976 and 1996, levels of polarization for those years are simply the averages of the levels in the preceding and subsequent election year.

¹⁷ Online Appendix 1 provides a list of all of the roll call votes used to construct the congressional polarization measures.

¹⁸ The pro-life percentage of each party in the House and Senate is simply the mean percentage of the party's members voting on the pro-life side of all bills involving abortion in a given year. We took the yearly difference in party means in both chambers and then averaged the House and Senate differences to produce the measure of party polarization on abortion. For activists and the electorate, we used the four-category abortion items in the NES and CDS. We show the response options over time in the two surveys in Appendix B. We coded the two most restrictive options as pro-life and the least restrictive option as pro-choice. To make the mass and activist measures of party polarization on abortion as comparable as possible to the congressional measure—based on yes or no roll call votes on abortion legislation—we eliminated the option in between the two most restrictive options and the least restrictive option (e.g., "permit abortion for [other] reasons . . ."). We then took the percentage of the remaining respondents on the pro-life side. Polarization is the difference between these percentages for Republicans and Democrats.

¹⁴ The percentage of Republican activists with conservative positions on social welfare issues was 31% in 1972 and 77% in 2004. On cultural issues, it was 42% in 1972 and 70% in 2004. On racial issues, it was 77% percent in 1972 and 80% percent in 2004. The percentage of Democratic activists with liberal positions was 77% in 1972 and 98% in 2004 on social welfare, 74% in 1972 and 79% in 2004 on race, and 82% in 1972 and 91% in 2004 on culture.

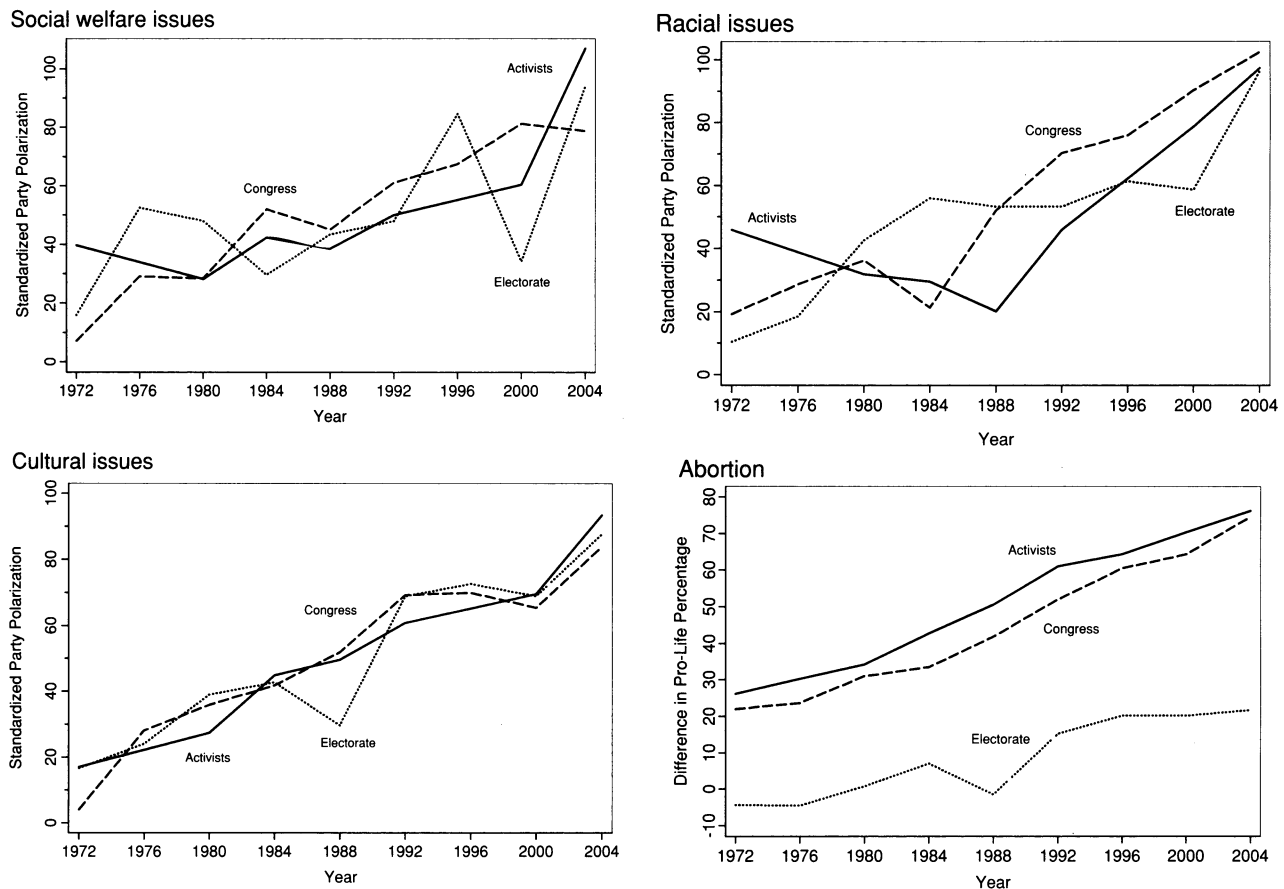
¹⁵ Even if party activists play a leading role in the development of conflict extension, it is quite possible that we will not find clear patterns of causality. One reason is that activists do not necessarily

FIGURE 2. Combination of Social Welfare, Racial, and Cultural Issue Positions among Democratic and Republican Activists, 1972–2004

Source: 1972–2004 Convention Delegate Studies.

we draw three conclusions from visual inspection of Figure 3. First, party polarization on all of these issue dimensions grew noticeably between 1972 and 2004 in Congress, among party activists, and in the electorate. Second, the patterns of polarization for these three different components of the party system appear to have trended together fairly closely, especially for party activists and the congressional parties. Third, the

section of the figure on abortion makes it plain that the parties in the electorate are considerably less polarized than the parties in government or party activists, just as other research has argued (e.g., Fiorina with Abrams and Pope 2005). However, as the parties' activists and legislators have diverged on abortion, the abortion differences between Republicans and Democrats also have grown.

FIGURE 3. Issue Polarization among Party Activists, the Parties in Congress, and the Parties in the Electorate, 1972–2004

Source: 1972–2004 Convention Delegate Studies, National Election Studies, and Congressional roll call votes.

Note: The levels of party polarization on social welfare issues, racial issues, and cultural issues have been standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25. For abortion, party polarization is the pro-life percentage among Republicans minus the pro-life percentage among Democrats.

To explore causal relationships, we conducted some very basic analyses of the relationships over time among Congressional party polarization, party activist polarization, and mass party polarization. We focus on abortion because our measures on this issue are the most comparable across the three series. Our first type of analysis is a set of bivariate Granger causality tests, where we regress one series on its own past value and the past value of one other series: $Y_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Y_{t-1} + \beta_1 X_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$. We use single lags due to small sample sizes. If the past value of X has a significant effect on the current value of Y in these models, then X may be said to Granger-cause Y (Granger 1969). We also undertake bivariate causality tests using the most general error correction model (ECM), suggested by De Boef and Keele (2008). We regress the change from one time point to the next in one series on the past value of that series, the past value of one other series, and change in the second series: $\Delta Y_t = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Y_{t-1} + \beta_0 \Delta X_t + \beta_1 X_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t$. Here, a joint F -test on β_0 and β_1 is an appropriate test of whether X causes Y .

The results are shown in Table 1. Looking first at activist and Congressional polarization, the Granger causality tests show a causal effect of activist polarization on polarization in Congress ($p = .01$), but no significant effect of Congressional polarization on abortion differences among party activists ($p = .84$). Similarly, the joint F -test in the ECM is statistically significant ($p = .06$) for activist polarization's effect on congressional party divergence, but is not significant ($p = .87$) for the Congressional series' effect on activist polarization. We also find that changes in levels of abortion polarization among party activists and the parties in Congress cause changes in mass party polarization (columns (3) and (5)), but that the reverse is not true (columns (4) and (6)). This pattern appears in both the Granger causality tests and the joint F -tests from the ECM results.¹⁹

¹⁹ A natural extension of our bivariate Granger-causality tests is a vector autoregression (VAR) model in which the current value of each of the three series is a function of its own past value and

TABLE 1. Bivariate Tests of Causality in the Relationships between Party Polarization among Party Activists, the Parties in Congress, and the Parties in the Electorate on Abortion, 1972–2004

Type of Causal Model and Independent Variables	Causal Relationship Tested					
	(1) Activists → Congress	(2) Congress → Activists	(3) Activists → Electorate	(4) Electorate → Activists	(5) Congress → Electorate	(6) Electorate → Congress
<i>Granger Causality Models (Dependent Variable = Y_t)</i>						
Congress $t-1$	–0.01 (0.97)	–0.10 (0.47)	—	—	1.02* (0.22)	1.26* (0.22)
Activists $t-1$	1.09* (0.29)	1.10* (0.46)	0.83* (0.25)	1.17* (0.15)	—	—
Electorate $t-1$	—	—	–0.41 (0.39)	–0.28 (0.23)	–0.67 (0.34)	–0.28 (0.33)
Constant	–3.45 (2.54)	5.48 (4.08)	–26.90* (9.68)	0.09 (5.74)	–27.51* (7.24)	–2.16 (7.03)
($N = 8$)						
AIC	34.97	42.56	48.96	40.61	45.22	44.74
BIC	35.21	42.80	49.20	40.84	45.46	44.98
<i>Error Correction Models (Dependent Variable = ΔY)</i>						
Congress $t-1$	–0.99* (0.32)	–0.32 (0.98)	—	—	1.06* (0.28)	0.42 (0.54)
Activists $t-1$	1.07* (0.31)	0.68 (0.98)	0.87* (0.31)	0.23 (0.29)	—	—
Electorate $t-1$	—	—	–1.47* (0.50)	–1.72* (0.41)	–1.72 (0.41)	–0.56 (0.88)
Activist change in polarization	0.15 (0.30)	—	–0.21 (0.84)	—	—	—
Congress change in polarization	—	0.39 (0.78)	—	—	–0.17 (0.51)	—
Electorate change in polarization	—	—	—	–0.07 (0.29)	—	–0.16 (0.48)
<i>F</i> -Test on X_{t-1} and X ($df = 2, 4$)	6.22*	0.15	4.53*	0.62	8.57*	0.35
($N = 8$)						
AIC	36.49	44.07	50.84	42.48	46.99	46.51
BIC	36.81	44.39	51.16	42.80	47.30	46.83

* $p < .10$ (two-tailed).

These results are at best suggestive. They do not take into account parallel changes on other issues besides abortion; they are bivariate; they are based on wider

the past values of each of the other two series. We estimated such a model and the results are quite similar to those in Table 1, despite the higher demands this model places on our limited data. They reinforce the idea that activist change led Congressional change on abortion rather than the reverse, whereas mass change has responded to, and not caused, elite-level change. When Congressional polarization is the dependent variable, the lagged value of activist polarization has a statistically significant ($p = .02$) effect on it, whereas the lagged mass series does not. Neither the lagged Congressional series nor the lagged mass series has any effect on activist polarization. Finally, when the mass series is the dependent variable, Congressional polarization has a positive effect that approaches significance ($p < .10$, one-tailed). Activist polarization does not have a significant effect in this model, so its effect on mass polarization on abortion appears to be exerted indirectly through its influence on Congressional polarization. Of course, collinearity between the Congressional and activist series, coupled with our small sample size will inflate the standard error estimates in these models. We were not able to estimate error correction models in which each of the three series was a function of the other two series. Such models require two more independent variables (change in each of the other two series in addition to their lagged values) than the VAR model and thus demanded too much of our very limited data.

time intervals than is desirable; and they include very few data points. Qualified as they are, these results are the first causal evidence of which we are aware for the widely shared assumption in the parties literature that political activists drive change in party positions, including, as we add in this article, the extension of party conflict to new issue domains.

REPLACEMENT, CONVERSION, AND CONFLICT EXTENSION AMONG PARTY ACTIVISTS

Attitudinal conversion among current party activists plays a critical role in our account of conflict extension. However, the cross-sectional survey data examined so far cannot distinguish conversion from replacement, which prior research identifies as critical for party activist change. Thus, to assess the contribution of replacement and conversion to conflict extension, we turn to the 1992–2000 CDS panel and the cross-sectional surveys in 1992 and 2000, limiting our focus to only those issues that were asked with identical questions and response options in both surveys. There

TABLE 2. Party Polarization among Presidential Campaign Activists in 1992 and 2000: Overall Change, Replacement Effects, and Conversion Effects

Group and Type of Change	Level of Party Polarization ^a			(N)
	Abortion	Social Welfare	Racial Issues	
<i>Overall Change</i>				
All activists in 1992	0.37	0.43	0.38	(2,791)
All activists in 2000	0.43	0.49	0.45	(2,993)
<i>Change from Activist Replacement</i>				
Dropouts in 1992	0.37	0.36	0.36	(150)
Newcomers in 2000	0.47	0.47	0.48	(140)
<i>Change from Issue Conversion</i>				
Stayers in 1992	0.36	0.44	0.33	(722)
Stayers in 2000	0.41	0.48	0.39	(722)
<i>Percentage of Overall Change Due to:^b</i>				
Replacement	29.4%	31.5%	29.1%	
Conversion	70.6%	68.5%	70.9%	

Source: 1992 and 2000 Convention Delegate Studies.

Note: "Dropouts" are 1992 activists (in the panel study) who were not active in the 2000 presidential campaign. "Newcomers" are 2000 activists (in the 2000 cross section) who became active after 1992. "Stayers" are individuals (in the panel study) who were active in both the 1992 and 2000 presidential campaigns.

^a Entries are coefficients on a party dummy (coded 0 for Democrats and 1 for Republicans) affecting the confirmatory abortion, racial, and social welfare factors (all ranging from 0 for most liberal to 1 for most conservative) in structural equation models. The effect of the party dummy on all three latent variables is significant at $p < 0.001$ in each year.

^b Replacement's contribution to the increase in party polarization is the proportion of 1992 activists dropping out of party activity by 2000 (0.17) multiplied by the difference in the polarization level between newcomers in 2000 and dropouts in 1992. Conversion's contribution to the increase in party polarization is the proportion of 1992 activists remaining active in 2000 (0.83) multiplied by the difference in the polarization level between stayers in 2000 and stayers in 1992 (Rapoport and Stone 1994). These contributions were divided by the overall change to compute the percentage contributions.

were 11 such questions, including six on social welfare, two on racial issues, and three on cultural issues (specifically, abortion).²⁰

²⁰ The six social welfare questions are about the proper level of government services and spending, government providing health insurance, and whether or not federal government spending on child care, welfare programs, programs that assist the unemployed, and aid to public schools should be increased, decreased, or kept at the same level. The two racial issue questions ask about government responsibility to help African-Americans and federal spending on programs to assist blacks. The three indicators of abortion attitudes are the respondents' views on the legality of abortion, feeling thermometer ratings of pro-life groups, and thermometer ratings of pro-choice groups. Attitudes on government services and spending, health insurance, and help for blacks are measured on seven-point scales with questions and response options identical to those used in the National Election Studies (NES). Abortion attitude is a four-point scale (see Appendix B). The federal spending items are all three-category variables ranging from increase to decrease. We employ feeling thermometer ratings (ranging from 0 to 100) as measures of abortion attitudes for two reasons. First, the only question about cultural policy with the same wording in the 1992 and 2000 surveys is the one on abortion, and we need more than one observed indicator of cultural attitudes to correct for measurement error when we examine change in individual activists' issue attitudes between the two panel waves. Second, unlike social groups that may be associated with a set of political issues but exist apart from the issues (e.g., poor people and social welfare issues), pro-life and pro-choice groups exist only in relation to the abortion issue. So feelings toward these groups should be good indicators of actual attitudes toward abortion policy.

In the first set of rows in Table 2, we examine the overall change in party polarization between 1992 and 2000, showing the estimated differences between the policy attitudes of all Republican and all Democratic activists in the two years (computed with the same method that was used for Figure 1). On all three dimensions, polarization was already large by 1992, with the gap between Democrats and Republicans ranging from 0.37 to 0.43 points on zero-to-one scales. However, it still grew noticeably between 1992 and 2000 in all three issue domains: by 0.06 on social welfare, 0.06 on abortion, and 0.07 on racial issues.²¹

To assess the contribution of activist replacement to these increases in party polarization, we use the 1992–2000 panel and the 2000 cross-sectional survey to compare the attitudes of "dropouts" (1992 presidential campaign activists who were not active in 2000) with those of the "newcomers" (2000 campaign activists who said that they first became active in party politics after 1992) who replaced them between 1992 and 2000. We estimate our party polarization model for both groups.

²¹ Constraining the level of polarization on each issue dimension in 2000 to equal the level in 1992 and computing the difference in χ^2 for the constrained and unconstrained models in 2000 shows that the growth in polarization on all three issue variables was statistically significant ($p < .001$).

To gauge conversion effects, we employ the 1992–2000 panel data and estimate our model for the attitudes of “stayers” (individuals who were active in both the 1992 and 2000 campaigns) in both 1992 and 2000.²²

The results are shown in the second and third sets of rows in the table. Turning first to replacement effects, party differences on abortion, social welfare, and racial issues were all significantly larger for new activists in 2000 than they were for the 1992 activists whom they replaced. Moving to conversion effects, Democrats and Republicans active in both 1992 and 2000 were more polarized in 2000 than they had been in 1992 on every issue dimension. As we expected, both replacement and conversion contributed to conflict extension.

The fact that replacement effects are consistently larger than conversion effects seems to suggest that factors outside of party politics contributed more than developments within the parties to conflict extension. However, there are two reasons to be skeptical of this conclusion. First, although the mobilization of new activists may be influenced by factors external to the parties, it also may be shaped by partisan factors. Parties are involved in recruiting new activists and those new activists already may have strong attachments to a party. In that case, the emergence of new activists with extreme positions on multiple issue agendas may result in part from mass party identifiers taking cues from party candidates and platforms and moving their own views in the direction of those cues (Layman and Carsey 2002a).²³

Second, the contributions of replacement and conversion depend on the proportion of activists who stay involved in and drop out of party politics, and a large majority (83%) of 1992 presidential campaign activists remained active in 2000. Based on formulas developed by Rapoport and Stone (1994),²⁴ the last

set of rows in Table 2 shows that about 70% of the overall increase in party activist polarization on each issue agenda stemmed from conversion, whereas only about 30% was due to replacement.²⁵ Thus, conflict extension might have occurred if replacement was the only process of activist change, but issue conversion has made it more likely and larger in scope.

REPLACEMENT, CONVERSION, AND THE GROWTH OF ATTITUDINAL CONSTRAINT AMONG PARTY ACTIVISTS

Because conflict extension occurs when Republican activists adopt more consistently conservative positions on a variety of issue agendas and Democratic activists adopt more consistently liberal positions, the emergence of partisan conflict extension should have been accompanied by an increase in the degree to which activists' preferences on social welfare, racial, and cultural issues are related to each other. Like conflict extension generally, increases in aggregate attitude constraint should result from both replacement and conversion.

We assess these predictions in Table 3. In the first two columns, we examine overall changes in constraint by showing the correlations between latent abortion, social welfare, and racial attitudes for all activists and for Democratic and Republican activists separately in 1992 and 2000. The correlations between abortion and social welfare attitudes and between abortion and racial attitudes grew between 1992 and 2000 among all activists and within each party's activist group. The correlation between social welfare and racial attitudes did not grow for all activists, but it already was quite large in 1992. The results also provide further evidence of an asymmetrical increase in issue polarization and constraint across the two parties. The correlation between social welfare and racial attitudes increased in the GOP, but not among Democrats. Also, the growth in the relationship of abortion attitudes to views on the other two agendas was clearly larger for Republicans than Democrats.

²² Because delegates to a particular year's national convention are very likely to be active in subsequent campaigns even if they are not delegates in those years (Miller and Jennings 1986), the large majority (83%) of individuals who responded to both the 1992 and 2000 CDS were active in the presidential campaigns in both years. Thus, our sample of stayers ($N = 722$: 459 Democrats and 263 Republicans) is a good bit larger than our samples of dropouts ($N = 150$: 108 Democrats and 42 Republicans) and newcomers ($N = 140$: 96 Democrats and 44 Republicans).

²³ In fact, evidence from the 2000–2004 American National Election Studies (NES) panel survey suggests that newcomers to party activism already are more strongly tied to a political party before they become active than are people who never become active in party politics. We defined party activists as respondents who performed two or more of the five partisan campaign activities (trying to influence someone else's vote; displaying a button, sign, or sticker; attending a party or candidate meeting or rally; doing some other sort of work for a party or candidate; and giving money to a party or candidate) asked about by NES. Among individuals who were not party activists in either 2000 or 2004, 30% identified themselves as strong Democrats or strong Republicans in 2000. Among 2000 non-activists who became activists in 2004, 44% were strong partisans in 2000.

²⁴ According to Rapoport and Stone (1994), the contribution of conversion to overall issue change is $\alpha(S_2 - S_1)$, where α is the proportion of time 1 activists who remain active through time 2 (.83 here), S_2 is the mean opinion of stayers at time 2, and S_1 is the mean opinion of stayers at time 1. The contribution of replacement is $(1 - \alpha)(N_2 - D_1)$, where $1 - \alpha$ is the proportion of time 1 activists dropping out

at time 2, N_2 is the mean opinion of Newcomers at time 2, and D_1 is the mean opinion of Dropouts at time 1. Using these formulas and replacing mean opinion with the difference in party means at time 1 and time 2, the contribution of replacement to the increase in party polarization is 0.02 $((1 - 0.83) \times (0.47 - 0.37))$ on abortion (29.4% of the overall increase in party polarization on abortion), 0.02 (31.5%) on social welfare, and 0.02 (29.1%) on racial issues. The contribution of conversion to increased polarization is 0.04 $(0.83 \times (0.41 - 0.36))$ on abortion (70.6% of the overall increase), 0.03 (68.5%) on social welfare, and 0.05 (70.9%) on race.

²⁵ Although the consistency of activism in our CDS panel is greater than it is at more grassroots levels of party politics, it is not much greater. In a panel survey of caucus attendees in Iowa, Michigan, and Virginia from 1984 to 1992 (Abramowitz et al. 1996), 75% of 1984 caucus attendees were active in the 1988 presidential campaign and 67% remained active in the 1992 presidential campaign. In the 2000–2004 NES panel study, nearly 63% of individuals who were party activists in 2000 also were activists in 2004. Even if we substitute the NES consistency rate for that in our CDS panel, conversion accounts for a majority of the increase in polarization on abortion and racial issues and over 40% of the increase on social welfare issues.

TABLE 3. Attitude Constraint among Presidential Campaign Activists in 1992 and 2000: Overall Change, Replacement Effects, and Conversion Effects in Correlations between Issue Attitudes

Group and Pair of Issues	Overall Change		Replacement Effects		Conversion Effects	
	All Activists in 1992	All Activists in 2000	Dropouts in 1992	Newcomers in 2000	Stayers in 1992	Stayers in 2000
Both Parties' Activists						
Abortion–social welfare	0.67	0.76	0.56	0.79	0.69	0.75
Abortion–racial	0.54	0.61	0.43	0.59	0.55	0.60
Social welfare–racial	0.86	0.87	0.85	0.86	0.86	0.87
(N)	(2,791)	(2,993)	(150)	(140)	(722)	(722)
Democratic activists						
Abortion–social welfare	0.32	0.36	0.14*	0.28	0.38	0.40
Abortion–racial	0.24	0.29	0.07*	0.15*	0.31	0.36
Social welfare–racial	0.75	0.74	0.69	0.63	0.76	0.76
(N)	(1,829)	(1,963)	(108)	(96)	(459)	(459)
Republican activists						
Abortion–social welfare	0.35	0.54	0.27*	0.71	0.29	0.47
Abortion–racial	0.18	0.32	—	—	0.13*	0.29
Social welfare–racial	0.74	0.83	—	—	0.83	0.81
(N)	(962)	(1,030)	(42)	(44)	(263)	(263)

Source: 1992 and 2000 Convention Delegate Studies.

Note: Entries are correlations between latent abortion attitude, latent social welfare attitude, and latent racial attitude. See Table 2 for explanation of dropouts, newcomers, and stayers.

* $p > .05$. All other correlations are significant at $p < .05$.

The last four columns of Table 3 show that both activist replacement and activists converting toward more consistent policy attitudes contributed to the increase in ideological constraint. Among all activists, the correlations between abortion attitudes and both social welfare attitudes and racial attitudes were clearly stronger for new activists in 2000 (.79 and .59) than they were for the dropouts in 1992 (.56 and .43). The relationship between social welfare and racial attitudes was no different for the two groups, but was large for both. Moving to conversion effects, individuals active in presidential campaign politics in both 1992 and 2000 displayed more ideologically consistent policy attitudes in 2000 than in 1992. Among all continuing activists, abortion attitudes became more strongly correlated with social welfare and racial attitudes. The relationship between social welfare and racial attitudes did not grow, but, again, was already extremely strong in 1992.²⁶ We again see some asymmetry across the two parties, as both the replacement and conversion effects are stronger for Republicans than for Democrats.²⁷

²⁶ Applying the Rapoport and Stone (1994) formulas to changes in attitude constraint shows that conversion contributed more than replacement across the three issue dimensions. For the correlation between abortion and social welfare preferences among all activists, replacement's contribution was .04 and conversion's was .05. For the abortion and racial attitude correlation, the contributions were .03 for replacement and .04 for conversion. For the social welfare and racial correlation, they were .002 for replacement and .008 for conversion.

²⁷ The very small samples of Republican dropouts and newcomers in our panel created difficulties for the estimation of our three-factor

PARTISAN OR IDEOLOGICAL ISSUE CONVERSION?

Our analysis thus far suggests that issue conversion among continuing activists has been more important than activist replacement for conflict extension and the growth of attitude constraint among activists. It also leaves open the possibility that extra-party factors, such as the influence of ideology, may have shaped the views of both new and continuing activists and contributed to conflict extension. In this section and the next, we assess the importance of inherently intra-party factors for conflict extension.

We first consider the possibility that the conversion effects shown in Tables 2 and 3 may not reflect the influence of party—or the positions of party candidates, platforms, and fellow activists—on activists' attitudes. Instead, in keeping with Converse's (1964) evidence that people active in politics tend to have ideologically constrained policy preferences, they may be due to activists bringing their views on particular issue dimensions into line with their ideologies or their attitudes on other issues.

To assess the effects of partisan and ideological influences on changes in activists' social welfare, racial, and cultural attitudes, we use the 1992–2000 panel data

model for these groups. So, for both dropouts and newcomers in the GOP, we estimated a two-factor model that combined social welfare and racial attitudes into a single factor. Thus, the only correlation shown for these groups is the one between the social welfare–racial factor and the abortion factor.

and estimate the structural equation model illustrated in the following equations:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Abortion}_{it} &= \alpha_1 + \lambda_1 \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{11} \text{Social Welf}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \gamma_{12} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{13} \text{Ideology}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \beta_1 \text{Party}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{1,it} \\
 \text{Social Welf}_{it} &= \alpha_2 + \lambda_2 \text{Social Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{21} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \gamma_{22} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{23} \text{Ideology}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \beta_2 \text{Party}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{2,it} \\
 \text{Racial}_{it} &= \alpha_3 + \lambda_3 \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{31} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \gamma_{32} \text{Social Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{33} \text{Ideology}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \beta_3 \text{Party}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{3,it} \\
 \text{Ideology}_{it} &= \alpha_4 + \lambda_4 \text{Ideology}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{41} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \gamma_{42} \text{Social Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{43} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \beta_4 \text{Party}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{4,it}
 \end{aligned}$$

The λ parameters connecting ideology and each issue attitude at time t (2000) to their own previous values at time $t-1$ (1992) capture individual-level stability in ideology and abortion, social welfare, and racial attitudes (all ranging from 0 for most liberal to 1 for most conservative) over time.²⁸

The β parameters linking party (a dummy variable for Republicans) at $t-1$ to issue attitudes at t capture the potential influence of party affiliation in 1992 on current ideology and current attitudes on abortion, social welfare, and racial issues. Because the model controls for past values of each endogenous variable, these parameters can be viewed as measuring the impact of party on *change* in ideology or policy attitudes from 1992 to 2000—in other words, party-based conversion. The γ parameters connecting ideology and each issue attitude at t to attitudes on the other issue dimensions or ideology at $t-1$ capture the impact of ideology or attitudes on one issue dimension in 1992 on change in attitudes on another issue dimension or in ideology between 1992 and 2000—in other words, ideological conversion.

²⁸ Social welfare, racial, and cultural attitudes are latent variables with corrections for measurement error in the observed indicators. We allow the measurement errors for each observed indicator to be correlated across the two panel waves. Because we only have one indicator of ideology (self-placement on a seven-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative), it is simply an observed variable with no measurement error correction.

The estimates of this model are presented in Table 4.²⁹ Not surprisingly, there is considerable stability in attitudes toward all three types of issues over our eight-year period. The unstandardized stability coefficients (the regression coefficients found on the diagonal of the first four rows of the table) are all .38 or greater and are all highly statistically significant ($p < .0001$). We also see evidence of activists bringing their attitudes into line with their views on other issue agendas or with their ideological identifications. Activists who were more conservative on social welfare in 1992 were more likely than social welfare liberals to convert in a conservative direction on racial issues and in ideology between 1992 and 2000. The gaps in racial attitudes and ideological identification between activists with the most conservative social welfare attitudes and those with the most liberal social welfare attitudes both increased by .16. Racial conservatism in 1992 is associated with conservative change in individuals' ideologies and social welfare and abortion attitudes, whereas activists who were more pro-life on abortion in 1992 moved their ideological, social welfare, and racial orientations to the right. Conservative ideological identification is related to increases in conservatism on both social welfare and abortion.

However, issue conversion over this period was not based only on ideology. Part of it clearly was partisan. Even controlling for the influence of ideology and other issue attitudes on attitude change and stability, Republicans were still significantly more likely than Democrats to become more conservative in their social welfare, racial, and abortion attitudes—and in their ideological identifications—between 1992 and 2000. Specifically, the gap between continuing Republican and Democratic activists increased by 0.03 on racial issues, 0.05 on abortion, 0.11 in ideological identification, and a sizeable 0.17 on social welfare issues. Party-based conversion by individual continuing activists clearly did lead to greater polarization between Democratic and Republican activists on each of these issue dimensions.

PARTY COMMITMENT AND PARTY-BASED ISSUE CONVERSION

Because party-based conversion occurs among activists, we next assess whether it is most prevalent among the most party-committed activists by estimating this model separately for each party:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Abortion}_{it} &= \alpha_1 + \lambda_1 \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{11} \text{Soc Welf}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \gamma_{12} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{13} \text{Ideol}_{i,t-1} \\
 &\quad + \gamma_{14} \text{Party Commit}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{1,it}
 \end{aligned}$$

²⁹ Tables 4 and 5 show the estimates of the structural portions of our various models: the causal relationships across time between party or party commitment, issue attitudes, and ideology. The estimates of the measurement portions of the models and any structural estimates not in the tables are displayed in on-line Appendix 2.

TABLE 4. Partisan Conversion? The Effects of Party, Ideology, and Attitudes on Other Issues on Issue Attitude Change among Continuing Activists from 1992 to 2000

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variables			
	2000 Social Welfare	2000 Racial	2000 Abortion	2000 Ideological Identification
1992 Social Welfare	0.39*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	0.16*** (0.02)
1992 Racial	0.29*** (0.03)	0.71*** (0.04)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.03)
1992 Abortion	0.10*** (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)	0.89*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.02)
1992 Ideological Identification	0.06*** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.38*** (0.02)
Party affiliation (1 = Republican)	0.17*** (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
(N)	(722)			
χ^2 (df)	3497.19 (258)			
Δ_1/Δ_2^a	0.89/0.89			
ρ_1/ρ_2^b	0.86/0.87			

Source: 1992–2000 Convention Delegate Study Panel.

Note: Entries are unstandardized full information maximum likelihood coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. Issue attitudes and ideological identification range from most liberal to most conservative. All variables range from 0 to 1.

^a Bentler and Bonett's (1980) normed fit index/Bollen's (1989) incremental fit index.

^b Bollen's (1986) relative fit index/Bentler and Bonett's (1980) non-normed fit index.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$. * $p < .05$ (one-tailed tests).

Soc Welf_{it}

$$= \alpha_2 + \lambda_2 \text{Soc Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{21} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{22} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{23} \text{Ideol}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{24} \text{Party Commit}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{2,it}$$

Racial_{it}

$$= \alpha_3 + \lambda_3 \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{31} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{32} \text{Soc Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{33} \text{Ideol}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{34} \text{Party Commit}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{3,it}$$

Ideol_{it}

$$= \alpha_4 + \lambda_4 \text{Ideol}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{41} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{42} \text{Soc Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{43} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{44} \text{Party Commit}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{4,it}$$

Party Commit_{it}

$$= \alpha_5 + \lambda_5 \text{Party Commit}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{51} \text{Abortion}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{52} \text{Soc Welf}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_{53} \text{Racial}_{i,t-1} \\ + \gamma_{54} \text{Ideol}_{i,t-1} + \varepsilon_{5,it}$$

The model is the same as that used for Table 4 except that party affiliation has been replaced by party commitment and, unlike party affiliation, we allow party commitment in 2000 to be endogenous to policy preferences and ideology in 1992. Our expectations for the effects of party commitment are plain: activists who are

more committed to their parties should be more likely to move their issue attitudes and ideologies toward positions growing more popular in their party between 1992 and 2000. We do not have clear expectations for change in party commitment, but it is possible that activists who share the ascendant issue positions in their parties will grow more committed to the parties over time.

The observed indicators of latent party commitment in our model are similar to those used to measure activists' party loyalties and commitments in previous research (e.g., Abramowitz, McGlennon, and Rapoport 1983; Conway and Feigert 1968; Miller and Jennings 1986). They include self-identified strength of party support, the degree to which presidential campaign activity was motivated by commitment to party, the difference in the respondent's feeling thermometer rating of his or her party and the other party (with higher scores representing more positive ratings of the GOP and more negative ratings of the Democratic party for Republican activists and just the opposite for Democratic activists), the extent to which the activist saw himself or herself as representing the party organization at the national convention, and whether or not the activist held party office at the time of the survey.³⁰

This set of items seems to capture the psychological, social, and instrumental components of party commitment among activists. Self-identified strength of party support comes closest—both conceptually and in measurement—to the psychological attachment to

³⁰ Appendix C provides more details about the measurement of these indicators and their distributions in our panel.

a party that activists are likely to possess. Activists whose campaign activity is stimulated by commitments to the party may be motivated by instrumental factors, viewing campaign involvement as a way to enhance their own political career or standing in the party. Party-based campaign activity may also be driven by psychological loyalties to the party or close social ties to other party activists. The difference in respondents' ratings of the two parties may reflect a psychological attachment to one's own party and negative affect for the other party, as well as an activist's social identity as being part of one partisan "team" and in opposition to the other team. Activists who view themselves as representing the party organization at the national convention may do so for instrumental reasons or because of strong loyalty to the party or social ties to other activists. Finally, party office-holding may reflect the instrumental ingredient of party commitment most closely and should also increase activists' social and psychological ties to the party and fellow partisans.

Table 5 presents the estimates of the model for each party, and clearly supports our argument about the role of party commitment.³¹ Even controlling for the effects of ideology and other issue attitudes on issue and ideological change, party commitment had positive effects on change between 1992 and 2000 in social welfare, racial, cultural, and ideological orientations among continuing Republican activists. These effects indicate that Republican activists who are more committed to the party are more likely than other continuing activists to convert toward the GOP's conservative positions on social welfare, racial issues, abortion, and ideology.³² The effects of party commitment for social welfare, racial, and ideological orientations are all statistically significant, and the effect for abortion attitudes approaches statistical significance. The effects also are substantively meaningful. The most party-committed Republicans moved 0.10 units—one-tenth of the full range of the variable—farther right on social welfare

than the least committed GOP activists did between 1992 and 2000. The effect of party commitment was slightly larger for racial and abortion attitudes, and was particularly large for ideology.³³

As we expected, the influence of party commitment is noticeably smaller and less consistent among Democrats. The effects are largely in the expected direction, with Democrats with higher levels of party commitment being more likely than their less party-committed counterparts to convert toward the party's dominant liberal positions on social welfare issues, racial issues, and ideology. The effect is strong and statistically significant on racial issues, but is much weaker and barely approaches significance on social welfare issues and is nowhere close to significant for ideology. On abortion, party commitment's effect is in a pro-life direction, although it does not approach statistical significance. Thus, party commitment does play some role in pushing Democratic activists toward greater liberalism. However, in keeping with the less party-centered culture of the Democratic party and the fact that its movement toward consistent liberalism began well before the GOP's lurch toward consistent conservatism, the impact of party commitment on change in activists' policy preferences is clearly less impressive among Democrats than among Republicans.

To get a better sense of the importance of party commitment to conflict extension, we estimated the level of party polarization on latent abortion, social welfare, and racial attitudes for all activists in 1992 and 2000 with low and high levels of party commitment.³⁴ Table 6 presents the results. Levels of polarization on all three issue dimensions already were higher among party-committed activists than their less committed counterparts in 1992, but the differences between the two groups had grown even greater by 2000. Party differences increased slightly for the low-commitment group, but the increases for more committed activists were over three times as large on every dimension.³⁵ For example, on social welfare, the party difference in 1992 was 0.48 in the high-commitment group and 0.40 for the low-commitment group. Over the next eight years, that partisan gap grew to 0.57 among party-committed activists, but only to 0.42 among the less

³¹ Both party affiliation and party commitment may be associated with a number of other factors that may influence attitude change on various issue dimensions. These factors include demographic characteristics, religious affiliation and commitment, membership in various types of political and social groups, and support for particular presidential candidates. To assess whether these factors account for the influence of party or party commitment on issue conversion, we estimated several different specifications of the models shown in Tables 4 and 5 with a variety of different control variables. In none of these specifications did the basic effect of party or party commitment on attitudinal conversion change.

³² As we suggested above, party-committed activists may be more likely to convert on issue dimensions that are less salient to them. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a satisfactory test of that possibility. Such a test would need measures of the salience of various issue agendas in the first wave of our panel (to ensure that issue salience was not endogenous to issue conversion), and there were no measures of issue salience in the 1992 CDS. However, the 2000 CDS did ask respondents to rank the importance of various issues. We estimated our model of the impact of party commitment on attitude change separately for activists attaching low and high levels of salience to each of the three policy domains. Among GOP activists, the positive (conservative) effect of party commitment on change on each issue dimension was significantly larger for activists attaching less importance to the issue agenda than for activists attaching more importance to it.

³³ The size of the discrepancy between party commitment's effect on change in ideology and change in policy attitudes is likely due to our inability to correct for measurement error in ideological identification.

³⁴ In other words, we reestimated the basic party polarization model used to determine the levels of polarization for all 1992 and 2000 activists in Table 2 for low- and high-party commitment activists. To define the low- and high-party commitment groups, we created a factor score from a principal components factor analysis of the five indicators of party commitment. We classified those respondents in the bottom 50% of the factor score values as having low party commitment and those in the top 50% as having high party commitment.

³⁵ For both the low- and high-party commitment groups, we constrained the level of polarization on each issue dimension in 2000 to equal the level in 1992 and computed the difference in χ^2 for the constrained and unconstrained models. The difference in χ^2 statistics indicates that the increase in party polarization for low-commitment activists was statistically significant (Difference in $\chi^2 = 10.57$, $df = 3$, $p < .02$), but the increase for high-commitment activists was much more significant (Difference in $\chi^2 = 47.64$, $df = 3$, $p < .00001$).

TABLE 5. The Impact of Party Commitment on Attitude Change among Continuing Activists from 1992 to 2000

Exogenous Variables	Endogenous Variable				
	2000 Social Welfare	2000 Racial	2000 Abortion	2000 Ideology	2000 Party Commitment
Republicans					
<i>Stability Coefficient</i> (Effect of variable's 1992 value on its 2000 value)	0.82*** (0.13)	0.83*** (0.13)	0.98*** (0.06)	0.50*** (0.05)	0.52*** (0.09)
<i>Effects of 1992 Issue Attitudes and Ideology</i>					
1992 Social Welfare	—	0.55*** (0.15)	0.06 (0.14)	0.45*** (0.11)	0.06 (0.06)
1992 Racial	0.27*** (0.05)	—	0.10 (0.08)	0.001 (0.06)	−0.05 (0.04)
1992 Abortion	0.11*** (0.02)	0.07* (0.03)	—	0.22*** (0.03)	0.03* (0.02)
1992 Ideology	0.02 (0.03)	−0.07 (0.05)	0.12* (0.06)	—	0.01 (0.03)
<i>Effect of 1992 Party Commitment</i>	0.10** (0.05)	0.14** (0.08)	0.13* (0.10)	0.30*** (0.09)	—
(N)	(263)				
χ^2 (df)	1063.08 (488)				
Δ_1/Δ_2^a	0.95/0.97				
ρ_1/ρ_2^b	0.94/0.96				
Democrats					
<i>Stability Coefficient</i> (Effect of variable's 1992 value on its 2000 value)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.95*** (0.09)	0.80*** (0.05)	0.34*** (0.04)	0.47*** (0.07)
<i>Effects of 1992 Issue Attitudes and Ideology</i>					
1992 Social Welfare	—	0.08 (0.06)	−0.08** (0.05)	0.13** (0.06)	0.03 (0.03)
1992 Racial	0.44*** (0.06)	—	0.20*** (0.04)	0.33*** (0.06)	−0.07** (0.03)
1992 Abortion	−0.02 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.05)	—	0.11** (0.05)	−0.03 (0.03)
1992 Ideology	0.06** (0.03)	0.002 (0.04)	0.08** (0.03)	—	0.004 (0.02)
<i>Effect of 1992 Party Commitment</i>	−0.07* (0.05)	−0.19** (0.10)	0.05 (0.07)	−0.03 (0.10)	—
(N)	(459)				
χ^2 (df)	1390.04 (488)				
Δ_1/Δ_2^a	0.94/0.96				
ρ_1/ρ_2^b	0.96/0.96				

Source: 1992–2000 Convention Delegate Study Panel.

Note: Entries are unstandardized full information maximum likelihood coefficients from a single model for each party. Standard errors are in parentheses. Issue attitudes and ideological identification range from most liberal to most conservative. All variables range from 0 to 1.

^a Bentler and Bonett's (1980) normed fit index/Bollen's (1989) incremental fit index.

^b Bollen's (1986) relative fit index/Bentler and Bonett's (1980) non-normed fit index.

*** $p < .001$. ** $p < .05$. * $p < .10$ (one-tailed tests).

committed. Thus, by 2000, party-committed activists were markedly more polarized than less committed activists on each policy dimension.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that the interplay between party activists and party office seekers within a participatory nominating system has opened the way for conflict extension in contemporary American politics. A variety

of activists—advocating issues from civil rights to the rights of the unborn to universal health insurance—have taken advantage of this openness to support candidates committed to their preferred policies. Our primary empirical contribution in this article has been to show how continuing activists have responded to the new activists and to candidates who support their new issues. Due to their commitment to their parties, many continuing activists have brought their attitudes on at least some policy dimensions into line with the

TABLE 6. Party Polarization among Presidential Campaign Activists in 1992 and 2000 by Level of Party Commitment

	Level of Party Polarization ^a			(N)
	Abortion	Social Welfare	Racial Issues	
<i>Low Party Commitment</i>				
1992	0.35	0.40	0.36	(1,069)
2000	0.39	0.42	0.40	(1,081)
<i>High Party Commitment</i>				
1992	0.37	0.48	0.41	(1,046)
2000	0.50	0.57	0.54	(1,097)

Source: 1992 and 2000 Convention Delegate Studies.

^a Entries are coefficients on a party dummy (coded 0 for Democrats and 1 for Republicans) affecting the confirmatory abortion, racial, and social welfare factors (all ranging from 0 for most liberal to 1 for most conservative) in structural equation models. The effect of the party dummy on all three latent variables is significant at $p < .001$ for both groups in each year.

positions emerging among party candidates, leaders, and other activists. The result has been conflict extension in the parties' activist bases. Because of activists' importance in today's nomination and election politics, the multidimensional growth of party activist polarization has helped to extend partisan conflict between the parties in government and in the mass electorate.

We presented an array of empirical evidence supporting both the macro-level and micro-level claims in our argument. First, conflict extension clearly has characterized recent change among party activists. Like Mayhew's (2002) and Gerring's (1998) evidence on historical party change, this casts doubt on the classic view of Sundquist and others that new party conflicts displace old ones during periods of partisan change. Second, the extension of partisan conflict among activists has been either at or very near the front lines of conflict extension in the party system more generally. Our paucity of over-time data prevented rigorous tests of causal ordering. However, increases in activist polarization on social welfare, cultural, and racial issues clearly coincided with the growth of party issue differences in Congress and the electorate, and, at least on the abortion issue, may have been the leading force behind that growth. Finally, we demonstrated that issue conversion among party activists contributed substantially to conflict extension and that such issue conversion was motivated significantly by party commitment. To be sure, activist replacement and ideological factors have also played a role. However, conflict extension would have been less likely and less substantial without attitudinal conversion among party-committed activists.

These findings have important implications for understanding the dynamics of American party politics. First, they provide important evidence on party activists, a component of the party system to which political scientists have assigned considerable importance in their theoretical accounts of partisan change and party polarization, but have devoted little attention in empirical work (see Carmines and Stimson 1989 and Saunders and Abramowitz 2004 for notable exceptions).

We have provided extensive evidence on issue change among activists and some limited evidence suggesting a leading role for activists in partisan issue change and polarization.

Second, the fact that conflict extension among activists rests heavily on attitudinal conversion among continuing activists should make it a more stable and permanent feature of the political landscape. Conversion increases the proportion of activists with ideologically extreme policy positions on multiple issue dimensions, and individuals who have been active in the past are more likely than political newcomers to remain active in the future.

Third, our evidence speaks to at least two of the core controversies in the literature on general party polarization. One of those concerns the degree to which the recent increases in polarization have been driven by changes in the mass electorate and in the parties' mass coalitions (e.g., Polsby 2005) or by elite-level political developments (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 2005). Our account clearly is in the latter camp, with the interplay between strategic office seekers and party activists pushing the parties toward noncentrist views on multiple policy issues, and our limited time-series evidence suggests that mass polarization has followed from, rather than caused, increases in polarization among party elites and activists. Another dispute is about whether polarization has resulted from the parties and their coalitions moving toward more ideologically extreme positions (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008) or simply from liberals and conservatives "sorting" themselves into the correct parties (Fiorina with Abrams, and Pope 2005). Although that debate is largely about the parties in the electorate, our account suggests that polarization among activists has resulted in part from greater extremism, with many activists moving their own issue positions in more extreme directions.

Finally, despite important differences between partisan change at the activist and mass levels, conflict extension at both levels is facilitated by individuals with strong party commitments bringing their policy attitudes into line with the ascendant positions in their

parties (see Carsey and Layman 2006, Layman and Carsey 2002a, 2002b for the mass-level evidence). This reinforces the view that partisanship is a moving force in politics. Parties are not simply vehicles through which political actors pursue their policy goals. For many individuals, party support is a goal in its own right, motivating political involvement, shaping policy preferences, and serving as a potent force in structuring political change.

APPENDIX A: ISSUES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS OF PARTY POLARIZATION OVER TIME (FIGURE 1)

- 1972: *Social Welfare*: Work requirements for welfare recipients, government action against inflation. *Racial*: Busing to achieve school integration, stopping crime vs. protecting rights of the accused. *Cultural*: Abortion, support for women's liberation movement.
- 1980: *Social Welfare*: Government efforts to reduce inflation vs. unemployment. *Racial*: Busing to achieve school integration. *Cultural*: Abortion, equal rights amendment (ERA).
- 1984: *Social Welfare*: Federal spending on public schools, federal spending on social security, federal spending on medicare. *Racial*: Busing to achieve school integration, federal spending on assistance to minorities. *Cultural*: Abortion, ERA, prayer in public schools.
- 1988: *Social Welfare*: Federal spending on aid to education, federal spending on social security, federal spending on care for elderly, federal spending on the homeless, federal spending on child care. *Racial*: Busing for school integration, government help for blacks, federal spending on assistance to minorities. *Cultural*: Abortion, prayer in public schools, ERA, role of women.
- 1992: *Social Welfare*: Government services and spending, government providing health insurance, federal spending on aid to public schools, federal spending on social security, federal spending on assisting the homeless, federal spending on child care, federal spending on welfare programs, federal spending on aid to poor people, federal spending on programs for the unemployed. *Racial*: Government help for blacks, federal spending on programs that assist blacks, dealing with problems of urban unrest. *Cultural*: Abortion, women's role, prayer in public schools, feeling thermometer rating of pro-life groups, thermometer rating of pro-choice groups.
- 2000: *Social Welfare*: Government services and spending, government providing health insurance, federal spending on aid to public schools, federal spending on child care, federal spending on welfare programs, federal spending on programs that assist the unemployed, social security privatization, using budget surplus for tax cuts. *Racial*: Government help for blacks, federal spending on programs that assist blacks, racial minorities given preference in hiring and promotion. *Cultural*: Abortion, prayer in public schools, feeling thermometer rating of pro-life groups, thermometer rating of pro-choice groups, government efforts to protect homosexuals from job discrimination, parental consent for teenager to have an abortion.
- 2004: *Social Welfare*: Government services and spending, government providing health insurance, federal spending on aid to public schools, federal spending

on child care, federal spending on welfare programs, federal spending on programs that assist the unemployed, social security privatization. *Racial*: Government help for blacks, federal spending on programs that assist blacks. *Cultural*: Abortion, legality of gay marriage, federal funding of stem cell research.

APPENDIX B: RESPONSE OPTIONS ON ABORTION IN THE NES AND CDS SURVEYS

American National Election Studies (NES)

1972 and 1976

- (1) Abortion should never be permitted
- (2) Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger
- (3) Abortion should be permitted if, due to personal reasons, the woman would have difficulty in caring for the child
- (4) Abortion should never be forbidden, since one should not require a woman to have a child she doesn't want

1980–2004

- (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

Convention Delegate Studies (CDS)

1972

- (1) Abortion should never be permitted
- (2) Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger
- (3) If a woman and her doctor agree, she should be able to have a legal abortion
- (4) Any woman who wants to have an abortion should be able to have one

1980–1988

- (1) Abortion should never be permitted
- (2) Abortion should be permitted only if the life and health of the woman is in danger
- (3) Abortion should be permitted if, due to personal reasons, the woman would have difficulty in caring for the child
- (4) Abortion should never be forbidden ("prohibited" in 1988)

1992 to 2004

CDS response options were identical to the 1980–2004 NES response options

APPENDIX C: DESCRIPTION OF THE INDICATORS OF PARTY COMMITMENT

Strength of party support. Respondents were asked to "Please choose the number that best describes how strongly you support your political party" and were provided with a seven-point scale ranging from "not very strong" to "very strong." Over 82% of panel respondents rated themselves at 6 or 7 on the scale, with nearly 54% (57% of Republicans and 52% of Democrats) choosing the highest value.

Importance of party commitment for presidential campaign activity. Whether "none," "some," or "a lot" of 1992/2000 presidential campaign was motivated by being "committed to party work." Over 70% (75% of Republicans and 68% of Democrats) chose "a lot."

Difference in Thermometer Ratings of Parties. The difference between respondents' ratings of their own party on a feeling thermometer (ranging from 0 to 100) and their ratings of the other party. Higher scores indicate more positive feelings toward the GOP and more negative feelings toward the Democratic party for Republican respondents and just the opposite for Democratic respondents. The mean rating of the Republican party in 1992 was 26.7 for Democratic panel respondents and 86.8 for Republican respondents. The mean rating of the Democratic party was 27.9 for Republicans and 86.3 for Democrats.

Representation of the party organization at the national convention. Respondents were asked "Which of the groups listed below comes closest to describing the ones you represented at the 1992 (2000) convention?" In 2000, they were provided with six groups—party organization, candidate support group, geographic place, demographic group, organized group, and "other"—and asked to rank them from one to six. In 1992, they were provided with four groups—party organization, candidate support group, partisan voters, and "other,"—and asked to rank the top three. Our indicator is a dummy variable for respondents who ranked the party organization first. In 1992, 54% of Republicans and 32% of Democrats ranked the party organization first. In 2000 (with more choices to rank), 27% of Republicans and 18% of Democrats ranked the party organization first.

Holding party office. A dummy variable for respondents who held local, state, or national party office in 1992/2000. In 1992, 66% of Republicans and 58% of Democrats held party office. In 2000, that was true of 49% of Republican respondents and 42% of Democratic respondents.

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