

Racial Realignment and the Roots of Contemporary Polarization*

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Abstract

I argue contemporary polarization is rooted in long-standing issue connections between racial attitudes and other policy views among ordinary voters. I present three key findings: (1) voters that express more conservative racial views have long expressed more conservative attitudes on essentially every other major policy issue; (2) voters expressed this package of issue attitudes before the parties established positions on many now salient policies including abortion, gun control, environmentalism, women's rights and gay rights; (3) voters who do not know where the parties stand on issues still package these attitudes together. I argue that because the parties divided on civil rights before issues like gun control or abortion gained salience, pre-existing issue connections encouraged party leaders to establish positions on these newly salient issues which reinforced this racial divide. Taken together, these findings challenge existing scholarship that argues elites created the now familiar alignment of party and ideology.

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The alignment of party and ideology has been a distinguishing feature of contemporary politics: by the 1990s the parties had sorted across a range of issues, such as abortion and gun control, that cross-cut party lines just decades earlier. Democrats adopted consistently liberal positions and Republicans consistently conservative positions.

Could pre-existing patterns in public opinion have predicted this alignment of party and ideology? Several broad pieces of evidence suggest not. First, on prominent issues such as abortion, defense spending and civil rights, the relationship between party identification and issue attitudes among voters was effectively zero until after party elites took distinct stands (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Adams 1997; Fordham 2007). Second, economic issues, which defined partisan conflict in the post-New Deal era, have historically had little relationship with other policy attitudes, such as abortion (Sanbonmatsu 2002, 60; Noel 2013; see Table 3). Third, leading scholarship in political science argues that political elites cause the constellation of policy views held by ordinary voters (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Lenz 2012). Together, these findings contribute to a literature that argues elites constructed the resulting ideological and partisan alignment. Voters played a passive role (e.g., Bawn et al. 2012; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Levendusky 2009; Layman et al. 2010; Noel 2013).

I argue the seeds of contemporary polarization are much more rooted in the mass public than existing scholarship suggests. Among ordinary voters, I show that left-right attitudes towards civil rights and race have long been tied with left-right divides on essentially every other major policy issue. More liberal voters on civil rights (defined in multiple ways), are also more liberal on abortion, gun control, feminism, gay rights, defense spending, environmentalism and economics.¹ These “issue bundles” — referring to the collection of policy views held by voters — existed before the parties adopted similar positions.

I argue that once race became a partisan cleavage in the 1960s, issue overlap among ordinary voters encouraged the parties to take positions on subsequent issues that reinforced this racial divide. For example, because the white South entered the Republican party before gun control

¹I use more liberal to refer to the leftward policy alternative.

became politically activated, issue overlap incentivized Republicans to oppose gun control once it gained salience. To be clear, I do not argue that racial attitudes necessarily cause attitudes on gun control. Rather, I argue that when the parties were first considering policy positions on gun control in the 1970s, they were doing so in an environment in which they had already staked out clear positions on race and civil rights.

In making this argument, I contend race, not economics, sits at the center of polarization. Economic attitudes have little, or at least an inconsistent relationship, to other policy views. Had the parties remained only divided by economic issues but overlapped on civil rights, as was the case in the New Deal era, there would have been less pressure to polarize on other issue dimensions.

I present three primary pieces of empirical evidence. First, I analyze the relationship between racial attitudes and essentially every other position asked on the American National Election Study (ANES) in the 1970s. I focus on the 1970s because the ANES began asking questions about newly salient issues that were not yet cemented in the party system. This allows analysis of issue attitudes prior to partisan crystallization. I find that opposition to civil rights positively correlates to what are now considered conservative positions across effectively every other issue position, too. This includes both “new” issues like abortion, and more traditional issues like taxes and government provided health insurance.

Second, I present evidence that these issue bundles cannot be fully explained by elite learning (the process by which ordinary voters simply follow cues from political elites). I show the relationship between racial attitudes and other policy positions persist even among those who lack knowledge of the parties’ relative policy positions or otherwise know little about politics. Respondents that do not know Democrats are to the left of Republicans across a range of policy views still exhibit these issue bundles.

Third, using historical opinion polls I construct a novel data set that shows that racial liberalism (e.g., support for civil rights) and liberal attitudes on other policy issues predated (sometimes by decades) the parties taking distinct positions on many issues now salient to political parties.

The timing and persistence of these issue connections suggests that this prominent constellation

of issues cannot simply be explained by voters learning what goes with what from politicians. I focus on this explanation given its prominence in the literature and its implications for a voter driven theory of party realignment. However, this paper raises the question as to why these issue attitudes do fit together. While I do not answer this question here, these findings pave the way for a deeper explanation as to what psychological and sociological factors do shape belief systems (e.g., Jost 2006; Feldman 1988; Rodden 2019), and why race sits at its center.

I then explore an implication of this finding: elites usually go along with, rather than disrupt, these pre-existing linkages. When publicly taking policy positions for the first time, especially on “easy” issues like abortion or gun control, politicians generally adopt positions they believe (or discover) to be popular among their supporters (e.g., Key 1961; Zaller 2012; Lenz 2012, 167). It is often easier to adopt prevailing trends than to disrupt the existing equilibrium. This means that even if elite cues affect public opinion, those cues are often endogenous to what politicians believe will be successful (Zaller 2012, 571). And while some elite-driven theories of public opinion note that “easy” issues are less malleable (e.g., Freeder, Lenz and Turney 2019, 280; Layman and Carsey 2002; Converse 1964, 46), leading scholarship on parties has not fully considered how or when voters matter. This paper argues the party system, however bluntly, is responding to patterns among ordinary voters.

Finally, while this paper focuses on events that occurred over 50 years ago, we are still living in an equilibrium created at this historical juncture. Understanding the structural nature of polarization and its roots in the mass public, rather than as an elite driven phenomenon, helps explain the intractability of contemporary partisan divisions and the inability of politicians to work across the aisle (e.g., Schickler 2016; Caughey et al. 2018; Abramowitz 2018).

1 Existing Views on Party Positioning

Existing literature on party realignment fits into two broad categories. The first, which largely rests in classic realignment theory first put forth by V.O. Key and E.E. Schattschneider, broadly

argues that shifts in voting coalitions engender party realignment (Key 1955, 1959; Schattschneider 1960; see Mayhew 2000 for review and critique of this literature). A crucial point, contributed by Schattschneider (1960) and Sundquist (1973, 1983), is that realignments occur not just when voting coalitions change, but when the issue around which political conflict changes, too. Schattschneider (1960, 62) refers to this as conflict displacement.

The second set of theories, which have defined scholarly debate in recent decades, argues political elites, not voters, drive realignment and party positioning (e.g., Bawn et al. 2012; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Noel 2013; Layman et al. 2010; and to a lesser extent Karol 2009). These theories align with public opinion research which argues that creative elites construct “ideologies” and diffuse them downwards to ordinary voters (Converse 1964).

A prominent theory of top-down party realignment by Carmines and Stimson (1989) argues that parties usually change slowly over time and at critical junctures, party leaders stake their party’s new position. On prominent issues, this new positioning then becomes a distinguishing cleavage between parties which trickles down to activists and finally voters.

A crucial implication of Carmines and Stimson’s theory — which they apply to the 1960s racial realignment — is that either party’s electorate would have been amenable to supporting (opposing) the Civil Rights movement. This flexibility of the mass public gives elites discretion in choosing their position relative to the other party (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 179). Indeed, elite discretion distinguishes Carmines and Stimson’s theory from the older realignment literature which views voters as the driving force (e.g., Key 1959, Schattschneider 1960, Sundquist 1973). Other scholars argue that Carmines and Stimson’s account also characterizes party positioning on abortion, defense spending and the environment (e.g., Adams 1997; Lindamen and Haider-Markel 2002; Fordham 2007).

A more recent scholarship argues that parties are driven by “intense policy demanders” rather than politicians (Bawn et al. 2012). These policy demanders – often referring to interest group leaders and their activists – coalesce within a party and nominate candidates who are mutually acceptable to the coalition. This literature argue organized interests, not politicians or voters, are

the principal component of parties (e.g., Bawn et al. 2012; Layman et al. 2010; Karol 2009; Carmines and Woods 2002).

A third argument, emphasized by Hans Noel (e.g., 2013) argues that political thinkers at prominent magazines and newspapers play the leading role in constructing ideologies which then later become absorbed into the party system. For example, media pundits first articulated and justified why racial and economic liberalism “fit together” decades prior to such bundles being adopted by major political parties.

These three theories, although they differ on which elites serve as the first mover, agree that voters play a passive role. However, some recent scholarship pushes back as to whether elites so freely construct party positioning. In evaluating racial realignment, Schickler (2016) finds economically conservative whites supported racially conservative positions decades before the parties divided on race. And by the late 1930s, racially conservative whites in the North (and later in the South), already favored Republican presidential candidates. These trends predated elite sorting (see also Chen, Mickey and Van Houweling 2008).

Similarly, Carr et al. (2016) find that on key culture war issues, such as abortion, Democratic state parties already took relatively more liberal positions than Republican state parties by the late 1960s. Consequently, these authors argue existing divides among the state parties constrained the national parties ability to position in the following decades.

The following article builds on the literature which argues that voters’ preferences matter. I contend that party positioning across many newly salient issues in the 1970s, which have then defined partisan conflict in the contemporary decades, was contingent on the 1960s racial realignment and rooted in the mass public.

1.1 Timeline of Party Positions

This section briefly summarizes a time-line for party positioning across various issues (See Karol (2009) for a more thorough overview). Figure 1 tracks changes in presidential party platforms over the 20th century.

The mid-century party platforms omitted some policy questions completely and lacked distinct positions on other issues. The parties held similar positions on civil rights as late as 1960 but by 1964 Lyndon Johnson and national Democrats had clearly embraced Civil Rights legislation and moved to the left of Republicans (Carmines and Stimson 1989, 38-39).

When the national parties took distinct positions (or a position at all) on other newly salient issues in the 1970s and 1980s is less clear. As late as 1972, both parties favored some sort of gun control and environmental regulation and both parties supported the Equal Rights Amendment between 1944 and 1976. Contrast these policy positions with the 1980 platform where the Republicans adopt clearly conservative positions vis-a-vis the Democratic party on each of these three issues. Neither party had a plank on abortion in 1972, but by 1980 the the Republican party platform clearly stood to the right of Democrats. Democrats first included very brief language about protecting discrimination based on sexual orientation in 1980. The Republican party platform omitted a statement on gay rights until 1992, at which point Republicans adopted the more conservative position.

This said, there are complications to understanding when national parties adopted positions. For example, the Republican party moved rightwards on environmentalism under Reagan, but George H.W. Bush assembled a fairly liberal environmental agenda, highlighted by the 1990 Clean Air Act. On defense spending, although Republicans are more conservative than Democrats by the early 1970s, Democrats and Carter made efforts to appear hawkish in the 1980 election. Furthermore, defense spending in this era cannot be abstracted from partisan divisions over Vietnam (Alrich 2011). And although both parties supported some sort of gun control until 1972, the Republican party by 1968 saw this effort as a responsibility of the states and was implicitly opposed to sweeping federal laws. This said, more congressional Republicans than Democrats voted for the 1968 Gun Control Act (Karol 2009, 84).

Figure 1: Timeline of Party Platforms

	NO POSITION										PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCT POSITIONS ON GAY RIGHTS			
GAY RIGHTS	NO POSITION										PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCT POSITIONS ON GAY RIGHTS			
ENVIRONMENT	NO POSITION	PARTY PLATFORMS SIMILAR ON ENVIRONMENT								NO POSITION	PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCT POSITIONS ON ENVIRONMENT			
ABORTION	NO POSITION										PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCT POSITIONS ON ABORTION			
E.R.A.	BOTH PARTY PLATFORMS SUPPORT ERA										PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCT POSITIONS ON ERA/WOMEN'S EQUALITY			
GUN CONTROL	NO POSITION										PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCTIVE POSITION ON GUN CONTROL			
DEFENSE SPENDING											PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE (GENERALLY) DISTINCT POSITIONS ON DEFENSE SPENDING			
	PARTY PLATFORMS SIMILAR ON DEFENSE SPENDING					PARTY PLATFORMS SIMILAR ON GUN CONTROL					PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE (GENERALLY) DISTINCT POSITIONS ON DEFENSE SPENDING			
CIVIL RTS	PARTY PLATFORMS SIMILAR ON CIVIL RTS										PARTY PLATFORMS TAKE DISTINCT POSITIONS ON CIVIL RIGHTS			
	GOP LEFT OF DEMOCRATS													
Year	1944	1948	1952	1956	1960	1964	1968	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996

2 Theory

This section argues why the activation of race as a partisan cleavage narrowed the set of options for party positioning on issues that became salient after racial realignment.

2.1 Activation of Race as a Partisan Cleavage

Entering the 1960s, the national parties held similar positions on civil rights and partisan conflict centered on government intervention in the economy (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Schickler 2016). This was partially strategic: the diversity of racial preferences within the Democrat's New Deal coalition, which included both the white South and African Americans, meant that national Democratic leaders tried to downplay civil rights to avoid intra-party conflict.

However, increasing pressure from an expanding civil rights movement upended this equilibrium. Civil Rights could no longer be ignored and fearing a primary challenge from the left, Democrat Lyndon Johnson saw embracing racial minorities as essential. Simply winning the South would be insufficient to gain the party's nomination (Schickler 2016, 232).

The civil rights movement presented an opportunity for Republicans, too. The Democrats leftwards shift on civil rights alienated the white South and conservative blue-collar workers. Conservative operatives believed that (white) blue-collar and white-collar workers, despite holding divergent economic preferences, could be united by a cross-class opposition to the racial (and later cultural) liberalism of the 1960s (Scammon and Wattenberg 1970; Phillips 1969; Rusher 1975). Some strategists believed this was not just an opportunity, but essential for the party to survive: the GOP had become the de facto minority party since the 1930s and campaigning on economic conservatism alone would maintain this status.

By the end of the 1960s, the parties' respective positions on civil rights and other racially motivated policies became a central feature of each party's platform.

2.2 Cascading Effect of the Racial Realignment

The activation of race as a partisan cleavage narrowed the parties' ability to position on issues that became salient after racial realignment. This includes abortion, gun control, feminism, gay rights, post-Vietnam defense spending and environmentalism. Central to this theory is that left-right attitudinal divides on civil rights correspond with left-right attitudes on effectively every other policy position. These issue bundles existed prior to the parties taking distinct positions on newly prominent issues such as abortion or gun control. Consequently, once the parties divided on race, pre-existing public opinion incentivized parties to take positions on abortion or gun control that reinforced this racial divide.

To illustrate this, consider two hypothetical scenarios. In scenario A, imagine the parties in the electorate divide perfectly along economic lines. Furthermore assume the relationship between economic attitudes and newly prominent issues (e.g., abortion, gun control, environmentalism) is effectively zero (see Table 3; Layman and Carsey 2002). With respect to the parties' economic position, activists or party leaders could take the party in either direction on these new policies; either position would appeal to half of either party. For example, if the 1972 election occurred where the only other issue that divided the candidates was economics, Nixon could have supported abortion rights without, on average, cross-pressuring economic conservatives already inside his party.

Now consider scenario B where an exogenous shock introduces a racial cleavage that instantly engenders a realignment. In this scenario, the parties in the electorate perfectly divide by attitudes towards race. Furthermore, assume those that are conservative on race are also conservative on abortion, gun control, the environment, etcetera (as I show in Figure 2). When these issues become salient, abortion and gun control conservatives are already inside the Republican party and those that are liberal are inside the Democratic party.

This overlap in public opinion then provides a set of incentives for Republicans to take conservative positions and Democrats to take liberal positions across each of these issues. To continue

the example of Nixon in 1972, Nixon and his aides realized that issue overlap between abortion and aid to minorities or busing meant opposing abortion rights would reinforce existing divides between Nixon and the leftward shifting Democratic party (Buchanan to Ehrlichman, Haldeman, and Colson, Sept. 23, 1971; Greenhouse and Siegel 2012, 215-218). To support abortion rights, Nixon would have had to appeal to voters who already disliked him on race other non-abortion social issues. It was easier for Nixon to follow prevailing opinion.

Of course, this hypothetical example simplifies reality. Racial realignment did not happen instantly. Indeed, the initial effect of the 1964 racial realignment was not that it pushed the white South to the Republican party. Rather, it made many conservative Democrats wary of the national party but not yet ready to vote Republican. To expand their base, Nixon and Reagan took conservative positions on issues like abortion and issue overlap meant that they now appealed to disgruntled Democratic voters on both abortion and race (see Appendix 17).

2.3 The Role of Elite Cues

How does this theory fit with existing scholarship which argues that politicians cause ordinary voters to follow their lead on policy issues (Converse 1964; Zaller 1992; Lenz 2012)? I argue elites can influence public opinion consistent with top-down accounts, but elite cues are often endogenous to what elites perceive will be popular among their supporters (Zaller 2012, 571; Arnold 1992; Key 1961). When new issues emerge onto the agenda, politicians calculate how latent opinion — referring to a set of inchoate attitudes that are not yet politically salient — when activated, will influence their support (e.g., Key 1961, Ch. 11)? In other words, elite cues are not random to public opinion.

Elite actors may follow latent public opinion by 1) measuring support and testing the waters before taking new positions; 2) taking policy positions they believe will get non-voters to turn-out for them; 3) abandoning old positions if activated opinion deems them unpopular or 4) being replaced if they continually embrace unpopular stands on crystallized issues.

For example, leading presidential candidates pour over opinion polls when making decisions

and politicians often take the positions they believe will be popular among their supporters or those voters they perceive to be up for grabs. Alternatively, presidential candidates may adopt the positions they have learned to be successful from congressional or state parties (e.g., Greenhouse and Siegal 2011, 286; Hershey 1984).²

A similar mechanism works with interest groups, too. For example, a group of conservative organizers in the 1970s, which became known as the “New Right,” built initial membership lists and raised seed money by surveying the public as to what issues, and frames, most effectively elicited support. These organizations recognized that because people care so little about politics, recruiting potential activists required using salient issues and frames that ordinary people already cared about. (Weyrich to Kamer, July 16, 1981; Memo from Howard Phillips “1979 Member’s Issue Priority Poll”).

This theory does not mean voters then must vote based on policy or that public opinion is immune to elite cues. Nor does it mean interest groups lacked influence in polarizing the parties’ position. Rather, I argue politicians find it is easier to take policy positions that are proximate to their supporters’ pre-existing preferences.

3 Data and Empirical Expectations

The previous theory generates three empirical expectations. First, I expect that latent divides exist prior to the parties taking clear positions on issues (see section 1.1 for time-line). Second, when an issue becomes politically activated party elites will send clear signals on their position; signals which are informed by latent opinion among their (potential) constituencies. Third, elite signals then strengthen the pre-existing divides in the mass public. This set of empirical expectations contrasts top down theories which argue that issue bundles should exist – or consistently exist – only after elites take consistent positions.

To explore the linkages between race and other issue attitudes, I analyze essentially every

²This assumes the divides among the mass public are sufficiently large that politicians would reasonably heed them. See section 6 for discussion on this and other limitations.

attitude asked on the 1972, 1976 and 1980 ANES. I focus on these years for both practical and substantive reasons. Logistically, the ANES first asked questions on many issues which now define party platforms in 1972. Substantively, I am interested in the 1970s because issues such as abortion and gun control were becoming salient, yet the national parties had yet to take distinct positions. This enables analysis of issue attitudes prior to their political crystallization.

I then supplement these data with historical opinion polls. As the ANES lacks many policy questions until 1972, these data have the advantage of analyzing views over a longer time period, in some cases for decades, but have the drawback of inconsistent wordings between years and asking about different aspects of a topic. Furthermore, the political context of issues change over time.³ I draw on surveys fielded by *Gallup*, some of which date to the 1930s and the *Louis Harris* polls, which date to the 1960s. Since these survey companies sometimes ask multiple questions in each year, and rarely do the same questions span years, I standardize each variable to have a mean 0 and standard deviation of 1 and then average across items in each survey. I then re-standardize the indexed variable.⁴ Averaging across issue areas reduces measurement error (Ansolabehere, Rodden and Snyder 2008) and circumvents arbitrary decisions as to which variables to include.

4 Results

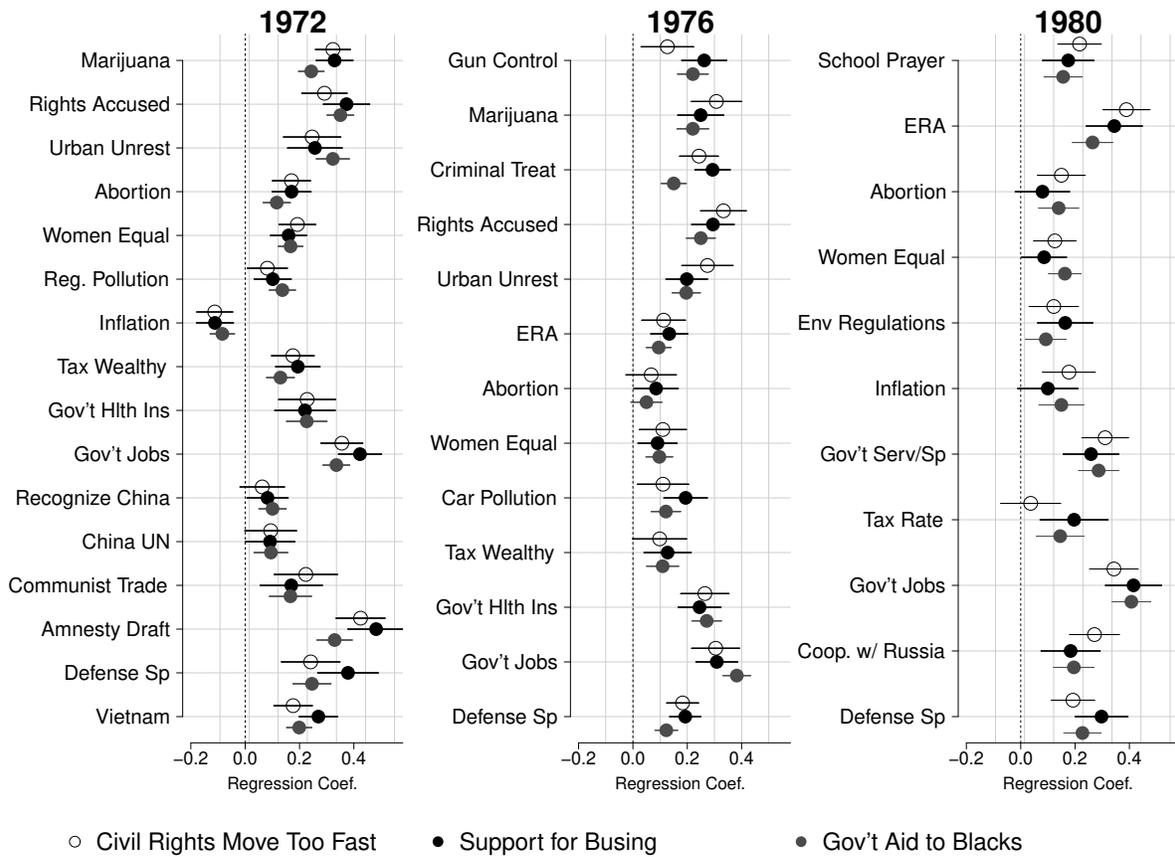
Figure 2 presents a nearly exhaustive analysis of issue bundles asked on the ANES with respect to three racial questions: Attitudes towards government aid to minorities, support for busing to integrate schools and whether the civil rights movement is moving too quickly or not quickly enough. To differentiate between racial “liberals” and racial “conservatives” I code all respondents who are left of center on each racial question as liberal (0) and those right of center as conservative

³For example, asking whether “homosexuals” as a group “are helpful or harmful” as *Harris* did in the late 1960s-1970s, imprecisely measures whether someone supports government policy to protect discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, prejudice against gay people overlaps and informs individual opposition to government policies that protect gay rights.

⁴For example, if a survey asks two questions on abortion, I standardize each variable and then average the two together and then restandardize the variable.

(1).⁵ To interpret the results, I then recode each secondary variable where “1” is a conservative position (reflects right of center position) and all other values are coded 0. (Results are robust using various coding schemes. See Appendix 1.) I then regress secondary issue attitudes (such as abortion, gun control) on the indicator variable of racial attitudes. This is represented by the following regression model: $Abortion_i = \alpha + \beta_1 Aidblack_i + \epsilon_i$.

Figure 2: Issue Bundles



Each point represents the difference in the proportion of racial liberals and racial conservatives who also take a conservative position on the secondary variable. The “independent variable” is differentiated by color. Positive coefficients mean that racial conservatives hold more conservative attitudes on the secondary position, too. With the exception of inflation in 1972, conservative racial attitudes predict conservative attitudes on every other issue. This is particularly interesting for policies such as abortion, women’s rights, pollution and gun control because the parties lacked distinct (or any) policy position on the issue in 1972 and 1976. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

⁵I define conservative as taking a right of center position. Because most questions on the ANES asked respondents on a seven point scale, I code respondents that indicate a response between 1 and 3 as liberal and between 5 and 7 as conservative. To test the robustness of this classification, I also standardize the variables to have a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1 and then classify respondents who indicate positions that are more conservative than the average as “conservative.” I also run the regressions without recoding variables. Results persist in both cases. See Appendix 1.

The regression coefficient (β_1) simply represents the difference in the proportion of abortion conservatives (for example) between racial liberals and racial conservatives. For example, the top set of points on the top-left panel (in 1972) shows those holding a right of center position on busing are approximately 29 percentage points more likely to hold a right of center position on marijuana legalization, when compared to busing liberals. (95% confidence intervals in parentheses.)

The differences vary by question and over years, but substantive differences persist: on every issue, with the exception of controlling inflation, conservative racial attitudes predict conservative attitudes on other issues. In 1972, the most polarizing of the three elections, the biggest divides between busing liberals and conservatives involve amnesty for draft dodgers (44% difference), whether government should provide jobs (38%) and defense spending (33%).⁶

These linkages remain after controlling for multiple demographic variables including race, region, religious affiliation, income, education and party identification (see Table 1 for 1972 results, and section 4 in the appendix for full regression controls). Furthermore, results persist when analyzing white respondents separately (see Appendix 3).⁷

4.1 A Longer View

To explore longer term trends in public opinion, I searched for all questions in either *Gallup's* or *Harris's* publicly available dataverse on six “single issues” that gained political salience in the 1960s and 1970s: abortion, gun control, the environment, women’s rights, defense spending, and gay rights. I use *Gallup* and *Harris* because the ANES lacks questions on many issues before 1972. Historical opinion data show that the issue bundles explored above predated elite party positioning by decades.

Each panel in Figure 3 graphs the long run relationship between racial attitudes and each of these six issues. The variables have been standardized to have a mean zero and standard deviation of one which means each point represents a correlation coefficient. Positive coefficients mean more

⁶Limiting inflation is usually interpreted as conservative because it benefits creditors (i.e. the wealthy) but Nixon aggressively pursued price controls to keep inflation down. Both Carter and Reagan took measures to fight inflation, too.

⁷Little variation among African Americans on racial questions makes analysis of only black respondents difficult.

Table 1: Issue Bundles, Controlling for Demographic Variables (1972 Data)

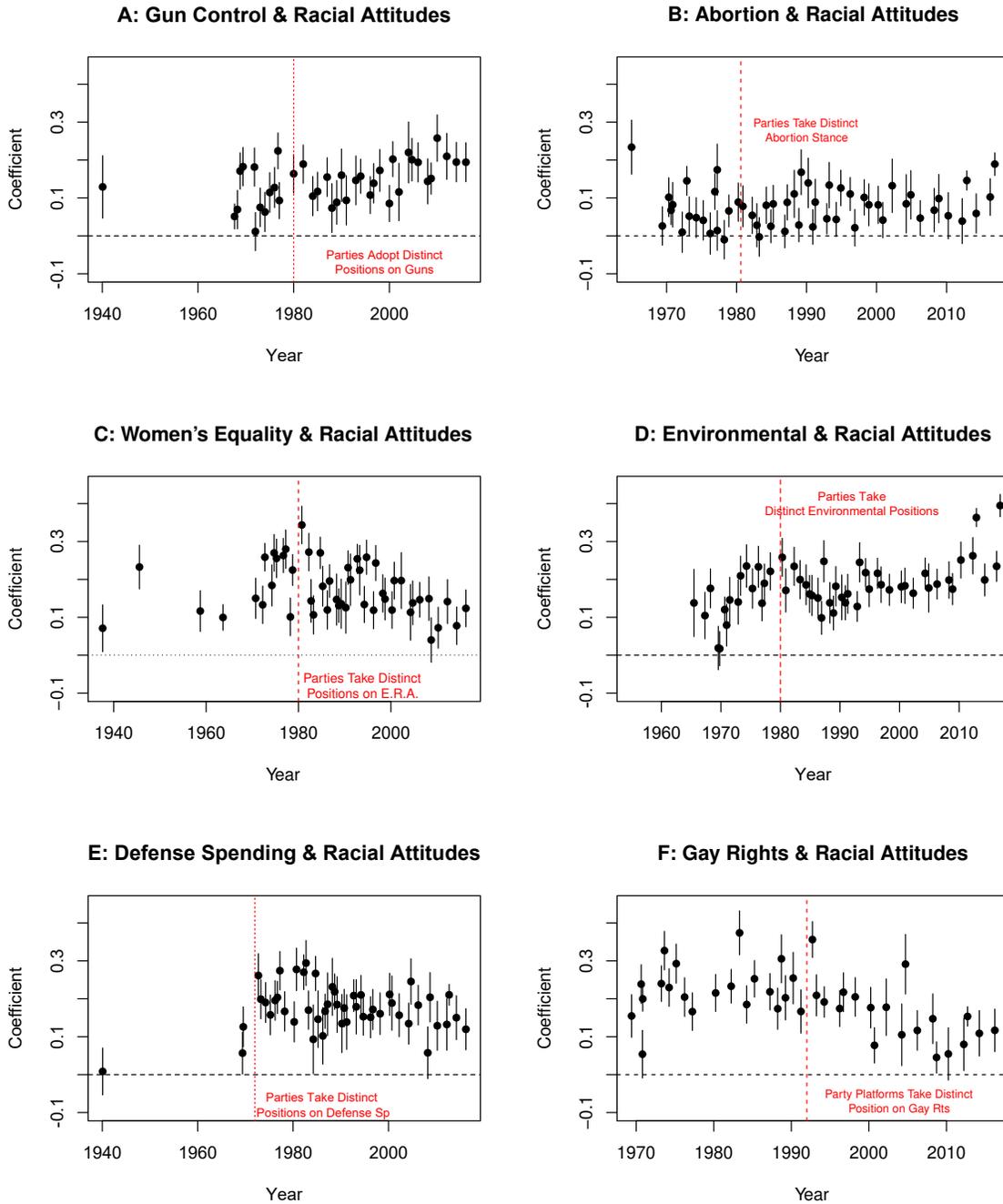
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
	Vietnam	Defense	Amnesty	CommunistTrade	ChinaUn	RecognizeChina	Jobs	Insurance	TaxRate	Pollution	Inflation	WomenEq	Abortion	UrbanUnrest	RtsAccuse	Marijuana
AidBlack	0.167*** (0.026)	0.173*** (0.039)	0.237*** (0.036)	0.138** (0.042)	0.107** (0.033)	0.111*** (0.027)	0.277*** (0.027)	0.164*** (0.042)	0.085** (0.029)	0.148*** (0.027)	-0.052* (0.025)	0.151*** (0.025)	0.107*** (0.027)	0.303*** (0.033)	0.306*** (0.027)	0.203*** (0.025)
Rural	-0.027 (0.026)	0.069 (0.038)	0.015 (0.035)	-0.032 (0.044)	0.013 (0.034)	-0.045 (0.028)	-0.035 (0.027)	0.095* (0.040)	0.051 (0.029)	-0.018 (0.028)	-0.049 (0.025)	0.043 (0.026)	0.116*** (0.027)	-0.027 (0.034)	0.064* (0.027)	0.110*** (0.025)
South	0.086** (0.029)	0.118** (0.044)	0.066 (0.040)	0.057 (0.050)	0.044 (0.039)	0.029 (0.032)	0.055 (0.031)	0.094* (0.046)	0.035 (0.033)	0.008 (0.032)	-0.008 (0.028)	0.006 (0.029)	0.110*** (0.031)	0.133*** (0.039)	-0.020 (0.031)	0.100*** (0.029)
Catholic	0.024 (0.029)	-0.003 (0.044)	-0.004 (0.040)	-0.034 (0.048)	-0.006 (0.037)	-0.016 (0.031)	-0.029 (0.031)	-0.057 (0.047)	0.017 (0.032)	-0.017 (0.030)	0.045 (0.028)	0.002 (0.029)	0.190*** (0.031)	-0.036 (0.038)	-0.042 (0.031)	0.044 (0.029)
Income	0.005 (0.011)	0.006 (0.017)	0.015 (0.015)	-0.013 (0.018)	-0.059*** (0.014)	-0.038** (0.012)	0.052*** (0.012)	0.083*** (0.018)	0.013 (0.012)	-0.003 (0.012)	-0.020 (0.011)	-0.030** (0.011)	-0.041*** (0.012)	-0.030* (0.014)	-0.021 (0.012)	-0.028** (0.011)
BA	-0.039 (0.035)	-0.199*** (0.051)	-0.136** (0.047)	-0.227*** (0.054)	-0.108* (0.044)	-0.087* (0.037)	0.000 (0.036)	-0.100 (0.053)	-0.123** (0.038)	-0.039 (0.036)	-0.070* (0.034)	-0.071* (0.034)	-0.094* (0.037)	0.013 (0.045)	-0.101** (0.037)	-0.250*** (0.034)
White	0.037 (0.040)	0.024 (0.060)	0.211*** (0.055)	-0.013 (0.068)	-0.171** (0.053)	-0.083 (0.043)	0.227*** (0.041)	0.017 (0.063)	0.051 (0.044)	-0.050 (0.042)	-0.097* (0.038)	-0.033 (0.039)	-0.087* (0.041)	0.058 (0.050)	0.049 (0.042)	-0.097* (0.038)
Rep	0.055 (0.039)	0.096 (0.060)	0.081 (0.055)	-0.044 (0.064)	0.008 (0.051)	-0.015 (0.041)	0.043 (0.041)	0.148* (0.064)	0.044 (0.044)	0.057 (0.041)	-0.032 (0.038)	-0.036 (0.039)	-0.004 (0.041)	0.011 (0.049)	0.030 (0.042)	0.049 (0.038)
Dem	-0.102** (0.037)	-0.069 (0.058)	-0.098 (0.054)	-0.035 (0.063)	0.008 (0.049)	-0.031 (0.040)	-0.053 (0.039)	0.018 (0.063)	-0.024 (0.042)	0.042 (0.039)	-0.006 (0.037)	-0.054 (0.037)	-0.013 (0.039)	-0.057 (0.047)	-0.071 (0.040)	-0.026 (0.037)
Constant	0.188*** (0.057)	0.437*** (0.085)	0.354*** (0.079)	0.386*** (0.103)	0.477*** (0.078)	0.308*** (0.063)	-0.023 (0.059)	-0.059 (0.090)	0.226*** (0.064)	0.082 (0.062)	0.976*** (0.055)	0.351*** (0.056)	0.588*** (0.059)	0.154* (0.072)	0.360*** (0.061)	0.662*** (0.055)
<i>N</i>	1408	696	654	541	633	652	1359	620	1306	690	1316	1428	1452	678	1352	1412
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.069	0.108	0.185	0.059	0.081	0.057	0.163	0.108	0.028	0.038	0.024	0.043	0.083	0.154	0.142	0.151

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
	Vietnam	Defense	Amnesty	CommunistTrade	ChinaUn	RecognizeChina	Jobs	Insurance	TaxRate	Pollution	Inflation	WomenEq	Abortion	UrbanUnrest	RtsAccuse	Marijuana
Busing	0.163*** (0.037)	0.250*** (0.058)	0.306*** (0.053)	0.100 (0.060)	0.073 (0.047)	0.057 (0.040)	0.282*** (0.041)	0.106 (0.057)	0.110* (0.044)	0.080* (0.037)	-0.088* (0.036)	0.123*** (0.035)	0.136*** (0.037)	0.195*** (0.054)	0.245*** (0.045)	0.259*** (0.035)
<i>N</i>	1988	921	887	789	946	975	1862	950	1815	1044	1854	2199	2233	843	1713	2180

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
	Vietnam	Defense	Amnesty	CommunistTrade	ChinaUn	RecognizeChina	Jobs	Insurance	TaxRate	Pollution	Inflation	WomenEq	Abortion	UrbanUnrest	RtsAccuse	Marijuana
CivilRtsMove	0.127** (0.042)	0.140* (0.065)	0.299*** (0.054)	0.222** (0.068)	0.034 (0.054)	0.047 (0.048)	0.251*** (0.046)	0.113 (0.064)	0.112* (0.047)	0.117** (0.044)	-0.080* (0.040)	0.191*** (0.041)	0.149*** (0.041)	0.189** (0.062)	0.224*** (0.050)	0.309*** (0.037)
<i>N</i>	1216	565	540	475	574	589	1112	594	1084	617	1105	1328	1359	488	1029	1325

Each column represents a multivariate regression including demographic controls. The primary variable(s) of interest are AidBlack, Busing, and CivilRtsMove (same as Figure 2). The relationship shown in Figure 2 holds even after controlling for multiple demographic variables. Each cell is the regression coefficient, with the standard errors in parentheses. Table 1 shows the full model for government aid to blacks. The main coefficient, only, for busing and whether the civil rights movement is moving too quickly are included at the bottom. See appendix for full results across years.

Figure 3: A Longer Look: Racial Conservatism and Political Issues



Each point represents the regression coefficient from regressing issue specific questions on questions related to civil rights or racial inequality in a given survey. Data show that the issue bundles adopted by the party system predated the parties taking distinct issue positions. I code each variable such that higher values represent more conservative attitudes. In each year, I standardize each variable to have a mean 0 and standard deviation of 1. In years with more than one question, I average across questions and then re-standardize the variable. Consequently, each point can be interpreted as a correlation coefficient.

conservative racial attitudes correspond to more conservative positions on gun control, abortion, etcetera. The historical data align with the ANES findings and suggest 1) the observed linkages have persisted for decades and 2) they clearly predate the parties adopting the distinct positions of the contemporary era.

For example, conservative positions on race correspond with opposition to gun control dating back to at least 1940. In that year, *Gallup* asked whether respondents favored a federal law to ban lynching and whether gun owners should be required to register firearms with the government. Opponents of anti-lynching legislation were 10 percentage points more likely to also oppose gun control than supporters of anti-lynching legislation (25%-15%). This is despite neither party having a position on gun control until the late 1960s. The Republican party's belated shift to the right in the 1970s follows these pre-existing cleavages.

On abortion, the first survey asking questions about both race and abortion was fielded in 1965 and surveyed only college students (first point, Figure 3, Panel B). Yet, relative conservatism on abortion rights already corresponds with racial conservatism. For example, students in the 1965 survey that opposed affirmative action were 9 percentage points more likely to believe abortions should be restricted compared to respondents who supported affirmative action. This issue bundle existed eight years before *Roe v. Wade* and 15 years before the parties polarized on abortion in the 1980 election. Furthermore, these bundles existed before even the earliest endorsements of abortion rights by women's rights groups (Greenhouse and Siegel 2012, 38-39).

On questions of women's rights (panel C), belief in equality for women correlated to belief in civil rights and racial equality dating to the 1930s. In a 1945 survey of white men, those men who opposed equal rights for African Americans were about 20 percentage points more likely to say women's role was in the home (as opposed to jobs outside the home). And in a 1958 survey (national sample), those opposed to racial integration were 14 percentage points more likely to say they would not support a female presidential candidate. These trends existed before the 1960s women's rights movement and before the parties diverged on the Equal Rights Amendment in 1980. (Both parties supported the E.R.A. between 1944 and 1976).

Similar linkages exist on environmental questions dating to the mid-1960s. In a 1965 survey, racial liberals were 13 percentage points more likely to say they felt badly about environmental pollution. By the mid-1970s, 41% of respondents that believed the civil rights movement was moving too quickly opposed regulating car emissions compared to just 31% that believed it moved not quickly enough. This is despite both parties supporting environmental reform in the 1960s and early 1970s. The Republican's rightward shift on environmentalism came after these bundles existed among ordinary voters.

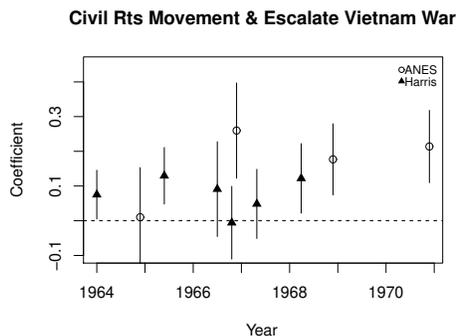
On gay rights (panel F), the first public opinion data show that racial liberals generally showed more liberal attitudes towards gay rights or gays as a group than did racial conservatives. For example, in August 1970, those who supported school segregation (by race) were 27 percentage points more likely to express that homosexuals are "harmful to the country" compared to those opposed to school segregation. This predated the parties diverging on gay rights in their 1992 platform.

On defense spending (panel E), the earliest survey in 1940 shows that racial liberals were marginally more opposed to increased defense spending in 1940. Opinion data are then absent until 1969 at which point favoring less defense spending clearly corresponds with racial liberalism. This roughly coincides with the Congressional parties flipping positions on defense spending and divergence of the national party platforms (Fordham 2007, 607).

While survey data on defense spending are lacking in the 1960s, survey companies asked many questions about U.S. involvement in Vietnam which informed post-1960s attitudes towards defense spending (Aldrich 2011). Figure 4 shows support for escalating the war into North Vietnam corresponds with the belief that civil rights movements was moving too quickly (two questions *Harris* and ANES asked continually over the time period). This linkage preceded the Democratic party's opposition to Vietnam. Kennedy and Johnson (both Democrats) escalated Vietnam throughout their presidencies and Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic nominee in 1968, largely continued Johnson's Vietnam position.⁸ Yet rank-and-file liberals in the Democratic party became increasingly

⁸Prior to the Gulf of Tonkin in the summer of 1964, liberals generally supported involvement in Vietnam. However, involvement in Vietnam in 1963 and early 1964 differs from engagement which now characterizes the era. Kennedy,

Figure 4: Civil Rights Movement & Support for Escalating Vietnam War



Each point represents the difference in attitudes towards escalating the Vietnam War in North Vietnam between those who believe the civil rights movement is moving too quickly compared to those who believe it is moving too slowly. Positive values mean those who believe the civil rights movement is moving too quickly, take a more hawkish military position on Vietnam.

wary of the war effort, even though liberal party leaders supported it (see Berinsky 2004 for discussion on latent attitudes towards the Vietnam war). This shift at the mass level preceded elite movement on Vietnam.

Together, these data suggest that these issue bundles date to the earliest opinion polling and existed before the parties or social movements bundled issues together.

5 Elite Learning

The previous section shows that left-right attitudes on race predict left-right divides on effectively every other policy issue. What then explains these bundles? While scholarship has produced numerous explanations for attitude formation, this section emphasizes that elite learning cannot fully explain the constellation of issues explored above.

5.1 Partisan Elite Learning

An established literature suggests that elites construct issue bundles and then pass them down to ordinary voters (Converse 1964).⁹ When new issues arise, elites who are perceived to be otherwise

Johnson and Humphrey also each aggressively pursued civil rights measures throughout their careers.
⁹Converse argues this is not the only cause, but a primary source of ideologies.

liberal or conservative “ferret” out some ideological connection of the issue and “positions come to be perceived as ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’ even though such alignments would have been scarcely predictable on logical grounds” (Converse 1964, 67). If politicians simply construct issue bundles and the mass public follows the leader, this suggests that elites constructed the resulting partisan alignment. (See Layman and Carsey 2002 for a related analysis.)

The analysis in section 4.1 casts doubt on elite driven explanations given that the issue bundles existed prior the parties adopting distinct positions. However, it is possible that by the 1970s even though the parties lacked formal policy positions, knowledgeable respondents had become aware of emerging partisan differences. For example, although the parties did not have positions on marijuana policy, McGovern was associated with decriminalizing marijuana and Nixon supported harsher penalties. In other words, Democrats in the mass public hold a set of policy views simply by learning those views from Democratic politicians.

To evaluate the effect of partisan elite learning, I compare issue bundles between respondents that know and do not know the parties’ relative policy positions in the 1970s. On some questions, and in some years, the ANES asks respondents to place the Democratic and Republican party’s position on a given issue on a 1-7 scale.¹⁰ I code those that place the Republican party to the right of the Democratic party on the respective issue as “knowers” and all other respondent’s as “don’t know.” This analysis separates respondents who have received distinct partisan cues from those who have not. For example, those that place the Republican party to the right of the Democratic party on both marijuana policy and on government aid to blacks have received partisan cues and are labeled as “knowers.” On some policy questions, knowing the parties’ positions would reasonably mean placing both parties at the same point. However, I label these respondents as “don’t know” because, consistent with the theory, they have not received distinct partisan cues.¹¹

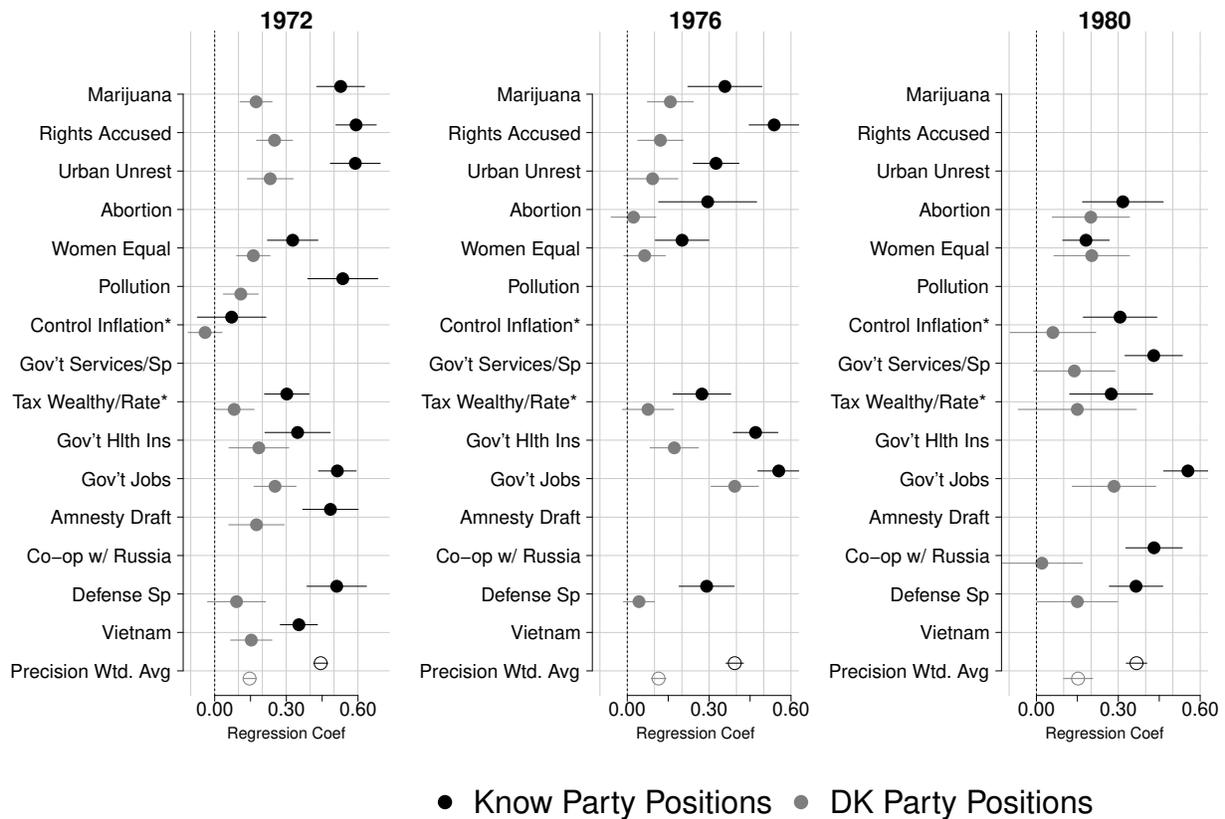
If elites construct issue bundles, their should be no consistent relationship among those that have not received partisan signals. Figure 5 shows who respondents that lack knowledge of the

¹⁰In some years, the ANES simply asks which party (for example) favors more defense spending.

¹¹Those respondents that place the Republican party to the right of the Democrats are consistently more educated and perceived by ANES interviewers as being more knowledgeable.

parties positions still consistently package issues together, especially in the polarizing 1972 election. For example, amongst “knowers” in 1972, racial conservatives are 53 percentage points more likely to oppose marijuana legalization than racial liberals. However, among those that do not know the parties’ relative positions on either issue, racial conservatives are still 17 percentage points more likely to oppose marijuana legalization than racial liberals.¹²

Figure 5: Know vs. DK Party Positions

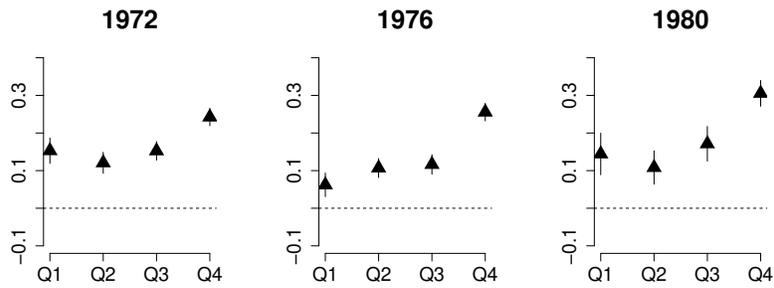


Panels break down issue bundles between respondents that know (black dots) and don’t know (gray dots) the parties’ positions. I code respondents that place the Republicans to the right of Democrats (and thus have received some partisan cue) on the given policy position as “knowers.” The gray points show that even respondents that lack knowledge of the parties relative positions still bundle racial positions with other attitudes. Lines represent 95% confidence intervals. *Wording on inflation and taxes differs in 1972 and 1980.

To analyze issue bundles by more general knowledge, I create an index of the average number of policy positions in which respondents know the Republican party is to the right of the Democratic party and then subset respondents by knowledge quartile. For example, the average

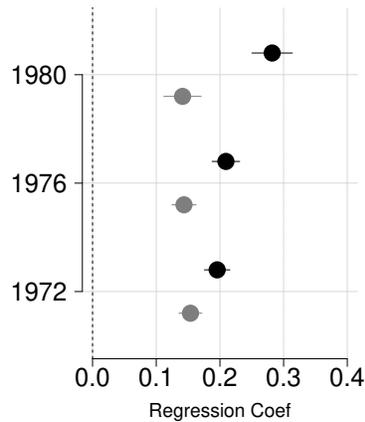
¹²However, many respondents may simply be guessing the parties’ positions. To check, in some years the ANES also asks respondents to place the Democratic and Republican nominee on each issue position (same as with party). Correctly placing both the parties’ and candidates’ positions reduces guessing. This analysis shows that the bundles persist well in 1972 and 1976, but weaken in 1980 (see Appendix, section 5).

Figure 6: Lib/Con Divides by Knowledge Quartile (Precision Wtd. Average)



Each point represents the average difference between racial conservatives and liberals taking conservative positions on the secondary position by knowledge quartile. 1 represents respondents that know the least about the parties' positions and 4 represents respondents that know the most about the parties' positions.

Figure 7: ANES Interviewer Knowledge (Precision Wtd. Average)



● ANES High Knowledge ● ANES Low Knowledge

Graph divides the sample between those who the ANES interviewer judges to have above average knowledge and everyone else. Each point is the precision weighted average (across all issues) in each year. Both high and low knowledge respondents package issues together. See appendix for graphs broken down by issue.

respondent in the bottom quartile in 1972 correctly places the parties effectively 0 percent of the time (this includes answering “DK” and “no difference”). The second quartile 19 percent of the time, the third quartile 42 percent of the time and the highest quartile 74 percent of the time. (Respondents potentially place up to 13 separate policy positions in 1972).

Figure 6 graphs the average issue bundle by knowledge quartile where 1 equals those with the lowest knowledge and 4 represents those with the highest knowledge. Two trends emerge. Across most policy issues, the bundles increase as knowledge increases. This aligns with theories of elite

learning. However, even among those in the lowest quartile — a group of respondents who in 1972 do not perceive the Republican party as more conservative on even a single policy position — still show “constraint” between policy issues. High and low knowledge respondents demonstrate the same issue connections. For example, racial conservatives in the lowest quartile are approximately 15 percentage points more likely to express a conservative abortion attitude compared to racial liberals in 1972. (See appendix 8 for results broken down by issue.)

Finally, it could be that party overlap in the 1970s meant that otherwise knowledgeable respondents are still confused about party positions (as they lack a position on many issues). Consequently, I separate respondents by perceived political knowledge. ANES interviewers rate the respondent’s general political knowledge on a 1-5 scale where 1 represents respondents with the highest levels of knowledge, 3 average knowledge and 5 the lowest levels. Figure 7 divides respondents between those the interviewer rates as above average (1 and 2) and everyone else. Respondents ranked as having above average knowledge by the interviewer generally express tighter linkages between the issues. However, the bundles persist even for the low knowledge respondents, too. In most instances only minimal differences separate the groups.¹³

The bottom line of this section is that *the bundles persist even among those that do not know the parties positions* and otherwise know little about politics.

5.2 Partisan Elite Learning through Parental Socialization

The previous section shows that respondents that do not know the parties’ positions still bundle racial views with other policy positions. However, there are alternative means for elite learning. Even if respondents have not received elite cues, they may learn what goes with what through friends or family who have received partisan cues. In other words, elite signaling may work through a network effect.

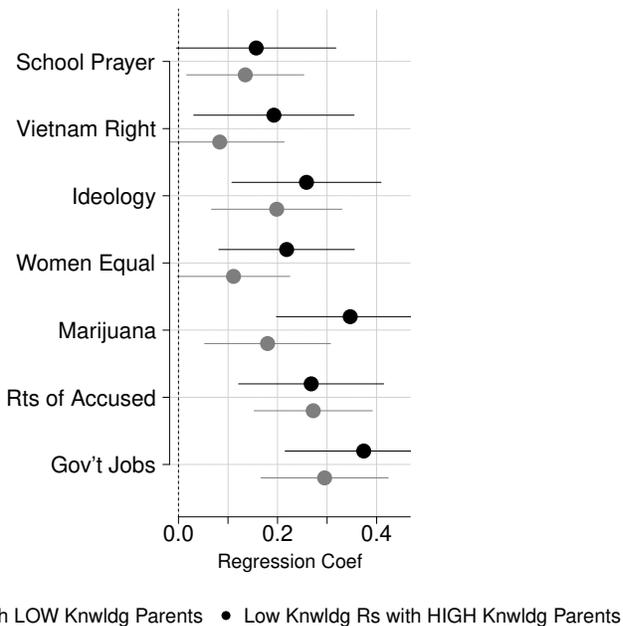
To explore this possibility, I use data from the 1973 Youth-Parent Socialization survey (YPS; ICPSR 7779) which interviews both parents and their children and includes policy questions simi-

¹³See section 16 of the appendix for other measures of basic knowledge.

lar to the ANES. (In the 1973 survey, most of the youth cohort are aged 27 or 28.¹⁴) Unfortunately, the YPS survey asks party placement on only two policy questions, but does ask several general knowledge questions about politics.

I combine party placement and general knowledge questions to create an eight item knowledge index for both the parents and students and then subset the data to only low knowledge students (as defined by whether their political knowledge was above or below average). I then split the low-knowledge group between those with high knowledge and low knowledge parents. Figure 8 shows that children who lack political knowledge, and whose parents also lack political knowledge, still consistently pair issues together.¹⁵

Figure 8: Low Knowledge Respondents, by Parent Knowledge



This analysis compares low knowledge respondents, only. I split low knowledge respondents between those who have high knowledge parents and low knowledge parents. Each regression coefficient plots the proportion of racial liberals and conservatives taking a conservative position on each variable listed down the left-hand column. Data are from the 1973 Youth-Parent socialization survey.

¹⁴The first wave, conducted in 1965 (when most respondents were 17 or 18), lacks a range of policy questions.

¹⁵There is some reason to suspect that parent socialization would not broadly explain issue bundles among those who do not know, as knowledgeable parents raise children who are also knowledgeable (Jennings, Stoker and Bowers 2009, 786).

5.3 Learning Media Cues

Noel (2013) argues that writers and intellectuals in the media play a central role in packaging disparate issues together to create ideologies. Voters are then reactive to these ideologues (Noel 2013, 35). Noel's argument implies that people may not know the parties' positions but learn "what goes with what" through media cues. Data availability present difficulty for evaluating this hypothesis, especially in this earlier time period. However, a 1985 survey of national households by the *Los Angeles Times* (*LAT*) asks respondents what newspaper they read the most frequently and further asks what policy positions that paper's editorial page or news stories endorse across a range of questions including affirmative action, abortion and gun control.

I conduct two analyses. First, I restrict the sample to only those respondents who do not perceive or know their preferred newspaper's position on each policy question. This represents the vast majority of respondents. I then regress attitudes on each secondary policy on attitudes towards affirmative action (as done in previous section).¹⁶ Table 2 (column 1) shows that respondents who do not know or perceive their newspaper to have taken a position on either affirmative action or the secondary policy across 8 issues still package issues together.

The second test includes only readers of the *LA Times* (the survey oversamples *LAT* readers). I differentiate *LA Times* readers between those that know and do not know the paper's general position on each issue.¹⁷ Again, results are consistent with previous tests. Those that do not know the *LAT's* position on affirmative action and the secondary policy still bundle positions together.¹⁸ (See Table 2, Column 2.)

This evidence is suggestive that people who do not know where their media source stands on various issues still package issues together.

¹⁶Unfortunately, the full codebook of newspapers has been lost, which prevents identifying respondents who believe a newspaper is liberal when it is actually conservative (for example).

¹⁷To validate the *LAT's* position on each issue, I compare the *LAT's* editors and journalists perceptions (who are also interviewed, but who I exclude from analysis) with readership's perceptions. Unsurprisingly, the balance of editors/journalists perceive the paper's position to be liberal, although the degree of liberalism varies. For example, *LAT* journalists overwhelmingly believe the paper supports abortion rights, but journalists have a less clear, although distinctly liberal perception, in coverage of defense spending.

¹⁸The small sample of "knowers" inflates the standard errors.

Table 2: Know/DK Newspaper Positions

	(1)	(2)	
	National Sample	<i>LAT</i> Readers	
	DK Newspaper Position	Know	DK
Gun Control	.211 (.046)	.29 (.104)	.177 (.088)
Defense Sp.	.055 (.043)	.191 (.113)	.256 (.08)
Welfare	.133 (.031)	.085 (.065)	.111 (.058)
Inequality	.158 (.038)	.362 (.132)	.154 (.085)
Abortion	.062 (.041)	.245 (.133)	.118 (.071)
Gay Rights	.107 (.04)	.103 (.081)	.168 (.065)
School Prayer	-.067 (.04)	-.035 (.149)	.092 (.081)
Death Penalty	.067 (.031)	.286 (.138)	.219 (.067)

Column 1 subsets data for a national sample of respondents who report they do not know or perceive differences in the policy positions of their most read newspaper. Column 2 splits *Los Angeles Times*' readers between those who know and do not know the *LAT*'s policy positions (as perceived by the paper's editorial page and news stories) on each of the issues.

6 Discussion & Limitations

6.1 Latent Opinion as Guardrails

The previous section provides evidence that various issue bundles existed among the mass public prior to the parties taking clear positions. This raises the question: do politicians, activists or public intellectuals disrupt these pre-existing cleavages? The evidence I present here suggests that elites usually go along with, rather than disrupt, these pre-existing linkages.

For example, sensing the environmentalism's rising tide in the late 1960s, Richard Nixon made overt appeals to the environmental movement: “[Nixon] saw environment as an opportunity to jump in front of this mob coming toward him and call it a parade” (Richard Andrews, Interview). Nixon founded the Environmental Protection Agency, signed the Clean Air Act of 1970 and celebrated the first Earth Day in 1970.

Yet Nixon miscalculated support for environmental liberalism inside the GOP. Ordinary voters had already packaged racial and environmental liberalism together since at least the mid-1960s. Nixon, who adopted both a “Southern Strategy” and supported environmentalism, failed to disrupt this prevailing pattern. Even if in the early 1970s there was broad support for environmental action,

enthusiasm differed. Nixon worried environmentalism had become a “fad of the elitist” and did not concern the “blue collar guy and the rest and so forth” (National Archives 2012). If Nixon wanted to expand his coalition to include blue-collar workers, pro-environmental stances did not provide that traction. Nixon’s Republican successors ultimately found it easier to oppose the environmental movement.¹⁹ Of course, Republicans in subsequent years may have opposed environmentalism to appease intense policy demanders (rather than voters), but this illustrates the alignment parties and interest groups followed mass level cleavages.

6.2 Are the Divides Large Enough?

An existing literature points to the flexibility of public opinion and weak correlations between various issue attitudes as evidence that the public cannot exert its will (Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017). Consequently, even if voters packaged issues together first, are the issue bundles large enough that politicians would heed them? Even low correlations reflect substantial divides. In 1972, the difference between racial liberals and racial conservatives on other policy positions (as measured by government aid to blacks; excluding inflation) ranged from 9 percentage points to 35 percentage points with an average difference of 21 percentage points. Among those who lack knowledge of either parties’ positions, this difference ranges from 8 to 25 percentage points with an average difference of 17 percentage points. In elections decided by a few percentage points, or voter persuasion efforts focused on a fraction of a percent, even 8 percentage points represents a substantial divide.

Furthermore, qualitative accounts of political decision making, especially on salient issues, typically characterize politicians as risk averse and even small differences between groups of voters may motivate policy positions on visible issues (Arnold 1992; Kingdon 1989; Key 1961).

¹⁹Although the Reagan administration shifted Republicans rightward on environmentalism, George H.W. Bush initiated some pro-environmental policies. However, Al Gore’s aggressive environmental message in 1992 ended national Republican’s efforts to embrace environmentalism.

6.3 Economic Issues

Of course, not all issues “fit” and elites do exercise discretion. One explanation is that “easy” issues, like race, constrain politicians but more abstract policies like taxes are prone to elite cueing (Lenz 2012, 213). For example, Table 3 shows that attitudes on key economic issues do not consistently align with liberal-conservative positions on other issues. Furthermore, those bundles that do exist are often restricted to respondents that know the parties positions (e.g., Layman and Carsey 2002).

Table 3: Issue Bundles Government Guarantee Jobs (1972)

	(1) Full Sample	(2) Know	(3) DK
Marijuana	.045 (.024)	.353 (.053)	-.046 (.035)
Rights Accused	.191 (.027)	.479 (.049)	.049 (.046)
Urban Unrest	.193 (.033)	.277 (.061)	.173 (.051)
Abortion	-.012 (.025)	–	–
Women Equal	.008 (.024)	.169 (.051)	-.016 (.038)
Pollution	.051 (.026)	.222 (.07)	.048 (.042)
Recognize China	-.033 (.027)	–	–
China UN	-.08 (.034)	–	–
Trade w/ Communists	.001 (.042)	–	–
Amnesty Draft	.276 (.034)	.53 (.053)	.037 (.062)
Defense Sp.	.162 (.037)	.524 (.059)	-.085 (.068)
Vietnam	.143 (.025)	.312 (.04)	.049 (.05)

Each cell is the bivariate relationship from regressing the secondary variable on attitudes towards whether the government can guarantee jobs. This can be modeled by the following regression equation: $Abortion_i = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 Govt.Jobs_i + \epsilon_i$. Standard errors in parentheses.

Economic divides, and thus New Deal party coalitions, inconsistently align with left-right divides on other issues. This is a primary point of the paper: because economic attitudes do not predict other policy views, but racial attitudes do, the activation of race as a partisan cleavage imposed a set of constraints on party positioning that was previously absent. Had the Democrats maintained their broad New Deal coalition with both racial liberals and racial conservatives, there would have been less pressure to polarize on other issue dimensions, too.

6.4 Explaining the Bundles

A broad literature across the social sciences suggests varying political, psychological and sociological factors contribute to attitude formation. This article has primarily argued that a prominent political explanation — that voters connect attitudes together by learning positions from political elites — cannot fully explain the long-standing relationship between race and so many other political attitudes. I focus on this explanation because it has direct implications for whether polarization is top-down or bottom-up.

While I cannot then explain why these attitudes fit together here, this finding supports the importance of research into why attitudes fit together outside of elite socialization and why race is so central to belief systems. One explanation is that racial attitudes overlap with many other cultural and psychological factors (e.g., Feldman 1988; Huber et al. 2010) in a way that economic attitudes have historically not. For example, attitudes towards race proxy predispositions towards traditionalism, a value which then connects to other political attitudes on gay rights or abortion. Alternatively, racial attitudes may proxy cosmopolitanism and socialization between urban and rural areas which then overlaps diverging preferences across multiple issue dimensions (Rodden 2019; Cramer 2012). Likewise, racial attitudes reflect an “us-versus-them” mentality (Kinder and Kam 2010) which then informs attitudes on non-racial policies, such as white opposition to wealth redistribution to minority groups (e.g., Mendelberg 2001).

7 Conclusion

I argue the seeds of contemporary polarization were sown in the 1960s racial realignment and rooted in the mass public. Among ordinary voters, left-right attitudes on race predict left-right attitudes on effectively every other policy position from abortion, to defense spending, to gun control. This constellation of views pre-dates the parties establishing distinct positions and persists even among respondents who know little about politics and who have not received elite cues.

I contend that when the parties divided on race in the early 1960s, overlap in public opinion

between race and other policy views encouraged party elites to take positions on newly salient issues that reinforced this racial divide. For example, once the white South entered the Republican coalition, the South's conservative opinions on gun control made it easier for Republicans to adopt conservative positions when gun control became politically activated.

A primary focus of this article is to show that elite learning does not fully explain these linkages. Then what does? This finding highlights the importance of research into why attitudes fit together outside of elite socialization (e.g., Jost 2006) and why race is at its center. Similarly, expanding on why racial attitudes so consistently predict other issue attitudes, while economic issues do not, is another avenue of future research.

Finally, while this paper focuses on events that occurred over 50 years ago, they are relevant today because we continue to live in a political world created at this historical juncture. Issue overlap between racial attitudes and so many other policies helps explain the depths of polarization in a party system increasingly divided by race and ethnicity. That these divides are rooted in the mass public contextualizes why it may be politically difficult for party elites to simply switch positions or work across the aisle. For example, in the early 2000s George W. Bush tried to move the Republican party leftward on immigration. However, Bush's electoral coalition relied heavily on the white South, a region opposed to immigration. Bush's appeals never gained traction. Conversely, Trump may have so easily incorporated anti-immigration views into the Republican party because they overlapped with constituencies already inside the GOP. These trends suggest that, however bluntly, the party system is responsive to the electorate.

8 References

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