

10. Gendered (and racialized) partisan polarization¹

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INTRODUCTION

Barnes and Williamson, in Chapter 2 of this book, cite polarization and the resulting policy gridlock at the federal level as important reasons to pursue local community-building policies. In this chapter, I explore partisan polarization among the mass public over the past several decades, focusing on citizens' views on gender, race, and class. Specifically, drawing on data from the American National Election Studies, I trace the relationship from 1970 through 2016 between Americans' views on gender, race, and class on the one hand, and feelings about the political parties on the other. Although 2016 marks a high point for the impact of gender and race on views of the parties, it represents the culmination of trends that date back decades. Americans' evaluations of the political parties have been strongly and increasingly connected with their racial views, especially since 2000. Views on gender roles and feminism also powerfully shape evaluations of the parties, and have done so consistently since the mid-1980s. And feelings about social class steadily increased in importance through 2012 before fading a little in 2016.

These trends will trouble many. They mark a decline in cross-cutting cleavages within the population, and with them, partisan cooperation or at least tolerance. Such cross-cutting cleavages were central to constitutional design; Madison famously favored a large republic, arguing in *The Federalist* that size would:

make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength, and to act in unison with each other. (Madison, 1787 [2005], p. 53)

Dahl and other pluralists similarly credited cross-cutting cleavages with moderating political parties and ensuring stability (Dahl, 1956, pp. 104–5). And empirical studies confirm that cross-pressured citizens—those whose policy

views do not all align with one political party—are more likely to cross party lines, changing their vote from election to election and splitting their ticket between parties within an election (Hillygus and Shields, 2008).

Moreover, our ideas about gender and race are not mere policy preferences. They are central elements of identities that construct and symbolize who we are, individually and as a nation. As identities become closely tethered to the party system, political disagreements feel personal and political opponents represent existential threats. Aligning the party system with race- and gender-based fault lines in society is, therefore, an excellent recipe for partisan enmity and gridlock.

That said, and despite pluralists' valorization of cross-cutting cleavages, we might see some normative appeal in the alignment of the party system with views on gender and race. Even if cross-cutting identity cleavages limit polarization and allow bipartisan compromise, they do so at a cost: such cleavages motivate the parties to avoid discussing race and gender issues, which deflects political attention from these structural systems of hierarchy and power.

APPROACH

I do not aim to make causal claims about the direction of the changes I examine—that is, whether increasing alignment among views on race, gender, and class push the political parties to polarize at the elite level, or polarized elite parties push citizens to change their attitudes or partisan attachments. Rather, I document an underappreciated face of increasing polarization among the mass public: the increasing alignment, over the past several decades, of Americans' views on race, gender, and the political parties. In so doing, this analysis reveals that the powerful impact of sexism and racism on the 2016 election is but an extreme example of a much longer-term trend in the images of the political parties that transcends any one candidate or election.

My focus on views toward the groups associated with the parties departs from most studies of polarization. There is a robust literature on the role of policy attitudes in polarization. Some ask whether ordinary Americans are sharply divided in their views and whether they have become more so in recent decades (e.g., Abramowitz and Saunders, 2005; Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2006); others focus on the reciprocal relationships between polarization among political elites and division among the mass public (e.g., Hetherington, 2001; Levendusky, 2013). Taking a different path, I explore the connections between citizens' views of the parties on the one hand, and their feelings of the groups that make up the party coalitions and that are central actors in many policy disagreements on the other.

There are several reasons to focus on feelings about social groups. First, few citizens think about politics in ideological or even issue-based terms. Rather,

most understand the parties—and politics more generally—in terms of groups (Campbell et al., 1960; Converse, 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017). Moreover, people are highly attuned to the social groups that make up the major political party coalitions, and party affiliation itself is a social identity that citizens understand in relation to other identities (Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2002; Miller, Wlezien and Hildreth, 1991).

In addition, partisan conflict is structured by social group cleavages. For example, in his examination of partisan realignment in the 1980s, Petrocik argues that “One is hard pressed to find instances where issue conflict is independent of social cleavages. Issues and ideology may be the language of party conflict, but group needs and conflicts are its source in modern party systems” (1987, p. 353). Petrocik traces changes in the groups that make up the parties—that is, changes in the party identification of social groups like white Northern Protestants, white Southerners, African Americans, and others. Thus, he—like many others who study partisan realignment—focuses on the social make-up of party membership.

Considering racial groups, many analyses trace the movement of African Americans into the Democratic Party and white Americans—especially in the South—toward the Republicans as the parties polarized on civil rights in the mid-twentieth century (e.g., Carmines and Stimson, 1989; Schickler, 2016). The relative homogeneity of African Americans’ views on civil rights and social and economic policy (Dawson, 1994) facilitates the conflation in these accounts of symbolic party image—Democrats stand for the interests of African Americans—and demographic party membership—African Americans are overwhelmingly Democratic. But of course, that symbolic image also led some white Americans—those with liberal views on civil rights—to favor Democrats and oppose Republicans.

The changing demographics of party membership is one important way that social groups intersect with the political parties. But groups play an important role in shaping each party’s symbolic image among voters who may not be members of those groups (Green et al., 2002). For example, consider economic policy. The Democratic Party generally advocates for liberal economic policies and is allied with labor unions; the Republican Party pushes conservative economics and is allied with business groups. These positions and alliances shape each party’s membership: union members are apt to identify as Democrats, business leaders as Republicans. But these policies and coalitions also affect citizens who are neither union members nor business leaders, because most citizens hold positive or negative views of those groups (labor unions and business), and use this information to make sense of the parties (Green et al., 2002; Nelson and Kinder, 1996). To call Democrats the party of labor and Republicans the party of business is not just to describe literal membership—at

the mass and elite coalitional levels. It also communicates each party's image and what it stands for.

This conflation of image and membership particularly obfuscates the role of gender in the party system. Many scholars analyze group membership defined by gender: the gender gap in partisanship, opinions, and voting (Gilens, 1988; Kaufmann, 2002; Kaufmann and Petrocik, 1999; Manza and Brooks, 1998; Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986). Gender gaps have ebbed and flowed and have certainly been politically important at times (Ladd, 1997; Mansbridge, 1985). However, focus on gender gaps misses important ways that gender structures party competition because the politics of gender does not, generally speaking, divide men from women. Rather, it often engages questions of women's *and* men's roles, rights, and relative power; it pits those defending traditional gender arrangements against those advocating for egalitarian gender arrangements. In other words, the politics of gender divides supporters of gender egalitarianism and feminism—male and female—from gender traditionalists and anti-feminists of both sexes.

Though there are modest gender gaps in partisanship, voting, and policy views, these pale compared with the differences *among* men and *among* women in views on gender roles and feminism. And gender roles and feminism have increasingly structured elite partisan debate. Marjorie Spruill traces the role of anti-feminism in the construction of modern American conservatism beginning in the 1970s (2008, 2017). A key moment for the political parties came in 1980, when the Republican platform first included opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); Greg Adams (1997) shows that abortion opinion also became more linked to partisanship following this shift. But men and women have differed little in their support for ERA and abortion rights, so these shifts on gender-based policy did little to create a gender gap in partisanship or voting (Cook and Wilcox, 1991; Mansbridge, 1985). And this is nothing new: for example, despite widespread expectations that one would form following suffrage in 1920, the United States has not seen a major women's political party (Andersen, 1996). In general, the social structure of gender, in which men and women are socially and functionally integrated—"dispersed among men" (Beauvoir, 1949 [2010], p. 8)—works against the formation of a sense of gender-group-based interest (e.g., Jackman, 1994).²

These intra-group differences on matters of gender—as opposed to inter-group difference *between* men and women—present a sharp contrast with the politics of race, where there are divides between white Americans and black Americans (Kinder and Winter, 2001); and to some extent with the politics of class, where rich and poor are relatively divided as well (McCall and Manza, 2011). To elucidate the gender- and race-based elements of citizens' images of the parties, I explore how the mass public views the social groups that make up each party's coalition at the elite level. Specifically, I explore

citizens' views of three social cleavages that are fundamental to the post-1970s U.S. party system: race, class, and gender. Race has, of course, been central to American political competition and party systems since the founding. Since the 1960s, the Democratic Party has become increasingly the party of racial liberalism; the Republican Party the party of racial conservatism, and citizens have become aware of this and adjusted their party identification accordingly (Carmines and Stimson 1989).³ Class, too, has been a central line of political disagreement that has structured partisan competition in many eras; since the New Deal, the association of Democrats with economic liberalism and the Republicans with economic conservatism has been a central feature of the party system (Sundquist, 1983).

DATA

To assess the contribution of feelings about social groups to Americans' views of the parties, partisanship, and voting, I need consistent measures of those feelings, and of reactions to the parties, over relatively long periods of recent American history. For this I turn to the American National Election Studies (ANES), which has conducted national surveys around the biennial federal elections since 1948 (ANES, 2018). These surveys represent the gold standard in sampling and other survey administration; as important, they have emphasized continuity in question inclusion and wording, which facilitates comparisons over time.

I draw on measures of respondents' views of the two major political parties, and of the social groups representing the politicized cleavages along lines of race, gender, and social class. I focus on these group-based evaluations—rather than views on policy issues having to do with race, gender, and class—for two reasons. First, I want to abstract from particular policy disputes that evoke myriad policy-specific considerations for respondents (Zaller, 1992) in order to focus on feelings about the broad social groups implicated in those issue debates. Second, the specific issues that appear in the ANES vary over time as the political agenda shifted; in contrast, instrumentation measuring group feelings has been more stable. My analysis begins in 1970, when the ANES first introduced a question asking respondents for their views of the women's movement.

I present three analyses. First, I document the increase in partisan affective polarization; that is, the increase in negative views that Democrats express toward Republicans, and that Republicans express toward Democrats. This is a relatively direct measure of the mass face of an increasingly polarized political system. Second, I analyze the feelings that partisans of each party hold toward race-, gender-, and class-based groups. Here I find increasingly polarized views of gender- and race-based groups, suggesting that these social

cleavages may underlie the strengthening partisan antipathy. Finally, I run a series of regression models to explore directly—and simultaneously—the impact of views about gender, race, and class on partisan affective polarization. In all these analyses, I draw primarily on a long-standing series of ANES questions: the so-called “feeling thermometer,” which asks respondents to rate on a zero-to-100 degree temperature scale how warmly or coldly (i.e., how favorably or unfavorably) they feel toward each of a series of groups.⁴ This measure serves my purposes well: it solicits *affective* evaluations of each group in a general way that abstracts from any particular political issues, in a format that is comparable across different groups. And it has an extensive track record as a reliable and valid measure of group (and candidate) evaluations (Weisberg and Miller, 1980; Wilcox, Sigelman and Cook, 1989; Winter and Berinsky, 1999). Most importantly for my purposes, in most years since 1970 the ANES included among the thermometers both political parties, as well as groups relevant to race (“blacks” and “whites”), gender (“feminists” and/or “the women’s movement”), and class (“labor unions” and “big business”).

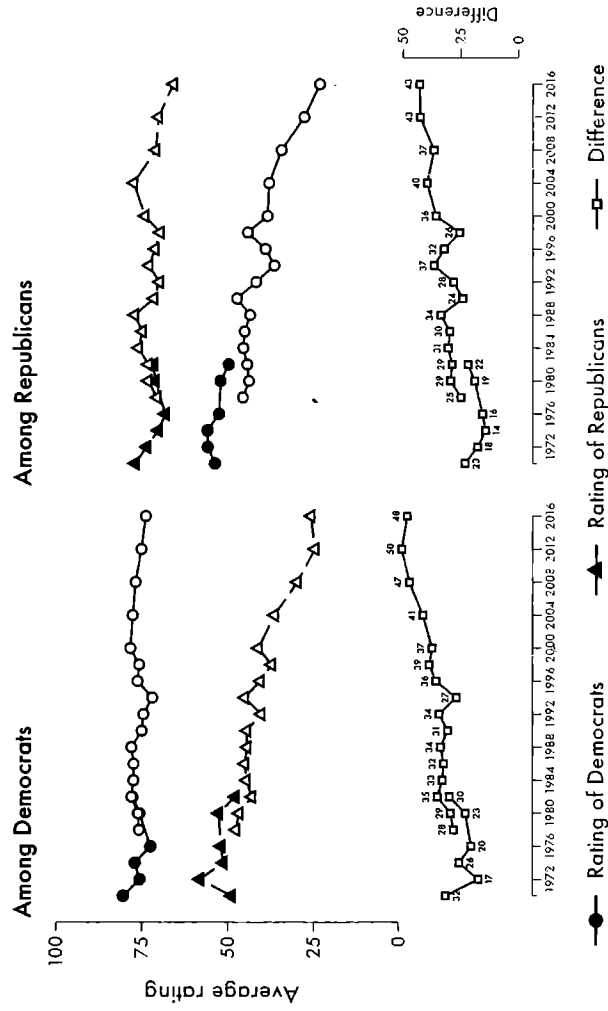
RESULTS

Partisan Affective Polarization

I begin with an analysis of the views of members of each political party: how they feel about their own party, and how they feel about the opposing party. Here I draw on two different pairs of feeling thermometer ratings: from 1972 through 1982, the ANES asked respondents to rate “Democrats” and “Republicans.” From 1978 through 2016, respondents rated “The Democratic Party” and “The Republican Party.” These items are somewhat different; the first pair refers to *members* of each party, while the second asks about the parties themselves. Happily, both pairs of items were included in 1980 and 1982, so I can calibrate the trends across this change of question wording.

Figure 10.1 shows the relevant averages. The left-hand panel shows the average ratings of each party by Democratic respondents,⁵ along with the difference between these two average ratings. The right-hand panel shows the same set of evaluations, this time among Republican respondents.⁶

Looking first at Democratic respondents, Figure 10.1 shows that evaluations of the Democratic (in-)Party (and partisans) are quite high and relatively stable, averaging about 75 points on the 0-to-100 thermometer rating scale.⁷ Evaluations of the Republican Party are lower—as we would expect. Over the past four-plus decades, Democrats’ ratings of Republicans have fallen precipitously: from about 50 degrees in the 1970s and early 1980s to just above 25 degrees in the 2010s. The difference between ratings of the in-party and the out-party represents affective polarization. This has increased dramatically



Source: ANES (2018).

Figure 10.1 Views of the parties by party members

among Democrats, from about 25–30 degrees in the late 1970s to about 50 degrees—fully half of the overall scale—by 2008 through 2016.

Turning to the right-hand panel, we see the mirror image among Republicans. Ratings of Republicans and the Republican Party are relatively high—in the mid-lower 70s, and are fairly stable over time. Ratings of Democrats are lower, and decline steadily from a difference of 25–30 points in the late 1970s to 43 points in 2012 and 2016. Thus, affective polarization has increased dramatically among members of both parties. The increase in polarization has been somewhat faster among Democrats, increasing by an average of 2.4 degrees per four-year presidential term, compared with 1.8 degrees every four years among Republicans.

Views of Groups at the Center of American Political Conflict

These findings mirror those of others who have documented increased affective partisan polarization over this period (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015). In this context of increasing antipathy between the parties, I will now trace parallel polarization in views of the race, gender, and class-based groups associated with each.

To measure feelings about gender and class groups, I continue to draw on the ANES feeling thermometers. For gender, I use ratings of two groups that have appeared on and off from 1970 through 2016 in the ANES: “feminists” and “the women’s movement.”⁸ These items fit my needs well, because both “feminists” and “the women’s movement” connote not simply women, but rather women who are politically active on behalf of a progressive gender agenda. That is, they capture quite well the *politicization* of gender rights, roles, and power. For class and economics, I make use of ratings of “big business” and of “labor unions.” While big business, and to a lesser extent labor unions, are not as deeply politicized, these groups do both engage in political activity, each is a central member of a party coalition, and each is understood to have opposing economic interests.

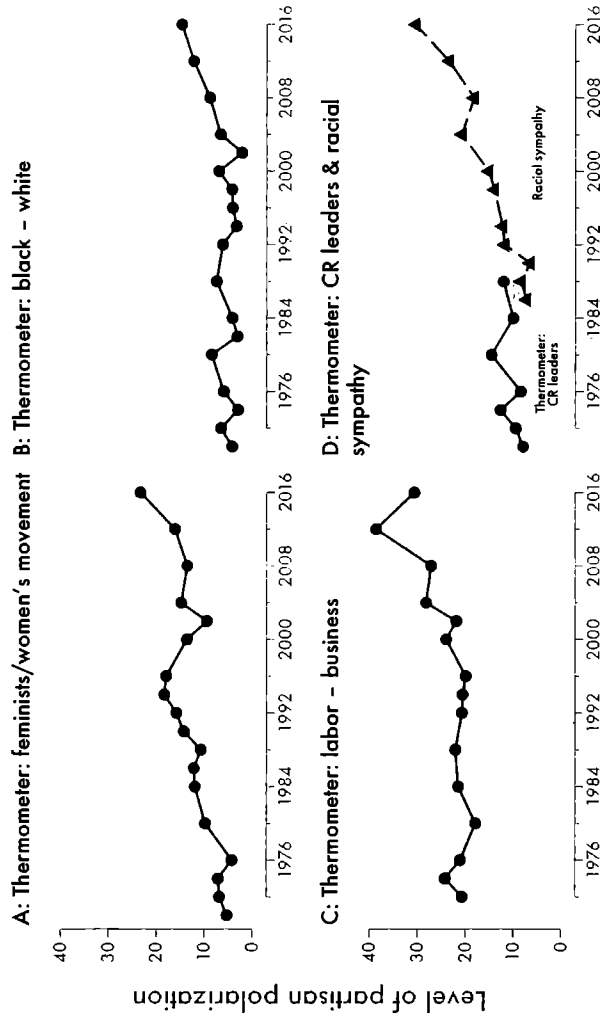
Turning to racial groups, no ideal measure is available, so I pursue two strategies. First, I draw on thermometer ratings of “blacks” and of “whites,” both of which have appeared consistently in the ANES. However, these do not directly engage *politicized* racial groups, and so they may under-state the role of views about politicized racial groups in the party system. And each may not measure white respondents’ views very well: norms against open expression of racism may affect the ratings whites report of blacks (Mendelberg, 2001) and the invisibility of white racial identity may distort their ratings of whites as a group (Frankenberg, 1993). Therefore, I also draw on a two-pronged strategy. Through 1988, the ANES asked for thermometer ratings of “civil rights leaders.” From 1986 forward, I also draw on a robust measure of racial sym-

pathy, based on the canonical racial resentment battery of questions.⁹ Though not parallel in form to the thermometer ratings, this measure precisely captures Americans' views on the contemporary *politics* of race, as opposed simply to their affective feelings about racial groups (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). In what follows, I focus primarily on the thermometer ratings of blacks and of whites, as they are available for the entire time period and are most comparable with the gender and class measures. I then supplement this with the combination of the thermometer rating of civil rights (CR) leaders (through 1988) and racial sympathy (from 1986).

Figure 10.2 shows the difference between Democrats and Republicans in ratings of each type of group.¹⁰ The top-left panel plots the difference, in each year from 1970 through 2016, in the average ratings by Democrats and by Republicans of feminists and/or the women's movement. For example, the plot shows that in 1984 Democrats rated the women's liberation movement 12 degrees warmer, on average, than did Republicans.¹¹ From 1970 through 2016, Democrats rated feminists and the women's movement higher than did Republicans. This difference was modest—between 5 and 10 degrees—through the 1970s, then increased steadily from 10 degrees in 1980 to almost 20 degrees in the mid-1990s. After closing slightly, partisan polarization in ratings of feminists reached their most polarized level yet in 2016. That year, Democrats rated feminists at 67 degrees, compared with 43 degrees among Republicans, a difference of about a quarter of the 101-degree rating scale. This peak polarization in 2016 is consistent with the finding of others on the importance of sexism and views on gender to the 2016 election (e.g., Bock, Byrd-Craven and Burkley, 2017; Bracic, Israel-Trummel and Shortle, 2019; Frasure-Yokley, 2018; Ratliff et al., 2019; Schaffner, MacWilliams and Nteta, 2018; Setzler and Yanus, 2018; Valentino, Wayne and Miller, 2018; Winter, 2018). However, looking at the whole trend, it is clear that 2016 represents an extension and acceleration of a trend that has been in place for decades.

Turning to racial group perceptions, the right-hand panels of Figure 10.2 show the partisan polarization in racial group views, relying on my two different measurement strategies. Panel B shows the partisan difference in ratings of blacks and of whites; panel D presents the parallel differences in ratings of civil rights leaders and in racial sympathy.

Panel B shows moderate and relatively stable polarization in views of blacks and whites. Before 2008, the difference hovers between five and eight points. In 2008, the partisan difference climbs to about ten degrees, then to 12 degrees in 2012 and 15 degrees in 2016. This is consistent with the findings of many other scholars that the election of Barack Obama, and his administration, heralded an increase in the partisan political salience of race that continued into the Trump era (Kinder and Dale-Riddle, 2012; Tesler and Sears, 2010). The suspicion that this measure underestimates the *level* of polarization is con-



Source: ANES (2018).

Figure 10.2 Polarization in views of groups among party members

firmed in panel D of Figure 10.2, which presents partisan polarization using my alternate racial measures. Through 1988, polarization in feelings toward civil rights leaders is of relatively stable, albeit at a notably higher *level* than in panel B, with differences of about 10 degrees. From 1986, racial sympathy shows moderately increasing polarization through the 1980s and 1990s, followed by sharp increases in 2012 and 2016. It is worth noting that although partisan polarization on this measure dropped somewhat in 2008 relative to 2004, this did not reflect even a momentary flowering of racial sympathy in the electorate. Rather, it reflected an *drop* in racial sympathy among Democratic identifiers.¹² More broadly, while partisan differences in thermometer ratings of blacks and of whites were relatively steady, the metric of racial sympathy shows sharply increasing polarization between the parties on matters of race. By this measure the political salience of race started increasing in the 1980s, and the Obama years simply continue the trend.

I turn now to partisan polarization on matters of gender. Although *levels* of racial resentment are not directly comparable with the thermometer scores of feminists and the women's movement, the story each tells about partisan polarization is the same. Over several decades, Americans who identify with the two parties have grown steadily apart in their views on gender, just as they have on race. Polarization on both gender and race reached a peak in 2016, but in both cases those sharp differences are the culmination of longstanding trends in American politics.

Finally, turning to social class and the realm of economics, panel C of Figure 10.2 presents the partisan differences in ratings of class-based groups. The underlying measure is the difference in a respondent's rating of labor unions and big business. The figure shows the partisan differences in this rating; it indicates that Democrats are consistently more positive toward labor (and more negative toward business) than are Republicans. The partisan polarization here is very large and relatively stable: from 1970 through 2002 the parties differ by 20 to 25 degrees. This increases to the upper 20s in 2004 and 2008, then to almost 40 degrees in 2012. In 2016, it drops to a still-extreme 30 degrees, perhaps reflecting Trump's appeal among some white working-class voters.¹³

In sum, in all three areas—gender, race, and class—partisan polarization has increased sharply over the past 16 years. For gender and race, it is at its highest levels in 2016; for class, the peak was in 2012. Class-based polarization has been at a high level since the 1970s, with notable recent increases. Polarization in views on race looks less sharp in the 1970s and 1980s, but then increases dramatically beginning in the 1990s. Finally, partisan polarization in gender views has been generally increasing since the 1970s, although it dips somewhat in the 2000s before rebounding sharply since 2008.

Impact of Group Attitudes on Partisan Views, Partisanship, and Voting

In the last section, I demonstrated that Americans who identify with the two parties have grown increasingly polarized in their views about group that symbolize and represent gender-, race-, and class-based competition in American politics. In this final empirical section, I take up directly the question of the impact of these group views on Americans' evaluations of the parties. In order to do so, I estimate a series of regression models—one per year—that estimate the impact of attitudes toward each group, controlling for the simultaneous effects of the others. This analysis contributes two things beyond those that have come before. First, by estimating the impact of group-based views on partisan evaluation simultaneously, the regression model quantifies the impact of each group view, above and beyond the impact of the others. And second, this model includes all respondents, not simply those that identify with one party or the other.

For this analysis, my dependent variable is the individual-level evaluation of the parties, operationalized as the difference between a respondent's thermometer rating of Democrats and of Republicans.¹⁴ Separately for each year, I estimate the following model:

$$\text{Affective polarization} = b_0 + b_1[\text{Gender-group affect}] + b_2[\text{Racial-group affect}] + b_3[\text{Class-group affect}] + b_4[\text{Respondent female}] + b_5[\text{Respondent African American}] + b_6[\text{Respondent Latinx}] + b_7[\text{Respondent other non-white race}]$$

The gender-group affect variable is the thermometer rating of the women's movement or of feminists, as available,¹⁵ and class-group affect is the thermometer rating of labor unions minus the thermometer rating of big business. For racial-group affect, I use each of my two measures in turn: first the thermometer rating of blacks minus the thermometer rating of whites; and then the combination of thermometer rating of civil rights leaders and racial sympathy. The four respondent variables are indicators (0/1) for respondents who are female, African American, Latinx, or other/mixed race, respectively.¹⁶

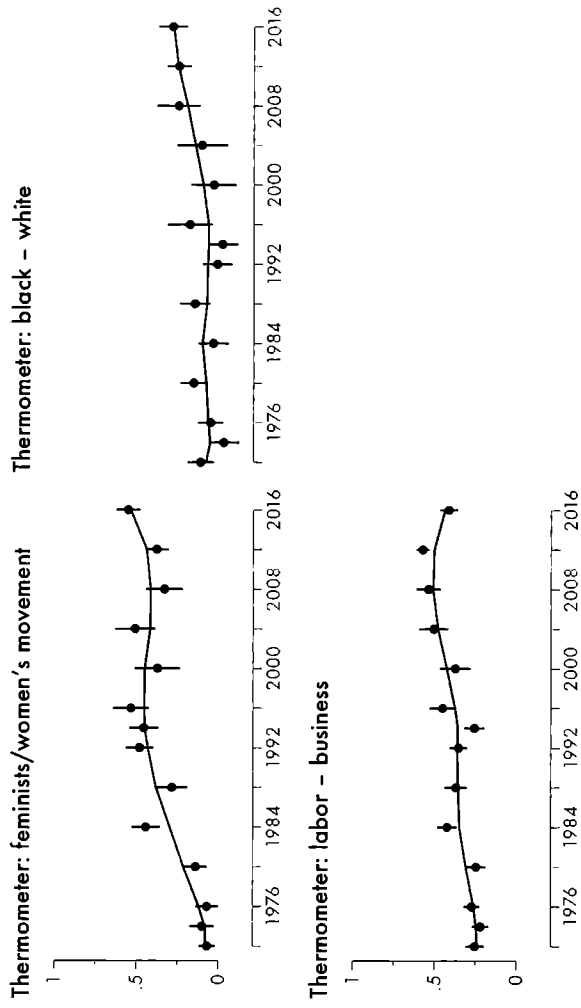
The dependent variable—the partisan evaluation difference—is rescaled to run from -1 to $+1$, with higher values corresponding to more positive Democratic evaluations and more negative Republican evaluations. For the independent variables, higher values correspond to warmer evaluations of the women's movement or feminists; warmer evaluations of blacks (and colder of whites); warmer evaluations of civil rights leaders; higher levels of racial sympathy; and warmer evaluations of labor unions (and colder of big business). The thermometer difference variables are constructed from these 0–1 coded variables, and so run from -1 to $+1$. The estimated coefficients indicate the

impact on the dependent variable of a one-point change in each independent variable.

Figure 10.3 shows the results for the model that uses as its measure of racial affect the thermometer ratings of blacks and whites. The top-left panel of the figure shows the estimated impact on relative party evaluations of respondents' views of the women's movement and/or feminists. For example, in 1980, the impact of the women's movement thermometer rating on relative party evaluations is 0.138 ($p < 0.01$). This means that if we compare a respondent who rates the women's movement at 100 degrees with one who rates it at 0 degrees, they will be 13.8 degrees higher on the party difference evaluation, holding constant racial and class evaluations. Surveying the trend, we see that evaluations of the women's movement and/or feminists has very little effect on evaluations of the parties in the 1970s. This changes, with the impact growing quickly through the 1980s and holding steady through the 1990s. It then drops slightly in 2008 and 2012, before peaking in 2016 with a regression coefficient of 0.552. The trajectory of these effects makes sense given the gender politics across this era: evaluations of the women's movement had little impact on partisan ratings in the 1970s ($b = 0.07$ to 0.10), before the second-wave feminist movement (and the Christian right backlash) became incorporated into the party coalitions. This changed in 1980 ($b = 0.138$, $p < 0.01$), when the Republican platform first opposed the ERA. The association between views of feminism and partisan evaluations grew through the 1980s and early 1990s, as the Republican Party adopted the gender agenda of the Christian right through the Reagan and Bush administrations. It is notable that views on feminism were particularly tightly connected with partisan evaluations in 1984, the year that the Democratic Party nominated Geraldine Ferraro for Vice-President, which sent a clear signal about the growing differences between the parties on gender issues and feminism. This association between views on feminism and the parties declined substantially in 2008, perhaps a result of Hillary Clinton's loss in the highly-contested Democratic primary race (e.g., McThomas and Tesler, 2016). In any case, this association then increased again in 2016, to 0.552 ($p < 0.01$).

The second panel, on the upper-right, shows that affective racial evaluations (the difference between ratings of blacks and of whites) had a rather modest impact on partisan evaluations through 2004, after which it increased in magnitude, ending with a coefficient of 0.285 in 2016 ($p < 0.01$). This means that in 2016, a respondent who evaluates blacks at 100 and whites at zero will have a party rating difference of about 28.5 degrees warmer toward the Democrats (and/or colder toward Republicans) compared with a respondent who rates the two racial groups equally.

Feelings about labor and big business have been strongly, and increasingly, associated with evaluations of the parties. This association has grown slowly



Note: OLS regression coefficients, with 95% confidence intervals; model includes controls for respondent gender and race.
Source: ANES (2018).

Figure 10.3 Impact of group views on party thermometer rating difference (model 1)

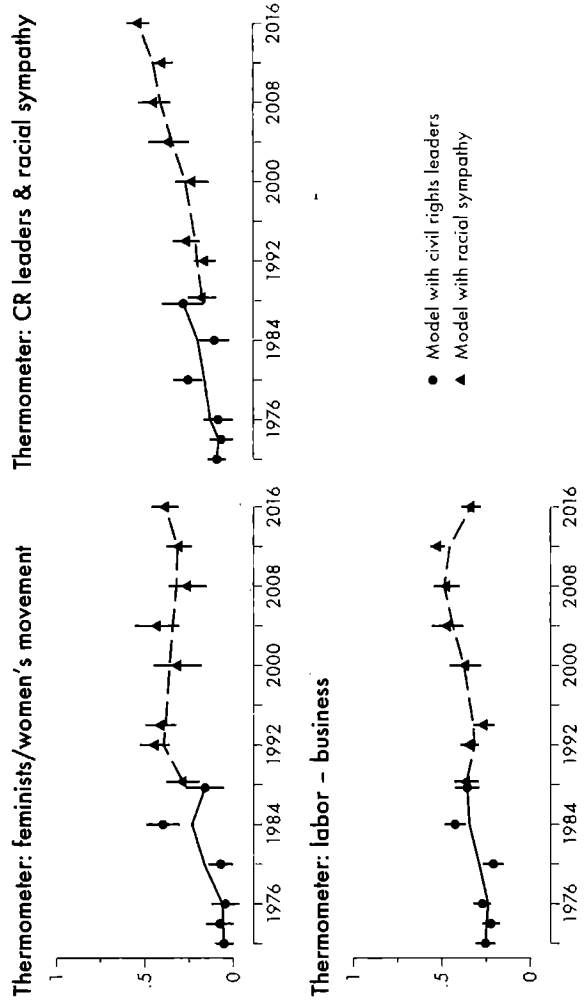
but steadily from about 0.25 in the 1970s to about 0.50 in recent presidential election years. While the impact of class-based views on partisan evaluations are quite strong in 2016—the regression coefficient is 0.415—it is notable that this association is weaker than that between party evaluations and gender groups, and also weaker than it was in 2012, when the coefficient was 0.574. This pattern is consistent with other work demonstrating that although economic considerations have structured partisan evaluations throughout the post-World War II era (Bartels, 2006), they were not especially or uniquely powerful in 2016 (Schaffner et al., 2018; Winter, 2018).

The thermometer-rating measure likely underestimates the impact of racial attitudes, so in Figure 10.4 I present analogous models that replaces that rating with the combination of ratings of civil rights leaders and the racial sympathy scale. This measure does a better job of assessing the full impact of racial attitudes, at the cost of less direct comparability over time and with the other measures after 1988. In these models, we observe a more robust impact of racial considerations on party evaluations, and one that increases steadily and relatively continually from the 1970s through 2016. Including this more robust racial measure decreases somewhat the estimated impact of both class and gender evaluations, though in these models both remain substantial and follow the same trajectory over time.

In sum, by 2016, Americans' evaluations of the political are rooted in considerations of gender and of race to an extent not previously seen since at least 1970. Despite this, 2016 represents the culmination of longstanding trends in which the images of the parties have been increasingly linked with gender and race, on top of their relatively steady class basis. Race-group affect, variously measured, has been an important force on party evaluations since the 1970s, with notably increasing impact since 2000. Gender-group affect came to prominence as a factor in party evaluations by the 1980s, and has remained significant ever since. And class has been a powerful force as well. In 2016, the impact of race and gender affect grew, and that of class affect fell somewhat.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2016, we observe the strongest connections since 1970 between feelings about the parties and about both racial and gendered political groups. Feelings about class-based groups loom large as well, though somewhat less in 2016 than 2012. While 2016 is extreme in this regard, it is not an aberration: rather, it represents the culmination of long-developing trends. These trends—in concert with parallel elite-level polarization—present serious challenges to policy-making in general, and to policies aimed at empowering historically excluded citizens in particular.



Note: OLS regression coefficients, with 95% confidence intervals; model includes controls for respondent gender and race.
Source: ANES (2018).

Figure 10.4 Impact of group views of party thermometer rating difference (model 2)

When parties are polarized, divided by fundamental questions of identity, and roughly evenly balanced in mass support, bipartisan action in the style of mid-century Washington is difficult or impossible. In this environment, citizens view any policy in terms of its real or symbolic impact on racial groups, on rich and poor, and on the social structure of gender. This allows polarized voices within each party to demonize their opponents, and many political leaders play to this polarization as a strategy to grow their own stature; this makes it nearly impossible to forge meaningful bipartisan reform. But 1950s-style bipartisan policy-making may not be the most likely—or even realistic—path to sustained reform of entrenched, ascriptive systems of power and hierarchy. In fact, that bipartisanship, arguably, was built on a foundation of racial (and gender) exclusion (Kalb and Kuo, 2018).

From another perspective, if we are to address entrenched hierarchies, we must first get them onto the agenda in clear terms. The increasing linkage between partisan support and views on race, gender and class allow—and even require—the parties to stake distinct positions on these issues, making it clearer where everyone stands. To be a Democrat is to be progressive with respect to questions of gender, race and class, and vice versa; my analyses imply that voters are increasingly aware of what they are going to get on these issues from each party. For a liberal egalitarian, who views systems of racial (and other) oppression as central to American political economy since the Founding, this clarification of partisanship is probably crucial to building sustained support for real change. Only if and when Democrats can claim a clear political mandate for a platform of structural change will we see major reforms to address these inequalities.¹⁷

If all this is true, then it means that the “space” to create public interest-based politics based on shared regard for the common good is vanishingly thin at the national level, or maybe just vanished. If so, it is all the more important to consider the Barnes/Williamson proposition in Chapter 2 of this book that it is more possible to build a politics of inclusive community at the local level that is not defined by hyper-partisan conflict, and look to local communities as the most likely place to build strong coalitions favoring community wealth building. So while the future remains uncertain, it’s important to build as many positive examples of community wealth building-type initiatives as possible at local and state scales, both because they are probably easier to advance now than major federal reform and because they may prove instructive to future national reform efforts.

NOTES

1. Supplemental figures and statistical analyses for this chapter are in an online appendix, available at <https://www.nicholasjgwinter.com/assets/papers/WinterCWBAppendix.pdf>.
2. On the broader difficulties inherent in conceptualizing women (or men) as a coherent, cohesive political group, see Young (1994).
3. See, however, Schickler (2016), who argues that party change on civil rights began earlier and was driven by ordinary citizens and state-level party officials, not national party elites.
4. With minor variation over the years, the full question wording is “We’d like to get your feelings about some groups in American society. When I read the name of a group, we’d like you to rate it with what we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don’t feel favorably towards the group and that you don’t care too much for that group. If you don’t feel particularly warm or cold toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees. If we come to a group you don’t know much about, just tell me and we’ll move on to the next one.”
5. This categorization is based on the standard ANES party identification question, which asks, “Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”
6. The wording change matters a little for evaluations of the out-party. In the years when both were asked, Democrats and Republicans are equally positive toward both co-partisans (the solid plotting symbols) and their own party itself (the hollow symbols). People rate the opposing *party* lower than *out-partisans* by about five points. Thus, by asking about partisans rather than the party, we observe less affective polarization. Nevertheless, both measures show the same trend of increasing polarization. It is unfortunate that the question about partisans does not appear in more recent studies, as it would be interesting to learn whether Americans continue to draw this distinction between the out-party and its partisans in this more polarized era.
7. The online appendix has tables with the numbers underlying the figures.
8. ANES cumulative file variables VCF0253 and VCF0225, respectively. The latter item asked respondents to rate “the women’s liberation movement” from 1972 through 1984, and then “the women’s movement” from 1986 through 2000.
9. My racial sympathy measure is simply the reverse-scored version of racial resentment.
10. This figure is analogous to the difference scores plotted at the bottom of Figure 10.1.
11. Democrats’ ratings averaged 63 degrees in 1984, compared with Republicans’ average of 51 degrees. The online appendix includes plots showing the average ratings by members of each party that underlie these differences.
12. In 2008, racial sympathy dropped among members of both parties, with an especially sharp decrease among Democrats. It then held steady in 2012 among Democrats, while continuing to drop among Republicans. In 2016, racial sympathy increased dramatically among Democrats and increased moderately among Republicans, leading to the largest polarization in the series.

13. Interestingly, and consistent with this interpretation, the decline in economic polarization in 2016 was driven by Republicans growing substantially warmer toward unions.
14. I use ANES items about partisans (“Democrats” and “Republicans”) and about parties (“Democratic Party” and Republican Party”); in years where both were asked, I average them.
15. I average the two ratings when both are available.
16. The results are very similar in models restricted to white respondents and in models run separately among men and women. See the online appendix.
17. Many have argued that demographic destiny favors the long-run success of such a Democratic party (e.g., Judis and Teixeira, 2004). In the meantime, however, Donald Trump’s success illustrates the power of backlash among those at the top of the historic hierarchies, and of Republican strategies to undermine voting rights (Hayter, this volume).

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