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Divided by Identity on the Left? Partisan Spillover and Identity Politics Alignment

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Abstract: It has often been stated that in the United States the left tends to be less united than the right on issues related to identity politics such as race, gender, and religion. This article presents evidence that this asymmetry in partisan alignment over identity politics is changing over time. Looking at various measures of public opinion shows that the left's agreement on issues related to identity politics has either caught up with the right or that the gap is diminishing. The article considers various possible explanations for unity on these issues – including personality distribution, party homogeneity, and message infrastructure – and shows that partisan spillover in the context of polarization helps explain the closing of the gap in unity between the right and the left. In an era of polarization, Democratic affiliation induces warmer feeling toward stigmatized coalition partners. Groups that may have joined the Democratic party on a single group interest claim (race, gender, religion, class) will gradually move toward greater acceptance of other group interest claims supported by the party. These findings have implications for the oft-stated strategic claim that the left needs to focus on class redistribution over identity politics if the left does not want to be fractured.

Keywords: asymmetric polarization, identity politics, partisan asymmetry, partisan spillover

Research and popular perception suggest that the left in the United States is more divided than the right on issues of race, gender, and religion – what many now refer to as “identity politics.” For instance, the Democratic party has been called a party of a “multiplicity of interests” (Acheson 1955, 25), “a coalition of diverse overlapping minorities” (Axelrod 1972, 13), a “mosaic of interests” (Polsby 2009, 20), and a “pluralistic” party with “multiple power centers that compete” (Freeman 1986, 329). By contrast, the Republican party has been described as “bound together much more by ideological agreement”; “much more likely to think more or less alike about public policy” (Polsby 1983, 85; Polsby 2009, 20); and a “unitary party” in which “activists are expected to be ‘good soldiers,’ and competing loyalties are frowned upon” (Freeman 1986, 329).

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There have been several attempts to verify these observations about the relative unity of the two parties. Mayer (1996, 73, 100–7) documented how Democratic voters are less ideologically unified than Republicans on a variety of issues. Grossman (2012, 81–2) found that, excluding business interests, liberal interest groups are more scattered than conservative interest groups, with liberal single-issue and ideological advocacy groups outnumbering conservative groups three to one. Grossman and Hopkins (2016, ch. 2) marshal a variety of evidence to characterize the Republican party as more ideological and the Democratic party as more oriented toward rewarding particularistic group interests. More recently, Mason and Wronski (2018, 267, 270) find party asymmetry in what they call social sorting, with Republicans on average feeling closer to the groups typically associated with the Republican party (Whites, Christians, and conservatives) compared with how close Democrats feel to groups associated with the Democratic party (Black, Hispanics, atheists, and liberals).

This article focuses on divisions within the left and right at the mass level, and uses the term identity politics (hereafter IP) alignment to describe the level of agreement on race, gender, religious, and class issues. What has been the trend in IP alignment on the right and left? Three theories – party homogeneity, personality distribution, and conservative message infrastructure – predict continued asymmetric IP alignment. The article proposes a mechanism, party spillover, that predicts the left catching up to the right in IP alignment. The empirical analysis makes two contributions. First, the article shows that on at least some measures, the gap in IP alignment is decreasing, contrary to the conventional view of the divided left. The second contribution of the paper is demonstrating that partisan spillover helps account for this unexpected increase in IP alignment on the left. These findings have implications for the oft-stated strategic claim that the left needs to focus on class redistribution issues over IP issues if the left does not want to be fractured.

1 Theories of Asymmetric IP Alignment

When it comes to analyzing the potential divisions within the left and the right in the United States at the mass level, there is good reason to focus on IP alignment rather than alignment on issues like taxes, the environment, or healthcare. On issues not associated with IP, the left may actually be more united because of the finding that on economic issues, the public tilts left (Drutman 2017). Mass public opinion also tends to be operationally liberal but symbolically conservative (Ellis and Stimson 2012), so it would be more likely for the left to be better aligned on “operationally liberal” issues.

The idea that the left is divided by IP is often found in popular discourse. African American feminists associated with the Combahee River Collective in the 1970s (Combahee River Collective 1995) were one of the first to use the term IP. The term originally meant highlighting specific forms of oppression that African American women faced from multiple systems of power. IP called for attention to group-specific disadvantages while also paying attention to more encompassing systems of power that affect other groups (Collins 2019, 137–8). However, the term's use in popular discourse often contrasted a supposed “narrow” IP with a supposedly more universalistic and inclusionary politics. On the right, this took the form of IP opposing “color-blindness” and individualism (King and Smith 2011). On the left, works like Gitlin (1995) and Lilla (2017) argued that IP detracted from either class politics or more general liberal ideals.

Others have critiqued how contemporary portrayals of IP draw too much of a distinction between the particular and universal, contrary to its original formulation by African American feminists (Collins 2019, 97). Still, while IP theoretically calls for identification both inside and outside one's groups, there is reason to believe that this is difficult to do in practice. While it has been sometimes theorized that groups that face institutionalized disadvantage might be able to better empathize with other groups' history of disadvantage, research on this question has been mixed. Some studies find greater identification among disadvantaged groups (Craig and Richeson 2012) while others find that prompting one group's disadvantages might actually stimulate a sense of zero-sum group conflict and less empathy for other disadvantaged groups (Craig and Richeson 2014; Craig et al. 2012).

In short, there is a prominent, recurring narrative that the left is divided by IP, buttressed by some of the research cited earlier (Mayer 1996; Grossman 2012; Grossman and Hopkins 2016; Mason and Wronski 2018). On the other hand, one might wonder why the right is not similarly divided by IP, given that the right is composed of different factions of evangelicals, pro-business conservatives, libertarians, traditionalists, pro-defense nationalists, and White nationalists. In the existing literature, there are three likely candidates that predict asymmetric IP alignment between the parties: party homogeneity, personality, and institutional messaging structure.

One common explanation for differences in the unity of the left and the right is that the Republican party is the more homogeneous party, particularly in regards to race and religion (Galvin 2010, 8; Mayer 1996, 100–7; Mason and Wronski 2018, 270). For instance in 2008, non-Hispanic Whites were roughly 90 percent of Republican identifiers, compared to only about 60 percent of Democratic identifiers (Newport 2013). The Republican party is also more homogeneous in religion. Non-Christians such as Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and nonbelievers skew heavily in favor of the Democratic party, whereas Christians predominate in the Republican party (Lipka 2016). The difference between the parties becomes starker when looking

simultaneously at race and religion. About 73% of Republican identifiers are White Christians, compared with 29% of Democratic identifiers (Ingraham 2017). Race and religion are significant predictors of political attitudes, and they are simultaneously connected with opinions on class and gender, since poverty is often associated with race and gender (Gilens 1999, 67–79; Hancock 2004, ch. 2). Gender is also often connected to religion through attitudes on abortion, contraception, and the role of women in the household. Hence, one would expect a wider distribution of views on IP in the party that is more racially and religiously diverse, making it harder for the coalition to bridge those divides and come to agreement on a consistent ideology. Racial minority groups and nonbelievers have continued to grow in the first two decades of the 21st century, and these groups continue to strongly associate with the Democratic party (Pew Research Center 2016, 7), so trends in demographic diversity would predict continued asymmetric IP alignment today.

A second explanation for asymmetric alignment could be personality distribution. A tendency for attitudes on race, gender, religion, and class to go together may be a reflection of personality traits that predict attitudes towards outsiders, novelty, normalcy, and/or hierarchy. For instance, supposing there is a personality type that has a strong aversion against strangeness and the abnormal, this personality orientation may be predisposed to similar political attitudes in race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and class. Outgroups can be racial (Blacks, Latinos, Asians), religious (Jews, Muslims, atheists), sexual (gay and lesbian), gendered (feminists as abnormal), or even expressed in terms of class, as the poor may be seen as a deviants compared to the middle class, or because particular racial or religious minorities may be overrepresented among the poor.

Researchers have proposed a variety of potential personality types organized around attitudes toward outsiders, novelty, normalcy, and hierarchy. Advocates of contemporary “biopolitics research” (Faulkner et al. 2004; Aaroe, Petersen, and Arce-neaux 2017) argue that orientations to outsiders stem from feelings of disgust selected through evolution to avoid germs and disease. Hetherington and Weiler (2018) describe what they call fixed versus fluid worldviews, with fixed worldviews preferring hierarchy and order to manage potential threats emanating from those who break from racial, gender, religious, or class norms (Hetherington and Weiler 2018, 17–18, 33–4, 38–55).

Personality approaches could explain asymmetric IP alignment in the United States. Hetherington and Weiler (2018, 18) report that 42 percent of the population have a mostly fixed worldview while 32 percent of the population have a mostly fluid worldview. They also report that those in the middle who are partially fixed and fluid tend to have issue positions closer to the fixed (164–5). The greater proportion of the population with fixed worldviews or sympathetic to that worldview may then translate into a greater proportion of the population with simultaneous negative views of racial and religious minorities, feminists, and the poor. Hetherington and

Weiler (2018, 23) note that during the Trump presidency fixed and fluid worldviews have concentrated in the Republican and Democratic parties respectively to a much greater degree than in the 1990s. Although the trend of the fluid identifying with the Democratic party should help left IP alignment, the simultaneous trend of the fixed moving into the Republican party, coupled with the numerical advantage of fixed personalities, should still lead to asymmetry in IP alignment.

A third explanation for asymmetrical IP alignment focuses on differences in the institutional infrastructure for policy and idea entrepreneurship on the left and right. It may be the case that organized institutional activists on the right have more resources and are more centralized, thus allowing them to promote a much more coherent ideological package than the left. Academics and left activists have noted a disparity in institutional infrastructure for ideological development (Grossman and Hopkins 2016, 75–102; Payne 2008, 13–4). The conservative message infrastructure includes: think tanks; conservative journals; broadcast television and radio; legal advocacy groups; the backing of billionaire family foundations; and organizations to promote legislation across states (Payne 2008, 31–40).

By contrast liberals may have a harder time uniting, in part because bridging institutions like unions have been disappearing. Instead, the left has tended to organize around single-interest groups (Grossman 2012, 81–2). Liberals have attempted to organize broader progressive infrastructure to match this conservative infrastructure, but these efforts appear to have fallen short. Comparing the Koch network to the left-oriented Democracy Alliance, Skocpol (2016) found the Democracy Alliance remains significantly weaker and less centralized. A comparison of cross-state policy advocacy groups on the left and right shows that not only have the networks on the right existed longer, they are also better funded and more centralized (Hertel-Fernandez 2016, 461–5). Benkler, Farris and Roberts (2018, 54–6) look directly at message dissemination on the left and right online, and their study shows that the media system on the right is more concentrated and insular. Given this institutional concentration, one might expect greater message discipline and unity on the right than on the left. Better IP alignment on the right may simply reflect a media ecology in which the right is exposed to more centralized and unified sources.

2 Toward Partisan Symmetry: Party Polarization and IP Polarization

While the above factors show why the right may be more united on IP issues, one factor that may help IP alignment on the left catch up to that of the right is partisan identity. Polarization has continually increased since the mid-20th century in

American politics, making party identity increasingly salient over time. Since party identity is one of the fundamental group identities in the United States, there may be a greater inclination of existing party members to match their issue positions with their party's positions and against the opposition party, leading to eventual greater IP alignment on the left.

An enduring tradition in public opinion sees group identities such as race, gender, and religion as shaping public opinion (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002, 4–5; Achen and Bartels 2016, 3, chs. 8–9). Partisan identity is also a significant group identity. Iyengar and Westwood (2014) for instance find that in judgments of scholarship eligibility, partisan bias is actually stronger than racial bias. Many studies show that partisan cues can shape in-group party members' opinion (Levendusky 2009; Lenz 2012; Druckman, Peterson, Slothuus 2013). If party elites have become increasingly polarized and if voters rely on partisan cues to form their opinions, then one would predict that as polarization increases, partisan voters will shift their attitudes to match. In other words, partisan attachment “spills over” into other facets of public opinion.

This spillover effect has been documented in other dimensions. For instance, Tesler (2016, chs. 4–5) has argued that racial biases can spill over into other issue domains. Individuals hostile to Obama because of his race oppose other things associated with Obama that have nothing to do with race, such as healthcare policy or the breed of dog chosen by the Obamas as their family pet. This spillover effect may also work in the reverse direction. Attachment to the Democratic party and/or aversion to the Republican party may lead Democratic supporters to align their attitudes on race to better match that of their party. As evidence of this effect, several studies have documented that in recent years White Democrats have become significantly racially liberalized (Engelhardt 2019; McElwee 2018; Goldberg 2019). Some studies have shown that party identification has contributed to this change in racial attitudes on the left (Engelhardt 2020) and the effect may be stronger on issues the public has not had time to form opinions, such as sanctuary cities (Collingwood, O'Brien, and J. R. Tafoya 2020).

Historically spillover within parties has not always happened. Gin (2017, 76–82) has pointed out the example of the Catholic–Southerner coalition in the Democratic party in the middle of the 20th century. Despite being committed to the Democratic party, White southerners remained hostile to Catholics. One difference between now and then is that polarization has deepened since the mid-20th century, making ideological consistency within the parties more common. Party elites and platforms are more well sorted in IP terms, with Democrats and Republicans strongly associated with opposing positions on race (Carmines and Stimson 1989), gender (Wolbrecht 2000), and religion (Margolis 2018). As the distance between

Democrats and Republicans increases, party positions should play a larger role in individual's stances on issues.

The most straightforward way in which spillover can occur is through the cues of party elites. A Democratic leader signals a position on race, gender, or sexual orientation, and Democratic identifiers may be more likely to adopt that position. Negative cues – i.e. defining oneself against the publicly declared stances of outgroup party elites – may also be particularly effective in the United States, given the constraint of the two-party system (Nicholson 2012). Cues can also come from social movements (Gillion 2020), as movements like Black Lives Matters get interpreted by the media, political entrepreneurs, and the mass public as part of a larger story about the differences between Democrats and Republicans.

With polarization, party spillover effects on race, gender, religion, and class should increase the level of IP alignment. Adherents to the Democratic party may have been initially attracted to the party by specific group-interest claims based solely on either race, gender, class, or religion, as Grossman and Hopkins (2016) have argued has been the main tendency of the left. Once identifying as Democrats, however, the effect of polarization in increasing the salience of party identity may lead those who initially sorted into the Democratic party on one or two group interest claims to be persuaded to adopt positions supporting other group interest claims – the party spillover effect as outlined above. This same process would have less an effect on Republican IP alignment, since they may have already been substantially aligned because of homogeneity, personality distribution, and messaging infrastructure. Hence, polarization and the partisan spillover effect may lead to the left catching up on IP alignment as time passes, in contrast to what theories of asymmetrical IP alignment predict.

2.1 Study 1. What Is the Trend in IP Alignment in the Mass Public?

To look at IP alignment over time and test whether different explanations explain the trend, I look at a variety of affective and policy measures. I first look at an affective measure in the American National Election Studies (ANES) Cumulative File. The ANES consistently asks a series of feeling thermometer questions related to a variety of groups – Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, feminists, the poor, fundamentalists, gays, Jews, Muslims, people on welfare, and illegal aliens. This captures affective attitudes to groups on race, gender, religion, and class dimensions. The feeling thermometer scores are scaled 0 to 100, with 50 explicitly defined as neutral. Anything over 50 is a positive evaluation, while anything under 50 is a negative evaluation. In terms of IP alignment, the following would count as IP alignment on the left: positive evaluations for groups typically associated as Democratic constituents (Blacks, Hispanics,

Asians, feminists, Jews, Muslims, the poor, people on welfare, and illegal aliens) and negative evaluations for constituent groups perceived as Republican (fundamentalists). The opposite would count for IP alignment on the right.

The top section of Table 1 shows average feeling thermometer scores by Democratic and Republican affiliation for the periods 1998 to 2006, and 2008 to 2016. From 2008 to 2016, the average feeling thermometer for Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, and poor people are well over 50 for both Democrats and Republicans. Looking at just these thermometers, there would be no grounds for calling Democrats less unified. Republicans are favorably rating groups that are not typically associated with the Republican party, so if anything, it is Republicans who are more divided. There are some thermometers in which there is a partisan split, with the average for one party above 50 and the average for the other party below 50 in the expected directions. These include the thermometers for feminists, fundamentalists, gays, people on welfare, and Muslims. For feminists, gays, and people on welfare, the Democratic distance from the neutral score of 50 is larger than the Republican distance from 50 – that is, Democrats are warmer to these constituent groups than Republicans are colder. Only for Muslims and fundamentalists might it be said that Democrat “feeling” is less intense than Republican feeling, with Republican distance from 50 greater than Democratic distance from 50. The only thermometer that is below 50 for both Democrats and Republicans is the thermometer for illegal aliens. So only with respect to fundamentalists, Muslims, and illegal aliens could Democrats be described as potentially lagging behind Republicans.

Switching focus to change over time, the change in Democratic thermometer scores over the two time periods is greater in the liberal direction than the change in Republican thermometer scores in the conservative direction for all of the thermometers except for Muslims and the two thermometers that deal with non-IP groups (i.e. poor and environmentalists). The last two lines of the first part of Table 1 show the average change by party for all thermometers except the gay and environmentalist thermometers. I exclude the thermometer for gays since it may be an outlier in that it has experienced the most dramatic positive change in the liberal direction for both Democrats and Republicans over the past 30 years. I also exclude the environmentalist thermometer from the average since it is not related to IP. The summary shows that the change for Democrats in the liberal direction is greater than for Republicans in the conservative direction, which is consistent with partisan spillover leading to a trend of greater IP unity.

As a harder test, I convert the thermometer ratings to z-scores to look at dispersion around the average in each survey year. If the right is really more united than the left, one would expect more extreme views in the tail of the distribution associated with right-leaning opinion than the tail of the distribution associated with left-leaning opinion. Looking at z-scores by year takes out of consideration

Table 1: Feeling thermometer average by party ID/z-score threshold and race, 1988–2006 and 2008–16.

		Feeling thermometer average by party ID					
		Whites only			All races		
		1988 to 2004	2008 to 2016	Change	1988 to 2004	2008 to 2016	Change
Black therm	Dem	64.3	67.9	3.6	68.8	71.7	2.9
	Rep	62.4	62.7	0.3	63.4	63.1	-0.3
Hispanic therm	Dem	60	65	5	63.5	68.8	5.3
	Rep	59.5	61.2	1.7	60.7	62.3	1.6
Feminist therm	Dem	59.1	62.3	3.2	59.6	62.2	1.6
	Rep	46.7	47.7	1	47.5	48.1	0.6
Fundamentalist	Dem	48	44.3	-3.7	52.8	50	-2.8
	Rep	56.3	58.7	2.4	57.1	58.9	1.8
Gay therm	Dem	44	60	16	44.3	58.4	14.1
	Rep	33.7	46	12.3	34.4	46.3	11.9
Poor therm	Dem	70.9	71.2	0.3	73	73.8	0.8
	Rep	67.2	68.6	1.4	68	69	1
Welfare therm	Dem	51.6	54.5	2.9	53.9	57.3	3.4
	Rep	46	48	2	46.8	48.3	1.5
Muslim therm	Dem	54.3	55	0.7	56.9	55.9	-1
	Rep	49.1	43.7	-5.4	50.3	44.5	-5.8
Illegal alien therm	Dem	35.5	42.8	7.3	39.5	47.6	8.1
	Rep	29.8	29.1	-0.7	31.4	30.7	-0.7
Environmentalist	Dem	72.1	69.7	-2.4	72.6	70.6	-2
	Rep	63.7	56	-7.7	64.5	56.4	-8.1
<i>Avg dem change (excluding gay/env; flip sign on fundamentalist therm)</i>				3.3			3.1
<i>Avg rep change (excluding gay/env; flip sign on fundamentalist therm)</i>				-0.3			-0.5

Thermometer average by z-score threshold of >0.5 (left) & <-0.5 (right)

		Thermometer average by z-score threshold of >0.5 (left) & <-0.5 (right)					
		Whites only			All races		
		1988 to 2004	2008 to 2016	Change	1988 to 2004	2008 to 2016	Change
Black therm	Left	88.7	39.7	1	89.9	90.6	0.7
	Right	45.6	47.3	1.7	45.6	47.3	1.7
Hispanic therm	Left	86.4	89.5	3.1	87.3	90.1	2.8
	Right	43.8	44.4	0.6	43.8	44.5	0.7
Feminist therm	Left	79	80.3	1.3	79.3	80.8	1.5
	Right	26.9	26.1	-0.8	26.5	25.5	-1
Fundamentalist	Left	23.8	20.9	-2.9	23.6	20.9	-2.7
	Right	81.8	83.1	1.3	82.5	83.5	1

Table 1: (continued)

		Whites only			All races		
		1988 to 2004	2008 to 2016	Change	1988 to 2004	2008 to 2016	Change
Gay therm	Left	71.5	84.1	12.6	72	84.4	12.4
	Right	6	11.2	5.2	5.9	10.7	4.8
Poor therm	Left	89.8	90.4	0.6	90.3	91	0.7
	Right	51.3	50.9	-0.4	51	50.7	-0.3
Welfare therm	Left	75.6	78.5	2.9	77	79.3	2.3
	Right	25.4	27.4	2	25.2	27.3	11
Muslim therm	Left	78.9	78.7	-0.2	79.5	78.6	-0.9
	Right	25	20	-5	25	20	-5
Illegal alien therm	Left	58.4	72.1	13.7	60.5	73.8	13.3
	Right	6.4	10.3	3.9	6.3	10.5	4.2
Environmentalist	Left	90.3	83.7	-1.6	90.6	89.2	-1.4
	Right	43	40.5	-2.5	43.4	41.3	-2.1
<i>Avg left change (excluding gay/env; flip sign on fund therm)</i>				3.2			2.9
<i>Avg right change (excluding gay/env; flip sign on fund therm)</i>				-0.1			0.2

thermostatic effects – i.e., the tendency of public opinion to track against the party that holds the presidency. Since the z-score is comparing the dispersion around the average for each survey year, the fact that the average changes thermostatically each year is irrelevant. Looking at z-scores also allows me to exclude party from the analysis to avoid the problem of sorting. One problem with looking at thermometer averages by party in cross-sectional data is that it does not take into account the possibility that people with positive evaluations of IP are sorting into the Democratic party while people with negative evaluations of IP are dropping out. Underlying mass opinion may not have changed, only the sorting of individuals into party. By looking at the average of those in the bottom and top of the thermometer distribution without including party in the analysis, the analysis excludes the possibility of partisan sorting and allows me to see whether there is actual change in mass public opinion and whether it is in the right or left tail that this change is occurring.

The bottom section of Table 1 looks at the average thermometer score of those with a z-score higher than 0.5 and less than -0.5. This is essentially the bottom 30% and top 30% of the distribution. The same story as above holds. On the left the average thermometer scores are generally farther from the neutral score of 50 than

the right for most thermometers (the exceptions being Muslims, illegal aliens, and fundamentalists). Looking at change over time also yields the same story as above. Comparing 1988–2006 to 2008–2016, there is greater change on the left than the right for most thermometers, the exceptions being Blacks, Muslims, and environmentalists. The last two lines of Table 1 shows the average for change in all thermometers in the left and right tails (again excluding the gay thermometer as an outlier and the environmentalist thermometer as non-IP-related). This shows a greater degree of change for the tail of the distribution associated with the left, rather than the right.

It still remains to be seen whether the left is aligned when looking at multiple thermometers simultaneously. I select the thermometers for Blacks, Hispanics, feminists, and the poor to look at simultaneously.¹ An individual is IP aligned in a given year if on at least three of the four thermometers they have a z-score at least half a standard deviation in the liberal or conservative direction.² For instance, positive z-scores greater than 0.5 on the Black, Hispanic, feminist, and poor thermometers would count as leaning liberal, and having a liberal opinion on at least three of these four thermometer scores would count as IP alignment on the left. This coding scheme gives a fairly easy interpretation to the resulting measure of those coded as 1—percent of the population that is IP aligned either on the left and right.

Pooling the data (Figure 1) allows a comparison of the trend in alignment before and after Obama became president. From 1988 to 2004, alignment on the right exceeds alignment on the left looking either at all races or just Whites. This would seem to confirm the standard narrative of a left divided by IP issues. However, from 2008 to 2016, left alignment overall is about the same as right alignment. Left alignment for Whites lags behind the right, but the gap has diminished over time.

These results complicate the narrative of a left divided by IP issues. On the left, higher levels of alignment of Blacks (Figure 1) is counteracting the lower alignment of Whites, so that overall differences between the left and right when all races are considered together are minimal by the Obama and Trump years. There is still some justification for calling the left more divided since the aggregate score conceals the difference between Whites and Blacks on the left. This is a greater problem for the left because Blacks are a much more substantial proportion of the left than the right. By comparison, Figure 1 shows that the religious (those defined

1 I omitted religion because the thermometer scores for fundamentalists and gays would favor left sorting here, but including an analysis of either gays or fundamentalists (Appendix 2, Supplementary Figures 1 and 2) does not change the patterns described in this article. I also include in the appendix an analysis of alignment based on blacks, feminists, and the two groups (people on welfare, illegal aliens) for which the left might be more split (Supplementary Figure 3).

2 I use z-score as a harder test of alignment, since looking at alignment based on whether the thermometer is above or below 50 would overwhelmingly favor liberal unity.

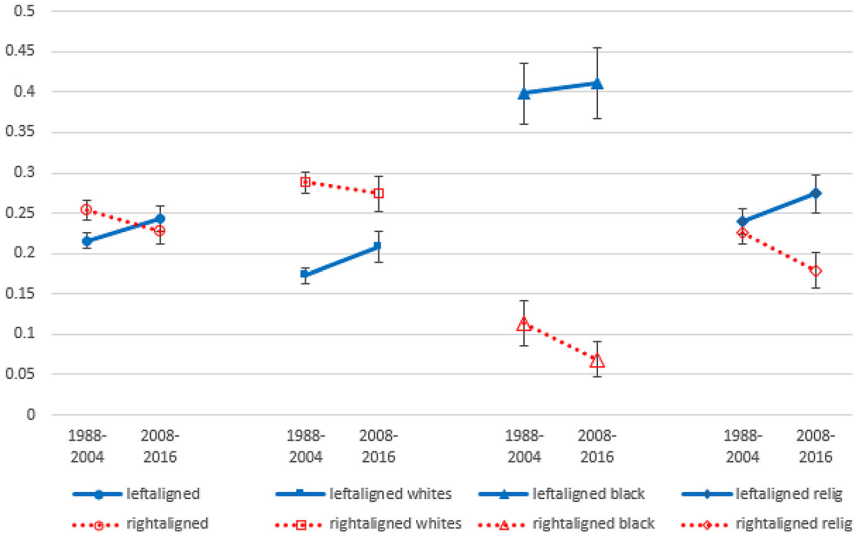


Figure 1: Aligned percentage: Black, feminist, Hispanic, poor thermometers (pooled, ANES).

as going to church at least once a month or more) on the right are slightly less aligned than everyone on the right, but this difference is not nearly as large as the difference between Blacks and Whites on the left. Still, the striking fact is that alignment of Whites on the left is increasing over time, so that the gap with Whites on the right has decreased.

These trends over time do not match up well with explanations of IP alignment that predict continued asymmetry. The proportions of fixed and fluid personalities in the population have not shifted significantly (see Appendix 2, Supplementary Figure 4). The left has become more racially and religiously diverse as time has passed. The left has also not caught up to the right in terms of message infrastructure according to Skocpol (2016) and Hertel-Fernandez (2016). The trend here also does not correspond to thermostatic effects. From 2008 to 2016, the entirety of the Obama administration, one would expect public opinion to have swung thermostatically against the liberal direction. The trend here is more consistent with the view that increasing polarization and partisan spillover has prompted higher levels of left alignment, especially among Whites on the left.

2.2 Study 2: Panel Analysis

Although the trend over time in the cross-sectional data is suggestive that partisan identity is causing left IP alignment to catch up, I further test the idea that

partisanship has motivated increasing IP unity on the left by looking at the Democracy Fund Views of the Electorate Research (VOTER) panel. The VOTER survey, conducted online by YouGov, started in 2012 with a nationally representative sample of adults. VOTER has re-polled these initial respondents, with 8000 respondents recontacted in 2016 and 5000 in 2017. With the VOTER panel data, the analysis below can look at the same individuals over time, see whether they are becoming more aligned, and tease out the factors that explain why someone who is initially unaligned in IP flips to aligned in the later time period.

I start with feeling thermometer measures in VOTER, then perform a second analysis looking at policy attitude measures. For the feeling thermometers, I look at z-scores as a harder test than just looking at the raw thermometer scores, since the average on most feeling thermometers are above 50. Judging whether one is left- or right-aligned by whether they are above or below 50 on the thermometer would massively favor left alignment. Looking at the z-score, I am instead using distance from the average as a measure of being on the left or right.

Figure 2a looks at the change in z-score on a variety of group feeling thermometers from 2012 to 2017, broken down by party identification in 2012. Self-identified Democrats in 2012 improved their z-scores five years later on feeling thermometers for Blacks, Hispanics/Latinos, Asians, gays/lesbians, Muslims, and Jews, while also feeling colder toward Christians. In comparison, both self-identified Republicans and those with no party identification in 2012 saw decreases five years later in their z-scores on feeling thermometers for groups thought of as Democratic constituent groups.

To analyze IP alignment on multiple thermometers simultaneously, I look at the subset of thermometers for Blacks, Latinos, gays/lesbians, and Muslims. Unfortunately, the thermometer for feminists was not asked in 2012, but the four thermometers used here do capture divisive IP issues related to race and religion in the contemporary era.³ As before, someone is on the left if their z-score on an individual thermometer is greater than 0.5, and they are on the right if their z-score is less than -0.5 . A person is coded as aligned on the left if their z-score is greater than 0.5 on at least three of these thermometers in a given year. A person is coded as aligned on the right if their z-score is less than -0.5 on at least three of the thermometers in a given year. Based on this measure, IP alignment for self-identified Democrats and Republicans in 2012 is about the same in 2012 and 2017 (see Figure 2b). In terms of change over time from 2012 to

³ I include the thermometer for gays in the analysis here since in this limited time frame, the scale of improvement for gays was similar for other groups (Figure 2a), where in the analysis looking from 1988 to 2016, the scale of improvement for gays was much bigger compared to other groups and might have too favorably contributed to left sorting.

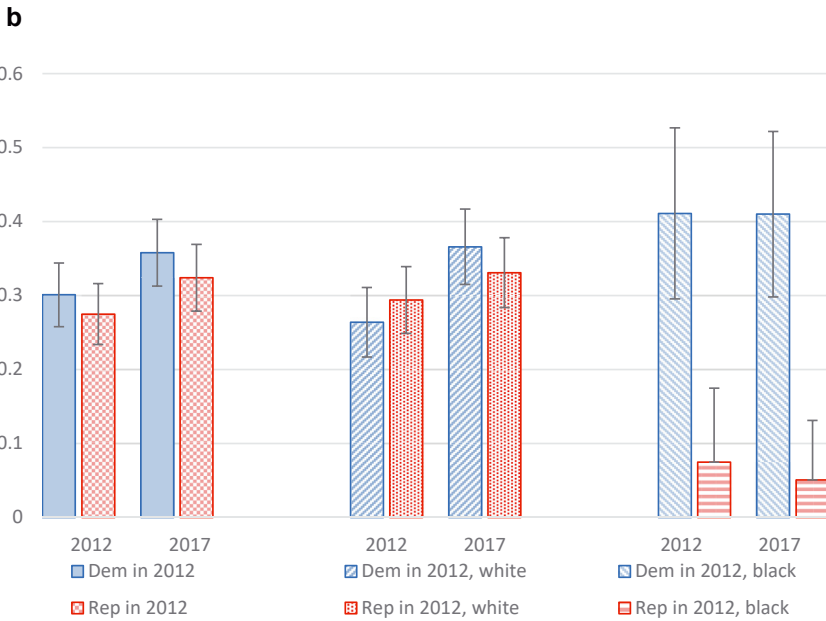
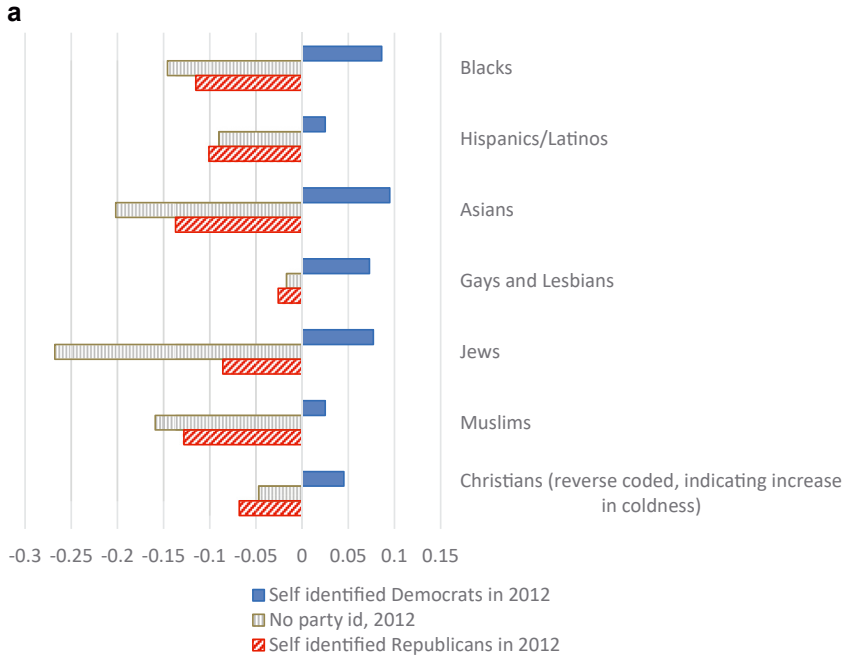


Figure 2: (a) Mean change in z-score 2012 to 2017, feeling thermometers (VOTER data).
 (b) Aligned percentage: Black, Hispanic, Muslim, gay thermometers (VOTER data).

2017, the only group for which there is significant improvement in alignment is White Democrats.

I employ a lagged regression to see which factors in 2012 are correlated with a change in alignment in 2017. The binary dependent variable is whether or not one is aligned on the left in 2017 in one regression (Table 2, column 1), and whether or not one is aligned on the right in 2017 in a separate regression (Table 2, column 2). Similar to Egan (2019), I include as an independent variable the value of alignment on the left and right in 2012. The inclusion of this lagged variable means that the regression can explain the change in alignment from 2012 to 2017 – that is, the newly aligned and unaligned in 2017.

I then include other independent variables from 2012 to test for the possibilities covered in the literature review section of this paper. I include variables for party and ideology in 2012 to test my main hypothesis that party spillover leads to improvements in alignment. I include racial dummies (African American, Latino, Asian, and other), which is relevant to understanding how much racial homogeneity within parties matters. Authoritarian/fixed personality is identified by the standard four questions on child rearing as defined by Hetherington and Weiler (2016; see Appendix for wording). Unfortunately, these questions were not asked in 2012, only in 2016. However, since personality is supposed to be a stable trait, the value in 2016 should be close to its value in 2012 for the same individuals in a panel.

Potential exposure to conservative/liberal infrastructure is measured by a variable indicating how closely the respondent follows and is aware of politics. This variable should capture some exposure to conservative or liberal messaging. The measure is overly broad, as other factors account for interest in politics, but this fact makes the overall regression a more conservative test of whether party and ideology matter. As further measures of the potential influence of messaging infrastructure, I also include a measure of how interest in politics changed from 2012 to 2017, as well as a measure of Internet use in 2012, since the Internet may expose the respondent to messages from political entrepreneurs.

Finally, I include control variables for gender, age, family income, and Church attendance. In addition, I include a variable for change of income between 2012 and 2017, since more dire economic circumstances may enhance competition and threat from out-group members.

The results of the logit regression are reported in Table 2. Column 1 looks at IP alignment on the left, while column 2 looks at IP alignment on the right. Being a Democrat in 2012 significantly leads to a greater probability of being aligned on the left. Fluid personality is also statistically significant, though it does not have as large an effect as party. Race and measures of exposure to messaging are not significant. For someone who was not left aligned in 2012, the average marginal effect of being a Democrat in 2012 contributes 11 percentage points to the probability of one becoming

Table 2: Logit regression predicting newly IP aligned in 2017 and 2016.

	(1) Alignleft 2017	(2) Alignright 2017	(3) Alignleft 2016	(4) Alignright 2016
Democrat 2012	0.856*** (0.245)		1.494*** (0.237)	
Liberal 2012	0.237 (0.268)		1.211*** (0.240)	
Fluid 2016	0.433** (0.204)		0.979*** (0.195)	
Republican 2012		0.431* (0.235)		1.106*** (0.194)
Conservative 2012		0.627* (0.340)		0.768** (0.300)
Fixed 2016		0.773*** (0.248)		0.239 (0.197)
Interest in politics 2012	0.464 (0.465)	-0.583 (0.464)	0.580 (0.449)	1.434*** (0.537)
Change interest politics 2012–17	-0.905 (0.575)	-0.234 (0.758)		
Change interest politics 2012–16			0.190 (0.531)	1.501*** (0.527)
Internet use 2012	-0.288 (0.244)	0.446 (0.348)	0.160 (0.241)	-0.222 (0.228)
Black 2012	0.104 (0.353)	-0.765 (0.656)	1.355*** (0.332)	-0.987* (0.515)
Latino 2012	0.061 (0.411)	-0.260 (0.489)	0.140 (0.307)	-0.169 (0.296)
Asian 2012	-0.821* (0.471)	0.359 (0.739)	-0.242 (0.465)	-0.924 (1.188)
Other race 2012	0.361 (0.330)	0.240 (0.622)	0.996** (0.507)	0.446* (0.257)
Church attendance 2012	-0.158 (0.291)	-0.694** (0.330)	-0.663** (0.301)	0.124 (0.288)
Male 2012	0.027 (0.194)	0.634** (0.257)	-0.239 (0.220)	0.003 (0.183)
Education 2012	0.069 (0.067)	0.111 (0.090)	0.125* (0.075)	-0.122* (0.071)
Age 2012	0.003 (0.008)	0.003 (0.010)	-0.017** (0.007)	0.004 (0.007)
Family income 2012 (in \$10000s)	0.033 (0.022)	-0.092** (0.038)	-0.049* (0.028)	0.053** (0.025)
Change family income 2012–17	0.088** (0.034)	-0.020 (0.033)		

Table 2: (continued)

	(1) Alignleft 2017	(2) Alignright 2017	(3) Alignleft 2016	(4) Alignright 2016
Change family income 2012–16			–0.085 (0.054)	–0.001 (0.031)
Alignleft 2012	1.760*** (0.205)		3.401*** (0.225)	
Alignright 2012		1.822*** (0.255)		2.792*** (0.195)
_Cons	–3.181*** (0.636)	–2.833*** (0.609)	–3.079*** (0.499)	–4.752*** (0.746)
<i>N</i>	2843	2843	4969	4969

Standard errors are in parentheses: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

left aligned in 2017. For instance, the predicted probability of a White fluid liberal male who was not IP aligned in 2012 becoming left aligned in 2017 goes from roughly 16 percent to 30 percent if one was a self-identified Democrat in 2012.

For IP alignment on the right, Republican identification and conservative ideology are significant under one-tailed tests, and fixed personality is significant under a two-tailed test for explaining whether one is right aligned in 2017. Exposure to messaging infrastructure and race are not significant (Table 2, column 2). For someone who was not right aligned in 2012, the average marginal effect of Republican party identification is 4 percentage points to the probability of being right aligned in 2017. In addition, the average marginal effect of conservative ideology is 6 percentage points to the probability of being right aligned in 2017. In summary, party matters for increased IP alignment on both the right and left, but to a larger degree for the left. This is consistent with the idea that the right has been previously better aligned so that the marginal effect of party on alignment is not as impactful as it is for Democrats.

To check the robustness of this finding beyond affective measures, the VOTER panel also allows for examination of IP alignment on attitude measures related to race, immigration, religion, and class redistribution. In 2012 and 2016, respondents were surveyed on the standard four questions on racial resentment related to African Americans; three questions related to immigration; two questions related to taxing the wealthy and governmental regulation of business; and a question on abortion. This gives four distinct attitude positions related to African Americans, immigration, class, and religion.

The four standard racial resentment questions are coded as 0 for the strongest liberal position, 0.5 for a neutral position, and 1 for the strongest conservative

position, and are combined to form one score ranging from 0 to 1 to measure respondent's attitudes on African American inequality (see appendix for wording of the survey questions in this section).

On immigration VOTER asks whether illegal immigrants are a drain on American society; whether there should be a path to citizenship for the undocumented; and whether immigration to the United States should be more difficult. The most liberal position was coded as 0, a neutral position as 0.5, and the most conservative position as 1. Moderately liberal or moderately conservative positions were coded as 0.25 and 0.75 when appropriate. These measures were combined to form one measure on attitudes toward immigration.

For attitudes on class redistribution, VOTER asks whether respondents favor raising taxes for those making over \$200,000 and how much government regulation is desirable. Liberal responses were coded as 0, neutral responses as 0.5, and conservative responses as 1. These scores were combined to form a measure of class redistribution.

Finally, VOTER asks whether respondents think abortion should be illegal in all circumstances, some circumstances, or legal in all circumstances. The liberal position (legal in all circumstances) was coded as 0, neutral responses (some circumstances) as 0.5, and the conservative response (illegal in all circumstances) as 1.

From 2012 to 2016, the change in average scores on these four measures are shown in Figure 3a. Attitudes for all party and non-party identifiers liberalized in relation to African American racial resentment and immigrants, but self-identified Democrats in 2012 became relatively more liberal in their attitudes than non-Democrats. Abortion also became more polarized, with Democrats becoming more liberal and Republicans and nonparty identifiers moving in the opposite direction. Strikingly, it is only with the one non-IP issue – taxation and government regulation – where both Democrats and Republicans became less polarized. Self-identified Democrats became slightly more conservative, while all others became slightly more liberal, contrary to the notion that class redistribution issues would be more likely to unite the left.

To look at the measures simultaneously, I create a dummy variable coding someone as left aligned in a given year if their scores on racial resentment, immigration, class redistribution, and abortion are below 0.5 for at least three of the measures. I create another dummy variable coding someone as right aligned in a given year if their answers are above 0.5 on at least three of the measures. As seen in Figure 3b, those who self-identified as Republicans were better aligned in 2012 compared to Democrats, consistent with party asymmetry theories. By 2016 however this asymmetry in alignment disappears. Both White and African American Democrats improved their alignment score in 2016 compared to 2012, allowing Democrats to catch up to Republicans in alignment.

As before I run a logistic regression to see which factors predict left and right IP alignment in 2016. For this analysis, I use the same independent variables in the

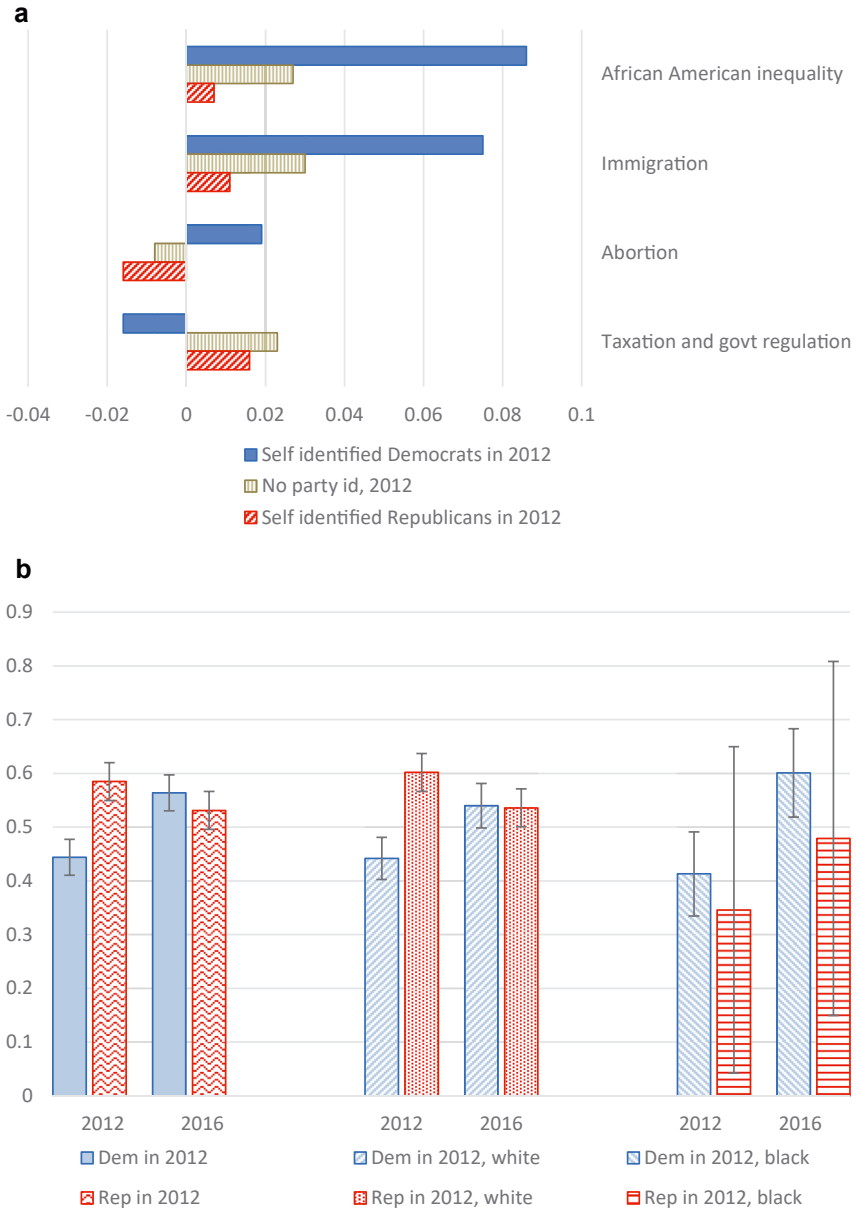


Figure 3: (a) Attitude change in liberal direction, 2012 to 2016: African Americans, immigration, abortion tax/regulation (VOTER data).

(b) Aligned percentage: Black inequality, immigration, tax/regulation, abortion (VOTER data).

regression for the thermometer scores above. The results are reported in Table 2, columns 3 and 4. Both Democratic and liberal identification in 2012 are significantly associated with a higher probability of being left aligned in 2016. African American and fluid personality are also significantly associated with left alignment in the expected directions, while none of the variables potentially associated with message infrastructure are significant. If one was not left aligned in 2012, the average effects margin for being a Democrat in 2012 is 17 percentage points to the predicted probability of being newly left aligned in 2016. The average effects margin for being a liberal in 2012 is 16 percentage points to the probability of being newly left aligned in 2016.

On the right, party identification and conservative ideology are significant in the expected direction. Consistent with the view that better right infrastructure may contribute to IP alignment, political interest is positively associated with right alignment. Being Black was negatively associated, as expected, while fixed personality was not associated with right alignment. The average effects margin of being a Republican in 2012 is 9 percentage points to the probability of being newly right aligned in 2016; the average effects margin for being conservative in 2012 is 5 percentage points.

In summary, the second panel analysis shows that prior party identification leads to better IP alignment on both sides of the political spectrum, but with a greater effect for Democrats. Fluid personality also contributed to better alignment on the left, but Democratic affiliation exerts an independent effect, and this effect is stronger than fluid personality. Both panel analyses, with different specifications of IP alignment, show evidence for the partisan spillover hypothesis. Controlling for other factors, Democratic partisanship is associated with an increase IP alignment for the same individuals at a later time period.

3 Discussion

The conventional narrative is that the left is more divided than the right, particularly on issues related to IP rather than class redistribution. This article has found some evidence that this was true prior to the Obama years. Study 1 found that Whites on the left were more divided than Whites on the right in IP alignment prior to Obama. Over time, however, this gap is decreasing. In the three measures of IP alignment in this paper (Figures 1, 2b and 3b), the White left's IP alignment increased over time, so that the gap with the right either decreases or disappears. When all races are included in the analysis, overall IP alignment of the left matches or exceeds that of the right in the contemporary period for all measures of IP alignment in this paper.

Previous findings of asymmetry may differ from the findings here because they are looking at different measures. Mason and Wronski (2018), for instance, find partisan asymmetry when asking Democrats and Republicans how close they feel to Whites, Christians, conservatives, Blacks, Hispanics, atheists, and liberals. They find Republicans on average feeling closer to their constituent groups (Whites, Christians, and conservatives) and more distant to nonconstituent groups (Blacks, Hispanics, atheists, and liberals) compared with Democrats feeling closer to constituent groups (Blacks, Hispanics, atheists) and distant to nonconstituent groups (Whites, Christians, and conservatives). This affective measure was captured by two separate surveys in 2013 and 2016, with different questions in each of those surveys. The asymmetry in Mason and Wronski's measure is consistent with declining asymmetry in the measures reported in this article. Not feeling close to a group in one's coalition can still be consistent with overall positive feeling toward a constituent group and support for policies that benefit that constituent group. It may make sense that Whites on the left may not feel close to African Americans because of African Americans' distinct history and experience with institutionalized discrimination. One would actually expect that recognition of this difference would lead to support for African American policy goals. In addition, it is possible that the sense of closeness of those on the left to constituent groups could be changing over time. Perhaps future iterations of the survey questions used by Mason and Wronski may find this trend.

Some of Grossman and Hopkins' (2016) evidence for partisan asymmetry looks at the composition of liberals and conservatives within each party and attitudes about party unity. For instance, Grossman and Hopkins (2016, 29–31) noted that in 2012 Republican party identifiers are much more united in considering themselves ideologically as "conservative," compared with Democratic party identifiers being relatively less likely to consider themselves "liberal." Grossman and Hopkins do not look directly at evaluations of the subgroup identities affiliated within the coalitions of the left and right, or the policies associated with those subgroups, which is the evidence considered in this paper. Why might there still be partisan disparity in embracing liberal/conservative identity, but not in evaluations of particular groups and policies associated with those subgroups within each party's coalition? The difference may reflect a well known paradox in public opinion. As other scholars have noted, American public opinion may be "symbolically conservative" but "operationally liberal" (Ellis and Stimson 2012). That is, more of the public is willing to agree with specific liberal issue positions but still be reluctant to label themselves as "liberal." The fact that individual attitude positions on race, gender, class, and religion may be moving toward greater unity but that the left side of public opinion still is reluctant to identify itself as "liberal" may be a reproduction of the observed distinction between operational and symbolic political identification.

The second contribution of this paper is in showing that partisan affiliation on the left plays a role in left IP alignment catching up to the right. Both panel analyses confirm the importance of prior Democratic affiliation to higher levels of IP alignment, with a greater effect of party on the left compared with the right. This evidence supports the hypothesis that the left can catch up with the right in IP alignment through a process of partisan spillover. In a context of severe polarization, partisans who initially may agree with the party only on a few of its IP stances will over time be more inclined to adopt the left's positions on more of its IP stances.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the necessity of looking at how multiple group identity positions stack on top of each in explaining political behavior (Mason and Wronski 2018). This article contributes to that agenda by considering simultaneous combinations of group identity positions that have been previously neglected. One limitation of this study is that it has looked at only a sample of these potential combinations of IP alignment. I have tried to select "hard cases," since testing out all possible combinations of alignment increases factorially with each new identity position added to the analysis. In some cases, my measures may not have adequately captured all dimensions of attitudes on race, gender, class, and religion. Other aspects of religious conflict such as transgender rights may be increasing in importance in the contemporary culture wars. Another gap is that in the panel studies, I could not include attitudes on gender in the analysis of alignment. Future studies of IP alignment may include other and more complete measures of attitude positions on race, gender, religion, and class, or add new dimensions. For now, however, the agreement of measures looking at a variety of combinations of IP alignment, both with cross-sectional and panel data, confirms in these specific cases the two major findings – decline of asymmetric IP alignment and partisan spillover contributing to this decline.

One potential implication of these findings is that polarization can contribute to raising the status of a group's coalition partners through party spillover. The existing literature on polarization tends to emphasize its negative effects, such as gridlock and extremism. The existing literature on minority political incorporation has also often been pessimistic. Frymer (1999) for instance suggests that African American votes are taken for granted in the Democratic party, making the party ineffective in transforming racial attitudes. By contrast, the evidence here suggests that polarization and party identification is making the left overall more sympathetic to the racial, ethnic, religious, and gender diversity of its constituent coalition partners. These findings suggest that the left does not have to focus solely on class redistribution issues to unify support among Democrats. Over time, polarization and partisanship has contributed to the left increasingly agreeing on IP issues.

APPENDIX 1: Question Wording from VOTER

VOTER, 2012 to 2017

Racial Resentment

race_deservemore_2016, race_deservemore_baseline: “Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve”

race_overcome_2016, race_overcome_baseline: “Irish, Italian, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors”

race_tryharder_2016, race_tryharder_baseline: “It’s really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites”

race_slave_2016, race_slave_baseline: “Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.”

Potential answers for all four questions: (strongly agree/agree/don’t know/disagree/strongly disagree).

Undocumented Migration

immi_contribution_2016, immi_contribution_baseline: “Overall, do you think illegal immigrants make a contribution to American society or are a drain?” (mostly make a contribution/neither/mostly a drain/not sure)

immi_naturalize_2016, immi_naturalize_baseline: “Do you favor or oppose providing a way for illegal immigrants already in the United States to become U.S. citizens?” (favor/oppose/not sure)

immi_makedifficult_2016, immi_makedifficult_baseline: “Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the U.S. legally than it is currently?” (much easier/slightly easier/no change/slightly harder/much harder/not sure).

Class Attitudes

taxdoug_2016, taxwealth_baseline: “Do you favor raising taxes on families with incomes over \$200,000” (yes/no/don’t know)

govt_reg_2016, govt_reg_baseline: “Do you think there is too much or too little regulation of business.” (too much/about the right amount/too little/don’t know)

Religion

abortview3_2016, abortview3_baseline: “Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases; legal/illegal in some cases; illegal in all cases; don’t know.”

Authoritarian/fixed personality

“Which do you think is more important for a child to have?”

SOCIAL_CONFORMITY_1_2016: independence/respect for elders

SOCIAL_CONFORMITY_2_2016: curiosity/good manners

SOCIAL_CONFORMITY_3_2016: obedience/self reliance

SOCIAL_CONFORMITY_4_2016: considerate/well behaved

Fixed answers: respect for elders; good manners; obedience; well behaved. Respondent gets one point for each fixed answer, 0 for fluid answer. A fixed personality is someone who has a cumulative score of 3 or higher; fluid if someone has a cumulative score of 1 or lower.

Exposure to conservative/liberal infrastructure

newsint_2016, newsint2_baseline: “Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs ...” (most of the time/some of the time/only now and then/hardly at all/don’t know)

Measure of how interest in politics changed from 2012 to 2017

Value of political interest in 2016 minus political interest in 2012.

Measure of Internet use in 2012

“How often do you use the Internet...”

daily_intuse_home_baseline: at home

daily_intuse_work_baseline: at work

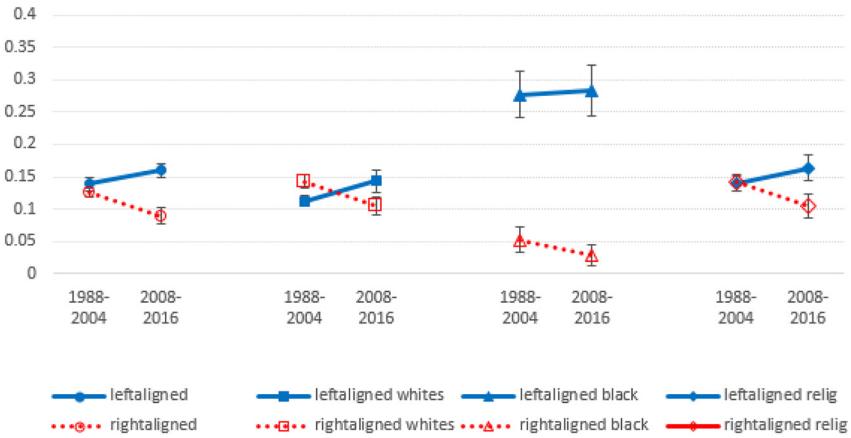
daily_intuse_else_baseline: somewhere else

daily_intuse_mobile_baseline: from a mobile wireless device

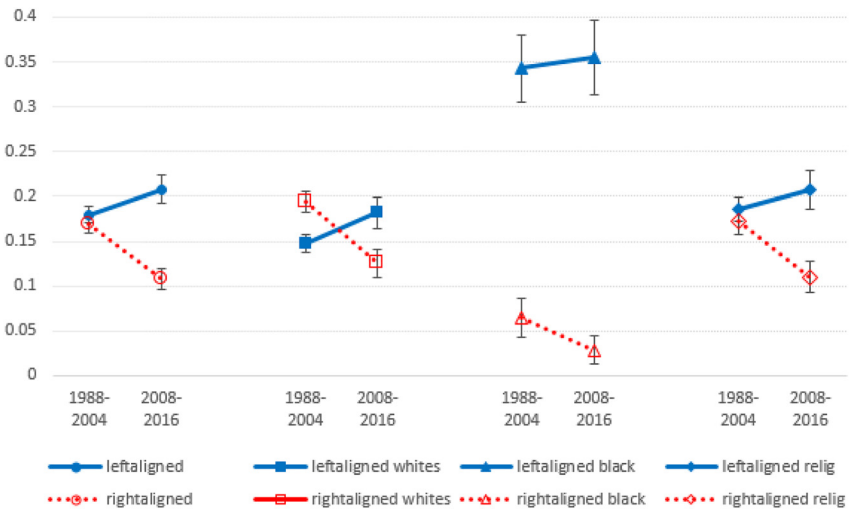
Answers: (More than 6 hours per day/3-6 hours per day/1-2 hours per day/Less than one hour per day)

Aggregate measure is averaged across all four questions (1=less than one hour a day, 4=more than 6 hours a day).

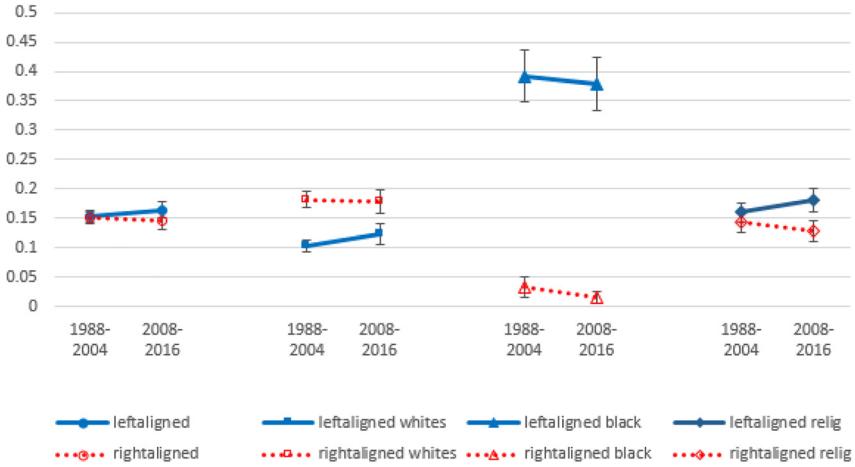
APPENDIX 2: Supplementary Figures



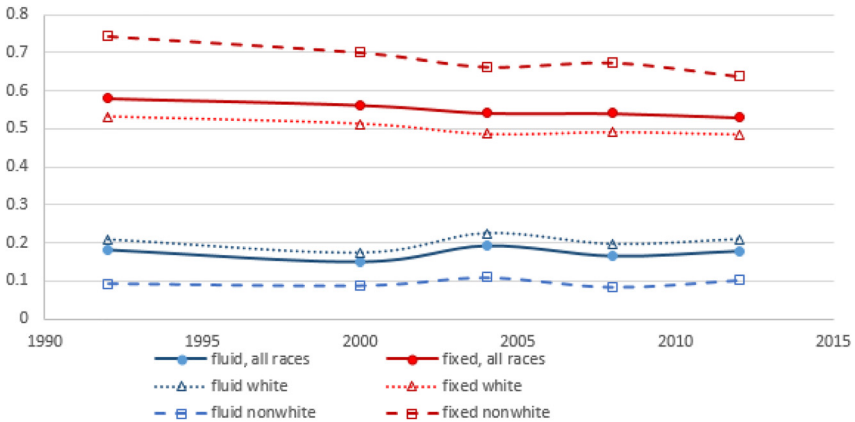
Supplementary Figure 1: Aligned Percentages Using Black, Feminist, Fundamentalist, and Poor Thermometers (ANES, pooled pre- and post-Obama).



Supplementary Figure 2: Aligned Percentages Using Black, Feminist, Gay, and Poor Thermometers (ANES, pooled pre- and post-Obama).



Supplementary Figure 3: Aligned Percentages Using Black, Feminist, People on Welfare, and Illegal Alien Thermometers (ANES, pooled pre- and post-Obama).



Supplementary Figure 4: Fixed and Fluid Proportions of Population, ANES Cumulative File.

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