

# Partisan Ambivalence, Partisan Intensity, and Racial Attitudes: The Impact of Shifting Policy Positions on Partisan Evaluations in the 1960s

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## Abstract

The concept of ambivalence is important to the study of political psychology and behavior. We examine the causes of partisan ambivalence following the passage of major civil rights legislation to test our argument that the correlates of ambivalence will change following the alteration of long-standing party positions on a highly salient issue. We find support for this hypothesis for White Southerners during this time period—Indeed, our results demonstrate that the strength of one’s partisan attachment is unrelated to partisan evaluations for such individuals immediately following the passage of major civil rights legislation, but is again a predictor by the early 1970s.

## Keywords

partisan ambivalence, Southern politics, party realignment

The concept of ambivalence has become increasingly important to the study of political psychology and public opinion. The considerable impact of ambivalence on subsequent attitude formation and behavior is well documented

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(e.g., Lavine, 2001; Lavine, Johnston, & Steenbergen, 2012; Meffert, Guge, & Lodge, 2004). Likewise, we now have a growing understanding of the causes of ambivalence (e.g., Keele & Wolak, 2008; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). Yet because nearly all of this evidence is from surveys conducted roughly in the last 25 years, the broad social and political context of these studies is similar. Here, we examine the causes of ambivalence toward the parties in a different era: the presidential elections immediately following the passage of major civil rights legislation in the 1960s. We argue that following the alteration of long-standing positions on a highly salient issue the influence of partisanship on ambivalence will be attenuated while that of the attitudes relevant to the policy will be heightened. Specifically, we believe that among individuals for whom the elite change is most salient—in this case, White Southerners—the degree to which individuals are one-sided or conflicted in their evaluations of the parties according to stated likes and dislikes of their own as well as the opposite party will be unaffected by partisan attachments during this period, and will instead be influenced by racial attitudes. The context of the mid-to-late 1960s offers a clear test of these hypotheses given the lack of visible major party positions on civil rights legislation until this point. Comparing the correlates of partisan ambivalence in the periods before, during, and after the major parties polarize on a salient issue enhances our knowledge of the contextual influences on an important psychological phenomenon.

The party system, especially in the South, was in flux in the 1960s following the passage of two important pieces of civil rights legislation. As a result of this abrupt change in policy stances on the issue of race, we argue that evaluations of the parties among Southerners will be less dependent on the strength of individuals' party identification and more dependent on their racial attitudes compared with citizens elsewhere. We find support for the hypothesis that the correlates of ambivalence were different for White Southerners during this period—In both 1964 and 1968, the impact of partisan intensity is weaker among Southerners, and racial attitudes predict ambivalence in our 1968 Southern sample. We interpret this result as being consistent with evidence demonstrating that although partisans did not immediately leave their party during this period (Green & Palmquist, 1994; Green, Palmquist, & Shickler, 1998, 2002), the electorate did respond to elite polarization on the issue of race (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Valentino & Sears, 2005). Even if White Southerners did not abandon their party identification straightaway, we argue that their partisan identity became “decoupled” from their evaluations of the parties and as a result their partisanship played a smaller role in shaping attitudes toward the parties. That is, Southerners' expressed likes and dislikes of the parties, and thus their likelihood of experiencing ambivalence became divorced from their

self-identified partisanship due to elites' changing position on the salient issue of race. Moreover, we demonstrate that the relationship between partisan intensity and ambivalence—two distinct dimensions of attitude strength (J. M. Miller & Peterson, 2004)—among Whites was evident in the election immediately prior to the disruption, 1960, and it reappears in each of the four subsequent elections, 1972-1984, suggesting that once the new political reality firmly supplanted the previous status quo, partisanship's influence on evaluations was again substantial. In that regard, our results also comport with recent evidence demonstrating the importance of "group-party" ambivalence (Shufeldt, 2017). Furthermore, the results are consistent with theories of issue-based partisan change in which elites' polarization on a novel political issue produces gradual shifts in citizens' partisan identities (Carsey & Layman, 2006; Carmines & Stimson, 1986, 1989; Layman & Carsey, 2002b,) and attitudes (Zaller, 1992).

The purpose of this article is to shed light on the way in which changing party positions on a salient issue affects the attitudes of the electorate—namely, polarization on an issue alters the criteria by which some in the electorate evaluate the parties. Importantly, one's level of ambivalence toward the political parties is potentially unrelated to his or her own partisanship if the disruption is sufficiently great. Periodic disruption of the ties that hold together party coalitions is a common feature of American politics (Key, 1955; Schofield, Miller, & Martin, 2003; Sundquist, 1983), and such an occurrence may be on the horizon (G. Miller & Schofield, 2008). This article demonstrates how the electorate responds to such an occurrence—Partisan identities are resistant to change, but their importance for subsequent attitudes can be diminished. Investigating the correlates of ambivalence in the years both prior and subsequent to major party polarization on the issue of race enables us to assess over time changes in the relationship between shifting party positions on a salient issue and voters' evaluations of the parties.

## Background

An individual is ambivalent when he or she has internalized both positive and negative attitudes toward some stimulus object (e.g., Newby-Clark, McGregor, & Zanna, 2002; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). Considerable evidence documents the considerable influence of ambivalence on attitudes and behavior. Evaluative conflict can diminish the accessibility (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 2000), certainty (McGraw, Hasecke, & Conger, 2003; Meffert et al., 2004; Tetlock, 1986), extremity (Meffert et al., 2004), and stability (Alvarez & Brehm, 2002; Rudolph, 2005) with which individuals hold their views. Ambivalence toward the political parties and candidates influences how

individuals seek information (Basinger & Lavine, 2005) and the timing of electoral decisions (Mutz, 2002; Nir & Druckman, 2008), as well as patterns of political involvement (Mutz, 2002) and voting behavior (Lavine et al., 2012; Mulligan, 2011).

Known sources of partisan ambivalence include one's context, including the campaign environment (Keele & Wolak, 2008) and social networks (Huckfeldt, Mendez, & Osborn, 2004), as well as personal characteristics, such as knowledge and one's need for cognition (Rudolph & Popp, 2007). One individual-level variable consistently shown to affect ambivalence is the intensity of one's partisan attachment (Huckfeldt et al., 2004; Keele & Wolak, 2008; Rudolph, 2011; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). However, nearly the entirety of the evidence regarding both the causes and consequences of ambivalence consists of studies of survey responses conducted no earlier than the 1990s. We examine the causes of ambivalence in an era of political upheaval, particularly in a region where partisan loyalties might be most tried—the American South during the civil rights movement.

For several decades prior to the passage of major civil rights legislation the parties were polarizing over racial issues. During this time, Northern Democrats in Congress became increasingly likely to take stances on these issues and support attempts to bring legislation to the floor (Noel, 2013; Schickler, Pearson, & Feinstein, 2010). Likewise, the thinking of public intellectuals on the matter also began to change in the 1940s (Noel, 2012). Yet, many—probably most—in the electorate were likely unaware of shifting legislative coalitions or the changing racial attitudes among intellectuals expressed in the pages of outlets such as the *National Review*. Certainly, large segments of the electorate had not yet fully processed the change. For example, Carmines and Stimson (1986) find that the public was just noticing a difference in the two parties' stances on racial issues in the mid-1960s. For these individuals, the passage of major civil rights legislation—the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965—signaled that party coalitions were significantly changing along racial lines. Opposition to integration and extending equal rights to Blacks was rooted in resistance to societal change (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980; Valentino & Sears, 2005), prompting Southern Whites to reassess their partisan loyalties in response to these landmark laws and the parties' stances on racial issues (E. Black & Black, 2002; M. Black, 2004; Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Hayes & McKee, 2007; Sundquist, 1983).

Still, although the public recognized the parties' polarizing stands on racial issues (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Valentino & Sears, 2005), individuals did not defect from their party identification in droves in the 1960s (e.g., Green et al., 2002; Lublin, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Consistent with theories of partisanship as a

psychological attachment (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), older individuals were particularly more resistant to abandoning their partisanship (Beck, 1977). Despite partisan identification remaining reasonably stable, there were other indications that White Southerners viewed the parties differently, including defections in presidential elections acting as “a leading indicator” (Osborne, Sears, & Valentino, 2011, p. 83) as well as an increase in split-ticket voting (Burden & Kimball, 2002).<sup>2</sup> A general characterization of the electorate following the disruption of the status quo in the 1960s was that partisanship mattered less to individuals’ subsequent attitudes and behavior in the South compared with the rest of the country (Stanley, 1988), as well as that the Democratic “Solid South” began to erode (E. Black & Black, 1992; Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Sundquist, 1983). The Southern electorate’s response to major party polarization on the dimension of race evidences the phenomenon of issue evolution in which shifts in elites’ issue positions produce partisan change (Carmines & Stimson, 1986, 1989), a pattern also observed for issues ranging from social welfare concerns (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998) to cultural issues such as abortion (Adams, 1997; Carmines & Woods, 2002) and the environment (Lindaman & Haider-Markel, 2002).<sup>3</sup> We argue that another way in which the reaction to a change in elite positions will manifest itself among the mass public is that the criteria used to evaluate the parties themselves will be different. As the parties staked out new and visible stances on racial issues during this period, White Southerners felt abandoned by their party and temporarily stopped using their partisan identities as a guide for evaluating the major parties. In other words, as a consequence of the emergence of party change on this highly visible and salient issue, we argue that the correlates of partisan ambivalence will be altered for White Southerners.<sup>4</sup>

## Theory

We argue that the parties’ shifting signals on a salient issue weaken the influence of partisan attachments and increase those of policy-relevant attitudes on individuals’ evaluation of the two parties. To show why this is the case, we begin by conceptualizing partisanship as a psychological attachment (Campbell et al., 1960) and social identity (Green et al., 2002; S. Greene, 1999, 2004; Mason, 2015). Campbell et al.’s (1960) conceptualization of partisanship as a psychological attachment has been expanded by explicitly incorporating Tajfel’s (1978) definition of social identity, which emphasizes the importance that group membership can have on one’s self-identity and subsequent behavior. Key to this conceptualization is that an individual’s sense of belonging to a group consequently affects both one’s self- and

group-image. Thus, under usual circumstances, one's partisan identification should impact how one interprets and perceives parties, candidates, and issues, as well as how one behaves (e.g., Huddy, 2001; Huddy & Bankert, 2017; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Lewis-Beck, Jacoby, Norpoth, & Weisberg, 2008). As a result, stronger partisans are, on average, less ambivalent than weaker partisans and independents (e.g., Keele & Wolak, 2008; Rudolph, 2011; Rudolph & Popp, 2007). However, some individuals do not have an exclusively or even predominantly one-sided evaluation of the two political parties. We argue that studying the concept of ambivalence in the periods before, during, and after major party polarization on the issue of race allows us to gain leverage on the question of how a sudden and radical change in party positions on a salient issue affects individuals' evaluations of the parties.

When the parties diverge and then differentiate on a prominent issue, some individuals may feel "abandoned" by their party and the normal processes that influence ambivalence may be altered. Stated differently, identity-conflicting evaluations can occur when "party behavior and performance impinge on an area of personal importance to a voter" (Lavine et al., 2012, p. 8). In particular, although one's evaluation of the parties is usually a function of what Rudolph and Popp (2007) term "directional" motivations, including partisan intensity, we argue that following large policy changes on a salient issue, this process weakens. A person who identifies with a party based on habit or tradition, but who feels he or she is no longer "part of the party" or that "the party changed, I stayed the same" is more likely to be ambivalent. Indeed, a person may be a strong partisan but will not necessarily strongly identify with the national party—He or she may strongly identify with the partisan label, but not with the party or its policies.<sup>5</sup> In other words, partisans' views of the parties and their traditional supporters and policies continue to exist, and thus conflict, with the new reality during periods of party upheaval. As a result, partisan identifiers view themselves as the true supporters of their party while viewing the national party's priorities with skepticism and perhaps hostility.

We agree with Green et al. (2002, p. 162) that self-conceptions change gradually, and thus we do not expect individuals who become uncomfortable with the parties' altered group images—what it means to be a Democrat and Republican fundamentally changes during tumultuous periods when parties shift positions and align with new social groups—to switch party loyalties immediately in the face of such a disruption. Given party identification's centrality to one's self-image, we instead anticipate that, as Green et al. (2002) write, "A person may identify with a party despite policy disagreement in the hopes that these tensions will subside" (p. 159). Consequently, we argue that

the initial response for most partisans to parties' changing policy positions and group images will be a "decoupling" of partisanship from partisan evaluations that alters the relationship between partisan intensity and partisan ambivalence. Thus, the act of disconnecting one's partisan attachments from one's party evaluations may be a first step in the process of partisan change and polarization as citizens ultimately decide whether to adopt their party's new issue stance and image or switch parties (e.g., Carsey & Layman, 2006; Green et al., 2002).

We focus on evaluations of the parties following the passage of civil rights legislation in the 1960s. As mentioned, until this point the parties were hesitant to stake clear stands on the issue. For example, in 1960, 56% of respondents believed there was no difference between the parties when it came to protecting Black Americans from discrimination—while the number declined to 32% in 1964 and 38% in 1968. Furthermore, this decline coincided with an increase in the belief that Democrats were the party more likely to protect African Americans from discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

Given the parties' relatively sudden split on civil rights policies that were largely aimed to improve social and political conditions for African Americans residing in the South, our expectation is that White Southerners are those who will feel abandoned, and thus partisan intensity should have a smaller impact on partisan ambivalence in the American South in this time period. We wish to note that our theory does not apply exclusively to Southern Democrats; Republican identifiers with more liberal racial attitudes might also feel abandoned by their party or perhaps will now have positive views of the national Democratic Party. Our first hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** Partisan intensity will have a smaller impact on ambivalence in the South than elsewhere in the United States following the passage of major civil rights legislation.

We emphasize importantly here that partisan strength and ambivalence are not identical concepts. For example, using panel data, Rudolph (2011) writes, "The results of this analysis demonstrate that ambivalence and partisan strength are not mirror equivalents of each other. The results suggest that causality flows from partisan strength to ambivalence but not the reverse" (p. 568). This finding is consistent with evidence from Steenbergen, Lavine, and Goolsby (2006) and Lavine et al. (2012).

A related consequence of a significant party change on a major issue is that attitudes relating to the policy area should have a larger influence on how individuals evaluate the parties, as these attitudes are now more salient. Our theory here suggests that the importance of attitudes toward African Americans

and the government's role in promoting racial equality will increase. Given that the legislation largely targeted the South, we expect racial attitudes will matter more there than elsewhere. Thus, our second hypothesis is as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** Racial attitudes will have a larger impact on partisan ambivalence in the South than elsewhere in the United States following the passage of major civil rights legislation.

The passage of highly visible and salient legislation on a controversial topic potentially disrupts how individuals evaluate the parties. Following an examination of two elections, 1964 and 1968, in detail, we examine all presidential elections from 1960 to 1984 to test our third hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between partisan intensity and ambivalence should be observable both before and well after major party polarization on the issue of race for White Southerners.

The logic of this hypothesis is that following the establishment of a new party system status quo, members of the electorate will recognize and accept the new party coalitions and as a consequence one's partisan attachment will behave as it had previously. Our argument here is similar to that of Lavine et al. (2012), who argue that because partisanship is a social identity, once the system returns to a stable status quo, "the partisan perceptual screen is reinstated" (p. 198).

## **Data and Methods**

To test our first two hypotheses, we examine data from the 1964 and 1968 CPS American National Election Studies (ANES).<sup>7</sup> We select these two years to explore in detail because each follows significant civil rights legislation and because each survey has the full battery of questions needed to test our theory. Following this analysis, we examine all presidential election years 1960-1984 to test more completely the dynamic aspect of our theory. To examine the impact of partisan intensity and racial attitudes on partisan evaluations, we use Basinger and Lavine's (2005) index of comparative ambivalence. The measure, which is a modification of a common objective measure (Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995), combines responses about both major parties from open-ended questions asking respondents what they like and dislike about the political parties to gauge the conflict regarding evaluations of the parties.<sup>8</sup>

Because ambivalence measures mishandle indifference (Rudolph, 2005; Thornton, 2011)—here, those respondents who offer no responses to the open-ended questions about the parties—we account for indifferent individuals by estimating a selection model (Heckman, 1979), as suggested by Kimball and Summary (2012) and Thornton (2013). In this scenario, the selection stage models if the respondent lists any statements and the outcome stage models the score from the Basinger and Lavine (2005) measure for those who offer at least one response. Given our theory’s emphasis on ambivalence, we are primarily interested in the coefficients in the outcome stage.

We define the South using census bureau coding; although this includes “border” states, we choose this coding to increase our Southern sample—and, in a sense this may make our tests more conservative as deep South states tend to be more different (e.g., Glaser & Gilens, 1997; McKee & Springer, 2015).<sup>9</sup> In addition, we limit our analysis to White individuals given our focus on attitudes toward African Americans. Because evidence suggests a substantial portion of the variation toward the higher end of the ambivalence measure may not be meaningful (Thornton, 2011), we test the robustness of the selection model by coding individuals into three nominal categories of ambivalent, indifferent, and univalent. These results are presented in Supplementary Appendix B. We measure partisan intensity by “folding” the traditional partisan scale around its midpoint. It therefore ranges from zero to three, from pure independent to strong partisan. Our theory suggests that Southerners will be less influenced by partisan strength when evaluating the parties than will others.

Both the 1964 and 1968 ANES feature multiple questions regarding respondents’ attitudes toward African Americans and the government’s role in ensuring racial equality. We use six questions to create a scale of racial attitudes. We include a 3-point scale of support for school integration, a binary measure of attitudes toward Whites’ ability to block African Americans from moving into their neighborhood, a 3-point measure gauging support for the government’s involvement in making sure African Americans are treated fairly when looking for jobs, a 3-point scale of if the respondent thinks the civil rights movement is pushing too fast, a 3-point scale of one’s attitudes toward segregation, and finally, a feeling thermometer question measuring affect toward Blacks, which ranges from 0 to 100. We recode all measures to range from zero to one and so that higher values are associated with negative attitudes toward African Americans. The resulting scale is quite reliable in both years: It has a Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .762 in 1964 and .742 in 1968. We include all respondents who answer at least four of the six questions (which is over 95% of the respondents in each year). Our theory suggests that the impact of this variable on ambivalence will be stronger in the South.

Given that our theory suggests that the effects of partisan intensity and racial attitudes on partisan ambivalence will vary among Southerners and non-Southerners, we interact each of our primary explanatory variables with a South dummy variable—coded one for Southerners and zero for all other respondents. Recall our first hypothesis that partisan intensity will have a larger impact on ambivalence for non-Southerners. Next, we hypothesize that racial attitudes will have a larger impact on ambivalence for Southerners.<sup>10</sup>

We include several control variables previously demonstrated to influence partisan ambivalence (e.g., Keele & Wolak, 2008; Rudolph & Popp, 2007).<sup>11</sup> Education is measured using a 6-point scale ranging from no high school to a college degree or higher. We control for knowledge in the form of whether or not the individual correctly identifies the party controlling the House of Representatives, coded one for answering correctly. Because those who care about the election may have more one-sided opinions, we include a binary measure of whether or not the individual cares about the election outcome. Finally, we include age, as those with more experience with the political system may be more likely to have opinions about the parties (e.g., Converse, 1969). Though not always necessary for the identification of a set of equations (Vella, 1998), we exclude age from the outcome equation. This decision does not drive our substantive results.

## Results

The results from the selection models are presented in Tables 1 and 2 for 1964 and 1968, respectively. Our first hypothesis is that partisan intensity will have a smaller impact on how the parties are evaluated in the South than elsewhere as a result of the parties' shifting policy priorities. We find support for this hypothesis in both years: The coefficient for the interaction term is positive and statistically significant, indicating that partisanship matters less in the South. Moreover, partisan intensity is a significant predictor of ambivalence—those who identify more strongly are less ambivalent—in our non-South sample. Among White Southerners, not only is the impact of partisanship smaller, but the marginal effect also cannot be distinguished from zero in either year.<sup>12</sup> Consistent with our theory, after the disruption to the status quo following the passage of major civil rights legislation, the strength of one's partisan attachment did not systematically reduce ambivalence for White Southerners.

Our second hypothesis is that due to the increased salience of racial attitudes following the passage of civil rights legislation, racial attitudes should be a larger predictor of ambivalence in the South, where most of the legislation was directed. Here we find mixed results. We find some support for our hypothesis in 1968 but none in 1964. The coefficient for the interaction term

**Table 1.** Partisan Ambivalence, 1964.

	Coefficient	SE	t
<b>Outcome equation</b>			
South	-0.439	0.203	-2.16
Partisan intensity	-0.252	0.035	-7.12
Partisan Intensity × South	0.155	0.064	2.43
Racial attitudes	-0.066	0.123	-0.54
Racial Attitudes × South	0.128	0.226	0.57
Education	0.048	0.015	3.14
Knowledge	0.021	0.057	0.38
Care who wins	-0.323	0.058	-5.55
Constant	0.530	0.131	4.03
<b>Selection equation</b>			
Partisan intensity	0.399	0.052	7.63
Racial attitudes	-0.004	0.191	-0.02
Education	0.131	0.033	3.96
Knowledge	0.404	0.097	4.16
Care who wins	0.560	0.095	5.92
Age	0.012	0.003	3.76
Constant	-1.210	0.237	-5.11
N		1,266	
Pr( $\rho=0$ )		0.004	
Log-likelihood		-1685.178	
$\chi^2$		114.40	
p		.000	

Note. Estimated using selection model.

is not statistically significant in either year. However, examining the marginal effect suggests that the impact is statistically significant for the Southern subsample in 1968 ( $p < .05$ ), but not in 1964, when racial attitudes are unrelated to ambivalence in both samples.

There are a few plausible explanations for this result. First, perhaps the presence of George Wallace, a candidate for the American Independent Party in 1968 who made race an explicit part of his candidacy, increased the salience of these concerns—Although Barry Goldwater was an opponent of the legislation in 1964, he appealed to the issue much more in terms of states' rights than race.<sup>13</sup> Boyd (1972), for example, suggests that 1968 was an unusual election in terms of issue salience and issue voting. In addition, Green et al. (2002, Chapter 6) convincingly show using panel data that the passage of the Voting Rights Act (1965) truly was the pivotal moment that

**Table 2.** Partisan Ambivalence, 1968.

	Coefficient	SE	t
Outcome equation			
South	-0.265	0.206	-1.29
Partisan intensity	-0.233	0.041	-5.7
Partisan Intensity $\times$ South	0.160	0.067	2.37
Racial attitudes	-0.251	0.155	-1.62
Racial Attitudes $\times$ South	-0.154	0.262	-0.59
Education	0.056	0.018	3.12
Knowledge	0.158	0.076	2.07
Care who wins	-0.203	0.070	-2.90
Constant	0.373	0.175	2.13
Selection equation			
Partisan intensity	0.275	0.055	4.97
Racial attitudes	-0.325	0.226	-1.44
Education	0.120	0.036	3.34
Knowledge	0.502	0.110	4.58
Care who wins	0.467	0.104	4.49
Age	0.016	0.004	4.40
Constant	-0.839	0.267	-3.15
N		1,148	
Pr( $\rho=0$ )		0.382	
Log-likelihood		-1688.521	
$\chi^2$		90.39	
p		.000	

Note. Estimated using selection model.

precipitated Southern party change as Whites responded to dramatic increases in Black voter registration rates, which remained anemic even after 1964. Finally, Beck (1977) argues that younger individuals were more receptive to change. Thus, perhaps the impact of racial attitudes is contingent not only on region, but also on age. To test this argument, we estimated a model in which we interacted racial attitudes with both age and region. We find support for this argument in 1968 but not in 1964. These results are available in Supplementary Appendix D. Green et al. (2002, Chapter 6) also help us reconcile the finding that age moderates the relationship between racial attitudes and party evaluations because they show that older Southerners are both more conservative and more likely to remain Democrats over time relative to their younger cohorts, who increasingly entered the electorate as Republicans.

We are therefore unsurprised to learn that older Southerners are more likely to decouple their long-standing partisan ties from their party evaluations in response to party change on the issue of race. These racially conservative Whites instead began to evaluate the parties on the basis of their racial attitudes, and some of them gradually changed their party affiliation—Green et al. (2002, Chapter 6) estimate that approximately half of the Southern realignment is owed to conversion, as opposed to generational replacement. We also wish to note that we do not interpret this null finding as definitive evidence that racial attitudes were unimportant in 1964 but instead believe that it may be at least partially a function of the difficulty in gauging racial attitudes accurately.<sup>14</sup>

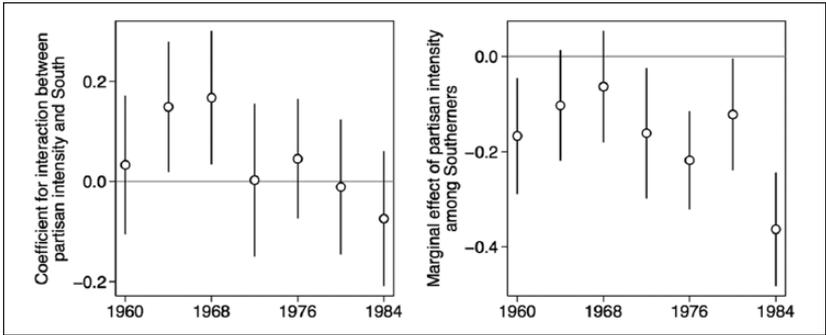
The impact of partisan attitudes might be conditional on both region and partisanship. To examine this possibility, we estimated a model with a three-way interaction between racial attitudes, region, and partisanship. The results, presented in Supplementary Appendix D, do not lend support for such an argument.<sup>15</sup> Finally, we examined the possibility that knowledge moderates the impact of racial attitudes on partisan ambivalence—In particular, we estimated a model with a three-way interaction between region, racial attitudes, and knowledge about the parties' positions on integrating public schools and preventing employment discrimination against Blacks. The specific coding, specification, and results of these models, presented in Supplementary Appendix D, indicate that knowledge does not moderate the impact of racial attitudes. This finding indicates that the party disruption was ubiquitous among Southerners in the first election following the passage of the Voting Acts Act (e.g., Green et al., 2002 Chapter 6), independent of these individuals' specific knowledge of the parties' postures toward public school integration and protecting Blacks from employment discrimination.

We argued that when citizens feel abandoned on a salient issue, and perhaps see the disintegration of long-standing party coalitions, their own partisanship is no longer as significant of a predictor in how they evaluate the parties. Although most Southerners initially held on to their partisan identity (Norpoth & Rusk, 1982), clearly many had mixed feelings about their party as the result of changing coalitions, especially those related to civil rights. When a party stakes a controversial position, it of course risks alienating its supporters. One possible consequence of this action is that some party members in the electorate may continue to identify with the party label, but this identity then has a smaller influence on how they evaluate the parties. Even if many Southerners were initially hesitant to abandon their party identification, their relationship with the parties and the party system fundamentally changed.

## **The Impact of Partisan Intensity on Ambivalence in the South, 1960-1984**

Our theory has dynamic implications suggested by our third hypothesis that are not fully tested in the previous section. If our argument that a shift in policy positions led to a change in the way the parties are evaluated is correct, then the two years already examined should be different from other years. Namely, in the years following the disruption to the status quo, we should see a return to normalcy, and thus partisan intensity should again influence how individuals respond to the parties in the South, as the electorate will have had time to respond to the change in party positions. In this section, we examine the changing impact of partisan intensity on partisan ambivalence among White Southerners both before major party polarization on the issue of race and well after the changes had become established in a new party system status quo. We are limited in this analysis because the ANES does not contain an identical set of questions used to gauge racial attitudes over the period of interest. We can, however, examine a straightforward test of if the impact of partisan intensity on partisan evaluations was influenced by the behavior of political elites. To do so, we estimate a model identical to that presented in Table 1—with the exception that the racial attitude variable is omitted—for each presidential election year from 1960 to 1984.<sup>16</sup> If our theory is correct, then once individuals adjust to the new reality of the party platforms, an increase in partisan intensity should again be associated with a decline in ambivalence and there should be no systematic difference in how Southerners and non-Southerners evaluate the parties. The results of interest are presented in Figure 1, which displays the coefficient of the interaction term between partisan intensity and region from the outcome stage of a selection model as well as the marginal effect of partisan intensity on ambivalence for White Southerners.<sup>17</sup> The full results for each year are available in Supplementary Appendix E.

The results are consistent with our expectations. First, note that in 1960, before the passage of landmark civil rights legislation signaling shifting elite policy positions on the salient issue of race, we observe a significant relationship between partisan intensity and ambivalence in the South. Second, by the 1970s and 1980s, partisan intensity once again becomes associated with less ambivalence among White Southerners. Moreover, with the exception of 1964 and 1968, there is no discernible difference in the impact of partisanship on ambivalence across the two regions. In the 1970s, the South was no longer solidly Democratic in presidential elections and in 1972 Richard Nixon was the first Republican presidential candidate to capture the entirety of the former Confederacy, winning the Deep South states with close to 70% of the



**Figure 1.** The impact of partisan intensity on ambivalence among White Southerners, 1960-1984.

Note. The left-hand side displays coefficient estimates from the outcome stage of a selection model with 95% confidence intervals; the right-hand side displays the marginal effect of partisan intensity among Southerners with 95% confidence intervals. Full results are available in the supplemental online appendix.

popular vote in the region. Moreover, by the 1970s, “Southern whites were only marginally different from the total electorate” in terms of the distribution of partisanship (Petrocik, 1987, p. 357), and the relationship between partisanship and other variables—for example, class (Nadeau & Stanley, 1993)—began to resemble that of the rest of the country. Similarly, among a survey of campaign activists, 50% of eventual partisan converts made the switch in the early 1970s (Clark, Bruce, Kessel, & Jacoby, 1991). In other words, the new political reality was firmly established by the 1970s and individuals responded to the parties in the way that we would expect: Their partisanship was a significant predictor of how they evaluated the parties. What we have shown is that as members of the electorate became accustomed to the new political coalitions, their partisanship once again became a major component of how they evaluated the parties.

The evidence presented here and in the previous section is consistent with those who argue that although the disruption to the status quo took a long time to influence the makeup of the Southern electorate (Green et al., 2002) and some citizens were initially reluctant to abandon their partisanship (Norpoth & Rusk, 1982), there were other indicators that the party coalitions had changed. For example, partisan defections in presidential elections increased, which is at least partly attributable to attitudes toward civil rights (Boyd, 1972). Our results demonstrate that the evaluative criteria among White Southerners were different following the change, consistent with Sears and Valentino (1997). Our interpretation of this evidence is that Southerners

did not abandon their party wholesale, but instead held mixed feelings that were not assuaged by party loyalty, as usually occurs. The evidence presented in this article is consistent with the argument that partisanship is a social identity that is resistant to change, but we argue that its influence on partisan evaluations can be diminished if a party takes actions that drive a wedge between it and its members on a salient issue.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of ambivalence to the study of political psychology and public opinion is now well established. But given that political scientists have devoted significant attention to the concept for only roughly the last 25 years, almost the entirety of the evidence documenting the causes and consequences of the phenomenon is gleaned from relatively recent data. From a practical standpoint, we provide evidence of its correlates using a different dataset in a different time, which is crucial for testing the generalizability of theories (Berinsky, Powell, Schickler, & Yohai, 2011; Bianco, Lynch, Miller, & Sened, 2006; Caughey, Berinsky, Chatfield, Hartman, Schickler, & Sekhon, n.d.). In doing so, we believe we have furthered the understanding of the relationship between partisan attachments and partisan ambivalence, as well as the reaction of White Southerners to the parties' polarization on the issue of race during a turbulent and transformative period in American politics.

The results support our argument that the parties' highly salient actions signifying new national coalitions can alter the relationship between ambivalence and its key predictors. In one of the two years under consideration, racial attitudes were a significant predictor of ambivalence among White Southerners but not of others in the electorate. Moreover, the impact of partisan intensity was indistinguishable from zero in our Southern sample in each year. Furthermore, an analysis of the impact of partisan intensity on ambivalence from 1960 to 1984 demonstrates that in the elections following the upheaval of the status quo, as the electorate became increasingly aware of the new political reality, partisan intensity once again was associated with a decline in ambivalence. In other words, the results demonstrate that when a party takes an action that is out-of-step with many of its members, some in the electorate will "decouple" their partisan identification from their evaluations of the parties. These results are consistent with evidence that although White Southerners did not immediately abandon their partisanship, their relationship with the parties fundamentally changed in the 1960s in response to a shift in the parties' positions on the issue of race. The reshuffling of coalitions is a periodic feature of political systems and may happen in the near future (G. Miller & Schofield, 2008). The findings in this article suggest that when members of the electorate feel alienated, they may not abandon their partisan

identity immediately, but the salience of that identity in formulating their evaluations of the parties—ambivalent or univalent—can be diminished. In other words, the electorate responds to changes in the makeup of party coalitions, even if that change is more gradual than a sudden realignment.

We also consider what our findings' implications may be for understanding contemporary party competition and intraparty divisions. Namely, might existing issue and group cross-pressures portend a political realignment? We cautiously speculate that socially conservative Democrats—minorities and labor union members, for example—may shift away from their party due to the Democrats' increasingly liberal social policy platform. We witnessed some of this defection in the 2016 presidential election when less educated Whites—a traditional Democratic constituency—turned sharply toward Donald Trump's economic populism and racial conservatism (rhetoric that, if continued, likely would forestall a crack in the Democratic Party's minority coalition). Interestingly, the Democratic Party identification advantage among less educated Whites remains, despite this defection at the polls. Time will tell whether the most recent presidential election was a "leading indicator" (Osborne et al., 2011) or an aberration due to the unique candidate combination, but divergence between partisan loyalty and presidential voting among this electoral subgroup is nonetheless a phenomenon that psephologists will want to monitor moving forward. On the flip side, we also can envision educated, wealthier Republicans defecting from their party if the GOP continues to advocate a nativist, racially hostile platform that is anathema to more cosmopolitan, economic conservatives. These twin developments could produce a wholesale electoral realignment, but we still rate this possibility as unlikely given the American two-party system's extraordinary resilience, a fact that reinforces the Southern realignment's exceptionalism.

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## Notes

1. Indeed, Lublin (2004) documents the Democrats' institutional hegemony that prevented democratization in the South even after the passage of civil rights legislation, thus inhibiting immediate partisan change in the region.
2. Regarding the "leading indicator" of presidential voting, E. Black and Black (2002) note, for example, that Republican candidates have won the majority of the two-party presidential vote in the South in each year since 1964.
3. Building upon the issue evolution framework and prior work by Layman and Carsey (2002a, 2002b) and Carsey and Layman (2006), Layman, Carsey, Green, Herrera, and Cooperman (2010) argue that increased ideological clarity among party activists along three dimensions—racial, social welfare, and cultural—produce changes in the issue attitudes of both elected officials and the mass public.
4. We note that although we approach the causes of partisan ambivalence in this period through the lens of the issue-evolution theoretical framework (i.e., Carmines & Stimson, 1986, 1989), our findings are also consistent with group- and activist-based theories of party change advanced by, most notably, Cohen, Karol, Noel, and Zaller (2008); Karol (2009); Noel (2012, 2013); and Wohlbrecht (2000). That is, whether the parties in government initiated the party reversal, or whether activists and outside intellectuals forced the issue and the national parties in turn changed positions as a form of coalition maintenance (e.g., Karol, 2009; Noel, 2012, 2013; Schickler, Pearson, & Feinstein, 2010), our theory suggests that the electorate responded to these changes beginning in 1964, at least in terms of altering the criteria by which they evaluated the major parties.
5. Consider this analogy offered by Senator Zell Miller (D-GA), explaining his reluctance to switch parties despite his increasing ideological divergence from his party and decision to endorse George Republican W. Bush for reelection in 2004 over Democrat John Kerry:

But I'm 72 years old and I have lived in this old house for a long time. That's what I compare it to, a house that's old that I've lived in that now is getting kind of rundown and got some strangers living in the basement that I don't even know. But it's where I've always been. And I could probably be more comfortable in another house, but I haven't got many years to live in this house. And I was here first and I'm not going to leave. (NewsNight with Aaron Brown, 2003).

6. The full distribution of this variable is presented in Supplementary Appendix A for all three years.
7. Both 1964 and 1968 include an oversampling of Black respondents. Our analysis is restricted to White respondents and we therefore do not utilize survey weights, per the CPS instruction.
8. The index defines ambivalence as  $Ambivalence_{comparative} = (D + R) / 2 - |D - R|$ . The first term on the right-hand side measures the intensity of the respondent's considerations; the second term takes into account the similarity. In the measure,

$D$  combines positive attitudes toward the Democratic Party with negative attitudes toward the Republicans,  $D = (P_D + N_R) / 2$ ;  $R$  does likewise for positive Republican and negative Democratic statements,  $R = (P_R + N_D) / 2$ . The measure ranges from  $-2.5$  to  $5$  where higher values indicate a greater level of ambivalence. Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin (1995) measure and its variants are widely used (e.g., J. M. Miller & Peterson, 2004), and evidence suggests its superiority to other measures of ambivalence (Breckler, 1994). The “Griffin Index” has been used in studies as diverse as marketing (Jewell, 2003) and attitudes toward different kinds of diets (Povey, Wellens, & Conner, 2001).

9. Our Southern sample is 339 in 1964 and 336 in 1968. Our non-Southern sample is 927 in 1964 and 812 in 1968.
10. To test the robustness of these findings, we split our sample into South and non-South respondents, similar to Sears and Valentino (1997). These results, which are substantively identical to those presented in the following section, are in the Supplementary Appendix C.
11. Unfortunately, one variable for which we are unable to control is ideology: ideological self-placement did not appear on the ANES until 1972.
12. We do not wish to imply that the observed lack of statistical significance necessarily means the impact is equal to zero, as failing to reject the null hypothesis is not the same as observing a null effect (Rainey, 2014).
13. The correlation between our racial attitudes scale and the thermometer rating for Wallace is 0.430 in 1968. We unfortunately cannot compare this to Goldwater, as ANES candidate feeling thermometers had not yet been introduced in 1964.
14. Racial attitudes may also moderate the impact of partisan intensity independent of region. That is, perhaps partisan intensity is diminished among those who harbor the strongest racial attitudes, regardless of region. We do not find support for such an expectation. The coefficient for the interaction term is not significant in either year. The impact of partisan intensity is relatively constant across the range of racial attitudes in both 1964 and 1968—for example, in 1968, at the minimum value of racial attitudes, the marginal effect of partisanship is  $-0.213$  (with a standard error of 0.074,  $p = .014$ ), while at the maximum value of racial attitudes it is  $-0.160$  (with a standard error of 0.074,  $p = .030$ ). Full results of a model in which partisan intensity is interacted with racial attitudes are presented in Supplementary Appendix D.
15. To test this hypothesis, we examine if the marginal effect varies across levels of partisanship once conditioned by region. We found no evidence that the effect was conditioned by partisanship. These results are also presented in Supplementary Appendix D.
16. We begin with 1960 rather than 1956 because the knowledge question is missing in 1956. When estimating the model in 1956 without the knowledge variable, the coefficient on the interaction is not distinguishable from zero.
17. The predicted probabilities are calculated using an “observed values” approach (W. H. Greene, 2008; Hammer & Kalkan, 2013)—These results are substantively identical to those calculated by setting each variable to its “typical” value.

## Supplemental Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online.

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