

# Priming Predispositions and Changing Policy Positions: An Account of When Mass Opinion is Primed or Changed

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## **Abstract:**

Prior research provides limited insights into when political communications prime or change citizens' underlying opinions. This paper attempts to fill that void by putting forth a new account of priming and opinion change. I argue that crystallized attitudes can often be primed by new information. An influx of attention to less crystallized issues, however, should lead individuals to alter their underlying opinions in accordance with prior beliefs. Since predispositions acquired early in the lifecycle like partisanship, religiosity and group-based affect/antagonisms are more crystallized than mass opinion about public policy, media and campaign content will tend to prime citizens' predispositions and change their policy positions. Both my review of previous priming research and original analyses presented in this study from five new cases strongly support that crystallization-based account of when mass opinion is primed or changed. I conclude with a discussion of the paper's potential methodological, political, and normative implications.

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## **Priming vs. Opinion Change**

*Not only is projection a plausible alternative interpretation [to priming], it is an alternative with real consequence. The political differences between priming and projection are enormous. If priming holds, then television news possesses the capacity to alter the standards by which a president is judged, and therefore the degree of public popularity a president enjoys and the power he can wield. If projection holds, then we will have discovered that people interpret new events or reinterpret old events in order to maintain consistency with their existing predispositions—an interesting discovery, though hardly a new one (e.g. Abelson 1959) and, most important, one that implies a sharply reduced role for television news as a molder of opinion.*

- Iyengar and Kinder, *News the Matters* (1987, pg 71)

As the epigraph indicates, Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) path breaking study of media effects was already sensitive to the large political differences between priming and opinion change.<sup>1</sup> The priming hypothesis, which posits that the more attention campaigns and the media pay to a particular aspect of political life the more citizens will rely on that consideration in their political evaluations, has substantial implications for American politics. Indeed, the capacity to alter the standards of public evaluations through priming opens the door for campaigns and the media to affect the overall popularity of incumbents and candidates for elected office.<sup>2</sup> The rival explanation of opinion change in accordance with prior candidate preferences offers much less potential for political communications to influence electoral outcomes. A political campaign's

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<sup>1</sup> The process whereby citizens change their underlying opinions has been variously described as projection, rationalization and persuasion. Following Lenz (2009; 2012), I use the term opinion change so as not to implicate any particular mechanism.

<sup>2</sup> Krosnick and Kinder (1990), for example, argue that President Reagan's job approval rating declined during the final weeks of 1986 in large part because Americans' negative attitudes towards U.S. intervention in Central American were primed by news of the Iran Contra Scandal.

emphasis on specific issues would have little net impact on vote choice under that mechanism because voters simply adopt the positions of their already preferred candidates.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from these political differences, priming and opinion change also carry different normative implications. When politicians adopt new positions or focus attention on older ones, voters may respond by either changing their minds about the recently salient position or changing sides to the candidate who best reflects their views about the issue (Carsey and Laymen 2006). The former mechanism, which following Lenz (2009) I refer to throughout this study as opinion change, suggests a less engaged public who responds to salient campaign issues by reflexively adopting their preferred candidate's position. The latter mechanism, which is consistent with the priming hypothesis, suggests a more attentive electorate—one who actively engages new information and updates their candidate preferences accordingly.<sup>4</sup> Given the large political and normative differences between priming and opinion change, it is especially important to understand when media and/or campaign content are likely to produce these two disparate processes and why.

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<sup>3</sup> According to Lenz's (2009) "issue opinion change," account citizens pick candidates for reasons such as performance advantages, party, or superficial traits and then tend to adopt those candidates' policy positions.

<sup>4</sup> Or to use Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) framework, opinion change would be more consistent with the peripheral route to persuasion, in which individuals change their beliefs largely on the basis of cues provided by trusted sources. Priming, on the other hand is more consistent with the central route to persuasion, whereby individuals update their opinions on the basis of the information provided.

Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) initial account weighed in on this debate, ruling out the possibility of opinion change in one of their experimental tests of media influence. They found that television news stories about arms control made subjects more likely to evaluate President Reagan based upon pretreatment perceptions of how the president was handling that issue rather than altering respondents' previously recorded opinions about the president's defense competency.<sup>5</sup> Those powerful results in support of their priming hypothesis helped revitalize interest in political communications—a research field long dominated by the conclusion that the media had only “minimal effects” on public opinion (see Kinder 2003 for a review). In fact, several subsequent experimental and quasi experimental studies produced similar results in support of priming—results ostensibly showing that attention to particular aspects of political life by campaigns and/or the media make citizens rely more heavily on those consideration in their evaluations of politicians (Valentino 1999; Miller and Krosnick 2000; Valentino et al. 2002; Mendelberg 2001; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Stoker 1993; Hetherington 1996; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Krosnick and Brannon 1993; Johnston et al. 2004; Hillygus and Shields 2008).

Most of these previous studies never ruled out the opinion change alternative, though. Instead, they operated largely under the priming hypothesis's assumption that considerations supposedly primed by media and campaign content do not change in response to such new information, but that the weight given to them in subsequent political evaluations does. Recent work by Lenz (2009; 2012), however, raises serious doubts about that assumption. His studies convincingly show that results interpreted as evidence of issue priming—that is, increased overtime effects of mass policy positions on voter preferences in response to campaign content—were actually a product of what he calls issue opinion change. More specifically, Lenz (2009,

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<sup>5</sup> See Iyengar and Kinder (1987, pg 146-147) for priming results that account for projection.

834) found that “rather than causing priming, campaign and media attention to an issue led individuals to learn the issue positions of the candidates or parties and then to adopt the position of their preferred party or candidate as their own.”

This process in which voters adjust their underlying opinions to comport with their vote intentions can increase the cross-sectional correlation between those opinions and candidate preferences for reasons that have nothing to do with priming (Bartels 2006). The enhanced overtime relationship between issues and vote choice in cross-sectional data as a result of such opinion change, therefore, presents a damaging alternative to the priming hypothesis. So much so, in fact, that Lenz (2009, 830) states, “this alternative potentially indicts almost every published priming study. Their findings could reflect priming or they could reflect peoples’ tendency to adopt their party’s or candidate’s issue positions.”

Yet, while Lenz unambiguously shows that prior research relied too uncritically on the notion that issue positions are causes rather than consequences of voting behavior, it would be similarly shortsighted to reject the priming hypothesis based upon his findings. In fact, he wisely cautions against drawing such sweeping generalization from his studies.<sup>6</sup> Even more important for our present purposes, both my review of previously published studies and the findings presented in this paper from five new cases reveal several prominent instances of real-world priming effects that are not subject to the alternative explanation of underlying opinion change.

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<sup>6</sup> In particular Lenz (2009) states, “Priming may occur on other kind of issues, such as those where people have previously developed strong attitudes from their social experiences, religious institutions or popular entertainment” (834). His subsequent work also suggests that performance evaluations are easier to prime than policy positions because they are cognitively simpler for voters to process (Lenz 2012).

Rather than assuming that increased effects of variables in response to media and campaign content resulted from either priming or opinion change, then, it is imperative to identify the conditions under which these two disparate processes are more likely to take place. This paper attempts to fill that void by putting forth a new account of priming and opinion change. I argue that crystallized attitudes should often be primed by new information. An influx of attention to less crystallized issues, however, generally leads individuals to alter their underlying opinions in accordance with prior beliefs.

A great deal of evidence suggests that predispositions acquired early in the lifecycle like partisanship, religiosity and group-based antagonisms are quite a bit more crystallized than mass opinion about public policies (see discussion below). Simply put, then, media and campaign content should tend to prime predispositions and stimulate policy position change.

### **Theoretical Expectations: When Priming and Opinion Change Should Occur**

As just mentioned, my account of why new information results in either priming or opinion change depends on how crystallized the public's views are about the underlying attitude thought to be primed or changed. Attitude crystallization, as noted by Sears (1975; 1983; Sears and Valentino 1997), generally refers to: 1) the stability of an attitude over time, 2) the constraint or consistency between an attitude and different but ideologically linked objects, and 3) the power or influence that attitude exerts over new evaluations.

By that criterion, political attitudes vary substantially in their levels of crystallization. Predispositions—which following Bartels (1988, 84) and Zaller (1992, 23) I define as a range of social characteristics, group loyalties, and basic values—represent the crystallized end of the attitudinal spectrum. These attitudes that include party identification, religious/moral beliefs, and group-based affect/antagonisms are presumably acquired during pre-adult socialization and

then persist rather stably throughout the lifecycle (see Sears and Levy 2003 for a review). Policy preferences, on the other hand, stand in stark contrast to that long term stability. Students of public opinion have long argued that a substantial majority of Americans lack well-developed beliefs about public policies. Instead, mass issue preferences are largely informed by cues that citizens take from groups and politicians who share their values (Converse 1964; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock 1991; Zaller 1992; Lupia 1994; Laymen and Carsey 2002; Cohen 2003; Tomz and Sniderman 2005; Levendusky 2009; Berinsky 2009).

Those established differences in attitude crystallization between predispositions and policy preferences have important implications for when and why priming and underlying opinion change should take place. Since predispositions are learned during one's formative adolescent years and then persist rather stably throughout the lifecycle they should be relatively resistant to new information. Zaller (1992, 23), in fact, presupposes that such attitudes are not in the short run influenced by elite communications. Likewise, Bartels (1988, 9) contends that predispositions are essentially static but their importance varies over time in accordance with campaign content. If those assumptions are correct, candidate appeals to crystallized predispositions like partisanship, religiosity, and group-based loyalties should generally be resistant to political communications. In other words, citizens are not expected to change their underlying predispositions to those championed by preferred political figures. Individuals are likely to change their opinions of political figures to maintain consistency with their crystallized attitudes, though, as predispositions heavily condition the influence of new information on political evaluations (Bartels 1988; Zaller 1992).

Our expectations are much different for increased overtime impacts of public policy positions in response to events, media coverage, and/or campaign content. As referenced above,

Americans as a whole lack crystallized public policy preferences and tend to formulate their preferences about these issues from cues provided by groups and politicians who share their values. Unlike predispositions, then, mass policy preferences are thought to be heavily influenced by elite communications (Zaller 1992). This line of research showing citizens take their cues on public policies from elites who share their values suggests that an influx of attention to specific issues would result in issue opinion change, not issue priming. More specifically, prominent issues like top-bracket tax increases during the 2008 presidential campaign should primarily lead voters to alter their un-crystallized policy positions to comport with those advocated by their chosen candidates; few, however, are expected to change votes in accordance with their weakly held issue preferences.

To be sure, there are some notable exceptions to this broad contention that campaign and media content tends to prime predispositions and stimulate policy position change. Issues deeply rooted in racial and moral predispositions like race-targeted policies and abortion exhibit unusually high stability for policy preferences (Converse and Markus 1979; Kinder and Sanders 1996). We might, therefore, expect campaign and media content to prime those crystallized issue preferences.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, weaker held predispositions such as ideological self-placement should be more likely to change in response to campaign content than highly crystallized ones

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<sup>7</sup> The issue evolution accounts put forth by Carmines and Stimson (1989) and Adams (1997) of how partisanship was reorganized in response to the two parties taking distinct positions on racial equality and abortion assume that these emotional and personal issues were unlikely to change based upon the new partisan schism. Consistent with that expectation, Lenz (2012) finds that abortion attitudes, as measured in 1982, significantly predicted individual level changes between 1982 and 1997 in the Jennings Socialization Panel Study.



like partisanship, group-based attitudes and religiosity.<sup>8</sup> For the most part, though, predispositions are generally stable and mass policy preferences are not. The upshot of those crystallization differences, by my account, is predisposition priming and policy position change in response to political communications.

### **Previous Evidence of Priming and Opinion Change in Panel Studies**

Disentangling priming from opinion change requires panel surveys that interview the same respondents before and after an issue becomes especially salient. For, as noted above, the phenomenon whereby voters adjust their underlying opinions about prominent issues to comport with their vote intentions can increase repeated cross-sectional correlations between the two for reasons that have nothing to do with priming. If, however, the impact of previously measured attitudes—that is, measures from earlier panel waves conducted *before* an influx of new information could have caused citizens to change their underlying views—increases in response to campaign and media content, then the results support the priming hypothesis. Lenz (2009; 2012) effectively uses measures from prior panel waves to show that earlier vote preferences generally predict changes in issue preferences more powerfully than earlier issues affect changes in candidate evaluations. An influx of attention to specific issues, therefore, generally changes rather than primes mass policy preferences.

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<sup>8</sup> Converse (2007, 146-147), for example, argues that after accounting for the large number of respondents who either cannot place themselves on a seven point ideology scale or who unknowingly default to the moderate midpoint, ideology is only one-fifth to one-tenth as stable as party identification. That established instability, by my account, helps explain why Lenz (2012) found many 1990-1991-1992 ANES panelists altered their ideologies in response to the 1992 presidential campaign.

There are important instances of *predisposition priming* in panel studies not referenced by Lenz (2009), though. Sears and Funk's (1999) test of how anti-black sentiments, as measured in the 1940 wave of the Terman Longitudinal Study, affected panelists' partisan and ideological identifications in 1940, 1950, 1960, and 1977 is especially relevant. Much like the account proffered above, these authors argue that Americans' well-crystallized racial attitudes should have been *primed* by the new partisan division over race-related issues that emerged in the 1960s. Consistent with that expectation, Sears and Funk (1999, Tables 6 and 7) show that panelists' feelings about "Negroes" in 1940 had a noticeably larger impact on their political orientations in 1977 than they had in prior panel waves, and that these 1940 racial attitudes were significant predictors of individual-level changes in party identification between 1960 and 1977.

Several additional studies, which also utilize measurements from prior panel waves, provide more evidence that predispositions can be primed new information. These results include: 1) The September 11 terrorist attacks priming ethnocentrism—a general tendency to partition the world into ingroups and outgroups that exhibits “impressive” overtime stability (Kinder and Kam 2009, 67). Kam and Kinder (2007) conclude that this stable predisposition was activated by 9/11 in part because ethnocentrism, as measured in the 2000 wave of the 2000-2002 American National Election Study (ANES) Panel, had a significantly larger impact on panelists' assessments of George W. Bush in 2002 than it had in 2000. 2) Hillygus and Jackman's (2003) panel results similarly suggest that pre-campaign measurements of party identification—a predisposition long considered to be the most crystallized of all political attitudes (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Markus and Converse 1979; Green et al. 2002)—were primed by party conventions and debates during the 2000 presidential cycle (see results below for partisan activation during the 2008 campaign as well). 3) Not surprisingly,

then, the influence of 2011 measures of partisanship on mass assessments of Mitt Romney also increased significantly after he secured the 2012 Republican nomination (Tesler 2012A). 4/5) Relatedly, Tesler (2012B; Tesler and Sears 2010) shows that pre-campaign measures of racial resentment—another highly stable predisposition (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Henry and Sears 2009)—became much more important determinants of McCain and Romney favorability ratings over the course of the 2008 and 2012 election years after their presidential campaigns were increasingly contrasted with Barack Obama’s highly racialized candidacy; 6) and a similar measure of racial conservatism from the 2011 baseline wave of the 2012 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project became a stronger predictor of 2012 primary support for Newt Gingrich immediately after his contention that African-Americans "should demand jobs, not food stamps" was subjected to intense media scrutiny (Tesler 2012C).<sup>9</sup> 7) Hutchings et al. (2011) offer experimental evidence of predisposition priming, too, as their racial threat manipulation enhanced the influence of pretreatment assessments of white identity in approval of Obama’s presidency. 8) And finally, Lenz’s (2007) reanalysis of Stoker’s (1993) priming results demonstrate that measures of moral traditionalism from the 1986 ANES were, in fact, primed by the 1987 revelation of Gary Hart’s sex scandal with Donna Rice.

A much different story emerges for issue priming in panel studies, though. Lenz (2012) examines eleven examples in which the cross-sectional correlations between policy positions and political evaluations increased in response to mass communications. Yet, his results show that those priming effects disappear in all but two of the eleven cases when using measurements from panel waves conducted before an issue became especially prominent. Consistent with those

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this incident see: Ward, John, “Newt Gingrich Seeks South Carolina Boost from Racially Charged Exchange with Juan Williams. *The Huffington Post*, January 17, 2012.

findings, an earlier unpublished version of this paper showed that the enhanced overtime correlations between Obama vote preferences and support for both top-bracket tax increases and governmental health care mostly vanished when these un-crystallized policy preferences were measured in panel waves conducted before the two issues received so much media attention in 2008 and 2009 (**citation redacted**).<sup>10</sup>

Informatively, one of the two instances in which Lenz finds policy preference priming—1982 abortion attitudes predicting changes in party identification between 1982 and 1997 in the Jennings Socialization Panel Study—involves an anomalous issue in which Americans have relatively crystallized issue positions (Converse and Markus 1979).<sup>11</sup> Taken together, then, this unique abortion case of policy preference priming case, along with the nine above-referenced instances of predisposition priming in panel studies, suggests that crystallized attitudes are oftentimes primed by new information. There is almost no prior evidence, however, that less crystallized issue preferences are susceptible to priming.

### **Method: Testing for Priming and Opinion Change in Panel Studies**

Based on both my theoretical expectations and the results from prior panel studies, we should expect news events, the media, and campaigns to regularly prime such predispositions as partisanship, group-based affect/antagonism and religious/moral beliefs. I test this hypothesis

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<sup>10</sup> These analyses were cut from the revised manuscript due to space constraints.

<sup>11</sup> The second instance of policy preference priming involves an increased influence of 2000 defense spending placement on 2002 political evaluations after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Ladd 2007). Ladd notes that unlike many policies this item had established validity prior its 2000 measurement, which could explain the rare instance of policy preference priming.

below with five new cases in which an influx of attention to those aspects political life could have either primed or changed Americans' underlying predispositions

These studies estimate multiple models from the data. The first model examines the influence of predispositions measured before an issue became prominent on both pre- and post-prominence dependent variables. Study 1, for instance, explores the influence of attitudes about Catholics—measured in the 1956 wave of the 1956-1960 ANES Panel before John F. Kennedy's religion made Catholicism a major issue during his campaign for president—on vote choice in the 1956 and 1960 presidential elections. This method effectively rules out the possibility that the enhanced overtime influence of predispositions on political evaluations were brought about by opinion change since attitudes were assessed before events could have prompted respondents' to alter their underlying predispositions. We can be confident, then, that the results from these tests were the product of predisposition priming, not predisposition change.

Those results, however, do not rule out the possibility that some citizens might also change their predispositions in response to new information. I, therefore, estimate two simple change models to test how much candidate evaluations changed in accordance with prior predispositions and how much predispositions changed to comport with prior political beliefs. If my predisposition priming account is accurate, then prior predispositions should predict changes in candidate preferences more powerfully than prior candidate preferences predicted changes in predispositions. In other words, the media attention should prime, rather than change, relevant predispositions.

All of those models include controls for such relevant factors as, party identification, ideological self-placement (when available), and standard demographics; all results from the

models are presented graphically to ease interpretation (see supplementary appendix for full tables and variable coding).

### **Study 1: Attitudes about Catholics and Presidential Vote Choice, 1956-1960**

“When a candidate is seen as standing for or against a certain social group,” according to Kinder and Dale-Riddle’s theory of group-based voting (2012, 23), “voters will be attracted or driven away, depending on their attitude toward the group in question.” A candidate’s most visible signal of social group sympathy is perhaps group membership itself, especially when his or her identity is the subject of intense media scrutiny (Kinder and Dale Riddle 2012). An influx of attention about candidates’ social identities, then, should be ripe for activating group-based considerations in Americans’ voting behavior.

By that account, we would expect pro and anti-Catholic predispositions to be primed by John F. Kennedy’s 1960 campaign to become the country’s first Roman Catholic president. After all, Kennedy’s religious affiliation received tremendous media attention during both the 1960 primary and general election campaigns (White 1961; Kinder and Dale Riddle 2012). So much so, in fact, that 64 percent of the American public could correctly identify Kennedy as Catholic by February 1960, with that number jumping to 84 percent in July, and 92 percent in the ANES’s pre-election survey.<sup>12</sup> Only 36 percent of the population, by contrast, could correctly identify John Kerry as a Catholic in August 2004.<sup>13</sup> That knowledge seemed to be on the top of many voters’ heads too. Nearly 40 percent of ANES respondents, for instance, voluntarily

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<sup>12</sup> These polling reports were accessed from a search of the Roper’s ipoll database for “Kennedy” under the sub-topic of religion.

<sup>13</sup> This polling report was accessed from a search of the Roper’s ipoll database for “Kerry” under the sub-topic of religion.

introduced Kennedy's religion into the conversation before any direct probing by interviewers (Converse et al. 1961). "Since this figure certainly understates the proportion of the population for whom religion was a salient concern," Converse et al. (1961, 276) conclude that, "it testifies rather eloquently to the importance of the factor in conscious political motivations during the fall campaign."

It is not particularly surprising, then, that prior studies found religion to be a major factor in 1960 presidential voting. Catholics and Protestants were much more divided in their general election vote choices that year than they were at any time before or have been any time since (Converse et al. 1961; Kinder and Dale Riddle 2012). Moreover, this Catholic-Protestant voting schism was most pronounced between Catholics who identified strongly with their religion and Protestants who distrusted Catholic groups (Kinder and Dale Riddle 2012). These prior analyses, however, do not address how much stronger the effect of attitudes towards Catholics were in 1960 than other years. Nor do they test whether attitudes about Catholics also changed in response to Kennedy's campaign for president. In other words, did the 1960 campaign prime or change attitudes towards Catholics?

My account of priming and opinion change predicts the latter. Religion has long set the standard for pre-adult socialization and attitude stability (Hyman 1959; Green et al 2002). In fact, most panel studies like the 1956-1960 ANES do not even re-ask religious affiliation in later panel waves because it is presumed to be so crystallized (Green et al. 2002). Like other group-based predispositions, attitudes towards prominent religious groups are also well-grounded in ethnocentrism (Kam and Kinder 2012). With feelings towards religious groups deeply rooted in both religion and ethnocentrism, we would expect those attitudes to be relatively crystallized. It is not surprising, then, that attitudes about the Catholic Church continue to exhibit substantially

more individual-level stability than most policy preferences even in a modern era where religious division are not nearly as salient in public life as they were when Kennedy was running for president.<sup>14</sup> Those crystallized attitudes, by my account, are not expected to change in response to Kennedy's candidacy. We should, however, expect citizens' to change their vote choices in accordance with their underlying feelings towards Catholics since Kennedy's religion was a strong signal that his presidency might be particularly sympathetic to that group.

Consistent with that expectation, the first panel of Figure 1 suggests that Kennedy's religious background powerfully primed attitudes towards Catholics in the 1960 election. That display graphs the relationship between attitudes toward Catholic Groups, as measured in the 1956 wave of the American National Election Study Panel, and presidential vote choice in 1956 and 1960 among the 794 ANES panelists who voted in both elections. As can be seen, there was hardly any impact of attitudes towards Catholics on panelists' 1956 vote preferences. Figure 1, however, shows that this 1956 measure of Catholic-group trust was a powerful predictor of the exact same panelists' vote choices in the 1960 presidential election. After controlling for party identification and standard demographic factors, the display indicates that changing from distrusting Catholic groups to trusting them increased average Americans' support for the Democrats by roughly 10 percentage points in 1956 and over 50 points in 1960. This highly significant priming effect is not subject to the opinion change alternative, either, since it employs its attitudinal measures from a panel wave conducted before Kennedy's religion could have prompted Americans to change their underlying group-based feelings.

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<sup>14</sup> The test-retest correlation between thermometer ratings of the Catholic Church in the 2002-2004 ANES was .59, which was substantially higher than the stability of most policy preferences.



The first panel of Figure 1 does not tell us the relative rates of mind-changing and side-changing, though. That is, how many panelists changed \ sides from the previous presidential election to comport with their feelings towards Catholics versus how many changed their minds about Catholics because the new leader of the Democratic Party was a member of that group? The bottom two panels of Figure 1 indicate this contest decisively favored mind-changing. The first of those two panels, for instance, discloses that 1956 attitudes towards Catholics were a highly significant ( $T = 8.1$ ) predictor of change in Democratic presidential support from 1956 to 1960. All else being equals, panelists who trusted Catholic groups in 1956 were nearly 40 percentage points more likely to change to Kennedy than those who distrusted them. The final panel of Figure 1, however, shows that there was virtually no aggregate change in attitudes about Catholics from 1956 to 1960. Moreover, prior vote preferences had no influence over the individual-level change that occurred.

All told, then, the evidence demonstrates that Kennedy's religious background primed Americans' underlying attitudes towards Catholics in presidential voting without changing them. Those results therefore handsomely support the contention that predispositions such as group-based loyalties are primed, rather than changed, by events and political communications that make them salient.

### **Study 2: Attitudes about Gays and Lesbians and Bush Evaluations, 2000-2004**

A candidate need not embody group membership to activate group-specific considerations in public evaluations, though. Candidates' prominent policy proposals provide another visible signal about whether they will or will not be sympathetic to specific social groups while in office. An influx of attention to issue positions that disproportionately help or hurt notable social groups are therefore also expected to activate group-based predispositions in

candidate evaluations. Differences in the 1964 presidential candidates' support for the Civil Rights Act, for example, helped open up a large racial divide in that year's presidential voting (Carmines and Stimson 1989); and as noted above, those elite-level differences between the two parties over racial issues primed attitudes about blacks in white Americans' partisan attachments between 1960 and 1977 (Sears and Funk 1999).

The influx of attention to Republicans' anti-gay marriage efforts in 2004 fit into that paradigm as well. A series of events in February 2004, which included both the Massachusetts Supreme Court's ruling that the state's gay marriage ban was unconstitutional and the mayor of San Francisco's order to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples, catapulted the issue to the lead news story in the country (Fiorina et al. 2006, 111). President Bush quickly aligned himself against those liberalizing events in a February 24, 2004 televised speech from the White House, which called upon congress "to promptly pass, and to send to the states for ratification, an amendment to our Constitution defining and protecting marriage as a union of man and woman as husband and wife." That proposed Federal Marriage Amendment eventually came up short in a July 2004 Senate vote. Yet, the appearance of anti-gay marriage ballot initiatives in eleven states virtually ensured that the issue would remain salient throughout the election year.

After every one of those initiatives passed, many in the media speculated that the president's strong opposition to same-sex marriage made the difference in his reelection bid. That popular narrative about gay marriage's crucial role in reelecting Bush has been criticized by political scientists, though, who point out that he did not systematically outperform his 2000 vote tallies in the gay marriage initiative states (Fiorina et al. 2006). Yet, the absence of aggregate evidence in these studies does not preclude the possibility that attitudes about homosexuals were more closely related to public support for George W. Bush in 2004 than they had been in the

past. It could be, for instance, that the president's well publicized anti-gay position increased his support among Americans harboring homophobic predispositions while diminishing his support among those who felt warmer towards gays and lesbians. The net effects of attitudes towards homosexuality might have canceled out in the aggregate, then, while still being powerfully correlated with individual-level assessments of Bush (see Campbell and Monson 2008 for a similar analysis of the offsetting effects of the gay marriage issue on turnout in the 2004 election).

Suppose for the moment that the prominence of gay marriage in 2004 made attitudes about gays and lesbians a stronger correlate of mass opinion about George W. Bush than they had been beforehand. We would still not know whether that enhanced overtime relationship was the product of priming or opinion change. Much like attitudes about Catholics in the previous study, though, there is reason to suspect that predisposition priming was more prevalent than predisposition change in this case. As mentioned above, attitudes like homophobia that are rooted in religious and moral beliefs tend to be much more crystallized than policy preferences. Moreover, Kinder and Kam (2009) show that attitudes towards gays and lesbians are also well-grounded in a broader ethnocentrism. Consequently, thermometer ratings of homosexuals exhibited substantially more stability at the individual level than policy preferences in the 1990s.<sup>15</sup> That relative crystallization of homophobia, by my account, suggests that this predisposition was far more likely to have been primed than changed after Republican efforts to ban gay marriage during the 2004 campaign were subjected to intense media scrutiny.

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<sup>15</sup> The test-retest correlations between thermometer ratings of homosexuals in the 1994-1996 was .69, which as noted above, is substantially higher than the stability of most policy preferences.

Figure 2 tests that expectation with data from the 2000-2002-2004 ANES Panel Study, which fortuitously asked respondents to rate gays and lesbians on a 0-100 thermometer scale in all three panel waves. The first panel examines the influence of the 2000 thermometer rating on Bush vote choice in 2000 and 2004 among the 591 panelists who voted in both elections. That figure suggests that homophobia may have been primed by the 2004 campaign. After controlling for party identification, ideological self-placement and standard demographic factors, the display shows that changing from the coldest to the warmest rating of gays and lesbians decreased Bush's vote share among average Americans by nearly 25 points in 2000 and 50 points in 2004. Yet, it is important to note that this increase in effects is not statistically significant and was less pronounced in the un-weighted data.

The test illustrated in the second panel of Figure 2, however, yielded significant and robust priming effects. That display graphs out the relationship between panelists' 2002 gay thermometer ratings and presidential approval in 2002 and 2004. After controlling for partisanship, ideology and demographics, moving from the coldest to the warmest gay thermometer rating actually *increased* approval of Bush in 2002. That same change in 2002 attitudes about homosexuals, however, substantially lowered support for George W. Bush in 2004. It appears, then, that the president's visible opposition to same-sex marriage over the course of the 2004 election year activated attitudes towards gays and lesbians in mass evaluations of his presidency.

The bottom two panels also suggest that this predisposition priming effect occurred without changing panelists' underlying attitudes towards gays and lesbians. The third panel of Figure 2, for example, shows that 2002 thermometer ratings were a significant negative predictor of presidential approval change between 2002 and 2004 ( $p = .002$ ). All else being equal,

panelists who rated gays and lesbians most favorably grew nearly 25 points less supportive of Bush between 2002 and 2004 than their most homophobic counterparts. The fourth and final panel of the display, however, indicates that there was hardly any aggregate change in gay thermometer ratings between 2002 and 2004; moreover, Bush's 2002 approval rating failed to predict what little individual-level change occurred over that two-year time period.

Once again, then, this case suggests that predisposition priming is far more prevalent than predisposition change when political communications make them salient.

### **Study 3: Attitudes about Gays and Lesbians and Obama Approval in 2012**

President Obama's highly publicized May 9, 2012 announcement that he supports same-sex marriage might be expected to prime attitudes towards gays and lesbians in presidential approval even more powerfully than George W. Bush's 2004 opposition to it. Unlike Bush, who was merely refocusing attention on his prior opposition to marriage equality, Obama's announcement represented an historic position change. That position change to become the first sitting president to openly support gay marriage could have prompted Americans to change their attitudes towards his presidency to comport with their underlying homophobic (or lack thereof) predispositions, and/or change their feelings about homosexuality in accordance with prior feelings towards the president. For reasons discussed in the previous study, though, we should expect predisposition priming to be more prevalent than predisposition change in response to Obama's announcement.

Fortunately, some unique data collected by YouGov for the 2012 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP, Jackman et al. 2012) allows us to confidently discern whether Obama's announcement primed underlying attitudes towards gays and lesbians. The CCAP began with a massive profile wave of over one million YouGov panelists in December 2011. It then re-

interviewed a different nationally representative sample of these panelists each week of the campaign. The upshot is a weekly 2-wave panel of 1,000 individuals. We can leverage that design to assess the impact of 2011 gay thermometer ratings on Obama's weekly job approval rating because this item was asked in the December profile wave. If my predisposition priming account is accurate, we should see a significant increase in the effects of the gay thermometer rating on presidential approval immediately after Obama's public support for marriage equality.

That expectation is borne out in Figure 3. The figure displays the effects of moving from the coldest to the warmest rating of gays/lesbians on Obama's 5-category approval ratings (net of partisanship, ideology, demographics, and 2011 Obama approval) before during and after his historic same-sex marriage announcement received so much attention. As can be seen, this change in 2011 attitudes towards homosexuals had a small but significant effect on Obama's approval in pooled CCAP surveys conducted between January 1 and May 5, 2012. That pre-announcement influence of gay thermometer ratings more than tripled, though, in the two weekly CCAP surveys conducted immediately after Obama's May 9<sup>th</sup> position change--a highly significant priming effect as shown by the confidence intervals in the display.

The results in Figure 3 also powerfully demonstrate the flipside of priming. The priming hypothesis implies that communication effects decay as the cognitive accessibility of the primed considerations fades (Gerber et al. 2011, 148). Obama's announcement dominated the headlines for a few days, but that media attention quickly gave way to other campaign events (see Figure 1A of the supplementary appendix for media content trends). Consequently, Figure 3 shows that the priming effects of attitudes about gays and lesbians receded as Obama's announcement was replaced by new information. Obama's statement clearly primed underlying attitudes about gays

and lesbians, then, but that significant priming effect decayed shortly after new events made other relevant considerations salient.

Unfortunately, the 2012 CCAP did not re-ask thermometer ratings of gays and lesbians in its weekly panel surveys. So, we cannot discern how much Americans' underlying attitudes towards this group changed to comport with their previous support for Obama. Both our theoretical expectations and the results from the prior study in which gay thermometer ratings were not changed by Republicans 2004 efforts to ban same-sex marriage, strongly suggest that few Americans altered their well-crystallized attitudes towards the group in response to Obama's historic position change.

#### **Study 4: Partisan Activation in the 2008 Campaign**

“Political campaigns are important because they activate latent predispositions.” At least that was the conclusion deduced from the Elmira Voting Studies of the 1940s (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944, 74; Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McGhee 1954). Finkel (1993, 6) elaborated on that initial account, stating, “The activation model suggests that the main function of the general election period is to make electorally relevant certain attitudes that individuals bring to the campaign, that is, that individual votes are determined from the predispositions that are in place before the general election period begins.” Much like my crystallization-based account of priming, these activation models posit that campaigns prime pre-election year predispositions like partisanship rather than inducing citizens to change their underlying attitudes in accordance with their presidential vote preferences. Several studies, in fact, note the tendency of voters to return to their partisan camps as the campaign progresses (Hillygus and Jackman 2003; Finkel 1993; Flanigan and Zingale 1987; Farah and Klein 1989; Tesler and Sears 2010).

Figure 4 also suggests that presidential campaigns may prime partisanship. The display shows that the cross-sectional correlations between party identification and relative evaluations

of the two parties' eventual nominees generally increased over the course of the 2000, 2004 and 2008 election year, with a dramatic strengthening of the relationship between partisanship and McCain - Obama favorability ratings from January to October 2008. Those 2008 results once again beg the question of whether that growing relationship in repeated cross-sectional data was the result of priming or opinion change. My crystallization-based account of when attitudes are primed or changed suggests the latter. For, as noted above, party identification is widely considered to be the most crystallized of all political attitudes. Partisan activation should therefore be much more prevalent than partisan change over the course of presidential campaigns.

We can test that expectation with two different election-year panel studies that re-interviewed the same respondents several times during the 2008 election year. The first of these panels—the 2007-2008 Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (Jackman and Vavreck 2008)—contains over 10,000 registered voters who were interviewed in both their January and October 2008 panel waves. Our second source of data, the 2008-2009 ANES Panel Study, contains nearly 1,100 respondents who participated in both their January and October 2008 waves.

The top two displays in Figure 5 assess whether the influence of party identification, as measured in January 2008, on McCain - Obama Ratings increased over the course of the campaign in those two panel studies. After controlling for ideological placement and standard demographics, the first display indicates that strong Democrats and strong Republicans were divided by nearly 25 percent of the 0-1 McCain minus Obama scale's range in January 2008, and more than 50 percent in the October CCAP. As can be seen, the second panel in the display shows that the effect of early-year party identification on McCain – Obama ratings also doubled from January to October in the ANES reinterviews. Both the CCAP and the ANES data,



therefore, suggest that the 2008 campaign significantly primed partisan predispositions in evaluating the two parties' nominees for president.

The third panel of Figure 5 graphs the relationships between January party identification and changes in relative candidate evaluations during the 2008 election year in both the ANES and the CCAP. As we would expect from the significant priming effects shown in the top two panels of that display, the results from both the ANES and the CCAP indicate that early-year party identification powerfully predicted changes in McCain-Obama ratings from January to October 2008.

Unlike our prior studies, though, the fourth panel of Figure 5 shows that January McCain-Obama ratings also significantly predicted changes in party identification from January to October 2008. Nevertheless, the effect of early-year McCain-Obama evaluations on partisan change pales in comparison to the impact of January party identification on changing candidate evaluations during the campaign. Averaging across the ANES and the CCAP, respondents were more than three times more likely to change McCain-Obama candidate evaluations to comport with their January 2008 partisanship, than change their partisanship to comport with their prior feelings towards the two parties' 2008 presidential nominees. So, while partisan change was present, it was much less prevalent than partisan activation during this presidential campaign.

#### **Study 5: The Growing Relationship between Religiosity and Republicanism (1980-1997)**

As those findings suggest, partisanship is not inherently stable. Instead, Green, Palmquist and Schickler (2002, 141) argue, "Party attachments tend to be stable because the social group imagery associated with the parties tends to change slowly over time. Once a person's party attachments take root, they are seldom disrupted by new conceptions of the partisan groups and the social coalitions that they comprise." One way to change this social group imagery is to alter the composition of party leadership. The Republican Party, for instance, effectively

changed its public persona by putting Southerners into top party positions throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Green et al. 2002, 13). Sears, Citrin and Kosterman (1987) similarly show that the increased association between the Democratic Party and African-Americans, which resulted from Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign, immediately accelerated the growing polarization of Southern partisanship by both racial attitudes and race.

Along with these regional and racial image alterations, the two parties' religious personas have also undergone substantial changes in recent decades. The increased influence of the religious right in GOP politics during the 1980s and 1990s, the growing polarization of partisan elites over moral issues like abortion, and the 1992 Democratic nomination of a morally "progressive" candidate in Bill Clinton, all helped establish Republicans as the more religious party (Fiorina et al. 2006). As a result, several studies document a growing relationship between religiosity—a predisposition typically measured by how much guidance one receives from religion and/or how often he or she attends religious services—and Republicanism. That enhanced overtime correlation extends to partisanship and presidential vote choice, with both increasingly polarized by religious commitments since the 1980s (Gelman et al. 2010; Fiorina et al. 2006; Campbell 2002; Laymen 2001; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

Priming and opinion change could have each contributed to that enhanced overtime relationship in cross-sectional data.<sup>16</sup> Yet, it seems unlikely that Americans would have dramatically altered their religious commitments to comport with their preexisting partisan

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<sup>16</sup> At least some of that enhanced relationship was also probably produced by generational placement, as the partisan attachments of Americans who came of age amongst the new religious schism between the two parties are more heavily influenced by religiosity than older cohorts (Campbell 2002; Putnam and Campbell 2010).

preferences. I noted above, for instance, that religion has long set the standard for pre-adult socialization and attitude stability. In keeping with that reputation, religiosity was one of the most stable predispositions in the 2006-2008 GSS Panel Study.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, Sears and Henry (2008, 111) speculate that religiosity's unusually strong aggregate stability over one's college years may be the product of an even earlier and more profound socialization than other stable predispositions like party identification. We should expect from this established stability that Americans were primarily changing their partisan preferences over the past few decades to comport with their well-crystallized religious predispositions rather than changing their underlying religious commitments in accordance with their previous political preferences.<sup>18</sup>

I test that expectation with the 1982 and 1997 youth waves of the Jennings Socialization Study. Those two surveys both re-interviewed over 900 respondents who were originally

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<sup>17</sup> The test retest correlation was .79. Religiosity in the GSS was a two-item additive index, measured by frequency of religious service attendance and whether or not respondents consider themselves religious people.

<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it is still possible that at least some of the enhanced overtime correlation between religiosity and Republicanism documented in much prior research was the product of opinion change. Putman and Campbell (2010, 145), in fact, found evidence in their 2006-2007 Faith Matters Panel Study that the few respondents who became more or less religious from 2006-2007 did so largely in accordance with their 2006 political ideologies. That study is limited for our purposes of discerning priming from opinion change, though, by the fact that hardly any panelists changed their stable religious commitments over such a short one year time period, and that the two parties did not substantially alter their religious personas from 2006 to 2007.

surveyed in 1965 during their senior years of high school. Putnam and Campbell (2010, 379) utilize the same data to show that the correlation between religiosity, as measured with church attendance frequency, increased significantly amongst this cohort of panelists' from 1982 to 1997. They do not, however, examine whether that enhanced overtime effect was primarily driven by panelists changing their religious commitments to comport with their prior partisan preferences or vice versa.

Figure 6 tests whether predisposition priming did, in fact, play a part in this enhanced overtime relationship between Republicanism and religiosity. The first panel in the figure displays the relationship between religious service attendance, as measured in the 1982 wave of the Socialization study, and presidential vote choice in 1980 and 1996 among the 486 panelists who voted in both elections. As can be seen, there was hardly any impact of religiosity on panelists' 1980 vote preferences. Yet, this 1982 measure of religiosity was a highly significant predictor of the exact same panelists' vote choices in the 1996 presidential election. After controlling for party identification, ideological self-placement and standard demographic factors, the display indicates that changing from never attending religious services to frequently attending them increased average panelists' support for the Republican presidential candidate by 10 percentage points in 1980 and 30 points in 1996. The second panel of Figure 6 shows a less pronounced priming effect of 1982 religiosity on 1997 Republican Party identification. Yet, 1982 religiosity was still a significantly stronger predictor of 7-point party identification in 1997 than it was in 1982 (see Table A9 of the supplementary appendix)

The bottom two panels of Figure 6 also suggest that this predisposition priming effect occurred without changing panelists' underlying religiosity. The third panel, for example, shows that 1982 religiosity was a highly significant predictor of changing presidential support between

the 1980 and 1996 presidential elections ( $p < .001$ ). All else being equal, the most devout panelists were roughly 20 points less likely to change to the Democrats than their least observant counterparts. The fourth panel of the display, however, indicates that there was little aggregate change in church attendance among these panelists between 1982 and 1987; and 1980 presidential support did not predict individual level changes in religiosity during that time period.

As was the case with our previous studies, then, this case also suggests that predisposition priming in response to new information was much more prevalent than predisposition change.

### **Conclusion**

Taken together, the theoretical expectations, results from previous panel studies, and findings presented above from five new cases, all suggest that predispositions are often primed by political communications. The results from these cases also suggest that crystallized predispositions remain mostly stable even after political communications make them salient. Those findings stand in stark contrast to recent research, which shows policy preferences are more likely to change than be primed by new information (Lenz 2009, 2012; **citation redacted**)

To be sure, these findings do not imply that priming will occur every time politicians appeal to a stable predisposition. I failed to find significant partisan activation, for example, in panel studies conducted before and after both the 2000 and 2004 presidential nominating conventions despite the fact that these events are designed to make party identification salient.<sup>19</sup> Nor does it mean that the public will alter their issue positions in accordance with prior beliefs

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<sup>19</sup> These tests, which were conducted on 2000 and 2004 National Annenberg Election Study panel data, were the only cases I looked at that returned null findings. One potential reason for null findings is that party identification was already powerfully linked to candidate evaluations by the time of the 2000 and 2004 conventions, as Figure 5 showed.

whenever a particular fiscal issue becomes salient. And of course, opinions can be primed and/or changed among different segments of the population (Carsey and Laymen 2006; Dancey and Goren 2010). Generally speaking, though, the more crystallized an attitude is the more likely it will be primed, rather than changed, by political communications.

This conclusion that media and campaign content tends to prime predispositions and change policy positions has important implications for both electoral politics and those who research it. The priming hypothesis has received so much scholarly interest in large part because its contention that political communications possess the capacity to alter the standards of public evaluations opens the door for campaigns and the media to affect the overall popularity of incumbents and candidates for elected office. Many in the field have become skeptical of that assumption, however, after Lenz (2009; 2012) convincingly demonstrated that instances previously interpreted as issue priming were actually the product of issue opinion change.

My exposition of the evidence suggests that such skepticism is both warranted and premature. Enhanced relationships in repeated cross-sectional data between vote intention and prominent campaign issues like social security privatization in 2000 or top-bracket tax increases in 2008 should be subjected to the utmost scrutiny. For, as Lenz's findings clearly demonstrate, an influx of attention to public policies that Americans do not have well-developed opinions about generally leads to policy position change, not issue priming.

We should be much more confident, however, that increased overtime effects of predispositions in response to political communications were primarily caused by priming. Take, for example, the extensive literature on racial priming (see Mendelberg 2008 for a review). Based upon my crystallization account, voters would not have altered their longstanding attitudes towards African-Americans simply because recent presidential candidates employed racial

appeals. Instead, the increased effects of racial attitudes on presidential preferences found in response to such campaign content (Mendelberg 2001; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Valentino 1999; Valentino et al. 2002; Valentino and Sears 2005) were likely produced by citizens changing their opinions about presidential candidates to maintain consistency with those well-crystallized racial predispositions. This same reasoning applies to increased overtime effects of other predispositions like partisanship, ethnocentrism, religiosity and moral beliefs as well.

From a methodological standpoint, then, researchers need not utilize panel data in tests of priming. To be sure, it is always best to conduct such tests with measures from prior panel waves taken before new information could have prompted individuals to change their underlying attitudes. Yet, in the typical absence of such ideal data, researchers should still look for priming in repeated cross-sectional data when testing for increased effects of stable predispositions in response to political communications. Those effects, according to my account, will be produced much more from predisposition priming than predisposition change.

Returning back to political implications, the results presented also suggest that there are important limitations on the power of partisan appeals to change Americans' underlying attitudes. Campaign appeals, as Lenz shows, clearly exert a strong influence on Americans' issue opinions. Yet, while party-sponsored communication shapes some political attitudes, it does not run roughshod over all of them. Political appeals to deeply rooted predispositions, in fact, lead more voters to change their candidates than to change their attitudes.

Those results are reminiscent of Bartels's (2003, 49) apt conclusion that "citizens have attitudes but not preferences." Indeed, voters will often utilize their underlying attitudes/predispositions but rarely change their minds about candidates who champion their weakly held policy preferences. Bartels is largely pessimistic about what those lack of

preferences mean for a liberal Democratic theory premised on the notion that citizens' have meaningful opinions about government and policy. If there is a normative silver lining in my results, though, it is that democracy with attitudes can still hold politicians accountable if and when they take positions out of step with citizens' more strongly held predispositions.



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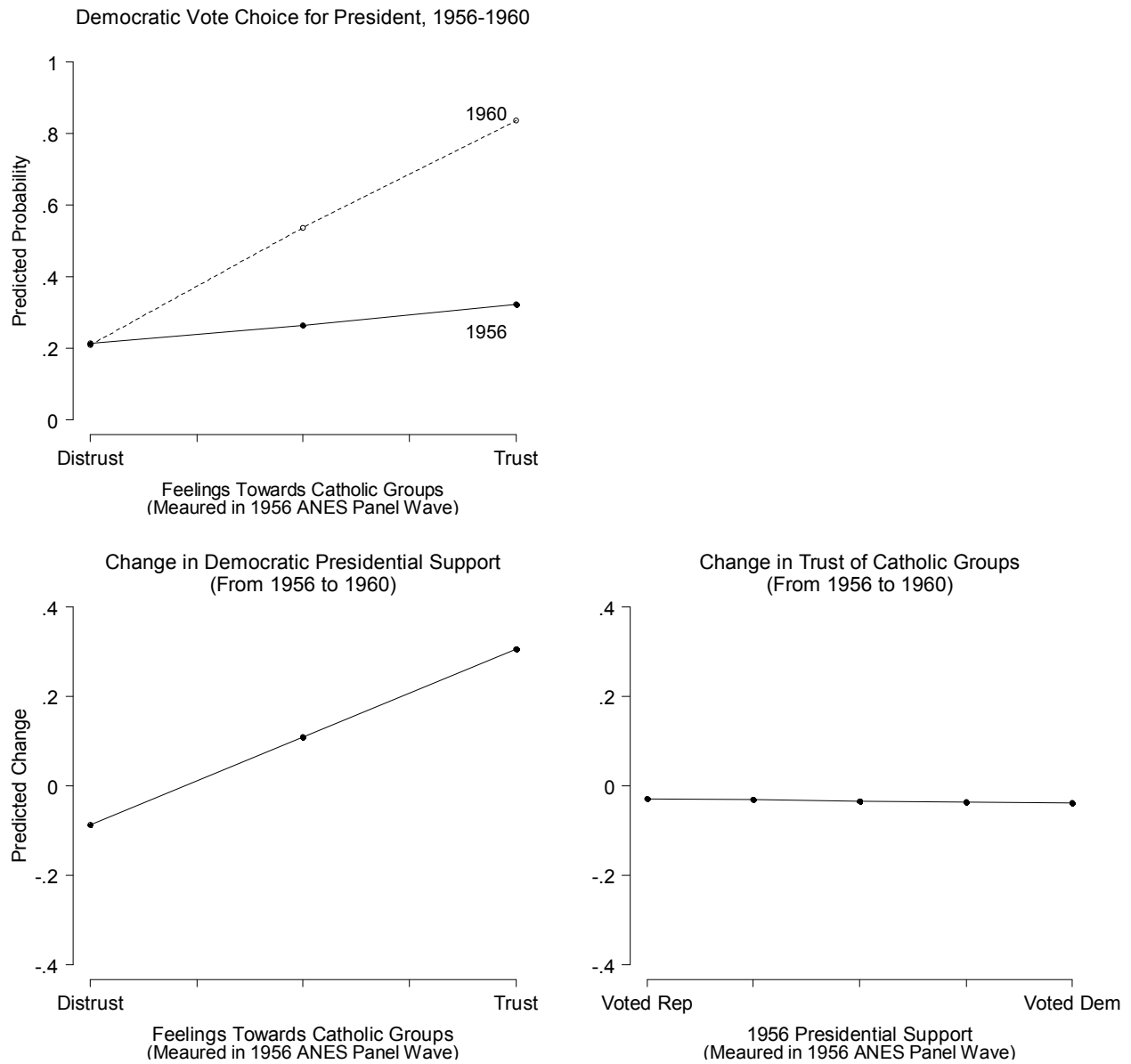
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*Figure 1: Attitudes about Catholics and Vote Choice, 1956-1960.* Predicted probabilities in panel 1 based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A1. Probabilities calculated by setting 1956 partisanship, gender, age, black, education and income to their sample means. Predicted change rates in panels 2 and 3 calculated from OLS regression coefficients in Table A2, with 1956 partisanship, gender, age, black, education and income, set to their sample means. *Source:* 1956-1960 ANES Panel.

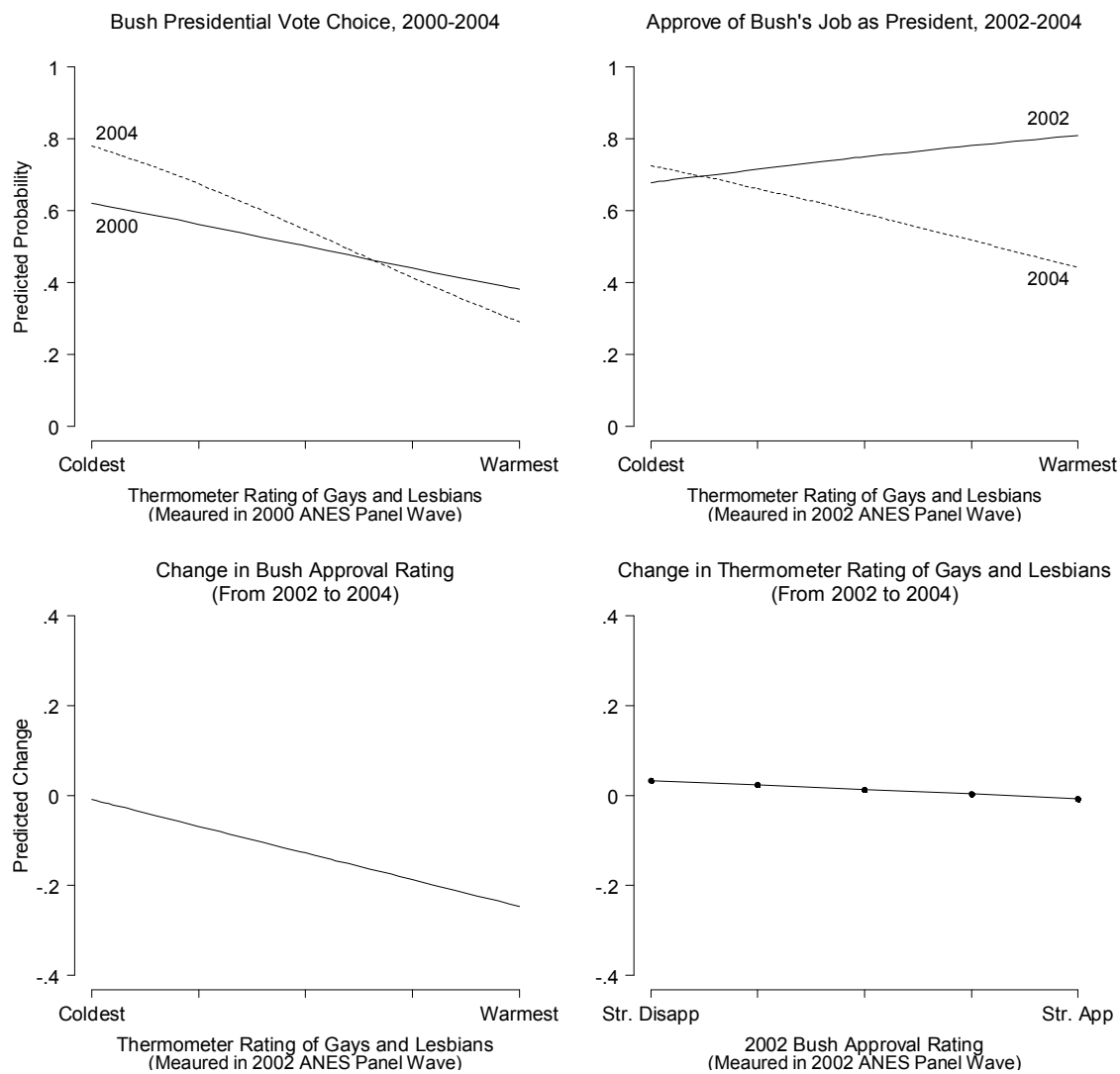
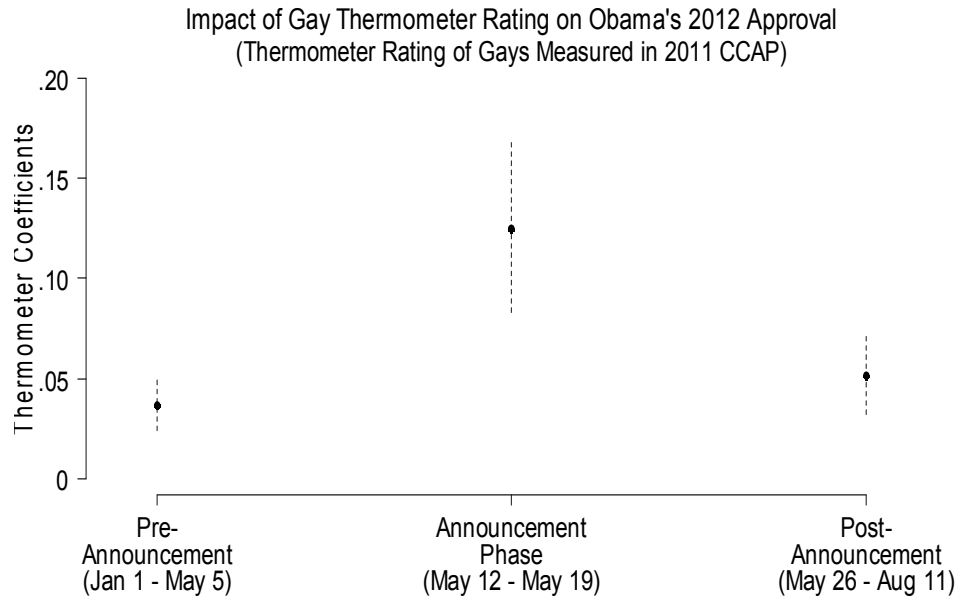


Figure 2: Attitudes about Gays and Lesbians and George W. Bush Evaluations, 2000-2004. Predicted probabilities in the top two panels based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A3. Probabilities calculated by setting 2000/2002 partisanship, ideological self-placement, male, age, black, education, south and income to their sample means. Predicted change rates in bottom two panels calculated from OLS regression coefficients in Table A4, with 2002 partisanship, ideological self-placement, male, age, black, education, south and income set to their sample means. Source: 2000-2002-2004 ANES Panel.



*Figure 3: Attitudes about Gays and Lesbians and Obama Approval, 2012.* Points plot OLS coefficients in Table A5. Each point denotes the change in 5-category Obama approval rating (coded 0-1) associated with moving from coldest to warmest on 2011 gay thermometer ratings, with 2011 partisanship, ideology, Obama approval, black, male, south, and education held constant. Dashed lines represent the 95 percent confidence intervals around those point estimates. *Source:* 2011-2012 CCAP.

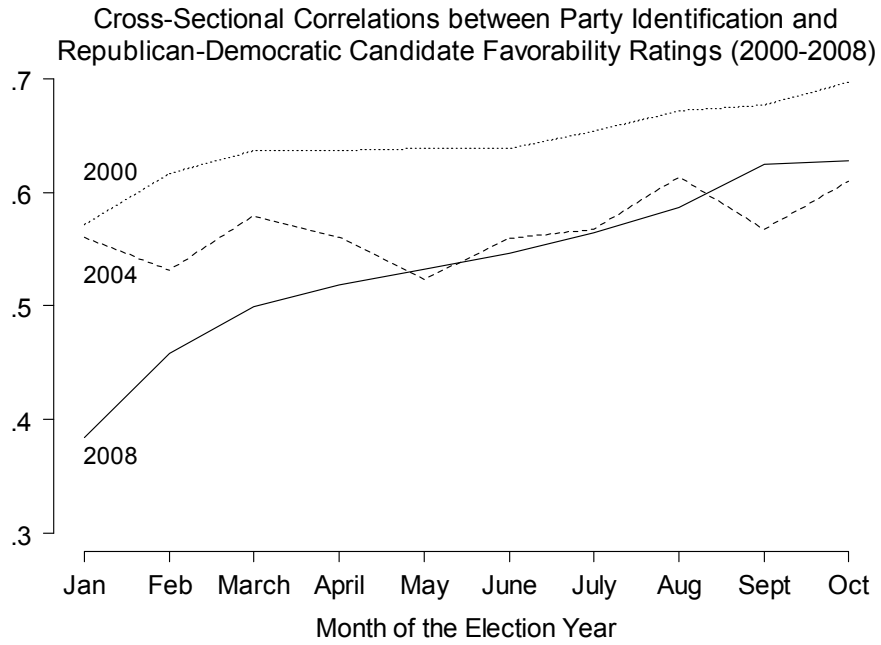


Figure 4: Cross-Sectional Correlations between 3-category Party Identification and Republican minus Democratic General Election Candidate Favorability Ratings. Source: 2000, 2004, 2008 National Annenberg Election Studies.

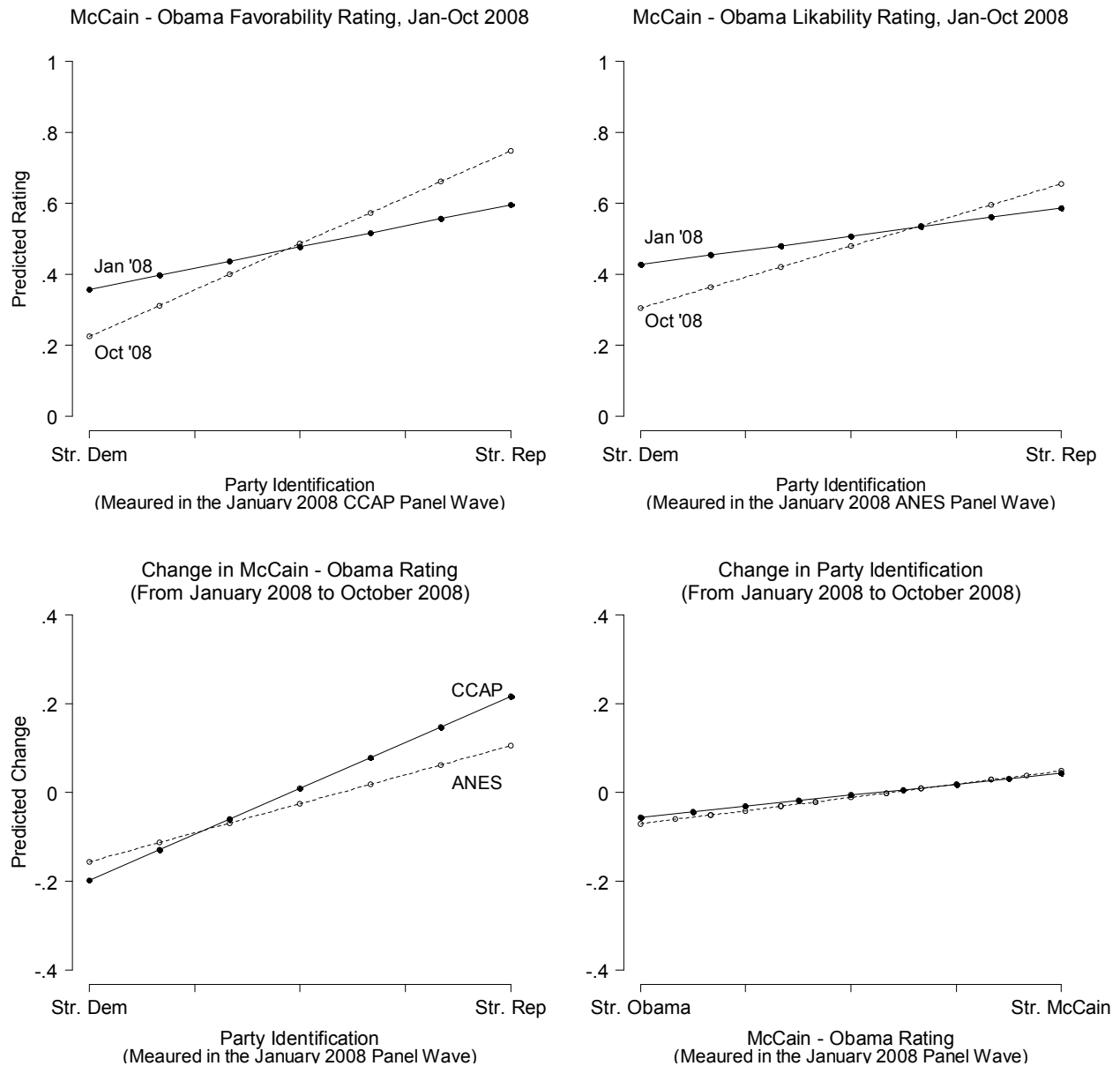
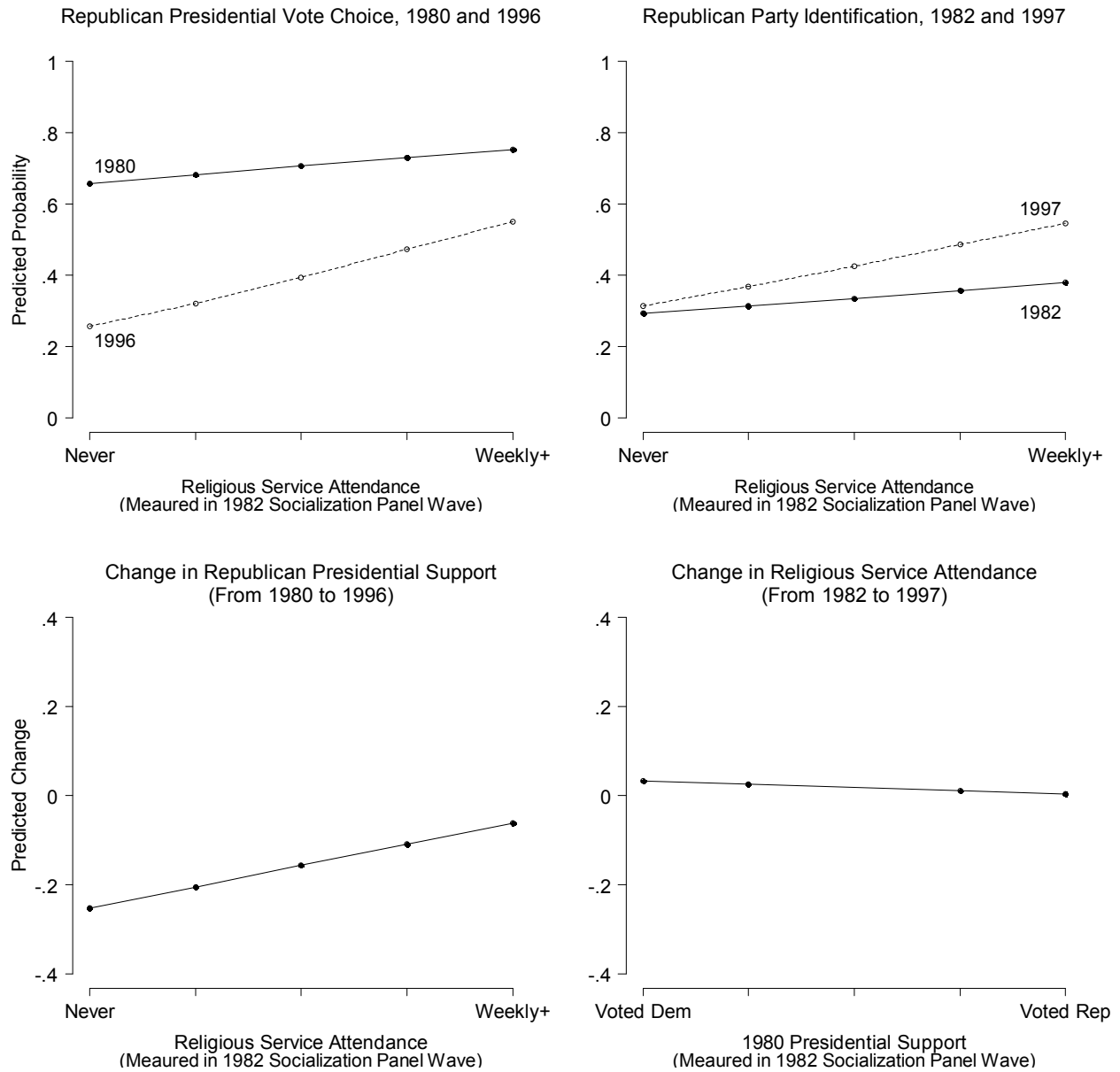


Figure 5: Party Identification and McCain – Obama Ratings, January – October 2008. Predicted ratings in the top two panels based on OLS regression coefficients in Table A6. Predicted ratings, which range from 0 (rate Obama very favorable and McCain very unfavorable) to 1 (rate McCain very favorable and Obama very unfavorable) calculated by setting January 2008 ideological self-placement, male, age, black, education, south and income to their sample means. Predicted change rates in bottom two panels calculated from OLS regression coefficients in Table A7, with January 2008 ideological self-placement, male, age, black, education, south and income to their sample means. Source: 2007-2008 CCAP; 2008-2009 ANES.



*Figure 6: Religiosity and Republicanism, 1980-1997.* Predicted probabilities in the top two panels based on logistic regression coefficients in Table A8. Probabilities calculated by setting 1982 partisanship (panel 1 only), ideological self-placement, male, age, black, education, south and income to their sample means. Predicted change rates in bottom two panels calculated from OLS regression coefficients in Table A10, with 1982 partisanship, ideological self-placement, male, age, black, education, south and income to their sample means. *Source:* 1982-1997 Youth waves of the Jennings Socialization Panel Study

## **Supplementary Appendix**

### ***Explanatory Variables***

*Age*: Actual age recoded from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest).

*Black*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (African-American) or 0 (non-black).

*Bush Approval*: A 5-category variable recoded from 0 (strongly disapprove) to 1 (strongly approve). Don't knows are coded as .5.

*Democratic Presidential Support*: A 5-category variable recoded from 0 (voted Republican) to 1 (voted Democratic).

*Education*: Recoded from 0 (lowest attainment) to 1 (highest attainment).

*Gay Thermometer Rating*: A 101-category variable recoded from 0 (coldest) to 1 (warmest).

*Ideology*: A five-category variable recoded from 0 (extremely/very liberal) to 1 (extremely/very conservative). Respondents who cannot place themselves ideologically are coded as .5.

*High Income*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (15th income percentile) or 0 (all other respondents).

*Low Income*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (25th income percentile) or 0 (all other respondents).

*Male*: An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (male) or 0 (female).

*McCain – Obama Favorability*: A ten category scale measuring the difference between evaluations of McCain and Obama (5 point rating scales for each item). The scale is recoded from 0 (rate Obama very favorable and McCain very unfavorable) to 1 (rate McCain very favorable and Obama very unfavorable). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*McCain – Obama Likability*: A 14 category scale measuring the difference between evaluations of McCain and Obama (7 point rating scales for each item). The scale is recoded from 0 (rate Obama extremely likable and McCain extremely unlikable) to 1 (rate McCain extremely likeable and Obama extremely unlikable). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*Obama Approval*: A 5- variable recoded from 0 (strongly disapprove) to 1 (strongly approve). Don't knows are coded as .5.

*Party Identification*: A seven category variable recoded from 0 (strong Democrat) to 1 (strong Republican).

*Religious Service Attendance*: A five category variable recoded from 0 (never) to 1 (weekly)

*Republican Presidential Support:* A 4-category variable recoded from 0 (voted Democratic) to 1 (voted Republican).

*South:* An indicator variable taking on a value of 1 (Southern residence) or 0 (non-South).

*Trust Catholic Groups:* A three category variable recoded from 0 (distrust) to 1 (trust).

### ***Dependent Variables***

*Bush Approval:* An indicator variable taking on a value of 0 (disapprove/don't know) or 1 (approve).

*Bush Vote Choice:* An indicator variable taking on a value of 0 (voted for Gore/Kerry) or 1 (voted for Bush).

*Change in Bush Approval:* A 10 category scale that subtracts 2002 Bush Approval from 2004 Bush Approval. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from strongly approve to strongly disapprove) to 1 (change from strongly disapprove to strongly approve).

*Change in Democratic Presidential Support:* A 10 category scale that subtracts 1956 Democratic presidential support from 1960 Democratic presidential support. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from voting Democrat to voting Republican) to 1 (change from voting Republican to voting Democrat).

*Change in Catholic Group Trust:* A 6 category scale that subtracts 1956 Catholic group trust from 1960 Catholic group trust. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from trust to distrust) to 1 (change from distrust to trust).

*Change in Gay Thermometer Rating:* A 202 category scale that subtracts 2002 thermometer ratings from 2004 thermometer ratings. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from warmest to coldest rating) to 1 (change from coldest to warmest rating).

*Change in McCain – Obama Ratings (CCAP):* A 20 category scale that subtracts January 2008 McCain – Obama ratings from October McCain – Obama Ratings. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from strong McCain to strong Obama) to 1 (change from strong Obama to Strong McCain)

*Change in McCain – Obama Ratings (ANES):* A 28 category scale that subtracts January 2008 McCain – Obama ratings from October McCain – Obama Ratings. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from strong McCain to strong Obama) to 1 (change from strong Obama to Strong McCain)

*Change in Party Identification:* A 14 category scale that subtracts January 2008 party identification from October 2008 party identification. Scale is recoded from -1 (strong Republican to Strong Democrat) to 1 (change from Strong Democrat to Strong Republican).



*Change in Religious Service Attendance:* A 10 category scale that subtracts 1982 Religious service attendance from 1997 religious service attendance. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from weekly to never) to 1 (change from never to weekly).

*Change in Republican Presidential Support:* A 8 category scale that subtracts 1980 Republican presidential support from 1996 Republican presidential support. Scale is recoded from -1 (change from voted Republican to voted Democrat) to 1 (change from voted Democrat to vote Republican)

*Democratic Presidential Vote Choice:* An indicator variable taking on a value of 0 (voted Republican) or 1 (voted Democrat).

*McCain – Obama Favorability:* A ten category scale measuring the difference between evaluations of McCain and Obama (5 point rating scales for each item). The scale is recoded from 0 (rate Obama very favorable and McCain very unfavorable) to 1 (rate McCain very favorable and Obama very unfavorable). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*McCain – Obama Likability:* A 14 category scale measuring the difference between evaluations of McCain and Obama (7 point rating scales for each item). The scale is recoded from 0 (rate Obama extremely likable and McCain extremely unlikable) to 1 (rate McCain extremely likeable and Obama extremely unlikable). Don't know responses were coded as 0.5 for both items.

*Obama Approval:* A 5-category variable recoded from 0 (strongly disapprove) to 1 (prefer strongly approve).

*Republican Presidential Vote Choice:* An indicator variable taking on a value of 0 (voted Democrat) or 1 (voted Republican).

Table A1 (Logistic Regression): Predictors of Democratic Vote Choice for President, 1956-1960

	1956	1960
1956 Trust in Catholic Groups	.563 (.446)	2.96 (.447)
1956 Party Identification	-6.35 (.441)	-4.34 (.300)
1956 Education	-.094 (.430)	-.681 (.380)
1956 High Income	-.216 (.264)	-.192 (.235)
1956 Low Income	-.428 (.346)	.235 (.311)
Male	.345 (.214)	.152 (.189)
Black	1.14 (.554)	.982 (.579)
Age	.638 (.539)	-.028 (.478)
Constant	1.11 (.510)	.821 (.463)
Observations	794	794

Note: Dependent variable is coded from 0 (Republican vote) or 1 (Democratic vote). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest value and/or most conservative value. All explanatory variables were measured in the 1956 panel wave. *Source:* 1956-1960 ANES Panel.

Table A2 (OLS): Predictors of Change in Democratic Presidential Support and Change in Trust of Catholic Groups, 1956-1960

	$\Delta$ Democratic Support	$\Delta$ Catholic Trust
1956 Trust in Catholic Groups	.392 (.048)	-.730 (.025)
1956 Dem Presidential Support	-.704 (.033)	-.010 (.017)
1956 Party Identification	-.462 (.040)	-.060 (.021)
1956 Education	-.113 (.045)	-.007 (.024)
1956 High Income	-.024 (.029)	.009 (.016)
1956 Low Income	.002 (.031)	-.051 (.016)
Male	.012 (.022)	-.009 (.012)
Black	.065 (.043)	.080 (.022)
Age	-.048 (.051)	.027 (.027)
Constant	.481 (.057)	.353 (.030)
Observations	1087	1103

Note: Dependent variable in left column is 1960 Democratic Presidential Support (recoded 0= voted Rep; and 1 = voted Dem) minus 1956 Democratic Presidential Support. Dependent variable in right column is 1960 Trust of Catholics (recoded 0= distrust; and 1 = trust) minus 1956 Trust of Catholics. All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest value and/or most conservative value. All explanatory variables were measured in the 1956 panel wave. *Source*: 1956-1960 ANES Panel.

Table A3 (Logistic Regression): Predictors of George W. Bush Evaluations, 2000-2004

	<b>Bush Vote Choice</b>		<b>Bush Approval</b>	
	2000	2004	2002	2004
Gay Thermometer	-.980 (.782)	-2.15 (.650)	.700 (.536)	-1.20 (.563)
Party ID	5.80 (.816)	4.27 (.611)	2.48 (.434)	3.06 (.434)
Ideology	2.60 (.746)	2.91 (.647)	1.50 (.532)	2.06 (.500)
Education	.691 (.873)	-.183 (.724)	-.581 (.471)	-.136 (.494)
High Income	-.902 (.435)	.016 (.379)	-.239 (.361)	.022 (.324)
Low Income	.203 (.520)	-.248 (.482)	-.581 (.371)	-.591 (.375)
Black	-2.22 (.874)	-2.69 (1.02)	-.776 (.542)	-.978 (.751)
Male	-.031 (.382)	-.052 (.323)	-.183 (.260)	-.281 (.259)
South	.628 (.356)	.725 (.341)	-.004 (.270)	-.266 (.272)
Constant	-3.94 (.894)	-2.24 (.675)	-.725 (.519)	-1.22 (.528)
Observations	591	591	740	749

Note: Dependent variables in left columns coded 0 (Dem vote) or 1 (Bush vote). Dependent variables in right columns coded 0 (disapprove/don't know) or 1 (approve). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. Analyses in left columns utilize explanatory variables measured in 2000; analyses in right columns utilize explanatory variables measure in 2000 or 2002. Regression analyses utilize cumulative panel weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. *Source:* 2000-2002-2004 ANES Panel.

Table A4 (OLS): Predictors of Change in Bush Approval and Gay Thermometer Ratings, 2002-2004

	$\Delta$ Bush Approval	$\Delta$ Gay Thrm Rating
2002 Gay Thermometer Rating	.392 (.048)	-.730 (.025)
2002 Bush Approval	-.704 (.033)	-.010 (.017)
2002 Party Identification	-.462 (.040)	-.060 (.021)
2000 Ideology	-.462 (.040)	-.060 (.021)
2000 Education	-.113 (.045)	-.007 (.024)
2000 High Income	-.024 (.029)	.009 (.016)
2000 Low Income	.002 (.031)	-.051 (.016)
Male	.012 (.022)	-.009 (.012)
Black	.065 (.043)	.080 (.022)
South	-.048 (.051)	.027 (.027)
Constant	.481 (.057)	.353 (.030)
Observations	1087	1103

Note: Dependent variable in left column is 2004 Approval (recoded 0= strongly approve; and 1 = strongly disapprove) minus 2002 approval; dependent variable in right column is 2004 gay thermometer rating (recoded 0= 0; and 1 = 100) minus 2002 gay thermometer. All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. Regression analyses utilize cumulative panel weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. *Source:* 2000-2002-2004 ANES Panel.

Table A5 (OLS): Predictors of Obama Approval in 2012

	Jan 1- May 5	May 12- May 19	May 26- Aug 11
2011 Gay Thermometer	.036 (.006)	.125 (.022)	.051 (.010)
2011 Obama Approval	.753 (.009)	.686 (.027)	.702 (.011)
2011 Party ID	-.159 (.010)	-.172 (.028)	-.176 (.012)
2011 Ideology	-.091 (.011)	-.110 (.034)	-.118 (.017)
2011 Education	.020 (.007)	.018 (.017)	.020 (.010)
Black	.044 (.007)	.074 (.019)	.049 (.010)
Male	-.008 (.003)	-.018 (.011)	-.011 (.005)
Age	-.004 (.008)	-.000 (.025)	-.005 (.012)
Constant	.208 (.011)	.204 (.033)	.241 (.016)
Observations	17965	1996	11986

Note: Dependent variable is 5-category approval rating, recoded from 0 (strongly disapprove) to 1 (strongly approval). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. Regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses. *Source:* 2011-2012 CCAP.

Figure 1A: 2012 News Reference Volume for "Gay Marriage" (Google)



Note: Figure made by Google Trends, searching keywords, "Gay Marriage"

Table A6 (OLS): Predictors of McCain minus Obama Ratings, January – October 2008

	CCAP Jan	CCAP Oct	ANES Jan	ANES Oct
Party ID (January)	.232 (.011)	.524 (.015)	.160 (.026)	.349 (.038)
Ideology (January)	.185 (.014)	.327 (.020)	.150 (.034)	.275 (.042)
Education	-.073 (.012)	-.068 (.018)	-.034 (.032)	-.046 (.036)
High Income	-.002 (.006)	.003 (.007)	-.018 (.019)	-.023 (.023)
Low Income	.006 (.007)	-.028 (.009)	-.006 (.023)	-.003 (.027)
Age	.021 (.017)	.084 (.020)	.150 (.050)	.068 (.063)
Black	-.081 (.010)	-.113 (.012)	-.114 (.024)	-.116 (.030)
Male	-.008 (.005)	-.016 (.007)	.024 (.015)	-.012 (.018)
South	.026 (.006)	.034 (.008)	.021 (.017)	.019 (.019)
Constant	.317 (.015)	.148 (.020)	.288 (.033)	.162 (.043)
Observations	9290	9290	1074	1075

Note: Dependent variables coded 0 (rate Obama very favorable and McCain very unfavorable) to 1 (rate McCain very favorable and Obama very unfavorable). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. CCAP regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses; ANES analyses utilize cumulative panel weights with robust standard errors present in parentheses. *Source*: 2007-2008 CCAP; 2008-2009 ANES Panel.



Table A7 (OLS): Predictors of Change in McCain-Obama Ratings and Party ID, January – October 2008

	<b><u>Δ McCain-Obama</u></b>		<b><u>Δ Party ID</u></b>	
	CCAP	ANES	CCAP	ANES
Party ID (January)	.413 (.015)	.261 (.036)	-.163 (.012)	-.228 (.031)
McCain – Obama (January)	-.523 (.016)	-.450 (.042)	.100 (.011)	.120 (.037)
Ideology (January)	.239 (.018)	.192 (.039)	.093 (.014)	.113 (.034)
Education	-.033 (.016)	-.027 (.029)	-.004 (.011)	.008 (.026)
High Income	.004 (.007)	-.013 (.020)	.001 (.004)	.027 (.012)
Low Income	-.030 (.008)	.000 (.024)	-.002 (.006)	-.018 (.025)
Age	.074 (.019)	-.012 (.055)	-.004 (.014)	-.073 (.050)
Black	-.074 (.011)	-.053 (.028)	-.041 (.008)	-.069 (.036)
Male	-.012 (.006)	-.025 (.016)	-.003 (.005)	-.005 (.017)
South	.021 (.007)	.008 (.017)	.000 (.005)	-.005 (.017)
Constant	-.003 (.008)	.003 (.024)	-.022 (.012)	.017 (.032)
Observations	9290	1074	8974	1074

Note: Dependent variables in left columns are McCain – Obama ratings in October (0 = rate Obama very favorable and McCain very unfavorable; 1 = rate McCain very favorable and Obama very unfavorable) minus McCain-Obama ratings in January. Dependent variables in right column are October Party ID (0 = strong Dem; 1 = strong Rep) minus January Party ID. All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. CCAP regression analyses utilize post-stratification weights with robust standard errors presented in parentheses; ANES analyses utilize cumulative panel weights with robust standard errors present in parentheses. *Source*: 2007-2008 CCAP; 2008-2009 ANES Panel.

Table A8 (Logistic Regression): Predictors of Republican Vote and Republican Identification, 1980-1997

	<u>Republican Vote</u>		<u>Republican ID</u>	
	1980	1996	1982	1997
1982 Religious Attendance	.485 (.371)	1.28 (.331)	.400 (.215)	.960 (.214)
1982 Party ID	5.85 (.602)	3.40 (.400)		
1982 Ideology	3.23 (.757)	2.81 (.679)	5.56 (.474)	4.68 (.443)
College Grad (1973)	-.480 (.278)	.356 (.245)	-.073 (.169)	.100 (.165)
1982 High Income	.405 (.344)	.005 (.296)	.559 (.218)	-.033 (.214)
1982 Low Income	.214 (.335)	.196 (.301)	-.161 (.205)	-.321 (.203)
Black	Dropped	Dropped	-2.69 (.738)	-3.21 (.742)
Male	.172 (.273)	.702 (.240)	.236 (.162)	.714 (.59)
1982 South	-.318 (.302)	.891 (.271)	-.387 (.193)	.109 (.187)
Constant	-3.77 (.500)	-4.88 (.502)	-3.73 (.311)	-3.39 (.300)
Observations	486	486	924	921

Note: Dependent variables in left columns coded 0 (Democratic vote) or 1 (Republican vote). Dependent variables in right columns coded 0 (non-Republican) or 1 (Republican/lean Republican). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. *Source:* 1982-1997 Youth waves of the Jennings Socialization Panel Study

Table A9 (OLS): Predictors of 7-Point Republican Identification, 1982-1997

	1982	1997
1982 Religious Attendance	.009 (.023)	.101 (.027)
1982 Ideology	.660 (.042)	.601 (.049)
1982 High Income	.052 (.023)	-.005 (.027)
1982 Low Income	-.033 (.022)	-.033 (.025)
College Grad (1973)	-.013 (.018)	-.012 (.020)
1982 South	-.045 (.020)	.007 (.023)
Male	.030 (.017)	.085 (.020)
Black	-.226 (.034)	-.301 (.039)
Constant	.127 (.028)	.114 (.032)
Observations	924	921

Note: Dependent variable is 7-point party identification, recoded from 0 (strong Democrat) to 1 (strong Republican). All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. *Source*: 1982-1997 Youth waves of the Jennings Socialization Panel Study

Table A10 (OLS): Predictors of Change in Republican Presidential Support and Change in Religious Service Attendance, 1980-1997

	$\Delta$ Republican Support	$\Delta$ Service Attendance
1982 Religious Attendance	.192 (.044)	-.369 (.030)
1980 Rep Presidential Support	-.895 (.045)	-.028 (.031)
1982 Party ID	.496 (.068)	.046 (.046)
1982 Ideology	.324 (.093)	.107 (.064)
1982 High Income	.002 (.041)	.052 (.029)
1982 Low Income	.015 (.041)	.024 (.028)
College Grad (1973)	.035 (.034)	.000 (.024)
1982 South	.117 (.037)	.026 (.026)
Male	.120 (.033)	-.047 (.023)
Constant	-.209 (.055)	.129 (.038)
Observations	602	661

Note: Dependent variable in left column is 1996 Republican Presidential Support (recoded 0= voted Rep; and 1 = voted Dem) minus 1980 Republican Presidential Support. Dependent variable in right column is 1997 religious service attendance (recoded 0= never; and 1 = weekly) minus 1982 religious service attendance. All explanatory variables are coded from 0 to 1, with 1 taking on the highest and/or most conservative value. *Source*: 1982-1997 Youth waves of the Jennings Socialization Panel Study