Origins of the Culture War:
Social Issues in State Party Platforms, 1960-2014

Matthew A. Carr

Department of Political Science

Columbia University

mac2399@columbia.edu

Gerald Gamm

Department of Political Science

University of Rochester

gerald.gamm@rochester.edu

Justin H. Phillips

Department of Political Science

Columbia University

jhp2121@columbia.edu

Partisan polarization has become the central story in American party politics over the last generation. Beginning sometime in the late 20th century, social issues that previously had played little role in party division came to separate one party from the other. Republican and Democratic elites staked out opposing positions on a range of issues–including abortion, gay rights, the role of religion in the public sphere, and gun control–and party electorates today are sharply polarized over these issues. But where and when did this divide begin?

Our focus in this paper is on the politics of abortion and gay rights. We test the proposition that–by the time national parties and elites took positions on social issues–the parties were already constrained by state-level position-taking, that the origins of social issues in the states came earlier than in national platforms, and that the Democratic party initiated this process. Drawing on a massive new dataset, drawn from over 600 state political party platforms between 1960 and 2014, most of them newly discovered, we argue that the groundwork for this partisan divide was not laid by presidential candidates or national parties. Rather, it was the product of years of fermentation at the state level. It was a bottom-up social revolution.

Introduction

Partisan polarization has become the central story in American party politics over the last generation. Beginning sometime in the late 20th century, social issues that previously had played little role in party division came to separate one party from the other. Republican and Democratic elites staked out opposing positions on a range of issues–including abortion, gay rights, the role of religion in the public sphere, and gun control–and party electorates today are sharply polarized over these issues.

This is a new phenomenon. When political scientists analyzed the American party system in the mid-20th century, they commented on the non-ideological nature of party divisions (Schattschneider 1942; Hartz 1955; Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1976; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006). The civil rights battles of the 1960s, like debates earlier over Prohibition or women's suffrage, were fought at least as much within parties as between parties. Southern Democrats in the 1960s led the opposition to civil rights legislation, while northern Democrats took the lead in Congress in securing passage. Similarly, Prohibition pitted rural and Protestant voters in both parties against immigrants in cities. But the situation today is far different. It is rare in 2016 to find a Democrat who does not support a woman's right to an abortion, same-sex marriage, or gun control, just as it is difficult to find Republican political leaders who do not oppose abortion, vigorously support gun rights, and reject the legitimacy of marriage equality.

But where and when did this divide begin? While it is possible that the rise of social issues took place entirely on the national stage, then later spread to state and local politics, we set out in this paper to explore the possibility that these debates took place first at the state level. Our working hypothesis is that it was at the state level that parties began to struggle with their positions on an array of social issues, that the adoption by the national parties of starkly opposing positions by the early 1990s was the culmination of work that had already taken place at the state level. We test the proposition, articulated by Feinstein and Schickler (2008) on civil rights issues, that, by the time national parties and elites took positions on social issues, they were already constrained by state-level position-taking. By this alternative account, the groundwork for this partisan divide

1

was not laid by presidential candidates or national parties. Rather, it was the product of years of fermentation at the state level. It was a bottom-up social revolution.

Literature

In tracing the origins of this culture war, scholars have generally focused on strategic decisions of national party elites, including Ronald Reagan, Pat Buchanan, and Bill Clinton. In their book *Culture War?* Fiorina et al. (2005, 1) open with Buchanan's fiery speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention: "There is a religious war going on in this country, a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America." One year before, in his seminal book *Culture Wars*, Hunter (1991) laid out the dimensions of this emergent struggle to define American politics and society. Even as traditional divisions and prejudices between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews were dissipating, Hunter in 1991 presented abundant evidence that Americans were starting to divide over a complex set of new issues, with a list including "abortion, child care, funding for the arts, affirmative action and quotas, gay rights, values in public education, or multiculturalism," all of which he traced to competing understandings of moral authority (Hunter 1991, 42, also 39-43). Hunter outlined the beginnings of alliances previously unknown to American politics, with conservative people of all faiths working together and facing opposition from secular Americans and those identifying with more liberal strains of Christianity and Judaism (Hunter 1991, 47, 96-106; see also Layman 1999; Layman, Carsey, and Horowitz 2006, 94; Barker and Carman 2012).

Some scholars suggest that this national culture war began in the early 1990s. "In the years since Buchanan's declaration of cultural war the idea of a clash of cultures has become a common theme in discussions of American politics," Fiorina et al. (2005, 1) write. Certainly, the battle lines between the national parties were clearly drawn in 1992 (Layman 2001, 1-3). On abortion and gay rights, the two platforms staked out opposing positions. National Republicans in 1992 called for a "human life amendment" to the Constitution to protect unborn children, while Democrats pledged to protect "the right of every woman to choose" an abortion, including support for public funding. In 1992 the Democratic national platform called for an end to the ban on gay service

in the military and for civil rights protections for lesbians and gays. Meanwhile, Republicans spoke out on an array of issues related to homosexuality, opposing civil rights protections, military service, adoption, and same-sex marriage. It was in 1992, not earlier, that large partisan differences between religious and secular voters developed (Gelman et al. 2008, 87). Only then did the national Republican party ally itself fully with the evangelical movement, according to Gelman et al., and did the national Democratic party fully embrace abortion and gay rights. Religious Christians began to regard themselves at this time as a persecuted minority, besieged by a godless culture (Gallagher and Bull 1996, 36-37; Feldman 2005, 206). It was in the early 1990s, too, that voters began to be systematically sorted between the two parties on the issue of abortion (Abrams and Fiorina 2015, 118).

Most scholars, though, argue that the parties began to diverge on social issues in the late 1970s, in the aftermath of *Roe v. Wade*, the organization of the Moral Majority, and the opposing positions taken by Carter and Reagan in the 1980 election. The national Republican party, whose support for an equal rights amendment extended back to 1944, expressed its support for the last time in 1976 and, in that same year, endorsed the efforts of those seeking to limit abortions. Schlozman (2015) argues that it was in the late 1970s that the Republican party forged its alliance with white evangelical Christians and began to embrace, even more emphatically, a conservative social agenda (Schlozman 2015; see also Abramowitz 2010, 65).

As late as 1972, neither national party platform mentioned abortion or homosexuality, and their nearly identical language on family planning did not foretell the polarization on the horizon.[1] The Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 contributed to the rise of an organized antiabortion movement, then, in response, a vigorous pro-choice movement (Luker 1984; Brewer and Stonecash 2007, 96). But, at least at the national level, neither movement found an immediate home in either party. Through the 1970s both national parties temporized on the issue. As

---

[1]In the 1972 national platform the Democratic Party included language about the "right to be different," which can be read as subtly supporting gay rights but could also be understood as affirming the legitimacy of the counterculture of the 1960s and early 1970s. The platform states: "Americans should be free to make their own choice of life-styles and private habits without being subject to discrimination or prosecution." This language disappeared from their platform in 1976.

president, Richard Nixon avoided taking a stand on abortion, even in the aftermath of the Roe v. Wade decision (Schlozman 2015, 102-3), and leading evangelicals did not begin preaching against abortion until the last years of the decade (Layman 2001, 11; Schlozman 2015, 102-3; Smith 2015, 155). Walker (2012, 354) argues that "the abortion issue was defused in the 1976 campaign because Ford and Carter held essentially the same position, and because the nascent antiabortion movement had not fully mobilized politically."

Four years later, though, in 1980, according to Walker (2012), positions on abortion would play a prominent role in distinguishing the two parties, and Reagan's winning coalition was built, in part, by those endorsing his opposition to abortion rights. "Conservative Protestants abandoned their apolitical moorings in the late 1970s and early 1980s," Layman (2001, 11) writes, "and they infiltrated the ranks of the Republican party to fight these battles." Anti-abortion activists in 1980 became part of a broader conservative movement aligning itself with the Republican party (Ziegler 2015, 54-55; Adams 1997).

A national partisan cleavage on homosexuality and gay rights, according to existing scholarship, was even slower to emerge. Brewer and Stonecash (2007, 106-8) observe that a large majority of Americans disapproved of homosexuality as late as the 1980s. Religious conservatives denounced homosexuality in the 1970s and 1980s, but the national Republican party did not adopt this rhetoric in its national platforms in this era (Smith 2015, 128-29). But the AIDS crisis, the apparent indifference of the Reagan administration through the mid-1980s, and the simultaneous increase in gay activism began to challenge the silence of national political leaders (Shilts 1987; D'Emilio 2000). Jesse Jackson broke new ground on many fronts with his 1988 presidential campaign, but in part because of his open support for gays and lesbians (Gallagher and Bull 1996, 33). Still, it was only in 1992–when, as Schlozman (2015, 88) writes, "Bill Clinton sought to end the ban on gays in the military, the Republican platform first mentioned homosexuality, and same-sex marriage surfaced as a state-level issue"–that gay rights gained the full attention of the national parties (D'Emilio 2000, 40-41; Brewer 2008, 2-3; Fetner 2008). By the early 1990s, a majority of states had decriminalized sodomy, and the supreme court of Hawaii became the first state-level

4

court or legislature to introduce the prospect of same-sex marriage into national discourse (Smith 2015, 109-10; see also Eskridge 2008; Mucciaroni 2008). During the 1992 campaign, all five Democratic candidates advocated ending the ban on gays serving in the military (Bull and Gallagher 1992, 69; Fetner 2008, 78).

While scholars debate the question of when the culture war began, they generally share a focus on the national level. Dominant narratives emphasize the positions of the national parties, which leaves state-level developments in the background. Elites, more than the mass public, have driven divisions between the parties (Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002). A major exception to this is the battle over same-sex marriage, which played out, state by state, in the 1990s and 2000s. After the Hawaii supreme court first raised the possibility of same-sex marriage in 1993, Congress in 1996 passed the Defense of Marriage Act. Over the next several years–spurred in part by the 2003 decision of the Massachusetts supreme judicial court, *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, voiding the state's ban on same-sex marriage-large numbers of states acted to define marriage as solely an opposite-sex institution (Smith 2015, 110). But most scholars suggest that same-sex marriage was exceptional in the extent to which the debate focused on state-level action. Overwhelmingly, the literature on abortion, homosexuality, and the culture war focuses on national-level trends and party positions. While scholars cite anecdotes from local politics–such as the anti-gay activism of Anita Bryant in the 1970s (Gallagher and Bull 1996, 16-17; Fetner 2008)–systematic analysis tends to focus on the emergence of these issues nationally. Accounts focus on presidential candidates, national elections, and national party platforms.

Although the national evidence is only suggestive, it appears that Democrats and liberals initiated conflict on these issues, upsetting a status quo that limited abortion rights and rejected the legitimacy of homosexuality (Layman 2001, 4, 10-12). *Roe v. Wade*, of course, represented a liberal victory for abortion rights, and it was in the years following the decision that evangelical Christians began to mobilize around this issue and, by 1980, to start looking to the Republican party as a partisan home. On gay rights, it appears, too, that it was liberals who began arguing for recognition of homosexual rights, eliciting a conservative backlash. This was the case in Florida,

where passage of an anti-discrimination statute preceded Anita Bryant's attacks on gay rights. And it was the case again in the debate over same-sex marriage.

We set out, then, to answer three questions about the origins of party polarization over culture issues–

1. When did parties begin to adopt clear positions on abortion and gay rights?

2. Was this movement led by state parties or national parties?

3. Did Democrats or Republicans initiate these divisions, or did the two parties move in tandem?

Looking at state party platforms, we discover that state parties moved much earlier on these issues than national parties. It appears that the crystallization of social cleavages at the national level came only after state parties had begun staking out clear policy positions, limiting and shaping responses by national elites. Further, the evidence from state parties is consistent with the idea that Democratic parties were first movers on the issues of abortion and homosexuality, with state Republican parties staking out opposing positions later.

State Party Platforms

Since the early 19th century, most state political parties have met in biennial conventions to endorse nominees for office and to write and adopt platforms. A platform is the document in which a party formally states its guiding values as well as its positions on a variety of relevant political issues. The values and policies supported by state parties can differ from those articulated by their counterparts in other states or at the national level. The federal nature of the American political system provides state parties with the ability to craft platforms that respond to local political conditions and constituencies. Indeed, throughout American history the primary entry point for many political activists has been through state and local party organizations. This has meant that state parties, conventions, and platforms are often the places in which new issues first gain an institutional foothold in American politics. From here, they may spread to other states and eventually become part of national political discourse.

While it may be tempting to dismiss the importance of party platforms, since they are not

read by most voters, the content of these documents nevertheless reaches the electorate through a variety of indirect means such as media coverage, campaign materials, and public appearances by candidates and activists (Paddock 2005). Furthermore, evidence suggests that there is a relationship between platforms and public opinion and that elected officials do a reasonable job delivering on or attempting to deliver on platform pledges once in office (David 1971; Monroe 1983; Budge and Hofferbert 1990). These documents also embody important compromises among contending factions within a party and thereby can tell scholars and political observers about the relative influence of different actors. While these documents sometimes contain platitudinous lines, the overwhelming majority of a party's platform offers a rich, policy-specific explication of what the party stands for. Representing the official policy positions of a party, the state platforms lay out the policy objectives and commitments of the state parties as institutions and serve as proxies for elite, state-level policy goals.

Indeed, in comparative politics scholars have regularly drawn upon national political platforms to study politics. The most noteworthy of these endeavors is the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP). This effort, which began in 1979, has compiled a database of national party platforms from 50 countries covering all free elections since 1945. These data have generated a wealth of empirical results as well as numerous new insights about party competition and policymaking (Baron 1991; Adams, Merrill, and Grofman 2005). CMP has also spurred innovations in computer-assisted techniques for coding and interpreting political texts (Budge 2001; Laver, Benoit, and Gary 2003; Hopkins and King 2010). While cross-national institutional differences limit the applicability to the United States of many of the empirical and theoretical insights generated by the CMP, this effort shows the great scholarly potential inherent in conducting a similar research effort among the American states.

There have been many fewer efforts to study political platforms in the context of the United States. Gerring (1998) and Levendusky (2009) represent notable exceptions. Gerring uses national party platforms to qualitatively trace the evolving ideologies of America's national political parties, while Levendusky uses national platforms to document increased polarization of the Democratic

and Republican parties in recent decades. The prior scholarship that is most similar to our efforts is that of Feinstein and Schickler (2008) who collected many state party platforms from 1920 to 1978 in order to study partisan realignment during the civil rights movement. Using these platforms, Feinstein and Schickler demonstrate that Democratic state parties had become more liberal on civil rights issues than scholars previously realized, challenging the dynamic growth model of Carmines and Stimson (1989).

Locating State Party Platforms, 1960-2016

At this point in our data collection we have compiled an archive of over 1,700 state platforms. Our goal is to create an archive of all state Democratic and Republican party platforms since 1960. Since state parties typically write a new platform every two years, the archive will ultimately consist of approximately 2,700 documents (assuming that all party platforms can be located). We begin the archive in 1960 to capture the transition from the partisan alignments that characterized the New Deal. This was a slow process that began during the mid-1960s after the adoption of national civil rights legislation and that eventually saw dramatic changes in the respective coalitions of both political parties. White southern voters, previously a mainstay of the Democratic Party, gradually switched their allegiances. Religious conservatives followed suit, while New England states, once a bedrock of Republicanism, became strongly Democratic. New, powerful electoral constituencies emerged as well, including Latinos, Asian Americans, and gays and lesbians. These constituencies slowly drifted to the Democratic Party. This period also saw the emergence of new issues onto the political landscape. Crucial among these were the social or "culture war" issues that we study here, abortion and the rights of LGBT individuals. By ensuring that our data collection effort starts before the appearance of these issues into American politics, we are able to capture where they first emerge and how they diffuse.

Collecting historic party platforms presents several challenges. Chief among these is that, unlike many other types of historic documents, state governments do not archive platforms. While we found a couple of states that published party platforms in serial publications–notably, Wisconsin and, for some years, Kansas–the vast majority of state party platforms have not been systematically

preserved. In building the state platform archive, we benefited greatly from the work and generosity of other scholars.[2] But we have proceeded to locate hundreds of additional state platforms scattered among historical societies, manuscript holdings in archives and special collections libraries, state parties, and party activists. Although the data collection process varies widely for each state party, we quickly discovered that in order to assemble a complete set of platforms for a given party, the help of all four types of sources is usually necessary. For the purpose of this project, finding these platforms is to seek buried treasure–state by state, party by party, year by year–through a quest where no map exists as a guide and where, in many cases, much of the treasure lies forgotten or has been permanently lost or destroyed.

The state party offices themselves, which we initially thought might be among the best repositories of their own party history, almost never maintain any significant archives. There are encouraging exceptions. For instance, the attic of the Montana Democratic party offices contain several old platforms and the South Carolina Republicans maintain a shed that serves as an informal archive of old party documents (including platforms). Most state parties, however, have small staffs with limited record keeping or–and perhaps even more regrettable–excellent record keeping marked by periodic, wholesale purges. (We were told by one party that just a couple years earlier decades' worth of platforms and documentation related to the platform making process were discarded.) Due to the general lack of preservation by the parties, we have largely turned to other sources. State platforms are rarely given a call number and put on a library shelf, but a small fraction of them are and we obtained these through interlibrary loan. Many states have historical societies, a handful of which maintain historical state platforms in a designated folder. For instance, we obtained several documents from the "platform folders" at the Iowa Historical Society. Very few libraries, however, maintain platforms as discrete, stand-alone collections.

Our most plentiful sources of platforms have been special collections libraries and archives.

Every state has at least one major library (often attached to a university) that preserves the papers of past political figures (e.g., governors, members of Congress, state legislators, and nonelected activists) and–when we are particularly lucky–the state parties themselves. For politicians of longevity and prominence, often over 100 feet of documents will comprise their collection; we have found many platforms scattered across scores of such collections. The specificity of the collection's finding aid determines how efficiently we can locate these documents. Many collections at the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, for instance, have document-level descriptions of the contents, allowing us to locate and request state platforms with relative ease. For many other libraries, however, the finding aid lacks such specificity and boxes with generic headings such as "state party," "state party convention," and "campaign literature" must be searched with the hope that they contain missing platforms. Various factors influence the richness of the libraries' collections, such as a library's collection efforts (some only preserve the papers of the most prominent politicians, while others archive the papers of state legislators and failed candidates) and even the population of a state (more members of Congress usually leads to the preservation of more politicians' papers which leads to more shots at finding platforms). Searching multiple collections across multiple libraries in order to collect over 50 years of documentation for the various state parties is a labor-intensive process.

Finally, we have contacted party activists to inquire whether they have kept old platforms in a private collection. This proved successful in our quest to acquire a complete set of Vermont Republican platforms. After over a year of searching, we obtained a majority of the party's platforms but became progressively convinced that the few we were missing were lost to history. In one of our more exciting origin stories, we made contact with a party activist who had decades' old state platforms in his barn in rural Vermont and we were able to complete our collection of Vermont Republican platforms. Two other historic platforms–in this case, what appear to be the only surviving copies of the 1964 and 1968 Virginia Democratic platforms–were shared with us by a long-time party activist in Virginia, who was given the platforms for safekeeping by a former co-chair of the state party soon before the co-chair passed away.

The likelihood of finding a platform among our various sources is mediated, in part, by how many copies were produced and distributed in the first place. The Connecticut platforms of the 1960s and 1970s were made by a professional advertising company and appear to be widely dispersed; the Iowa Republican platforms of the 1980s direct that the document be mailed to all Republican state convention delegates, officeholders, and candidates as well as all Iowa government teachers and news media. Most platforms, unfortunately, were not so assiduously dispersed and we fear that some are permanently lost. Many appear to be unique copies, typed out on sheets of paper or, literally, carbon copies with handwritten marginal notes reflecting changes made at the convention. But we are encouraged by how many we have found so far and how some (even after over a year of searching) show up buried in an archive (or barn).

Sample and Coding

For the purposes of this study, we focus on twelve states–California, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. (For these twelve states we have a total of over 600 platforms.) These states are included in our sample because we have complete or nearly complete sets of platforms for each for the entire time period. Our sample captures a fair amount of regional diversity. We have two states from the Northeast, five from the Midwest, two from the Pacific Coast, two from the South, and one from the Interior West. In California and Texas we also have the two most populous states. Of course, this sample is small and not random so we urge caution about generalizing from our results. We will integrate additional states into the analysis as we continue our research.

The individual platforms from our sampled states tend to be quite lengthy, often running longer than 15 pages. They also tend to include numerous statements regarding the general values of the party and, without exception, they take specific policy stances on numerous national and state issues. The types of issues covered differ over time but typically include agriculture, budgeting, civil rights, criminal justice, labor, economic development, education, environmental policy, foreign policy, health policy, government reform, and transportation. In general, these platforms are even more informative than we initially expected.

11

Platforms were coded using the software package NVivo. Once uploaded into NVivo, each platform was read in its entirety by one of the coauthors of this paper. We coded any references in the platform to either abortion or LGBT rights, identifying whether each reference was supportive, opposed, or, in rare cases, ambivalent. Therefore, for each platform we know whether a platform addresses abortion or gay rights, the position it took (supported or opposed), and the proportion of text dedicated to articulating that position.

Results

We begin by considering the amount of platform space that has been dedicated to the issues of abortion and LGBT rights over time. Figure 1 shows the average percentage of platform text dedicated to these two issues in our sample of seven states (the solid line) and the percentage dedicated to these issues in the national platforms (the dashed line). Note that this figure does not distinguish between Democratic and Republican platforms.

Figure 1 reveals that discussion of these social issues does not appear in party platforms until the late 1960s and early 1970s, and even then this discussion is infrequent and takes up very little platform space. However, later in the 1970s we begin to see a steady increase in the amount of platform space addressing these issues. Much of this has come at the state level—the graph shows that state platforms have, on average, spent more time addressing abortion and gay rights than have the national platforms. Over the entire time series, on average 1.81% of the text in state platforms and 1.34% of the text in national platforms is spent expressing views on these issues. The amount of space that state platforms have spent on abortion and gay rights accelerated markedly in the mid-1980s and reached its zenith in 2000, when nearly 4% of platform space is dedicated to these issues. The national platforms appreciably increased their discussion of these issue in the late 1980s and the most recent national platforms have more relative space dedicated to abortion and gay rights than ever before. In fact, the national and state platforms seemed to have converged in terms of the amount of space dedicated towards social issues. Figure 1 indicates that abortion and gay rights, non-issues in the early 1960s, have by now been consistently discussed for decades.

Figure 2 focuses exclusively on state platforms, displaying the average share of state Demo-

Figure 1: Average Percentage of State Platform Text (solid line) and National Platform Text (dashed line) of Both Parties Dedicated to Abortion Rights or LGBT Rights
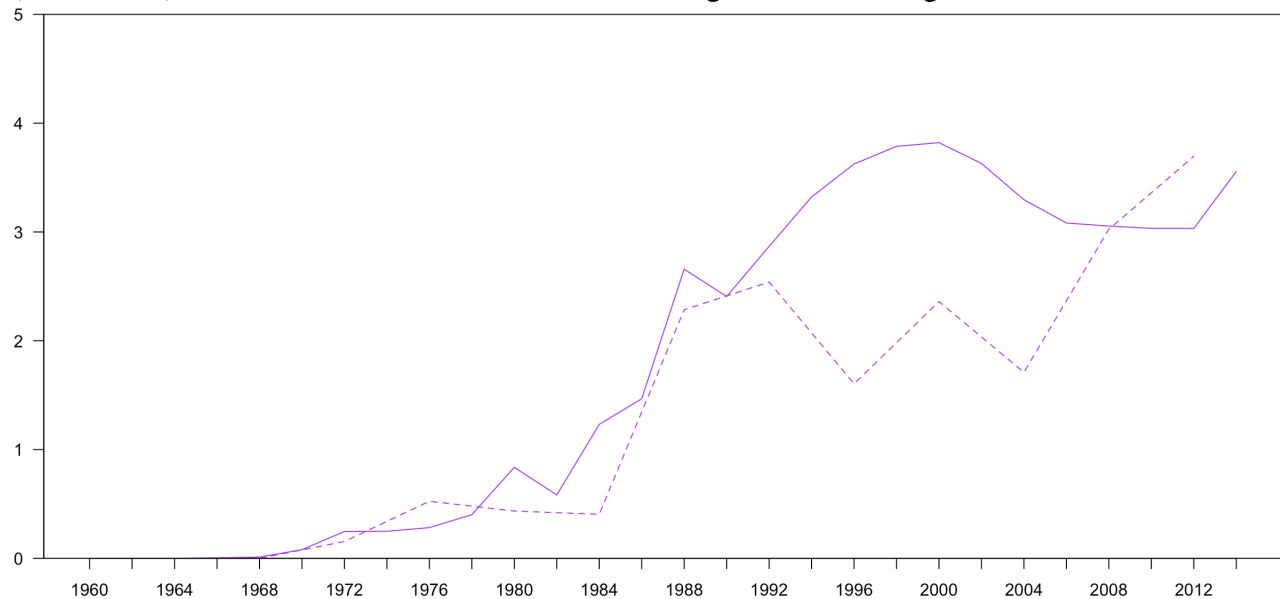
cratic and Republican party platforms dedicated to gay rights (the dashed lines) and abortion (the solid lines). The blue lines are for Democratic parties and the red lines are for Republican parties.[3] As the figure shows, Democratic parties began addressing LGBT rights and abortion earlier than their Republican counterparts. The first direct mentions of abortion in platforms occur in 1968 when the Minnesota Democrats called for the legalization of "therapeutic abortions." That same year, the Washington Democratic Party called for "reform[ing] the [state's] current abortion laws" and providing "family planning assistance by public health care centers where it is compatible with the conscience and religious faith of the individual." We interpret this as a plank in favor of loosening existing restrictions on abortion because at the time the platform was adopted, abortion was illegal in Washington except if the life of the mother was in danger.[4] The first Republican platform to mention abortion was Utah in 1972, which argued that abortion, except to save the life of the woman, is "a violation of the constitutional right of the child." Utah was followed by California and Texas Republicans in 1976—California (opposed to abortion based "solely on request") and

---

[3]If you are reading the paper in black and white, the thicker lines are for Republican parties.

[4]In 1966, the Washington Democrats used the same language in relation to family planning but did not explicitly mention abortion. For coding purposes we did code this as a pro-abortion plank, but we are not certain this was the correct decision. Moving forward, almost every state platform that said something supportive regarding family planning also explicitly supported abortion.

Texas (supportive of a constitutional amendment "protecting human life at every stage of its biological development")–did not do so until 1976. By 1976, five of the twelve Democratic platforms (42% of the total) had already taken stands in favor of abortion rights.

With respect to gay rights, Democratic parties again moved first. In 1970, the Washington Democratic party was the first party to discuss gay rights, opposing criminal sanctions for sodomy. The first Republican platforms to discuss homosexuality did not do so until 1978–a year by which 58% of state Democratic platforms had taken a stand in favor of gay rights. The Republican platforms in 1978 were in Texas (which declared that homosexuals not be allowed to teach in public elementary and secondary schools) and Washington (which stated that "homosexuality, lesbianism or prostitution shall not be glorified or otherwise promoted as acceptable").

In addition to finding that state Democratic parties moved earlier, faster, and more extensively on these issues than state Republican parties, we find that state parties generally were taking positions on these social issues prior to their national counterparts. For example, the national Democratic party did not adopt a plank clearly supporting abortion rights until 1976. By that time, five of our twelve sampled state Democratic state parties had already adopted pro-choice planks. Likewise, the national Democrats did not adopt a plank clearly supporting gay and lesbian rights until 1980, at which point they stated, "All groups must be protected from discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, language, age, sex or sexual orientation." By then, eight of the twelve Democratic state platforms had already expressed support for gay rights. Surprisingly, the national Republican platform does not include language openly opposing homosexuality until 1992, by which point eight of the twelve Republican party platforms in our sampled states had already staked out at least some opposition to gay rights. Similarly with abortion, four of the twelve Republican party platforms came out against abortion by the time the national platform states its opposition in 1976.

Figure 2 also allows us to see which of these two issues state parties have spent the most effort addressing. Democratic state parties have tended to spend more of their platforms on LGBT rights than abortion. Across our entire times series, 1% of the text of Democratic state platforms

Figure 2: Average Percentage of State Platform Text Dedicated to Abortion Rights (solid lines) and LGBT Rights (dashed line), by Party (thicker lines represent the Republican Party, and the thinner lines the Democratic Party).
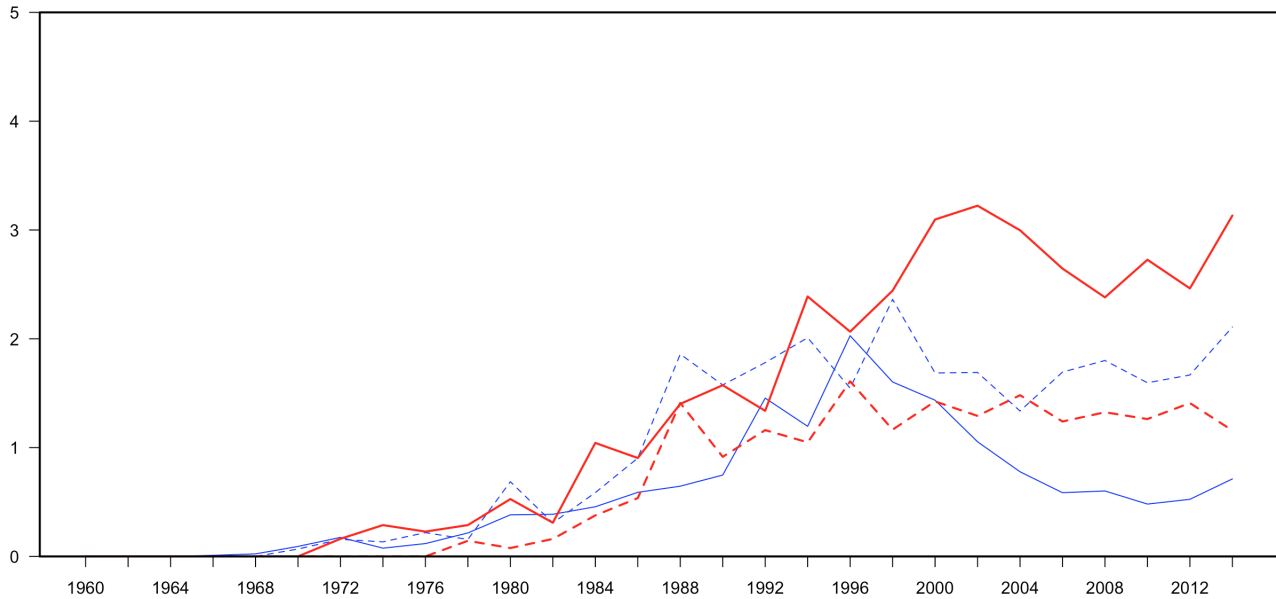
dealt with gay rights, compared to .58% on abortion. In 1998, the amount of platform text that Democrats spent addressing gay rights rose to a rather high 2.36%, largely due to the rise of HIV/AIDS as an issue in American politics. Correspondingly, the amount of platform space that Republicans spent on gay rights rose during this same time period, but not as substantially. In contrast to state Democratic parties, Republicans have spent more platform space addressing abortion (1.34%) than gay rights (.69%). In 2014, the most recent year in our sample, Republican platforms dedicated 3.13% of the text to addressing abortion rights, approaching the high water mark of 3.22% in 2002.

Our coding of platforms also allows us to examine the speed of partisan polarization on social issues. Figure 3 shows the polarization of state parties on abortion over time–the adoption of pro-choice and pro-life positions by state Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. The x-axis is time and the y-axis is the proportion of state parties adopting a given position. For Democrats, this is the proportion staking a clear pro-choice position and for Republicans, it is the proportion taking a clear pro-life position. (In the over 600 state platforms we examined, we only have two Democratic parties that voiced opposition to abortion rights–Minnesota 1974 and
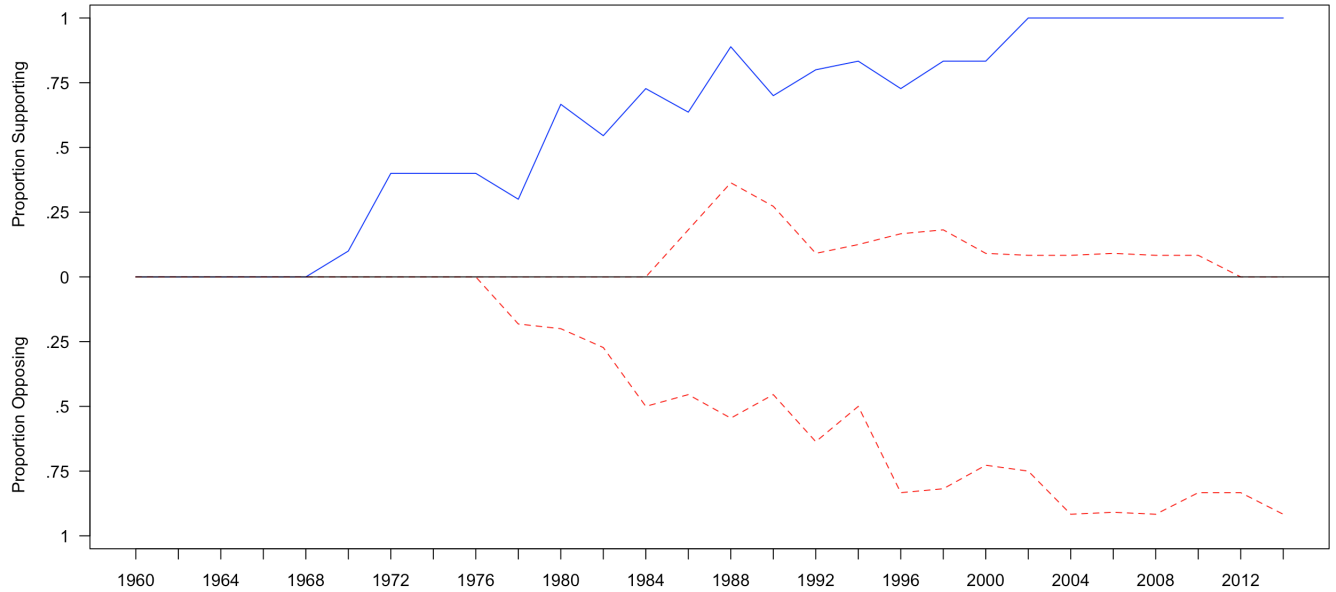
Figure 3: Proportion of Democratic State Platforms Supporting Abortion Rights (solid line) and Republican State Platforms Opposing Abortion Rights (dashed line)
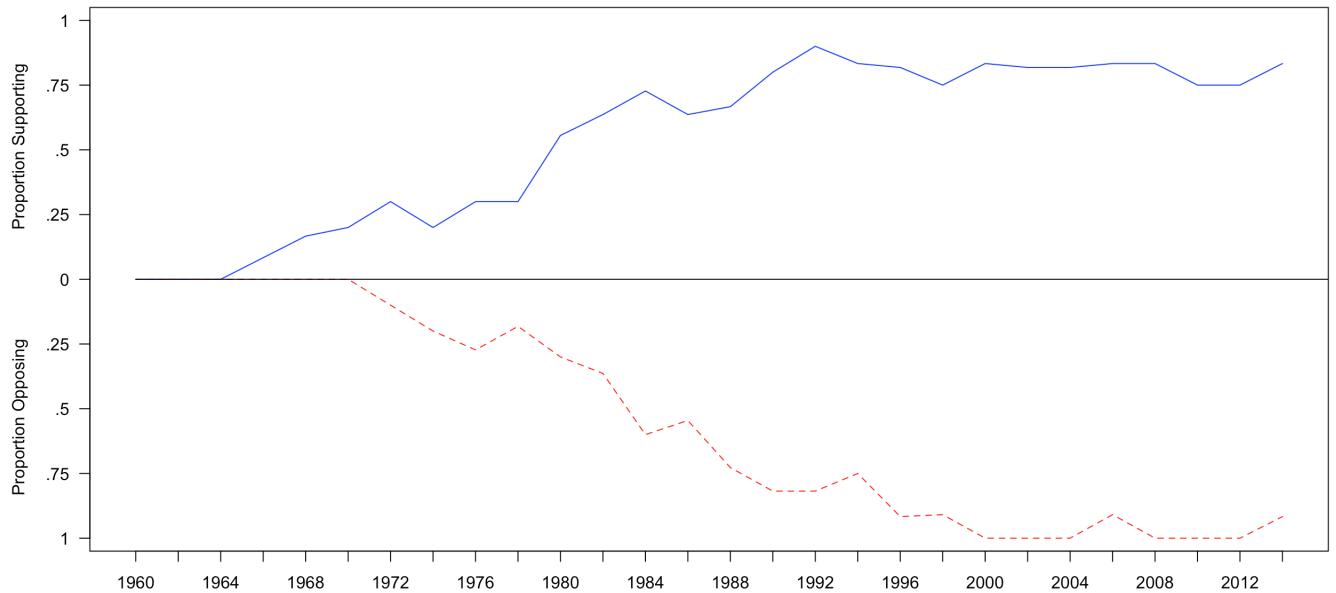
South Dakota 1976 and 1978. We similarly have two instances of Republican parties that, at one point, took an explicitly pro-choice stance—the Iowa party in 1972 and the Maine party in 1990. These unconventional observations are not plotted.) As one can see in the figure, Democratic state parties moved first, with a handful staking out pro-choice positions in the years prior to the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*. By 1984, eight of the state Democratic parties had explicitly stated that they supported a woman's right to choose. Similarly, nine of the state Republican parties opposed abortion by 1984.

Figure 4 displays similar data regarding the speed of polarization on LGBT rights. Here the solid line shows the share of state Democratic platforms that take a pro-gay position on a key gay rights issue (i.e., sodomy, non-discrimination, hate crimes, adoption, relationship recognition, HIV/AIDS, etc.). We do not have Democratic platforms in our current sample that ever state an anti-gay position. A dashed line shows the proportion of Republican platforms that take an anti-gay position on any of these same issues. No Republican platform in our sample ever takes a pro-gay position, with the exception of language related to HIV/AIDS. The proportion of Republican platforms staking out a pro-gay position on AIDS (i.e., supportive of domestic AIDS funding and

16

Figure 4: Proportion of Democratic State Platforms Supporting Any Type of LGBT Rights (solid line), Republican State Platforms Opposing Any Type of LGBT Right (dashed line), and Republican State Platforms Supporting an LGBT Right (this is always in relation to HIV/AIDS) (dashed line)

the sympathetic treatment of AIDS victims) is shown by a dashed line. Figure 4 shows that by 1970 Democratic platforms begin to embrace gay rights. By 1988, a large majority of Democratic state platforms are taking at least one pro-gay position and this continues unabated until the present time period (with Democratic parties becoming unanimously pro-LGBT rights by the early 2000s). Republicans were somewhat slower to adopt platforms critical of gay rights but a majority did by the mid 1980s and a large majority did so by the mid-1990s.

The LGBT issues addressed in Democratic party platforms changed over time. From the early 1970s until the mid-1980s, when Democratic platforms addressed gay rights they called for the enactment of employment and housing non-discrimination protections for gays and lesbians and they also tended to focus on repealing existing prohibitions on sodomy (laws which criminalized gay sex). By the mid-1980s issues of relationship recognition moved into Democratic platforms, though this did not necessarily mean support for same-sex marriage. The first Democratic platform to embrace gay marriage was Minnesota in 1972. However, this plank was short lived and disappeared from the state platform in 1974. It was not until the 2000s, that Democratic

17

parties began to consistently embrace legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Similarly, the inclusion of issues relating to gender identity began appearing in Democratic platforms in 2000.
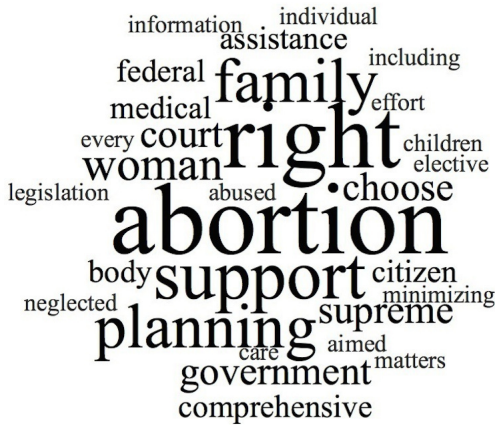
Similarly the LGBT issues that have appeared in Republican party platforms has evolved over time. For much of the time series, Republican platforms have expressed their opposition to extending civil rights protections (such as employment and housing protections) to LGBT individuals. Typically, Republican platforms dismiss these as "special privileges" or "entitlements." For instance, in the 1980s the Washington Republicans refer to such protections as "special privileges based on deviant sexual activity" and in the same time period Texas Republicans referred to them as "special legal entitlements or privileges based upon... sexual deviancy." By the mid-1990s, state Republican platforms tended to focus primarily on their opposition to relationship recognition for LGBT couples, especially their opposition to same-sex marriage.

Figure 5 displays the most commonly used words in the sentences of state platforms that address abortion. The top left shows Democratic language of the 1970s and the top right shows Republican language of the 1970s; the bottom left and bottom right display the Democratic and Republican language of the 2000-2014 period, respectively. Word size is proportional to the frequency with which it is used. We can see that as the parties increasingly abandon the use of the more neutral term "abortion," they discuss the topic with words more distinct from each other. The language in Republican platforms has come to emphasize the life of the unborn child, with a dramatic increase in words used to express support for fetal rights. "Unborn," "life," "human," "death," and "innocent"–all seldom used, if at all, in the 1970s–are among the most frequent terms modern Republicans use to discuss abortion, as it is now common for Republican platforms to call for constitutional rights for fetuses. Democrats, in contrast, have rarely used the word "abortion" in recent years, instead focusing on the rights and choices of women, and the party's support for women's health.

Figure 6 is similar to figure 5, except that here the words displayed are those most commonly used in the portions of the platforms that discuss gay rights. Due to the dearth of Republican statements on gay rights in the 1970s, Figure 6 uses all platform statements related to gay rights

Figure 5: Most Frequent Words Used in the Portions of State Platforms Addressing Abortion, Democrats (top left) and Republicans (top right) in the 1970s and Democrats (bottom left) and Republicans (bottom right) in the 2000-2014 period

Democratic Parties, 1970s: Republican Parties, 1970s:
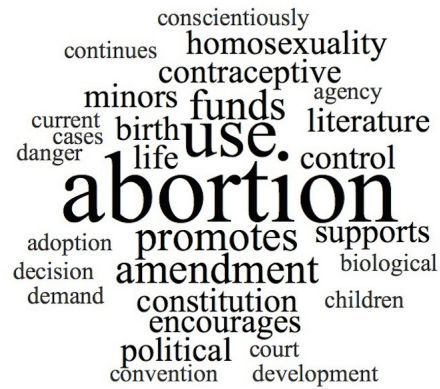
Democratic Parties, 2000-2014:   Republican Parties, 2000-2014:
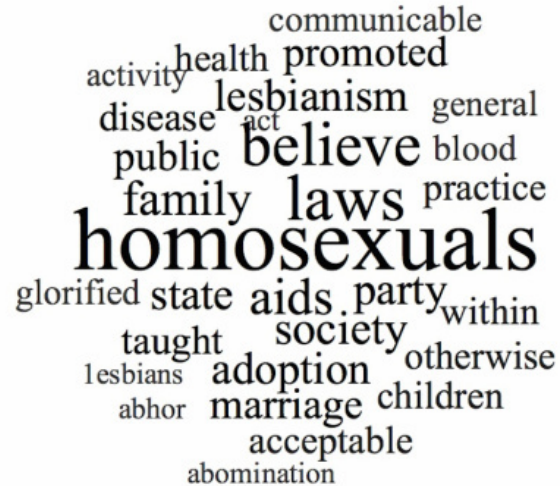

in 1984 and prior on the top row (where the Democrats are on the left and the Republicans are on the right). Again, the bottom row shows the most frequently used words on the Democratic (left) and Republican (right) platforms in the 2000-2014 time period. In addition to the obvious difference in that Democrats prefer to use the term "sexual" and Republicans "homosexual," the parties have always discussed LGBT in different ways. The use of "race," "religion," and "age" on the Democratic side indicates that they tend to include sexual orientation with other attributes

Figure 6: Most Frequent Words Used in the Portions of State Platforms Addressing LGBT Rights, Democrats (top left) and Republicans (top right) in 1984 and prior, and Democrats (bottom left) and Republicans (bottom right) in the 2000-2014 period
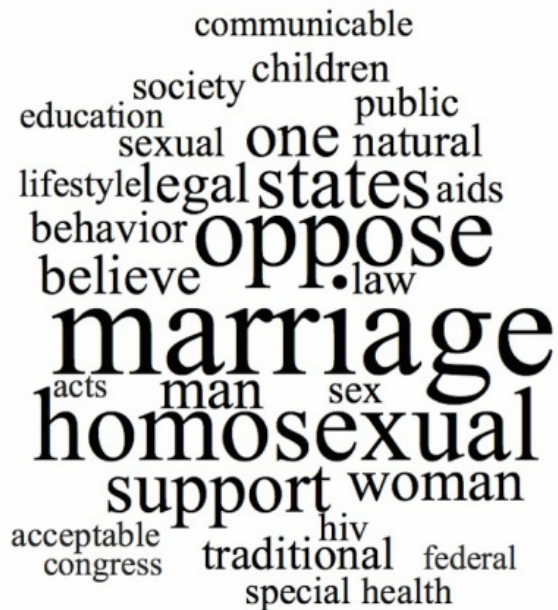

that cannot be the basis for discrimination. Republicans reject this, and instead reference children and terms associated with choice: "activity" and "practice" in the earlier period and "lifestyle" and "behavior" in recent times. Republicans have somewhat softened their language, no longer

using "abhor" and "abomination" when discussing gay rights. Unsurprisingly, marriage is now the most frequently used word by Republicans. Democrats also now frequently speak of "marriage," a contrast with the past, and have begun to regularly express support for transgender rights, which Republican platforms still rarely address.

Figure 7: Proportion of State Party Pairs Polarized on Abortion (solid line) and LGBT Rights (dashed line)
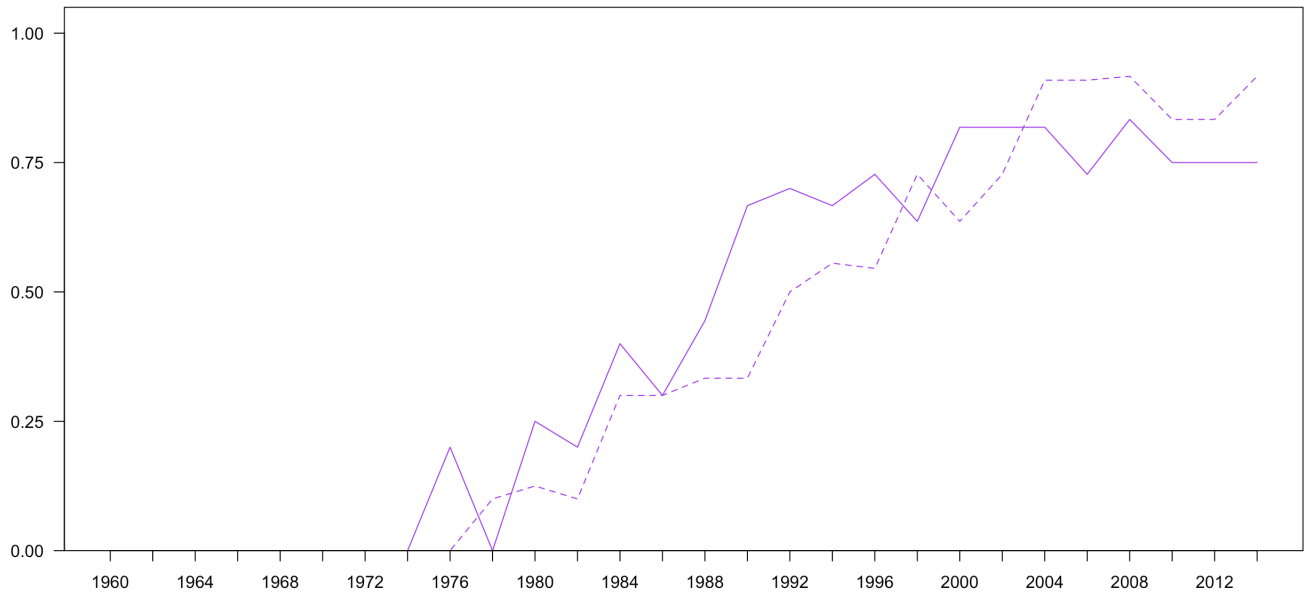
Finally, we consider the extent to which state-level parties have polarized on abortion and LGBT issues. Here the unit of analysis is a pair of parties (e.g., the California Democratic and Republican party) in a given year. We code a pair of parties as being polarized if they each take the opposite position. For example, if one party explicitly supports abortion rights and the other opposes them. As Figure 7 shows, there was a small amount of state-level polarization on abortion and homosexuality in the second half of the 1970s. But polarization has steadily increased over time, and in 2014, 75% of state party pairs are polarized on abortion and 92% are polarized on gay rights. Table 1 lists the average proportion of polarization by state across our entire time series (the proportion of the time series the party pairs are polarized on abortion is averaged with the proportion they are polarized on gay rights). As the table shows, there is wide variety in the length of time a state party has been polarized on these issues. At one extreme is Washington,

State	Proportion
Washington	.71
Texas	.65
California	.64
Iowa	.63
Minnesota	.59
Utah	.41
Wisconsin	.38
South Carolina	.28
Maine	.27
Vermont	.21
Kansas	.18
South Dakota	.11

Table 1: Proportion of the 1960-2014 time period a state's party pairs are polarized on abortion averaged with the proportion they are polarized on LGBT rights

which, using this measure, is polarized for 71% of the time series, whereas South Dakota has only recently polarized (and is polarized for only 11% of the total time series).

Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that abortion and gay rights, non-issues in the early 1960s, slowly emerged as partisan policy concerns of the state parties in the late 1960s and 1970s. These two bedrock culture war issues have taken up an average of about 2 to 4% of state platform text from the mid-1980s through 2014. In general, today neither party is shy about staking out clear positions on these issues, although the Republicans tend to discuss abortion more and the Democrats dedicate more space to addressing gay rights. Virtually every state party in our analysis now takes a position on both abortion rights and gay rights. Interestingly, and we urge caution in generalizing our results given the limited sample, it was the Democratic parties that moved first to politicize these issues. Democrats began staking out a position supportive of abortion four years before Republicans began to express opposition, and, similarly, Democrats announced official support for certain gay rights eight years prior to Republican rejection of those policies.

We also find evidence that state party positioning on these issues predates national party positioning by several years. This state-level maneuvering indicates that, for both parties, coalitional

support was in place before the national party explicated its own position. On the Democratic side, state parties began taking a position supportive of abortion rights eight years prior to their national counterpart–and the same year the national party registered its support for abortion, a majority of state parties had as well. The Democratic process in support of gay rights was similar: state parties began to support gay rights 10 years prior to the national party, and by the time the national party took an explicitly pro-gay position, a majority of the state parties had as well. The Republican positioning process on abortion similarly began at the state level, with the first Republican plat-form in our sample coming out against abortion four years prior to the national party. With gay rights, the GOP state parties began registering opposition 14 years prior to the national party and by the time the latter addressed the matter, a majority of state parties already explicated a position. In general, the respective Democratic and Republican positions on the quintessential culture war issues of abortion and homosexuality were staked out not in a dramatic, critical moment led by the national parties, but instead by a steady percolation at the state-level, which in turn constrained the policy choices available to the national parties.

We are actively collecting additional data and coding more states, which will allow us to see how widespread state party positioning on these issues was prior to national positioning and whether Democrats truly moved first on abortion and gay rights, as our current study indicates. More data will also allow us to uncover regional and demographic patterns in the state parties' stances on these issues. Beyond analyzing our current research questions with more data, in future iterations of this project we hope to study the emergence and life cycle of additional policies and also integrate into the analysis measures of state-level public opinion in order to understand the relationship between the public will and party positioning. Finally, our preliminary text analysis, which indicates that the parties discuss issues in different ways, can be made much more rigorous, perhaps with topic modeling.

References

Abramowitz, Alan I. 2010. *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Abrams, Samuel J., and Morris P. Fiorina. 2015. "Party Sorting: The Foundations of Polarized Politics." In *American Gridlock: The Sources, Character, and Impact of Political Polarization*, eds. James A. Thurber and Antoine Yoshinaka. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Adams, Greg D. 1997. "Abortion: Evidence of an Issue Evolution." *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 718-37.

Adams, James F., Samuel Merrill III, and Bernard Grofman. 2005. *A Unified Theory of Party Competition: A Cross-National Analysis Integrating Spatial and Behavioral Facotrs*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Barker, David C., and Christopher Jan Carman. 2012. *Representing Red and Blue: How the Culture Wars Change the Way Citizens Speak and Politicians Listen*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baron, David. 1991. "A Spatial Bargaining Theory of Government Formation in Parliamentary Systems." *American Political Science Review* 85: 137-64.

Brewer, Mark D., and Jeffrey M. Stonecash. 2007. *Split: Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Brewer, Paul R. 2008. *Value War: Public Opinion and the Politics of Gay Rights*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.

Budge, Ian. 2001. "Validating Party Policy Placements." *British Journal of Political Science* 31: 211-23.

Budge, Ian and Robert Hofferbert. 1990. "Mandates and Policy Outputs: U.S. Party Platforms and Federal Expenditures." *American Political Science Review* 84: 111-31.

Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes. 1960. *The American Voter*. New York: John Wiley Sons.

Converse, Philip E. 1964. "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics." In Ideology and Discontent, ed. David E. Apter. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

David, Paul T. 1971. "Party Platforms as National Plans." *Public Administration Review* 31: 303-15.

D'Emilio, John. 2000. "Cycles of Change, Questions of Strategy: The Gay and Lesbian Movement after Fifty Years." In *The Politics of Gay Rights*, ed. Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D. Wald, and Clyde Wilcox. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Eskridge, William N., Jr. 2008. *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861-2003*. New York: Viking.

Feinstein, Brian D. and Eric Schickler. 2008. "Platforms and Partners: Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered." *Studies in American Political Development* 22: 1-31.

Feldman, Noah. 2005. *Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem–and What We Should Do about It*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Fetner, Tina. 2008. *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fiorina, Morris P., with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman.

Gallagher, John, and Chris Bull. 1996. *Perfect Enemies: The Religious Right, the Gay Movement, and the Politics of the 1990s*. New York: Crown.

Gelman, Andrew, with David Park, Boris Shor, Joseph Bafumi, and Jeronimo Cortina. 2008. *Red State, Blue State, Rich State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gerring, John. 1998. *Party Ideologies in America , 1828-1996*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hartz, Louis. 1955. *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

Hopkins, Daniel and Gary King. 2010. "Extracting Policy Positions from Political Texts." *American Political Science Review* 97: 311-31.

Hunter, James Davison. 1991. *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Define America*. New York: Basic Books.

Laver, Michael, Kenneth Benoit, and John Gary. 2003. "A Method of Automated Nonparametric Content Analysis for Social Science." *American Journal of Political Science* 54: 229-47.

Layman, Geoffrey C. 1999. "'Culture Wars' in the American Party System: Religious and Cultural Change among Partisan Activists since 1972." *American Politics Quarterly* 27: 89-121.

Layman, Geoffrey C. 2001. *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Layman, Geoffrey C., Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz. 2006. "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences." *Annual Review of Political Science* 9: 83-110.

Levendusky, Matthew. 2009. *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservative Became Republicans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lindaman, Kara, and Donald P. Haider-Markel. 2002. "Issue Evolution, Political Parties, and the Culture Wars." *Political Research Quarterly* 55: 91-110.

Luker, Kristin. 1984. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Monroe, Alan D. 1983. "American Party Platforms and Public Opinion." *American Journal of Political Science* 27: 27-42.

Mucciaroni, Gary. 2008. *Same Sex, Different Politics: Success and Failure in the Struggles over Gay Rights*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nie, Norman H., Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik. 1976. *The Changing American Voter*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Paddock, Joel. 2005. *State and National Parties and American Democracy*. New York: Peter Lang.

Schattschneider, E. E. 1942. *Party Government*. New York: Rinehart.

Schlozman, Daniel. 2015. *When Movements Anchor Parties: Electoral Alignments in American History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Shilts, Randy. 1987. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*. New York: St. Martin's.

Smith, Mark A. 2015. *Secular Faith: How Culture Has Trumped Religion in American Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Walker, Samuel. 2012. *Presidents and Civil Liberties from Wilson to Obama: A Story of Poor Custodians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ziegler, Mary. 2015. *After Roe: The Lost History of the Abortion Debate*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.