

CHAPTER 4



The Cultural Divide

The simple truth is that there is no culture war in the United States—no battle for the soul of America rages, at least none that most Americans are aware of.

—Morris P. Fiorina¹

Apparently, nobody told the new Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives that the culture war had been cancelled. On February 18, 2011, in one of its first major acts, the House voted 240 to 185 to cut off all federal funding of Planned Parenthood, an organization that provides family planning services, including abortions, for low income women. The amount of money involved was relatively small, no federal funds were being used to pay for abortions and abortions accounted for only a small fraction of the organization's family planning services. Nevertheless, defunding Planned Parenthood was a top priority of Republican leaders because it allowed them to reward a group of supporters who were critical to the GOP's 2010 midterm election gains—religious conservatives.

The House vote to defund Planned Parenthood almost perfectly followed party lines. Republicans voted 230 to 10 in favor of cutting off funding while Democrats voted 178 to 7 against cutting off funding.² And

¹Morris P. Fiorina with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2011), p. 8.

²Erik Eckholm, "Planned Parenthood Funding Is Caught in Budget Dispute," *New York Times* (February 18, 2011): A16.

the GOP attack on Planned Parenthood did not stop there. Following the House vote, several Republican-controlled state legislatures quickly moved to cut off state funding of Planned Parenthood. As with the U.S. House of Representatives, the votes to cut off funding in the states followed party lines, with Republicans voting overwhelmingly in favor of cutting off funding and Democrats voting overwhelmingly against cutting off funding.³

There may not be a battle raging for the soul of America, but there clearly is a battle raging for the hearts and minds of American voters, and cultural issues such as abortion have become major weapons in that battle. The reason that battle continues to rage is because there is a deep cultural divide in the American electorate.

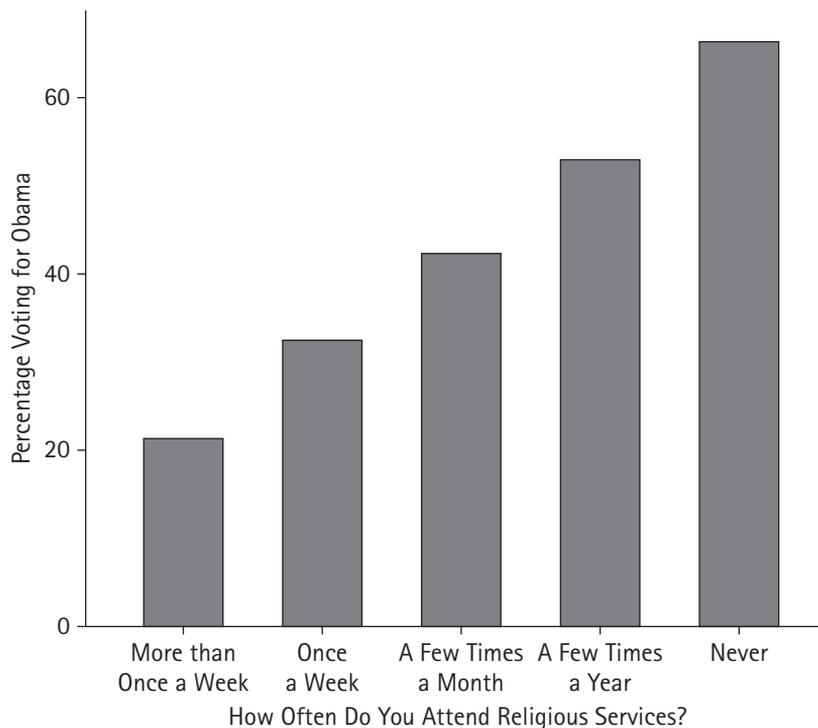
The cultural divide was very evident in the results of the 2008 presidential election despite the fact that the election took place in the midst of a major economic crisis and neither major party candidate focused much attention on cultural issues during the campaign. One of the strongest predictors of candidate choice among white voters in 2008 was frequency of church attendance.⁴ The data from the 2008 national exit poll displayed in Figure 4.1 show that the more time white voters reported spending in church, the more likely they were to cast a Republican ballot. Among whites who never attended religious services, less than 40 percent voted for the Republican presidential candidate, but among those who attended religious services more than once a week, almost 80 percent voted for the Republican candidate.

That candidate, John McCain, was no favorite of religious conservatives. He had received little support in the Republican primaries from born-again and evangelical voters, many of whom preferred former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister. McCain's decision to choose little-known Alaska governor Sarah Palin

³See Kaiser Health News, "States Are Battleground for Planned Parenthood Funding, Abortion Issues," *Kaiser Health News Daily Report* (May 4, 2011): <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/daily-reports/2011/may/04/planned-parenthood-abortion.aspx>.

⁴For the most part, the cultural divide in American politics involves white voters. Nonwhites, including African-Americans and Latinos, are also divided on cultural issues but those divisions generally have little or no relevance to their party affiliations or candidate choices. The evidence presented in this chapter will, therefore, focus mainly on the cultural divide among white Americans.

FIGURE 4.1
2008 Presidential Vote of Whites by Church Attendance



Source: 2008 National Exit Poll

as his running mate was viewed by many political commentators as an attempt to generate enthusiasm for the GOP ticket among religious conservatives.⁵ Hoping to take advantage of McCain's weakness among this group, Democratic nominee Barack Obama made a concerted effort during the 2008 campaign to stress his Christian beliefs and to reach out to religious voters. It made no difference. Obama fared little better among religious whites than the Democrats' 2004 nominee, John Kerry.

⁵For an informative and entertaining account of the 2008 nomination and general election campaigns, see John Heilemann and Mark Halperin, *Game Change: Obama and the Clintons, McCain and Palin, and the Race of a Lifetime* (New York: Harper, 2010). See also Dan Balz and Haynes Johnson, *The Battle for America 2008: The Story of an Extraordinary Election* (New York: Viking, 2009). Scholarly perspectives on the 2008 election can be found in Larry J. Sabato, ed., *The Year of Obama: How Barack Obama Won the White House* (New York: Longman, 2010).

Kerry had received 21 percent of the vote among white born-again and evangelical Christians. Obama received 24 percent.

Religiosity is now a powerful predictor of party identification and candidate preference among white voters in the United States—more powerful in many elections than characteristics traditionally associated with party affiliation and voting behavior such as social class and union membership.⁶ Thus, data from the 2008 national exit poll show that among white voters the impact of church attendance on candidate choice was much stronger than the impact of either family income or union membership. The difference in support for Obama between whites who attended church more than once a week and those who never attended church was a stunning 45 percentage points. In contrast, the difference in support for Obama between whites with family incomes below \$30,000 and those with family incomes above \$150,000 was a meager 6 percentage points. And despite the strong support that he received from organized labor in the general election, the difference in support for Obama between whites in union households and those in nonunion households was only 9 percentage points.

The data in Table 4.1 show that regardless of income or household union membership, religious whites voted overwhelmingly for the Republican presidential candidate in 2008. Thus, whites with family incomes below \$50,000 who attended religious services more than once a week voted for John McCain over Barack Obama by better than a two-to-one margin. And despite the strong support of union leaders for the Democratic ticket, whites from union households who attended religious services more than once a week voted for McCain over Obama by close to a three-to-one margin.

On the other hand, regardless of income or household union membership, secular whites voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic presidential candidate in 2008. Whites with family incomes above \$100,000 who never attended religious services voted for Obama over McCain by better than a two-to-one margin and whites from nonunion households who

⁶For an exploration of the changing role of religion in American life and the relationship between religious beliefs and practices and political attitudes, see Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

TABLE 4.1
**Percentage of Whites Voting for Obama in 2008 by Church Attendance,
 Family Income, and Union Membership**

	MORE THAN WEEKLY	ONCE A WEEK	FEW TIMES A MONTH	FEW TIMES A YEAR	NEVER
ALL VOTERS	21	32	42	53	66
INCOME					
UNDER 50,000	30	42	46	56	64
50–100,000	17	22	49	46	66
OVER 100,000	11	35	32	55	70
HOUSEHOLD					
UNION	26	38	46	60	82
NONUNION	20	31	41	51	63

Source: 2008 national exit poll

never attended religious services voted for Obama over McCain by better than a three-to-two margin.

The deep partisan divide between religious and nonreligious whites is a relatively recent development in American politics. In the years following World War II, the most significant religious divide among white voters in the United States was that between Protestants and Catholics. White Catholics were strongly Democratic while white Protestants outside of the South were almost as strongly Republican. In the 1960 presidential election, for example, according to data from the American National Election Study (ANES) survey, 82 percent of white Catholics voted for Democrat John F. Kennedy while 71 percent of white Protestants in the North voted for Republican Richard M. Nixon.

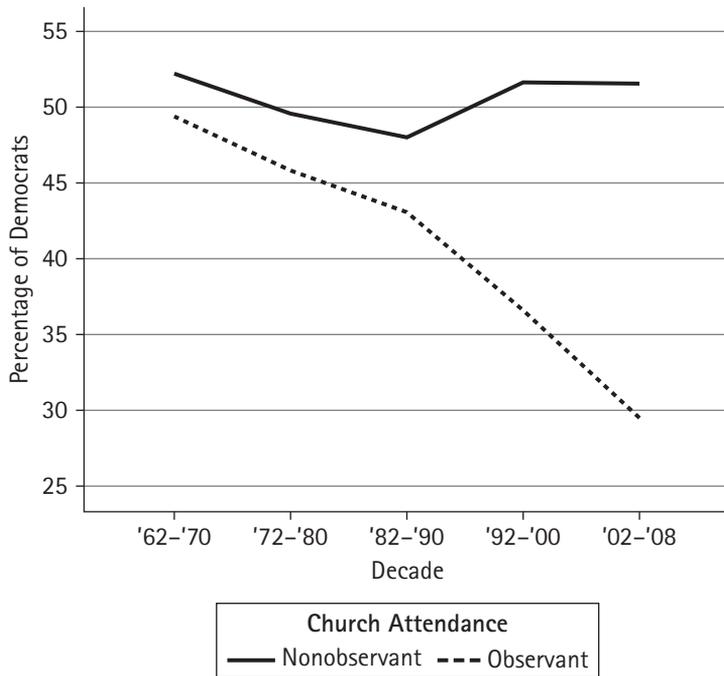
Since the 1960s, the partisan divide between white Catholics and Protestants has gradually diminished as a result of the ideological realignment of the American party system. Conservative Catholics have gravitated toward the Republican Party while liberal Protestants have moved into the Democratic camp. By 2008, according to the ANES survey, the 46 percent of white Catholics who voted for Barack Obama was almost identical to the 45 percent of northern white Protestants who voted for

Obama. However, as the Catholic-Protestant split has diminished, a new religious divide has emerged among white voters—a divide between the religious and the nonreligious.

Figure 4.2 displays the trend in party identification among white voters between the 1960s and the first decade of the twenty-first century based on frequency of church attendance. Voters were classified as “observant” if they reported attending religious services every week or almost every week and as “nonobservant” if they reported attending religious services only a few times a year or never. On average, about 40 percent of white voters fell into each of these two categories. About 20 percent of white voters who reported attending religious services “a few times a month” are left out of the graph. Their party identification generally falls right in the middle of the “observant” and “nonobservant” groups.

The data in Figure 4.2 show that between the 1960s and the 1980s Democratic identification (which includes independents leaning toward

FIGURE 4.2
Trend in Democratic Identification among White Voters by Church Attendance



Source: American National Election Studies, 1952–2008

the Democratic Party) declined among both observant and nonobservant whites, with the gap between the two groups growing only slightly. Since then, however, the gap has widened considerably due mainly to a sharp drop in Democratic identification among observant whites. During this more recent period, Democratic identification has increased modestly among nonobservant whites. As a result, by the 2000s, the religious divide among white voters had reached an all-time high. Slightly over 50 percent of nonobservant white voters identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party compared with less than 30 percent of observant white voters. To put this in perspective, the twenty-two-point gap in Democratic identification between observant and nonobservant whites was considerably larger than either the thirteen-point marriage gap or the seven-point gender gap among white voters.

EXPLAINING THE RELIGIOUS DIVIDE: THE RISE OF ABORTION AS A POLITICAL ISSUE

What has happened since the 1970s to produce the yawning gap in party identification and voting behavior that we see today between religious and secular white voters? The major explanation appears to be the emergence during this time period of a new set of issues that divide Democratic candidates and officeholders from Republican candidates and officeholders—issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and stem cell research. These are issues that, for the most part, were simply not on the political agenda during the 1950s and 1960s. They differ from the traditional issues involving the size and role of the federal government that have divided the parties since the New Deal in that they tap into voters' moral values and religious beliefs. And for that reason, these cultural issues are often more divisive and more difficult to compromise on than economic issues.⁷

One of the most divisive of these new cultural issues is abortion. We can trace the emergence of abortion as a major national issue in the

⁷See John Kenneth White, *The Values Divide: American Politics and Culture in Transition* (New York: Chatham House, 2003).

United States to the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which essentially legalized abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy.⁸ Even after *Roe v. Wade*, however, it took time for abortion to develop into a partisan issue. Initially, there was little reaction to the decision from national political leaders. Opposition to *Roe v. Wade* was concentrated mainly among certain religious leaders, especially Roman Catholic clergy. Among the public, as well, opinions on abortion divided along religious lines rather than partisan lines. Religious voters in both parties tended to oppose legalized abortion while nonreligious voters in both parties tended to support a woman's right to choose whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy.

It was not until Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign that the issue of abortion clearly began to divide Democrats from Republicans. Although he had never expressed much interest in the issue of abortion during his years as Governor of California, by 1980 Reagan and his advisors saw abortion as a potential wedge issue—one that could divide Democrats and attract religious conservatives, whether Protestant or Catholic, into the Republican camp.⁹ The Republican Party's 1980 platform included a plank strongly opposing legalized abortion and endorsing a constitutional amendment to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.¹⁰

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the party divide on the issue of abortion was clear, with Republican leaders increasingly taking the side of religious conservatives in supporting restrictions on access to abortion if not an outright ban and Democratic leaders increasingly taking the side of feminist organizations in defending *Roe v. Wade* and women's access to legal abortion. Today, it is difficult to find prominent Republican politicians who support legalized abortion or prominent Democratic politicians who

⁸For an in-depth examination of the emergence of abortion as a national issue and its impact on U.S. politics, see Barbara H. Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (New York: Chatham House, 1993). See also Karen O'Connor, *No Neutral Ground: Abortion Politics in an Age of Absolutes* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

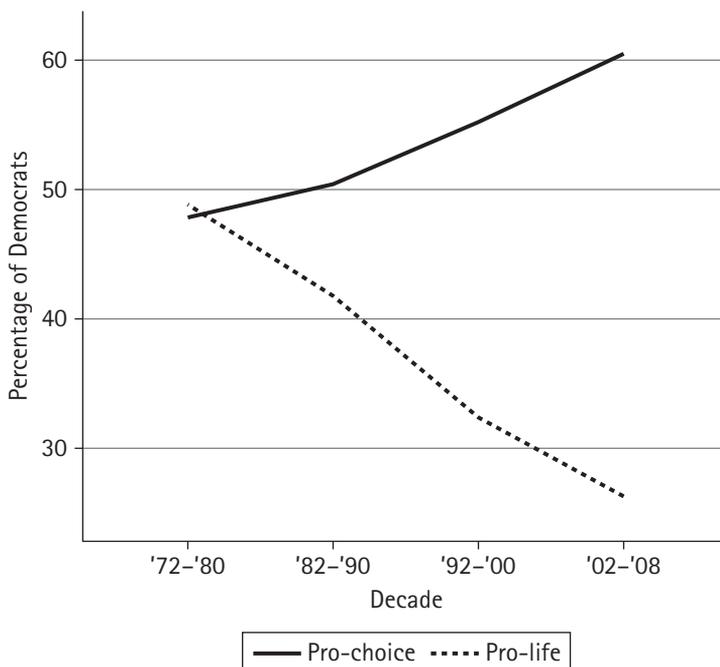
⁹See Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The 1980 Presidential Election and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

¹⁰The full text of the 1980 Republican platform can be found on the Web site of the American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25844#axzz1TzeBNGvG>.

oppose it. Certainly, no candidate seeking the Republican or Democratic presidential nomination in the twenty-first century could take a position contrary to the now-established position of his or her party on abortion and hope to be successful. A pro-choice Republican would have no chance of winning the Republican nomination for president and a pro-life Democrat would have no chance of winning the Democratic nomination for president. Indeed, only a handful of pro-choice Republicans and pro-life Democrats remain in Congress.

But the partisan divide on abortion is by no means limited to elected officials, candidates, and activists. It is now firmly entrenched among the parties' rank-and-file supporters, as the data displayed in Figure 4.3 make clear. This graph shows the trend in party identification among white voters with opposing positions on the issue of abortion based on data

FIGURE 4.3
Trend in Democratic Identification among White Voters by Abortion Attitude



Source: American National Election Studies, 1952–2008

from ANES surveys conducted over four decades. Voters were classified as “pro-life” if they indicated that abortion should always be illegal or should be legal only in cases involving rape, incest, or danger to the life of the mother. Those are the sorts of relatively rare exceptions that are often supported by Republican candidates and elected officials, though even those exceptions have not been included in the language of the Republican Party’s national platform in recent presidential elections. On the other side, voters were classified as “pro-choice” if they indicated that “a woman should always be able to have an abortion as a matter of personal choice.”

The ANES has been using this particular question since 1980 to measure opinions on the issue of abortion. Over this time period, the distribution of opinion on this issue has fluctuated within a fairly narrow range. On average, 41 percent of voters were classified as “pro-choice” and 42 percent were classified as “pro-life.” An average of 17 percent of voters who indicated that they supported legalized abortion “for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman’s life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established” were placed in a middle category. That category is excluded from Figure 4.3. In terms of party identification, this group generally falls right in the middle of the pro-life and pro-choice groups.

Of course, there are many ways to measure opinions on abortion policy. In using the results of the ANES question to divide voters into two opposing camps, we are simplifying a more complex set of opinions. As Fiorina and his coauthors have correctly pointed out, most Americans have ambivalent feelings about abortion.¹¹ No doubt many of America’s pro-choice voters would support some limited restrictions on access to abortion and many of America’s pro-life voters would permit abortions to take place under some extreme circumstances. Despite their ambivalent feelings, however, the large majority of voters in the United States clearly fall into one of two opposing camps on the fundamental question

¹¹Fiorina with Abrams and Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, chapter 5.

of whether abortion should remain legal under the large majority of circumstances, as *Roe v. Wade* provides, or whether it should be banned under the large majority of circumstances. And that is the division that matters politically. Among white voters in the United States today, the large majority of those on the pro-choice side of that divide are Democrats while the large majority of those on the pro-life side of that divide are Republicans.

The data in Figure 4.3 show that over the past four decades the party divide on the issue of abortion has steadily widened. Initially there was no difference in party identification between white voters on opposite sides of the abortion issue. Pro-life voters were just as likely to be Democrats as pro-choice voters. By the 2000s, however, there was a deep partisan divide between pro-life and pro-choice voters. In 2008, for example, 62 percent of pro-choice voters identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party compared with only 24 percent of pro-life voters. This divide was also reflected in the presidential candidate choices of the two groups. Sixty-five percent of pro-choice whites voted for Barack Obama while 78 percent of pro-life whites voted for John McCain.

But the issue of abortion was not equally divisive among all voters in 2008. This can be seen in Table 4.2, which compares the size of the partisan divide on abortion among white voters based on the importance that these voters accorded the issue of abortion and their level of involvement in the 2008 campaign. In terms of issue importance, voters who considered abortion to be a “very important” or “extremely important” issue were placed in the “more important” category while those who considered it only “somewhat important,” “not very important,” or “not at all important” were placed in the “less important” category. Just under half of white voters rated the issue of abortion as either “very important” or “extremely important.”

With regard to campaign involvement, those who engaged in no activities beyond voting were placed in the low involvement group, those who engaged in one activity beyond voting were placed in the moderate involvement group, and those who engaged in two or more activities

TABLE 4.2
The Party Divide on Abortion in 2008: Percentage of Democratic Identifiers by Abortion Opinion among White Voters

	PRO-CHOICE	PRO-LIFE	DIFFERENCE
ALL VOTERS	62	24	38
ABORTION IMPORTANCE			
LESS IMPORTANT	55	35	20
MORE IMPORTANT	69	16	53
CAMPAIGN INVOLVEMENT			
LOW	53	36	17
MODERATE	62	20	42
HIGH	75	8	67

Source: 2008 American National Election Study

beyond voting were placed in the high involvement group. Thirty-seven percent of white voters were in the low involvement group, 37 percent were in the moderate involvement group, and 26 percent were in the high involvement group.

The results in Table 4.2 show that the partisan divide on abortion was much larger among white voters who considered abortion an important issue than among those who did not consider it an important issue and much larger among those who were politically active than among those who were not politically active. And the deepest partisan divide on abortion was found among those voters who cared about the issue and were also politically active. Among active Democrats who cared about abortion, 88 percent were pro-choice. Among active Republicans who cared about abortion, 84 percent were pro-life.

Given these divisions within the electorate, it is hardly surprising that officeholders and candidates are also deeply divided on this issue, with Democrats overwhelmingly on the pro-choice side and Republicans overwhelmingly on the pro-life side. There is no “disconnect” between politicians and voters on this issue. Democratic officeholders and candidates are accurately reflecting the pro-choice views of their party’s active

supporters while Republican officeholders and candidates are accurately reflecting the views of their party's active supporters.

CULTURAL ISSUES IN 2008: ABORTION AND GAY RIGHTS

Abortion is not the only cultural issue dividing American voters. Opinions on abortion are closely related to opinions on a number of other issues that involve deeply held moral and religious beliefs, especially issues concerning the rights of gays and lesbians in American society. There is considerable evidence that attitudes on issues involving gays and lesbians are changing fairly rapidly in the United States. Younger Americans are generally much more accepting of homosexuality than older Americans and much more likely to support policies protecting the rights of gays and lesbians including the right to marry. There has also been a substantial increase since the 1990s in the proportion of American adults who favor allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military and who support same sex marriage. In May 2011, the Gallup Poll reported that for the first time a majority of Americans supported legalizing marriage between same sex couples.¹²

Given these trends, it is entirely possible that at some time in the future, civil rights for gays and lesbians will no longer divide Americans along party lines. But that time is not yet here. In fact, even as overall support for homosexual rights has increased in recent years, the party divide on these issues appears to have widened. Support for same sex marriage and for other policies protecting the rights of gays and lesbians has been growing much more rapidly among Democrats than among Republicans. In the May 2011 Gallup Poll, for example, same sex marriage was supported by 69 percent of Democratic identifiers but by only 28 percent of Republican identifiers. This forty-one-point gap between Democrats and Republicans was substantially larger than the twenty-eight-point gap in a

¹²Frank Newport, "For First Time, Majority of Americans Favor Legal Gay Marriage," *Gallup Poll*: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147662/First-Time-Majority-Americans-Favor-Legal-Gay-Marriage.aspx>.

2010 Gallup Poll. So while antigay sentiment appears to be diminishing within the American electorate, gay rights continue to be a divisive issue in the United States. And that was certainly the case in the 2008 presidential election.

In 2008, the ANES for the first time incorporated questions on gay rights, including one on same sex marriage and one on adoption by gay and lesbian couples. The data displayed in Table 4.3 show that opinions on gay marriage and adoption, like opinions on abortion, were closely related to frequency of religious observance among white voters. The more often white voters attended church, the less likely they were to favor giving

TABLE 4.3
Cultural Attitudes of White Voters in 2008 by Religious Observance

	OBSERVANT (%)	NONOBSERVANT (%)
ABORTION		
PRO-CHOICE	21	53
MIXED	15	18
PRO-LIFE	64	29
GAY MARRIAGE		
PRO-MARRIAGE	17	50
CIVIL UNIONS	28	28
NEITHER	55	22
GAY ADOPTION		
FAVOR	29	66
OPPOSE	71	34
CULTURAL ISSUES SCALE		
VERY LIBERAL	7	33
LIBERAL	9	17
SLIGHTLY LIBERAL	8	15
SLIGHTLY CONSERVATIVE	14	13
CONSERVATIVE	15	13
VERY CONSERVATIVE	47	9

Source: 2008 American National Election Study

legal rights to gays and lesbians. Thus, while 50 percent of nonobservant white voters supported same sex marriage and only 22 percent opposed either marriage or civil unions, only 17 percent of observant white voters favored same sex marriage and 55 percent opposed either marriage or civil unions. Likewise, 66 percent of nonobservant white voters supported adoption by same sex couples compared with only 29 percent of observant white voters.

As expected, opinions on abortion, gay marriage, and gay adoption were closely related. The correlation (Pearson's r) between opinions on gay marriage and gay adoption was .64, the correlation between opinion on abortion and opinion on gay marriage was .44, and the correlation between opinion on abortion and opinion on gay adoption was .45. Since all three questions appeared to be measuring a common underlying orientation on cultural issues, I combined them to form a scale measuring cultural liberalism versus cultural conservatism for further analysis.

There was a fairly even division within the white electorate on these cultural issues. Thirty-six percent of white voters were classified as "very liberal" or "liberal" on the cultural issues scale while 35 percent were classified as "very conservative" or "conservative." The remaining 29 percent were evenly split between those classified as "slightly liberal" and those classified as "slightly conservative." The data in Table 4.3 show that frequency of church attendance was strongly related to the location of white voters on this cultural issues scale. Among nonobservant white voters, liberals outnumbered conservatives by close to a two-to-one margin. Among observant whites, however, conservatives outnumbered liberals by a greater than three-to-one margin.

Cultural attitudes were strongly related to party identification and candidate preference among white voters, especially among those who were more politically active. Among all white voters, the correlation between the cultural issues scale and party identification was a fairly strong .43. Among those engaging in at least one activity beyond voting, though, the correlation was an even stronger .52 and among those engaging in at least two activities beyond voting the correlation was a very strong .65. As a result, the party divide on cultural issues was much greater among more

politically active whites than among those who were less active. This can be seen very clearly in Figure 4.4 (see Chapter 4 color insert), which compares the cultural attitudes of white Democrats and Republicans based on their level of political activity in 2008.

About half of whites engaged in no campaign activities at all or only voted. Among that group, the party divide on cultural issues was relatively small: The distance between the average Democrat and the average Republican was only 0.5 units on the six-point cultural issues scale. And only 34 percent of these less active whites were located at the liberal or conservative end points of the scale while 36 percent were located in the two middle categories. In contrast, among the 50 percent of whites who engaged in at least one activity beyond voting, the party divide was much wider: The distance between the average Democrat and the average Republican was 2.2 units on the cultural issues scale. And 49 percent of these politically active whites were located at the liberal or conservative end points of the scale while only 21 percent were located in the two middle categories.

Opinions on cultural issues were also strongly related to presidential candidate preference among white voters in 2008. Among all white voters, 71 percent of cultural liberals (those with scores of 1 or 2 on the cultural issues scale) voted for Barack Obama compared with 39 percent of cultural moderates (those with scores of 3 or 4) and only 13 percent of cultural conservatives. And among most politically active whites, those who engaged in at least two campaign activities beyond voting, the relationship was even stronger: 82 percent of cultural liberals voted for Obama compared with 32 percent of cultural moderates and a mere 2 percent of cultural conservatives.

GROWING CONSISTENCY BETWEEN CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

Another important development in American politics in recent years is that opinions on cultural issues are increasingly related to opinions on the economic issues that have traditionally divided the two parties.

As recently as the 1970s and 1980s, a good many Democratic candidates and officeholders from working class constituencies combined economic liberalism with cultural conservatism. They supported government regulation of economic activity and generous spending on social programs but opposed policies such as legalized abortion and gay rights. At the same, a good many Republican candidates and officeholders from affluent and highly educated constituencies in the Northeast combined economic conservatism with cultural liberalism. They favored limits on government regulation of the economy and spending but supported abortion rights and tolerance of alternative lifestyles.

Today, few candidates or elected officials combine cultural liberalism with economic conservatism or cultural conservatism with economic liberalism. The vast majority of Republican candidates and officeholders are both cultural and economic conservatives while the vast majority of Democratic candidates and officeholders are both cultural and economic liberals. Thus, while the initial emphasis of the Tea Party movement during 2009 was on the issues of taxation and government spending, the most prominent leaders of the movement today are politicians like Michele Bachmann and Jim DeMint who combine highly conservative views on economic issues with staunch opposition to legalized abortion and same sex marriage. And consistency between cultural and economic issues has also increased among voters. For example, between 1984 and 2008, the correlation between opinions on abortion and opinions on government responsibility for health insurance among white voters increased from .07 to .28. In terms of shared variance, this means that the relationship between opinions on these two issues was sixteen times stronger in 2008 than it was in 1984.

In order to compare the consistency of opinions within and between different issue domains, I created a scale measuring liberalism on economic issues. I used four questions from the 2008 ANES to create this economic issues scale—support for government aid to blacks, government versus personal responsibility for jobs and living standards, government versus private responsibility for health insurance, and preferred level of government services and spending versus

taxes. For white voters, the average correlation among these four questions was a solid .45, with a range from .29 to .55, indicating that all of these questions were measuring opinions about the role of government in the economy.

Among all white voters in 2008, the correlation between the cultural and economic issues scales was a fairly strong .44, indicating that there was a fairly high degree of consistency between cultural attitudes and economic attitudes. However, political engagement affected consistency of opinions within issue domains and between issue domains. The data displayed in Table 4.4 show that whites who were more politically active had much more consistent opinions than those who were less active. Among those who did nothing or who just voted, the average correlation within the cultural issue domain was .37, the average correlation within the economic issue domain was .33, and the average correlation between issues in the two domains was .08. So while opinions within each domain were moderately consistent, opinions on issues in the cultural and economic domains were almost unrelated. Among this group, the correlation between the cultural and economic issues scales was only .18.

In sharp contrast, among politically active whites, those who engaged in two or more activities beyond voting, there was much greater consistency both within and between domains. The average correlation within the cultural issue domain was .65, the average correlation within the economic issue domain was .61, and the average correlation between

TABLE 4.4
Average Consistency across Issue Positions for Whites in
2008 by Campaign Involvement

ISSUES	VERY LOW TO LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
CULTURAL	.37	.56	.65
ECONOMIC	.33	.40	.61
CULTURAL WITH ECONOMIC	.08	.20	.52
CULTURAL ISSUES SCALE WITH ECONOMIC ISSUES SCALE	.18	.32	.79

Source: 2008 American National Election Study

issues in the two domains was .52. Even more impressively, the correlation between cultural and economic issues scales was a very strong .79.

For politically active whites, it appears that there was almost no separation between cultural and economic issues in 2008. Opinions on cultural issues were very closely related to opinions on economic issues. For example, among politically active whites who preferred more government services and spending to lower taxes, 76 percent were pro-choice on abortion and 57 percent supported gay marriage. On the other side, among those who preferred lower taxes to more government services and spending, 68 percent were pro-life on abortion and only 11 percent supported gay marriage.

Among politically active whites, just as among elected officials and candidates, cultural attitudes and economic attitudes are closely connected. Cultural liberals are also economic liberals and cultural conservatives are also economic conservatives. As a result, not only do opinions on these two types of issues increasingly reinforce one another, but economic issues are frequently viewed in religious or moral terms. For many liberals, social welfare programs are seen as promoting a more just and equitable society while for many conservatives they are seen as undermining personal virtue and promoting dependence on a secular state.

CULTURAL ISSUES, ECONOMIC ISSUES, AND PARTY IDENTIFICATION

Cultural issues are now one of the foundations of support for political parties in the United States. However, the influence of cultural issues varies considerably based on race and political engagement. Table 4.5 compares the strength of the relationship between economic and cultural issues and party identification among various groups of voters in 2008. In general, we would expect to find the effect of cultural issues to be stronger among whites than among nonwhites, and we would expect the effect among whites to be stronger among those who are politically active than among those who are inactive.

The results displayed in Table 4.5 generally confirm our expectations. For African-Americans and Latinos, cultural issues appeared to play little

TABLE 4.5
Correlation of Party Identification with Economic and Cultural Issues
Scales by Race and Campaign Involvement in 2008

GROUP	ECONOMIC ISSUES SCALE	CULTURAL ISSUES SCALE
BLACKS	.14	.04
LATINOS	.36	.02
WHITES	.59	.36
VERY LOW INVOLVEMENT	.21	.00
LOW INVOLVEMENT	.39	.19
MODERATE INVOLVEMENT	.60	.41
HIGH INVOLVEMENT	.77	.65

Source: 2008 American National Election Study

Note: The entries shown are Pearson's r .

or no role in shaping partisan orientations in 2008. Among Latinos, only economic issues were related to party identification. Latinos with conservative views on economic issues identified themselves somewhat less with the Democratic Party than those with liberal views on economic issues, but Latinos with conservative views on cultural issues identified themselves just as much with the Democratic Party as did those with liberal views on cultural issues. African-Americans overwhelmingly identified themselves with the Democratic Party, but neither economic issues nor cultural issues seemed to explain their attachment to the party. The relatively small group of blacks with conservative views on economic issues identified itself only slightly less with the Democratic Party compared with the much larger group of blacks with liberal views on economic issues. And blacks with conservative views on cultural issues identified themselves just as much with the Democratic Party as did blacks with liberal views on cultural issues.

The evidence in Table 4.5 shows that among whites both economic and cultural issues were related to party identification, though the impact of economic issues was somewhat stronger. And both types of issues had much stronger effects among politically active whites than

among politically inactive whites. In fact, among the most politically active whites, opinions on economic and cultural issues were so closely related that it is difficult to disentangle their effects on party identification. Politically active Democrats were very liberal on both economic and cultural issues while politically active Republicans were very conservative on both economic and cultural issues.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Since the 1970s, a deep cultural divide has developed within the white electorate in the United States. Among white voters today, religious beliefs and practices are stronger predictors of party affiliation and candidate preference than characteristics traditionally associated with partisan orientations such as social class and union membership. The reason for this growing cultural divide is the emergence of a new set of issues dividing Democrats and Republicans that tap into voters' moral values and religious beliefs, issues such as abortion and gay marriage. And increasingly, opinions on these cultural issues are related to opinions on more traditional economic issues, especially among the politically active. The result is that opinions on cultural issues reinforce opinions on economic issues, infusing those issues with moral overtones. Leaders of the opposing party are no longer viewed simply as mistaken in their views but as immoral. We will see in Chapter 5 that the growing cultural divide within the American electorate has also been an important factor contributing to a growing geographic divide in American politics.