

8 Great Communicators? The Influence of Presidential and Congressional Issue Framing on Party Identification

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Introduction

Conventional political wisdom and empirical political science research suggest that Democrats in the electorate are as pro-choice as Republican voters are pro-life—where both groups are mirroring the positions taken by elected officials in each party¹ (Adams 1997; Gerrity et al. n.d.). However, it was not always this way. Even though the electorate sent pro-life Republican Ronald Reagan to the White House after his victory over the pro-choice Jimmy Carter in the 1980 election, the August 30, 1982, edition of *Newsweek's* story, “Abortion: The Debate Begins” referred not to a GOP—Democratic divide on abortion but to Republican senator Jesse Helms’s bill that human life begins at conception and *Republican* senators Bob Packwood and Lowell Weicker’s filibuster of Helms’s proposal. At that time, there was not a significant difference between Republican and Democratic voters’ views about abortion (Gerrity et al. n.d.).

The Democrats were no more transparent in their views on abortion in the years following *Roe v. Wade*, the decision that legalized abortion in the United States. A March, 1975, *Newsweek* article chronicles Idaho Democrat Frank Church’s efforts at passing anti-abortion legislation while stories appearing in issues of the same magazine in 1976 chronicled Jimmy Carter’s pro-choice political position on abortion and pro-life personal position on the same issue.

More than a decade later, the November 16, 1992, *Newsweek* reported that the abortion issue represented the “great dividing line” in American politics; even though Republican leaders were divided themselves on whether to frame the abortion issue in ardently pro-life terms to appeal to religious conservatives or to frame the issue in top strategist Lee Atwater’s preferred nomenclature of the “big tent,” where people with diverse views on abortion were welcome in the GOP. Four years later, *Newsweek's* pre-election issue labeled pro-choice Republicans “unusual” and highlighted the pro-choice stances of every Democratic senate candidate in a close election. By 1999, the parties’ abortion positions (which had been long standing pieces of their official party platforms) were solidified in conventional political wisdom connecting partisan politicians’ positions on abortion to the preferences of Republicans and Democrats in the electorate. *Newsweek* columnist David Brooks noted in 1999 that, while he felt

that Republican candidates needed to take on some section of the Republican establishment to appeal to moderates, attacking the pro-life movement would be “political suicide.” In other words, in contemporary American politics, an individual’s opinion about abortion can be used to reliably predict their party identification (Adams 1997; Stimson 2004).

How did we get to this point? Did people change their minds on the abortion issue to match their party’s position? Or, did prominent partisan politicians take competing positions on the abortion issue, framing the issue in ways that slowly nudged pro-choice voters to the Democrats while simultaneously inching pro-life voters to the GOP? If so, does partisan framing affect party identification on all major political issues, or just hot-button, cultural issues like abortion? In this chapter, I examine how presidents and members of Congress framed their arguments on taxes and abortion, two prominent issues that have helped shape modern partisan alignments, in order to demonstrate that the consistency with which partisan elites, especially presidents, frame issues has long-term consequences on partisan alignments in the electorate (Sundquist 1983; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Adams 1997).

This chapter argues that the role of presidential issue framing, and elite-partisan framing more generally, is a missing link that informs our understanding of how partisan change occurs in American politics. Combining an original content analysis of 25 years of partisan issue framing (1975–2000) in *Newsweek* and *The New York Times* with public opinion data from the American National Election Study (ANES) from the same time period, this chapter demonstrates that the consistency with which presidents frame particular kinds of issues in the marketplace of ideas helps to explain the conditions under which issue-based party change occurs in the electorate (Carsey and Layman 2006; Wagner 2007)².

In short, when presidents (and nominated candidates for president) frame issues in ways that are consistent with their own party platform *and* when there is partisan competition over the way particular types of issues are framed by elites in the news media, presidential issue framing influences party identification. This claim comes with two important caveats: we should expect changes in partisanship only for those citizens for whom the issue is important, and we should expect more substantial shifts when it comes to “cultural” issues like abortion than for “social-welfare” issues like taxes. The analysis presented here advances our understanding of the role that partisan issue framing has on partisan change by revealing the unique role that presidents play in communicating to the American people in the rough and tumble world of partisan political communication.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I explain how presidential issue framing’s influence on party identification synthesizes a broad theoretical framework; second, I explain the chapter’s research design, which takes advantage of an original dataset containing a comprehensive content analysis of the frames political elites used to describe the issues of taxes and abortion from 1975 to 2000; third, I examine how the frames used by presidents, presidential candidates, and members of Congress influenced long-term trends in party

identification; and finally, I consider the implications of the findings on our knowledge of the presidency, partisan change, and framing.

Conflict Extension, the Media, and Partisan Issue Framing

Scholarly accounts treating partisanship as strikingly stable and able to influence political preferences dominate modern political science (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002; but see Fiorina 1981). Party identification is the chief engineer of political opinion for the vast majority of preferences—that is, those that are not deeply held (Carsey and Layman 2006; see also Zaller 1992).

So when should we expect one's political partisanship to affect her opinions? And when should we expect one's opinions to affect his partisanship? When issues clearly divide the two major political parties, party-based issue change (people develop issue positions in line with their party's) and issue-based party change (people change parties to more closely match their issue positions) should be likely to occur under different, particular circumstances (Carsey and Layman 2006). This "conflict-extension" perspective argues that when political elites, like party leaders and candidates, take competing positions on issues with elites of the other major political party, signals are sent to the public explaining which views go with each party (Carsey and Layman 2006; Carmines and Stimson 1989). Thus, some people could react to these signals by changing their party identification to match their issue preferences while other citizens could change some issue preferences to better match the positions taken by elected officials within the party.

The principal question is, who should undergo issue-based party change and who should undergo party-based issue change? First, people who are not aware that the two major parties have taken diverging positions on an issue should not have any reason to alter either their partisanship or their issue preferences accordingly. The crucial element of the "conflict extension" perspective is individual awareness of party differences on issues (Layman and Carsey 2002). Issue-based party change should occur for issues that are important to people. In other words, when one is a member of a party and becomes aware that her party is taking a different position on an issue than she would prefer, *and* that issue is of the utmost importance to her, the conditions are ripe for issue-based party change (Carsey and Layman 2006; see also Brody and Page 1972; Schattschneider 1960; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Carmines and Wagner 2006; Tormala and Petty 2004, 2002).

On the other hand, individuals who do not find an issue to be all that significant to them should not be expected to undergo issue-based partisan change. Rather, these individuals would likely amend their preferences on the issue to match the position of their party, undergoing party-based issue change (Campbell et al. 1960).

One element missing from the theoretical accounts of issue-based party change and party-based issue change is the dimension of conflict on which the

issue exists (or, indeed, cross-cuts). That is, does issue-based party change happen for all types of issues? Cultural issues (or “easy issues”) appear to be more deeply held than other issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Alford, Funk, and Hibbing 2004). Presidents and other partisan elites may find it very difficult to persuade individuals to alter their preferences (or even preference weights) for issues that are held at this “gut” level. These issues are the prime candidates, then, for issue-based party change. Shafer and Claggett’s (1995) account of two “deep” issue dimensions of conflict that exist in the American public provide a useful description of the major types of issues that dominate the American political landscape.³

The first dimension focuses on the economic and social-welfare issues that became prominent during the New Deal. These are issues that deal with the government’s involvement in the economy, such as taxes, spending on health care, social security, and welfare. The linchpin connecting these issues is that their focus on distribution, “tapping arguments over the appropriate (re)distribution of economic benefits to the less fortunate” (Shafer and Claggett 1995, p. 24).

The second dimension is concerned with cultural values including issues like abortion, gay rights, and prayer in public schools; “easy issues” in the Carmines and Stimson (1989) parlance. These issues are connected by their focus on “the implementation of American values—values that define appropriate social behavior” (Shafer and Claggett 1995, 23). These two issue dimensions have become incorporated into a single broad ideological dimension for party elites (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), but they remain largely separate and distinct for the American electorate.

The issues that have been prominently featured in accounts of aggregate partisan change fall almost exclusively into the cultural issues category. Carmines and Stimson (1989) demonstrate how racial issues transformed American politics before they fused onto the social-welfare dimension (Kellstedt 2003). Adams (1997) provides a similar account of “issue evolution” for abortion, explaining how congressional elites took different positions on abortion *before* the public responded to this difference by slowly following the direction of elite debate.

To summarize, when individuals are aware of party differences on an issue, we should expect individuals with preferences that are incongruent with positions staked out by their party to undergo party-based issue change when the issue at hand is less important to people (especially social-welfare issues) and issue-based party change for issues of import (especially cultural issues). This chapter investigates the issue-based party change hypothesis by examining the impact of presidential issue framing on a cultural issue (abortion) and a social-welfare issue (taxes).

Public Awareness of Party Differences: Partisan Elites, Framing and the Media

Before issue-based party change can occur, we must know more about *how* individuals become aware of party differences on issues. If we can better

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understand the conditions under which people will learn about party differences on issues, we improve our ability to predict, understand, and explain instances of conflict extension and issue-based party change.

The mass media are a crucial intermediary between elite actors and the public. Journalists' professional norms of objectivity regularly lead media outlets to provide arguments to "both sides" of an issue⁴ (Graber 2006). Since political parties provide structure for political debate (Schattschneider 1942; Sniderman 2000; Wright and Schaffner 2002), they are often key players in media stories that provide two "sides" to an issue. Elite partisans make up a significant portion of the "official sources" that are routinely relied upon in political news stories (Cook 1998).

The claim that people's evaluations of issues are influenced by how they are characterized in elite discourse is not new in the study of politics, or even social science more generally (see Introduction, above). Scholars from as diverse perspectives as E.E. Schattschneider (1960), Murray Edelman (1988), and William Riker (1990) have theorized about how issues can be portrayed in ways that encourage specific opinions and/or actions. Empirical examinations demonstrating how opinion systematically and intelligibly depends on the way issues are frame by elites abound (Iyengar 1991; Nelson and Kinder 1996). What is new to the framing discussion is the notion that *partisan* issue frames, when consistently reported in the media, provide individuals the opportunity to become aware of party differences on issues, creating the possibility for either issue-based party change or partisan-based issue change.

Political parties provide citizens the opportunity to choose between these competing values. Parties have an interest in providing different, competing choices to the public in order to win public power (Schattschneider 1942; Sniderman 2000). What the majority of framing studies have not considered, then, are two key points. First, citizens may be more susceptible to framing effects under some conditions more than others (Sniderman and Theriault 2004; Druckman 2001; Chong and Druckman 2007). Second, since both major political parties in American politics tend to contest issues and because the news media's norm of providing objective coverage results in the reporting of "two sides" of the issue at hand, citizens are regularly exposed to *alternative* ways of framing issues, and thus have a choice regarding how they might think about them. Too often, framing studies fail to account for this important fact, leading to potentially misleading conclusions about framing's effects in the political world (Druckman in this volume; 2004).

We should expect individuals to become aware of party differences on an issue after the news media have provided prominent coverage to that issue *and* reported consistent, competing partisan frames defining the issue (see Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Indeed, as I have previously demonstrated, when partisan elites present consistent frames on issues like taxes and abortion over time, people are more likely to believe there are important differences between the two major parties. When parties provide inconsistent frames on issues like energy policy, people are not more likely to notice important differences between the parties (Wagner 2007).

Once the parties are competing over an issue and important differences are noticed, we should expect presidential framing to affect party identification for cultural issues that are important to people while party identification should be less influential on economic issues like taxes. Those who have a position on the cultural issue in question that is inconsistent with their party's position as described consistently by the president (or the out-party's standard-bearer) are the most likely to undergo issue-based party change over time.

Coding Presidential Framing

To develop a dataset of issue frames used by partisan elites when framing taxes, a social-welfare issue, and abortion, a cultural issue, I coded every article in *Newsweek* magazine containing any mention of either issue.⁵ Using Lexis-Nexis, I engaged in a "full text" search of every *Newsweek* magazine article and editorial from 1975 to 2000 that contained the word "abortion."^{6,7} I coded abortion-related frames for every story in *Newsweek* that mentioned the word abortion. A total of 1,236 stories were coded. Those stories contained a total of 2,258 frames such as "abortion is murder," "abortion is about choice," "the government shouldn't pay for abortion" and so forth.

For taxes, I again engaged in a Lexis-Nexis "full text" search of every *Newsweek* magazine article and editorial from 1975 to 2000 that contained any one of the following phrases: "tax policy," "tax plan," "tax cut(s)," "cut taxes," "raise taxes," or "tax hike." Initially, I searched only for the words "taxes" or "tax"; however, the result was that the Lexis-Nexis search of *Newsweek* produced a very high percentage of articles that were unrelated to tax policy in the United States and thus were not coded. After trying several combinations of various words and phrases, I settled on the above search to provide a comprehensive list of stories about US tax policy without forcing me, or the other coders, to sift through large amounts of unrelated stories.⁸ A total of 1,259 stories were coded. Those stories contained a total of 2,659 frames that were coded into 208 framing categories such as "taxes are too high," "the wealthy pay too much in taxes," "tax cuts are unfair to the poor," and so forth.

Each story was coded for a wide variety of elements.⁹ Most crucial for this chapter, each story was coded for up to six different frames present in the story, the source of the frames, whether that source was the president or the politician who became his party's nominee for president,¹⁰ whether the sources were identified with partisan labels, and whether the partisans' frames matched the official party platform position¹¹ on the issue in question.

Since the Eisenhower Administration, *Newsweek* has been delivered to the mailboxes of over two million subscribers per year. While the *New York Times* is the national "paper of record" and has been shown to be a reasonable, if imperfect, proxy of media coverage in general (Brians and Wattenberg 1996), the *Newsweek* audience is comprised of less, as Kellstedt (2003) claims, "highbrow" readers than the readers of the *New York Times*. This reduces worries over the generalizability of *New York Times* findings to less elite members

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of society. Further, *Newsweek's* circulation has been quite consistent from 1975 to 2000, the years I examine in this analysis. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that *Newsweek's* impact on society has been relatively stable.

To supplement his *Newsweek* data, Kellstedt (2003) also coded a random sampling of articles about racial issues that appeared in the *New York Times*. As Gerrity et al. (n.d.) found with respect to coverage of abortion and interest groups, Kellstedt found no significant differences in the way racial issues were framed in the *New York Times* and *Newsweek*. This reduces concerns about the generalizability of the *Newsweek* data to other national media sources.

Issue Framing and Party Identification: The Cases of Taxes and Abortion¹²

Before examining the role that presidential issue frames play in long-term trends in party identification, it is useful to have an idea of the various sources employed by reporters in their stories about tax and abortion policies. If elite partisans such as presidents and members of Congress do not play a prominent role in framing these issues, it is not reasonable to expect their frames to affect long-term trends in party identification. As Table 8.1 shows, Republicans are the most common source of tax policy frames, providing 41.3 percent of them. Democrats provide 26.9 percent of the frames, providing face validity to Petrocik's "issue ownership" hypothesis that Republicans own the tax issue in the public's eyes (1996). Illustrating that the partisan nature of the framing of

Table 8.1 Distribution of Frame Sources for Taxes, 1975–2000, % (no. of frames)

Source	Frequency of source providing a frame
Republican	41.3 (1,093)
Democrat	26.9 (711)
Journalist	17.7 (468)
Expert	5.8 (153)
Public opinion	3 (80)
Other	2.5 (66)
House/Senate, no party	2.4 (62)
Interest group, business	1.9 (51)
Interest group, citizen	1.1 (28)
Federal Reserve Chair	0.8 (21)
Religious leaders	0.1 (3)
Ross Perot	0.6 (17)
Senate member, no party	0.4 (10)
Person	0.3 (9)
Other politician, no party	0.2 (5)
House Member, no party	0.2 (6)
Court	0.04 (1 frame)

Note

Percentages add up to more than 100 because are allowed to have more than one source.

tax policy, fully 68.2 percent of all issue frames about tax policy had a party label attached to them. Of the Republican-sourced frames, 67.7 percent came from GOP presidents, the Republican Party’s nominee for president, or presidential administration staff. Republicans in Congress provided nearly 22 percent of all Republican-sourced frames.

Turning to Democratic sources of frames regarding tax policy, members of Congress edge out Presidents Carter and Clinton as the most widely used Democratic source on tax frames when considering the entire time period. During the respective times that Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were in office, presidents are the most prominent category among Democrats. Indeed, the presidents, nominees for the White House, and Democratic presidents’ administration officials, and eventual presidential nominees account for 57 percent of Democrats’ frames on taxes overall. Democratic members of Congress provided nearly 35 percent of tax-related frames, while non-nominated candidates for president and “other” Democrats provided the rest.

Figure 8.1 illustrates the general relationship between the consistency of presidential and congressional issue frames from 1975 to 2000. Consistency is defined as the frame being consistent with the party’s platform. Thus, if Republican Ronald Reagan said that a constitutional ban on abortion was unnecessary, the frame would be coded as inconsistent since the Republican platform called for such an amendment. The values presented in the figure

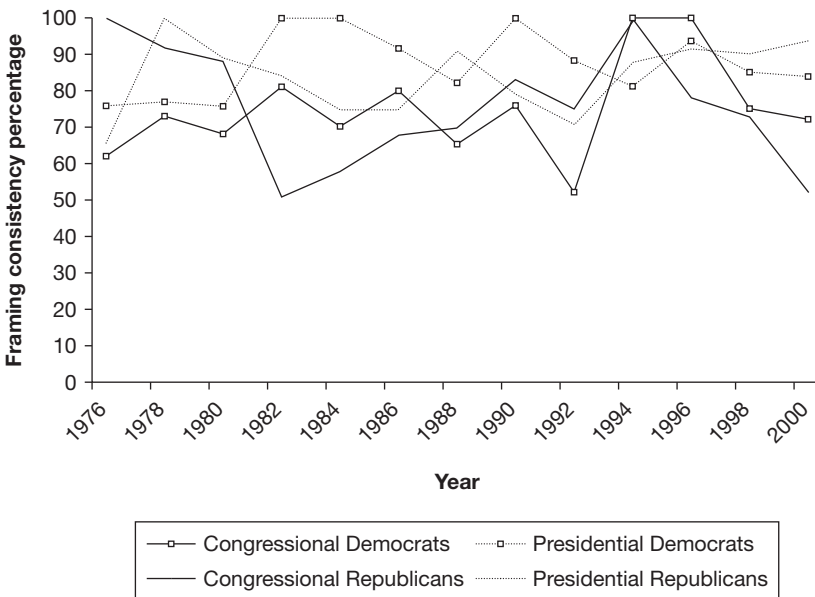


Figure 8.1 The Variability of Presidential and Congressional Framing on Tax Issues, 1975–2000

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represent the percentage of frames offered by a particular source that was consistent with the source's party platform in a two-year period. Presidents, their administration officials, and nominated candidates for president of both parties exhibited variance but were fairly consistent in their framing of tax issues, with Democratic presidents often achieving perfect consistency. Democratic presidents never fell below 76 percent consistency in their frames while Republicans, with the exception of Gerald Ford (66 percent), never fell below 71 percent consistency with their party platform. Consistent with the themes outlined by Schaffner and Atkinson in the previous chapter, Republican presidents framed tax issues in terms of individual freedom and lower taxes for the citizenry and businesses. Democratic presidents framed tax issues in terms of equality and the use of taxes for government programs.

While Republican and Democratic members of Congress generally used the same themes as their party's presidents, congressional framing, perhaps unsurprisingly, varied much more considerably. Democratic congressmembers exhibited an "off-year" election pattern where non-presidential election seasons brought with them more consistent framing of tax issues. On the Republican side, the two years with the lowest levels of consistency (1982 and 2000) were also the years when they were quoted the least in *Newsweek*, likely artificially inflating the importance of frames they made that did not match the party position on tax policy.

Table 8.2 shows that while abortion frames were provided by a partisan source over 38 percent of the time, abortion was reported in a much less partisan manner than tax issues were as Republicans and Democrats provided 68 percent of tax frames from 1975 to 2000. Interestingly, from 1975 to 1980, partisan elites provided only 20 percent of the total number of frames on the abortion issue. By 1990, over 35 percent of abortion frames contained partisan sources. In 2000, 53 percent of all abortion frames had a party label attached to them. This increase in the partisan nature of abortion frames comports with the issue evolution model (Gerrity, this volume; Adams 1997; Gerrity, Wagner, and Carmines n.d.).

Table 8.2 Distribution of Frame Sources for Abortion, 1975–2000, % (no. of frames)

<i>Source</i>	<i>Frequency of source providing a frame</i>
Republican	23.4 (528)
Interest Group	17.6 (398)
Democrat	15.2 (344)
Court	14.1 (318)
Journalist	12.6 (254)
Other	9.5 (215)
Religious Community	6.1 (137)
Medical Community	3 (67)
Public Opinion	2.7 (60)
Politician, no party	1.9 (42)

Overall, though, Republicans provided the most abortion frames of any general source (23.4 percent). Interest groups were reported as giving 17.6 percent of abortion frames, while Democrats were linked with 15.2 percent. Court decisions, statements by judges, and the like were tied to 14.1 percent of abortion issue frames, and 12.6 percent came from journalists.

Focusing specifically on Republican sources of abortion frames, congressional sources slightly edged out Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole, and George W. Bush's use of abortion frames. However, when those Republicans were in office, they dominated the amount of frames used by members of the GOP. This was especially true for Ronald Reagan, who personally provided 40 percent of all Republican frames on abortion from 1980 to 1988. Members of his administration provided another 18 percent of frames during his presidency.

On the other side of the aisle, congressional sources framed the abortion issue most often for the Democrats. However, during the Clinton years, the president provided over 41 percent of Democratic frames on abortion, and other members of his administration provided another 20 percent. Nominated presidential candidates like Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis supplied 18.6 percent of Democratic abortion frames while non-nominated presidential candidates gave 15.7 percent of frames in *Newsweek* from 1975 to 2000.

Figure 8.2 shows that presidential issue frames took some time to become consistent on the abortion issue. Remarkably, presidents and other elite partisans

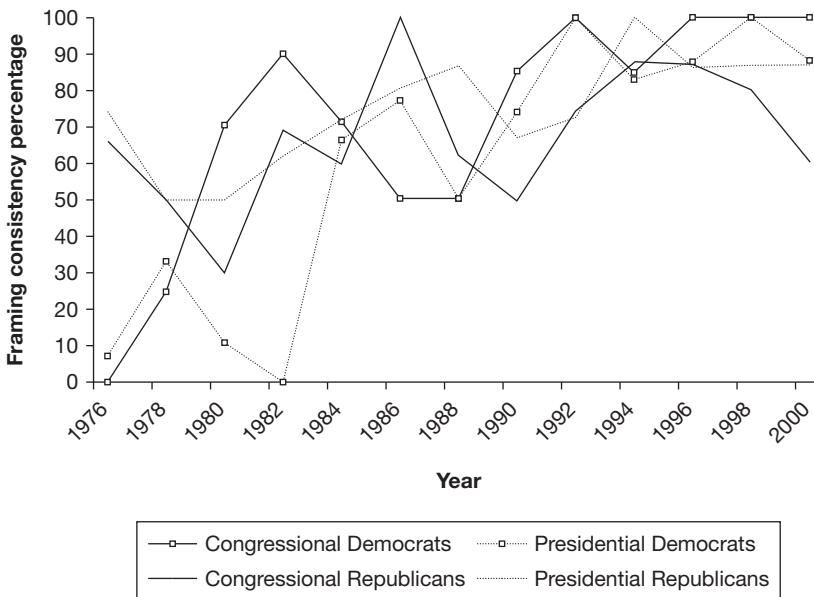


Figure 8.2 The Variability of Presidential and Congressional Framing on Abortion, 1975–2000

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were about as likely as not to express party doctrine on the abortion issue in the late 1970s and early 1980s. President Carter had a famously inconsistent view regarding abortion. On occasion, he framed the issue as a moral one—opposing it. On other occasions, he framed the issue as one of women’s rights—supporting it. Ronald Reagan became increasingly consistent in his opposition to the abortion issue; George H.W. Bush struggled with consistency at times with his own view, but regularly framed the abortion issue in ways consistent with his party’s platform. President Clinton was very consistent with his frame that abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare.”

Congressional Democrats’ and congressional Republicans’ framing of the abortion issue essentially mirrored the consistency with which their party’s standard-bearer framed the issue. In both cases, the consistency with which partisan elites framed the abortion issue became increasingly consistent, on average, over time with the Democrats in government providing a slightly more consistent case than Republicans did from 1975 to 2000.

Variables used in the Time-Series Analysis of Framing and Party Identification

Figures 8.1 and 8.2 demonstrate that partisan frames on taxes and abortion vary over time. While we often presume in framing studies that politicians pick the right frame and stick to it, the data demonstrate that the real political framing process includes bouts of inconsistency, appeals to voters who aren’t in the party “base,” and time spent searching for an effective argument. Thus, partisan frames vary, but do they matter? In order to systematically explain how presidential and congressional issue framing has mattered over time, I use party identification as the dependent variable in my analyses. *Party ID 7pt* is a 7-point measure of respondents’ self-identification with a political party, measured 1 = Strong Democrat to 7 = Strong Republican (see Appendices A and B for tables presenting the results of the time-series analyses on taxes and abortion).

The major independent variables of interest measure the appearance of particular dimensions of frames and the percentage of party matches on frames over time. *Democratic Presidential Match*, *Republican Presidential Match*, *Democratic Congressional Match*, and *Republican Congressional Match* are all variables that measure the level of consistency with which political actors provided issues frames on policy tax during each two-year period between American National Election Studies for the years examined in this chapter (as seen in Figures 8.1 and 8.2).¹³

In “off years” for the party that was out of the White House, I used frames from the last candidate for president and the next candidate for president in the two-year interim to achieve a value for that year. Not surprisingly, the number of frames during these years is lower than years in which a candidate is running for president or actually is president. As checks on this measure, I also ran the analyses by coding the non-White House holding party’s “off year” score as the

congressional score for that year and as an average of the year preceding and following the off year. The results of the analysis presented here are entirely consistent with the results of the additional analyses.

The value for each of the presidential and congressional “matching” variables is determined by taking the percentage of time that frames matched the official party position on taxes at time 2 (Frame2) minus the percentage of frames in that category at time 1 (Frame1) divided by the percentage of frames in that category at time 1 (Jones and Baumgartner 2005):

$$\frac{(\text{Frame2} - \text{Frame1})}{\text{Frame1}}$$

For example, Figure 8.2 shows that Ronald Reagan and his administration framed abortion consistently 81 percent of the time from 1985 to 1986 as compared to 72 percent of the time from 1983 to 1984. Thus, the *Republican Presidential Match* score for the 1985–86 is calculated as:

$$\frac{(81 - 72)}{72}$$

Number of Stories is simply a measure of the number of stories in any given two-year period about the issue in question. In addition to the media variables detailed above, several control variables must be put in any model examining party identification. *Ideology* is a similar measure, coded 1 = Strong Liberal to 7 = Strong Conservative. *Party Strength* is a four-point “folded” measure of the *Party ID 7pt* variable with 1 = Independent and 4 = Strong Partisan.¹⁴ *Religiosity* measures how much guidance one’s religion plays in one’s life from 1 = No role to 4 = a great deal of guidance (Layman 2001). *Age* is a variable representing the respondent’s age. *Gender* is coded 1 = male and 0 = female. *Political Knowledge* is coded on a three-point scale ranging where 0 = low knowledge, 1 = moderate knowledge and 2 = high knowledge. *Race* is coded 1 = white/non-black and 0 = black. *Education* is a four-point scale coded 1 = no high school degree to 4 = college degree. *South* is coded 1 if the respondent lives in the former Confederacy and 0 otherwise. *Income* is a categorical variable that increases as the respondent’s income category increases. *MIP Tax* is coded 1 if taxes or tax policy was named as the “most important problem” facing the nation by the respondent and 0 otherwise while *MIP Abortion* is coded 1 if abortion was named the “most important problem.”

The most important problem variable is a blunt measure as it does not specifically measure instances where respondents named taxes as the most important problem. The ANES collapses taxes with similar issues to create a “social-welfare” category of important issues and does the same with “cultural” issues like abortion. This, unfortunately, prevents absolutely direct tests of the hypothesis that issue-based party change occurs for issues important to the

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survey respondent. However, these variables represent the best-available proxy for the kinds of issues the respondent feels are important.

Results

The results of three time-series analyses including the variables concerning the consistency with which Republican and Democratic presidents and members of Congress framed tax issues moderately support Carsey and Layman's issue-based party change hypothesis and moderately support my claim that presidential and partisan framing are less likely to engineer partisan change on social-welfare issues (See Appendix A). The full model fails to support the hypothesis. The variable measuring the Democratic presidents' framing of taxes is negative, suggesting party identification moving towards the Democrats. The Republican presidential framing variable is positive, implying party identification moving towards Republicans. However, neither variable reaches conventional levels of statistical significance, indicating that we cannot be confident in these effects. Both variables capturing the role of congressional issue framing also failed to achieve levels of statistical significance, preventing us from being confident in their effects.

Restricting the analysis to those for whom taxes is a highly salient issue,¹⁵ the presence of Republican presidents' frames that consistently matched the GOP's contemporary positions on tax policy significantly and positively affected party identification (*Republican Presidential Match*, $p < 0.05$). The *Democratic Presidential Match* variable does not approach conventional levels of statistical significance indicating that we cannot be as confident in the influence of this variable. Once again, this points to the issue-ownership hypothesis (Petrocik 1996) that suggests that Republicans own taxes and stand to grow their coalition when Republican presidents and presidential nominees espouse frames in favor of low taxes. Both of the variables measuring the consistency of all partisan congressional frames about taxes were not significant, pointing to a special role for Republican presidents in issue-based party change on tax issues.

The taxes-as-important model also contains a positive, significant coefficient for *Gender* ($p < 0.05$) that was not present in the full model. The rest of the variables in the middle column model have identical direction and significance as the model in the left-hand column with the exception of *Party Strength*. For those people for which taxes are important, *Party Strength* does not influence party identification over time in the cross-sectional ANES surveys. For those who find taxes, or issues like taxes, to be important, consistent partisan frames on tax issues positively affect identification with the Republican Party.

The model restricting the analysis to those who did not name taxes as the most important problem facing the nation looks nearly identical to the full model. Consistently with my expectations, no issue-based party change occurs for those who do not find taxes to be an important issue.

By setting the values of the partisan matching variables to their highest and lowest values, Table 8.3 reports various likelihoods that an ANES respondent

Table 8.3 Effects of Presidential and Congressional Framing of Taxes on Party Identification (%)

<i>Consistency</i>	<i>Strong Democrats</i>	<i>Weak Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Weak Republicans</i>	<i>Strong Republicans</i>
High DP/CD					
High RP/CR	29	13	10	17	31
High DP/RP					
Low CD/CR	29	12	11	16	32
Low DP/CD					
High RP/CR	28	16	11	14	31
High DP/CD					
Low RP/CR	24	21	11	15	29
Low DP/CD					
Low RP/CR	28	16	15	13	28

Note

High = the highest matching variable score for the framing source, Low = the lowest matching variable score for the framing source. DP = Democratic Presidents, CD = Congressional Democrats, RP = Republican Presidents, CR = Congressional Republicans.

would identify as a strong Democrat, weak Democrat, Independent, weak Republican or strong Republican. In each case, respondents are highly politically aware and believe that taxes are the most important issue facing the nation. Other variables are held at their respective means.

Table 8.3 shows that when Democrats and Republicans are framing tax issues consistently within their party, but competitively between parties, Republicans benefit the most. This comports with the issue ownership hypothesis which suggests that Republicans fare better in elections where taxes are a prominent issue (Petrocik 1996). Republicans do the best when presidents frame taxes at a high level of consistency, but GOP members of Congress frame taxes with low consistency. Democrats similarly benefit the most when presidents are framing tax issues consistently as compared to congressional Democrats. Both of these results imply that presidential framing is more consequential than congressional framing of issues, perhaps yet another indicator of the media's focus on presidential news as compared to congressional news.

Interestingly, when everyone exhibits low consistency in their framing, the electorate is predicted to be much more moderate, which is consistent with the idea that issue-based party change can occur only when there is awareness of elite differences on important issues. When the parties are not clashing, awareness of differences is harder to come by, even if the differences are spelled out in party platforms.

The results of the three cross-sectional, random effects time-series analyses examining how presidents and congressmembers framed abortion strongly confirm the issue-based party change hypothesis (see Appendix B). The full model is in the left-hand column. There, *Democratic Presidential Match* has a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and negative (towards the Democrats) influence on party identification while *Republican Presidential Match* has a significant

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($p < 0.05$) positive (towards the Republicans) affect on party identification over time. While the results for the *Republican Congressional Match* and *Democratic Congressional Match* variables both suggest that elite partisan framing matters in general as well, the statistical significance does not quite reach conventional levels. Thus, as the presidents or nominees for president of the two major political parties communicated in increasingly consistent issue frames over time, the public reacted in a predictable way to the new information filling in the political landscape.

The variable measuring the importance of the abortion issue is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that the more important abortion is to people, the more likely they are to move towards the Republican Party (see also Layman 2001). *Number of Stories* is also positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), implying an agenda-setting effect on abortion that favors the Republican Party.

When the model is restricted to those who find abortion or similar “culture wars” policies to be the most important problem facing the country, the *Democratic Congressional Match* and *Republican Congressional Match* variables achieve statistical significance in the expected directions ($p < 0.05$) while the *Number of Stories* variable fails to approach conventional levels of statistical significance. The presidential framing variables’ coefficients are statistically significant once again. Thus, when people believe abortion is an important issue, and when the political parties provide increasingly consistent, competitive issue frames about abortion, party identification moves in a way consistent with the issue evolution and conflict extension models. When the analysis is restricted to those who do not find abortion to be the most important problem facing the nation, framing does not have a statistically significant effect on party identification.

By setting the values of the partisan matching variables on abortion to their highest and lowest values, Table 8.4 reports various likelihoods that an ANES respondent would identify as a strong Democrat, weak Democrat, Independent, weak Republican or strong Republican. In each case, respondents are highly politically aware and believe that abortion is the most important issue facing the nation. Other variables are held at their respective means.

Here, the advantage seems to be with the Democrats. When both Democratic and Republican presidents and members of Congress frame abortion in internally consistent, but externally competitive ways, Democrats benefit, with 37 percent of respondents predicted to place themselves at a 1 or 2 on a 7-point party identification scale. When Republicans are consistent in their framing of abortion but Democrats are inconsistent, Democratic identifiers (both weak and strong) drop from a total of 52 percent in the high matching condition (row 1 of Table 8.4) to 42 percent (row 3). That said, Republican identifiers (both weak and strong) drop from 38 percent in row 1 to 34 percent in row 3. When both presidents and members of Congress from both parties provide highly variant (inconsistent) messages on abortion, Republicans have their best performance in Table 8.4 while Democrats have their worst.

Table 8.4 Effects of Presidential and Congressional Framing of Abortion on Party Identification (%)

<i>Consistency</i>	<i>Strong Democrats</i>	<i>Weak Democrats</i>	<i>Independents</i>	<i>Weak Republicans</i>	<i>Strong Republicans</i>
High DP/CD					
High RP/CR	37	15	10	18	20
High DP/RP					
Low CD/CR	36	14%	10	18	22
Low DP/CD					
High RP/CR	30	12	16	16	18
High DP/CD					
Low RP/CR	32	17	11	19	21
Low DP/CD					
Low RP/CR	29	17	13	22	19

Note

High = the highest matching variable score for the framing source, Low = the lowest matching variable score for the framing source. DP = Democratic Presidents, CD = Congressional Democrats, RP = Republican Presidents, CR = Congressional Republicans.

Comparing the framing effects on taxes and abortion, the claim that the more substantive effects should be present for abortion rather than taxes is confirmed. While the difference in total Republicans and Democrats is never greater than seven on the tax issue, partisan abortion issue frames can influence up to a predicted 14-point advantage for Democrats.

Discussion

This chapter presents the first systematic evidence that variability in presidential and congressional issue framing helps to explain changes in party identification. The results presented here suggest that partisan elites—and especially presidents—can nudge long-term trends in party identification on cultural issues of high import to the public by virtue of presenting consistent, competing, inter-party frames over time. Thus, presidents, and other elite partisans (though to a lesser degree), may be a missing link to understanding how conflict extension, and changes in partisanship more generally, actually occur.

Interestingly, the presence of consistent, competing frames does not simply benefit both parties equally. Republicans do better when engaged in a clear framing battle with Democrats on taxes while Democrats enjoy the advantage on the abortion issue. Sometimes, the biggest advantages come when presidents provide a clear message, but members of Congress from the same party are less dependable in their framing of the issue. The implication may be that parties need to frame issues consistently enough to develop a brand name, but not so dogmatically as to be perceived as too rigid by moderates.

There is much more work to be done: including adding the examinations of argument quality in competitive elite issue framing over time (Chong and Druckman 2007), elite framing and television news coverage, how other issues

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have been framed (Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002), and how framing worked in other political eras. The results also point to the importance of political debate. When the parties offer consistent, competing positions on issues, the prospects for legitimate democratic choice exist. When one side is overrepresented in media coverage, as presidents often are (especially on foreign policy issues), the possibility for political manipulation is more likely (Page and Shapiro 1992; Zaller 1992).

Also left out of this chapter is a careful treatment of why the particular framing strategies of parties elites vary so much. Clearly, the fact that presidents framed the abortion and tax issues increasingly consistently from 1975 to 2000 suggests that these elite politicians believed they had generally found frames that worked; or, at least, that they had found frames that worked on a targeted portion of the population. How frames develop, why they change, and what kinds of frames are most successful on what kinds of people remain open, crucially important questions (but see Steensland 2008 and the other chapters in this volume).

Previous analyses of framing effects questioned citizen competence because citizens seemed to shift their preferences quite easily, depending on the frame most recently presented to them. The analyses presented here suggests that, when presidents and Congress members present consistent and competing frames on important issues, people become aware of partisan differences and, under some conditions, identify with a political party because of what they have learned.

Appendix A

Table 8.A1 Tax Frames and Changes in Party Identification, 1975–2000

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Party identification</i>	<i>Party identification</i> MIP taxes = 1	<i>Party identification</i> MIP taxes = 0
Number of stories	0.0000 (0.001)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.0008 (0.002)
<i>Democratic</i>	0.0469	0.1543	-0.0097
<i>Congressional match</i>	(0.08)	(0.14)	(0.098)
Republican	0.0053	-0.0113	0.0102
Congressional match	(0.015)	(0.03)	(0.018)
Democratic	-0.1332	0.2152	-0.1909
Presidential match	(0.16)	(0.307)	(0.191)
Republican	0.1301	0.4787**	0.0102
Presidential match	(0.118)	(0.218)	(0.143)
Religiosity	-0.029+ (0.019)	-0.0195 (0.032)	-0.0347+ (0.023)
Age	-0.0669*** (0.012)	-0.0829*** (0.02)	-0.0591*** (0.015)
Gender	0.0491 (0.04)	0.1478** (0.218)	0.002 (0.049)
Race	0.2095*** (0.02)	0.1782*** (0.038)	0.2206*** (0.023)
Education	0.2086*** (0.024)	0.1935*** (0.04)	0.213*** (0.029)
South	-0.2193*** (0.044)	-0.2944*** (0.078)	-0.1764*** (0.054)
Income	0.1667*** (0.019)	0.1073*** (0.035)	0.1932*** (0.023)
Ideology 7pt	0.6677*** (0.015)	0.7425*** (0.027)	0.6348*** (0.018)
Party strength	-0.1402*** (0.02)	-0.058+ (0.036)	-0.1852*** (0.025)
MIP tax	0.1047** (0.043)	NA	NA
Political knowledge	0.3452*** (0.077)	0.335** (0.089)	0.3418*** (0.81)
Constant	1.269*** (0.168)	0.9812*** (0.299)	1.500*** (0.206)
Wald Chi ²	2954.84(16)***	1048.97(15)***	1908.12(15)***
N	8922	2877	6045
R ²	0.69	0.96	0.57

+ p < 0.15, *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

Sources: American National Election Studies, author

154 *Impact***Appendix B***Table 8.B1* Abortion Frames and Changes in Party Identification, 1975–2000

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Party identification</i>	<i>Party identification MIP abortion = 1</i>	<i>Party identification MIP abortion = 0</i>
Number of stories	0.0035** (0.001)	-0.0019 (0.004)	0.0046*** (0.002)
<i>Democratic</i>	-1.2621 (0.959)	-1.976** (0.959)	0.0075 (0.522)
<i>Congressional match</i>			
Republican	1.6214+ (1.12)	2.619** (1.12)	-0.2443 (0.595)
<i>Congressional match</i>			
Democratic	-0.2086** (0.092)	-2.409** (1.18)	-0.1665 (0.3726)
<i>Presidential match</i>			
Republican	0.3913** (0.165)	2.805** (1.31)	0.3651* (0.203)
<i>Presidential match</i>			
Religiosity	-0.0503** (0.021)	-0.0069 (0.05)	-0.0578** (0.023)
Age	-0.0682*** (0.014)	-0.0411 (0.032)	-0.0677*** (0.015)
Gender	0.0447 (0.044)	0.1146 (0.102)	0.0273 (0.05)
Race	0.226*** (0.021)	0.2676*** (0.047)	0.2127*** (0.024)
Education	0.2141*** (0.027)	0.2036*** (0.06)	0.2155*** (0.03)
South	-0.1974*** (0.049)	-0.2082** (0.106)	-0.1817*** (0.055)
Income	0.1562*** (0.021)	0.1888*** (0.049)	0.1476*** (0.024)
Ideology 7pt	0.6737*** (0.017)	0.672*** (0.039)	0.666*** (0.018)
Party strength	-0.1474*** (0.027)	0.0676 (0.053)	-0.1944*** (0.025)
Political knowledge	0.1977* (0.105)	0.1267* (0.066)	0.072*** (0.032)
MIP abortion	0.1443*** (0.056)	NA	NA
Constant	1.244***	0.8207 (0.597)	1.28*** (0.274)
Wald Chi ²	2636.81(18)	627.27(18)***	2005.8(18)***
N	7361	1372	5989
R ²	0.86	0.92	0.97

+ p < 0.15, *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

Sources: American National Election Studies, author

Notes

1. Of course, there is considerable variation in the abortion preferences of both Republican and Democratic voters (Fiorina 2005)
2. The coding universe runs from 1975 to 2000, but some of my statistical analyses occur from 1980 to 2000 during to public opinion data limitations.

3. Layman and Carsey (2002) argue that three dimensions exist: one for racial issue, one for cultural issues, and one for social-welfare issues. This is a legitimate perspective, though, as Kellstedt (2003) carefully demonstrates (analyzing media coverage of elite issue frames regarding racial issues), the public's racial issue dimension "fused onto" the social-welfare dimension over time. This is also true of partisan elites (Poole and Rosenthal 1997)
4. This, to the dismay of some media critics, occurs even when an issue has more than two sides. Typically, only two sides of an issue are reported; just as typically, these sides are Republican and Democrat.
5. See also Carmines, Ensley, and Wagner (2005) for a detailed factor analysis demonstrating the placement of these and other major political issues on a social-welfare issues factor and a cultural issues factor.
6. From this point on, I will use "articles" as a global representation of articles and editorials.
7. I did not code stories that mentioned abortion in the following contexts: (1) letters to the editor; (2) the character of a book, play, movie, or poem does or does not have an abortion; (3) stories about other nations' abortion policies that were not related to the United States.
8. I did not code letters to the editor, articles about other nations' tax policies, and the like. Even after narrowing the search terms to the most relevant words and phrases that also provided a wide range of articles, 409 stories were excluded from the analysis because of a lack of applicability.
9. See Wagner (2006) for a comprehensive explanation of the content analysis. Inter-coder reliability was always above 88 percent, regardless of the coding category.
10. This choice allowed me to continue the time-series coding in years when a party was out of the White House. For example, Walter Mondale's media coverage provides the data from 1981 to 1984 for the *Democratic Presidential Match* variable.
11. Coders referenced copies of the relevant sections of each party's platform statements on abortion and taxes during the coding of each article to determine whether the frame was consistent with the party platform, inconsistent with the party platform, or indeterminate. Frames consistent with the party's platform were coded 1 for "match" while frames inconsistent or indeterminate were recoded to both equal 0 for "non-match."
12. While I have content analyzed media data from 1975 to 2000, the ANES only asks consistent questions about each issue from 1980 to 2000, so I restrict the more formal analyses to that period.
13. For example, the 1986 matching scores for Democratic and Republican presidents and Congress members are all calculated by adding together the scores for 1985 and 1986.
14. Some may bristle at controlling for partisan extremity in a model seeking to explain partisan change. See Hetherington's (2001) analysis examining the increasing polarization in the electorate which includes an independent variable measuring party strength.
15. Recall that the salience measure here is a rather blunt instrument that cobbles together social-welfare issues that include taxes.

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