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Who Do You Belong To?: Social Sorting Between
Gender and Partisan Identity Groups

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Abstract

Individuals participate in social sorting when they align their various social identities with their partisan identity. While there exists significant research on the social sorting phenomenon, there is not much causal insight on the matter as it pertains to the American electorate. Where previous research correlates socio-economic status, geographical location, and generational replacement with social sorting, findings from this study indicate that social identity pressure to align gender and partisan identity in a 'correct' way causes weak partisans to participate in this phenomenon. Detecting social pressure as a cause of this phenomenon helps explain why social sorting occurs and raises questions about platforms which exert these pressures. This finding also highlights the role of perceptions in partisan identification, which suggests subjective factors, rather than logical and policy-based positions, play a significant role in the formation of partisan identity. Overall, this study enhances understandings of American political behavior.

Introduction

There exists a growing body of literature on the effects that social identification processes have on social groups within the American electorate. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) development of social identity theory allowed for growth in political psychology, specifically concerning how and why individuals group themselves. The social sorting phenomenon has emerged from social identity theory. Social sorting is the process by which individuals align their social identities with their partisan identities (Mason, 2016). This process is similar to the partisan sorting process— where individuals align their partisan identity with their ideological stance (Levendusky, 2010). However, social sorting will be the focus of this paper which will investigate how women's gender identity and partisan identities align. While much of the literature on social sorting is helpful in providing correlative explanations for this process, no research has provided causal evidence of the social sorting phenomenon. Where previous research has assumed more calculated factors such as policy preference to cause social sorting, this study analyzes social pressure as a potential cause of this occurrence. Social pressure is detected as a cause of social sorting in this study by using gender and partisan identity as variables dependent on these pressures. This finding indicates that individual perceptions of how social identities *should* intersect, promulgated by social pressures, lead members of the electorate to participate in social sorting.

Central to understanding social sorting is the concept of cross-pressures. This concept, first investigated by Berelson, Gaudet, and Lazarsfeld (1944) and Campbell et al. (1960), explains pressures individuals feel in response to concurrent prevailing social identities. These pressures stem from widespread perceptions of social identities which establish identity norms (Bicchieri, 2002). Perceptions of identity norms, in turn, influence how individuals feel they should simultaneously express their various identities (Miller et al., 1981; Bicchieri, 2002). Feeling cross-pressured in response to 'conflicting' identities decreases overall extremity of these identities among individuals and makes determining where they 'belong' more difficult (Miller et al, 1981). In other words, when individuals are internally divided between their own 'conflicting' identities, they are faced with the presumed responsibility to choose in favor of one identity or the other— a decision which, on a mass scale, leads to a more socially sorted electorate.

Decreased extremity in identity strength leads members of the electorate whose identities "cross-cut" to be more tolerable of individuals whose identities presumably conflict with their own and withhold less biases and feelings of negativity towards out-groups (Roccas and Brewer, 2002). Alternatively, individuals who have already sorted and aligned their identities tend

to be less tolerant of conflicting identities and withhold more biases than their non-sorted counterparts (Mason, 2014). On the one hand, arguments are made that this cross-pressured faction of the electorate will ease social tension, reduce judgments between groups, and lead to a more moderate electorate (Hillygus & Shields, 2008; Lavine, Johnston, & Steenbergen, 2012); whereas on the other hand, it is expected that individuals may begin to align their identities (to varying degrees) in response to these pressures and yield a more tense and divided electorate (Mason, 2016). When cross pressured individuals do sort into more cohesive groups, they begin to develop more biases and express less tolerance toward the ‘other’ side (Mason, 2016). This process causes bipolarity of American politics to intensify and could further polarize the electorate.

It is important to note the distinction between sorting and polarization, because while they are interconnected and mutually relevant, they are conceptually unique. Polarization differs from sorting as it occurs when members of the electorate take more extreme ideological and political stances (Levendusky, 2010). When the electorate becomes increasingly polarized, prevalence of moderate ideologies dissipates and ideological positions exist on a more bimodal spectrum (Levendusky, 2010). Where polarization exists primarily as a matter of ideological positions and intensity amongst partisans, sorting is a matter of how partisans align their various identities. While the distinction between polarization and sorting is clear, both remain inextricably linked to one another. Since both perpetuate an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mindset amongst individuals, these processes directly influence social identity and “motivate partisans to conform to defend the[ir] party’s positions” (Groenendyk, 2018, p. 166). Furthermore, it may be the case that social pressures play a significant role in polarization just as with social sorting, as both processes cause partisans to feel a need to ‘conform’ in one way or another.

Levendusky (2010) makes the point that polarization on the elite level contributes to sorting by publicly displaying which ideological viewpoints partisans should align with at the mass level. This results in simplification of elite cues to the electorate and more ideologically homogenous parties. Polarization and division on the elite level is presumed to cause ordinary voters, or those who hold more centrist positions, to feel as though there are only two options—to either be a conservative Republican or a liberal Democrat (Levendusky, 2010). Other research suggests that in addition to elite polarization increasing the divide between ideological poles, it also amplifies, “partisans’ potentially competing motives” (Groenendyk, 2018, p. 170). This amplification implies feelings of animosity towards out-groups do

not necessarily result in cohesion within groups (Groenendyk, 2018). This is important to note when considering the sorting process. While it would appear as though rise in intergroup disapproval and increased sorting would yield more cohesive in-groups, this may not be the case. Rather, the only thing perpetuating the facade of unity within partisans' own groups may be the stronger sense of disdain towards out-groups than one's own in-groups.

The nature of this division for individual group members varies depending on how impactful policy is on their partisan identity (Abramowitz, 2010). For instance, individuals who heavily consider policy positions to determine their partisan identity will feel politically divided (Abramowitz, 2010) whereas partisans who determine partisan identity primarily on identity matters will feel more socially divided. Furthermore, as members of the electorate who do not identify strongly with either partisan identity begin to sort more frequently, the bipolar nature of the American political system will intensify. As parties and their members increasingly shift further from the center, greater political and social intergroup divisions are likely to occur. When members of the electorate increasingly sort their partisan identities with their ideological positions, parties become, "more homogeneously liberal or conservative" (Levendusky, 2010, p. 9). As this process continues, members of the electorate are likely to feel pressure to sort between their cross-cutting identities and strengthen their aligned identities. Moreover, as partisan sorting takes place and ideologies increasingly align with certain parties, more specific collective understandings form around each party. These understandings include perceptions of which social identities 'should' correspond with each party. The social sorting phenomenon shows this leaves partisans feeling the need to sync their social identities with their partisan identity in a way that supports this collective perception.

Developments in literature on social identities and sorting has enhanced understandings of the gender gap, which Kaufmann explains as "male-female differences in party identification and voting behavior" (Kaufmann, 2006, p. 449). Gender identification has shown to carry significant weight in how partisans align their various social identities, including partisan identity (Kaufmann, 2004). Kaufmann explains that women as a whole identified more with the Democratic Party after President Lyndon B. Johnson took office, and that this gender-partisan identity alignment has incrementally increased over the years (Kaufmann, 2006). While the alignment between these two social identities has increased overall since the process began, its increase has not been entirely steady and has fluctuated along the way.

There are several factors which have been identified as contributors to the gender gap. Salience of policy issues, how individuals perceive political

elites (individually and collectively), and “changes in the distribution of political attitudes” are three reoccurring factors that appear to influence and deepen the gender gap in America (Chaney, Alvarez, & Nagler, 1998; Kaufmann & Petrocik, 1999; Kaufmann, 2006, p. 447). Kaufmann explains the mixture of policy positions and characteristics of elites who espouse these positions appear to significantly affect where partisans of differing genders direct their support (Kaufmann 2006). While these conclusions are not based upon causal evidence, voting and demographic trends do support this claim. Although policy positions and elite characteristics correlate with the widening of the gender gap, there must be certain fundamental aspects of each that cause this occurrence to take place. In other words, perhaps policy position and elite characteristics are not what cause the gender gap to widen, but rather the pressures people feel from their perceptions of both policy positions and elite characteristics.

Widespread perceptions of social identity groups are assumed to play a significant role in how individuals identify with groups. Huddy (2004) explains that social identities are generated through feelings of belonging to certain groups and are rooted in emotional connections to these groups. This subjective method of self-categorization allows for variance in strength, understanding, and feelings towards groups from person to person (Huddy et al., 2015). The assumption that perceptions significantly influence social group identification competes with Kaufmann’s suggestion that policy positions are the driving factors of partisan identification. Since perceptions are socially accumulated however, it appears logical that perceptions would significantly influence social identification processes—including partisan identification. Subjectivity of social identification makes the assumption that perceptions influence individuals’ social group identification seem firmer than the assumption that policy positions withhold the most influence. Just as social pressures from perceptions of policies and elite characteristics may contribute toward the widening gender gap, these pressures may also motivate individuals to participate in social sorting.

Findings from Tajfel and Turner (1979) explicitly emphasize individuals’ tendencies to self-categorize and differentiate their groups from others as a way to establish positive social identities (Huddy et al., 2015). While partisan identity is often viewed in comparison to social identities, Mason and Wronski (2018) clarify partisan identity itself is a social identity. This view is supported by the notion that the degree of an individual’s association with a particular party—or their partisan identity—is developed through “psychological attachment” to that political party (Huddy et al., 2015). Furthermore, it can be inferred one’s psychological attachments are

developed through social processes, making partisan identity just as much a social identity as gender identity or any other.

Understanding how individuals develop their partisan identity enhances comprehension of phenomena such as the widening gender gap and social sorting. Huddy et al., describe party identification as the most effective variable in understanding the dynamics of American political behavior. They also describe two separate mechanisms which explain party identification processes: instrumental and expressive partisanship. Instrumental partisanship suggests individual partisan identities are formed on party performance, ideological stance, and other crediting factors (Huddy et al., 2015), whereas expressive partisanship approaches the concept of partisanship entirely as an identity matter. Expressive partisanship views party identity as “strengthened by social affiliations to gender, religion, and ethnic or racial groups” (Huddy et al., 2015). Furthermore, expressive partisanship depicts party identity as something for individuals to be a part of and as something that is a part of individuals.

Assumptions that social pressures lead to sorting and widening identity gaps are supported by the expressive partisanship mechanism, whereas suggestions that policy preferences and elite positions influence these occurrences are supported by instrumental partisanship. When individuals’ party identification is influenced by policy preferences, logic and reasoning are the foundation of this identification. However, when party identification is influenced by social pressures, it is developed in a subjective manner. On the one hand, instrumental partisanship suggests parties and elites derive support from their abilities to effectively contribute toward goals that deal with policy positions, where on the other hand, expressive partisanship suggests that parties and elites gain support based on how individuals identify with and perceive each party. Although some individuals likely take an instrumental approach to partisanship, partisans who participate in social sorting and contribute to the widening gender gap are likely to take a more expressive approach and be influenced by social identity pressures because of the role that “psychological attachment” plays in social identification processes (Huddy et al., 2015).

Since perceptions play a significant role in social sorting, polarization, cross- pressures, and the gender gap—understanding how these perceptions are perpetuated plays an integral part in analyzing each occurrence. While modes of receiving information have evolved all throughout contemporary history, one method that has remained consistent is discussion. This said, the ways that individuals engage in discussion has evolved significantly—especially in more recent years with the rise of social media and the Internet.

While research on the impacts social media and online discourse have on society is limited, in part because of methodological restrictions, there is some research on the degree of influence social networking sites (SNSs) have on several aspects of social and political processes.

Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela (2012) find that SNS use amongst individuals who seek information results in a “significant and positive impact on individuals’ activities aimed at engaging in civic and political action” (p. 329). This finding implies SNSs are, in a sense, gateways to facilitating political activity and inciting political and social engagement. Results from this research also reveal a connection between SNS usage for news with increased levels of social capital. Furthermore, this result suggests SNSs can play a role in communal development and can significantly increase bonds within social groups. While more research still needs to be conducted to better understand the dynamic role that Internet media resources play in social and political activity, Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela have made substantial efforts in starting the conversation.

To better understand the current and future state of American politics and its actors, determining causes of both increasing division and alignment among social identity groups within the American electorate is important. Mason and Wronski (2018) point out that, “as social identities are increasingly associated with one party or the other, and as partisans increasingly identify with these party-associated groups, the American political divide grows more intractable” (p. 274). An intractable divide between social identity group alignments could considerably alter political structures within America resulting in civil discontent on social and political levels. By understanding what causes sorting and polarization, this growing divide can be better mitigated and prevented from becoming “intractable.” Finally, in addition to understanding the functions of these various socio-political occurrences, it becomes increasingly important that we also understand the factors which bring them to fruition. Considering the changing dynamics of communication in today’s world and the effects these changes have on public perceptions, this may be a good place to begin investigation.

Methodology Sample

The survey experiment created for this research was administered through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (M-Turk) and distributed among a sample of 388 people¹. While M-Turk subjects are often more representative of the general population than other platforms used for convenient sampling (Berinsky et al., 2012), the sample in this study is not representative of the target population. Berinsky et al., explain that subjects on M-Turk typically respond to stimuli in the same way as subjects used in research prior to M-Turk. Furthermore, the subject pool on M-Turk is not overused, so concerns about "habitual responding" are minor (Berinsky et al., 2012, p. 366). Since the study specifically analyzed alignment trends between women gender identity and American political parties, only individuals who identified as women and who are members of the American electorate were surveyed.

Experimental Design

This paper examines the relationship between social identity pressure and social identity alignment. To better understand this relationship, a survey experiment was designed and administered by use of Qualtrics and Amazon's Mechanical Turk (M-Turk). Various multiple choice and matrix table identity questions made up the contents of the survey experiment in addition to a single open-ended question following a graphic. Participants' partisan identities were assessed using the American National Election Studies (ANES) partisan identity scale at the beginning of the survey experiment and their partisan, gender, and feminist identities by a social identity (SID) scale at the end of the survey experiment². ANES partisan identity measures use a series of branching questions beginning with, "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" and go on to determine strength of partisan identity by allowing participants to categorize themselves as either "strong" or "not very strong" members of their party. In the case where participants identify as "Independent" or "Other" the ANES scale helps determine whether participants consider themselves as "closer to the Republican or Democratic party." The SID scale

¹ M-Turk is a marketplace where researchers ("Requesters") can pay participants ("Workers") to take part in survey experiments

² The SID scale applied here was replicated from the scale used by Bankert, Huddy, & Rosema (2016) which was modeled on the Identification with a Psychological Group (IDPG) scale created by Mael and Tetrick (1992).

used in this study assessed the strength of individuals' social identities by determining the degree to which participants relate to statements about the social identities examined. The SID scale provides "Always", "Often", "Sometimes", or "Never" as possible responses to these statements³. In this survey experiment, five SID statements were used to determine the strength of participants' partisan, gender, and feminist social identities. These identities were measured using the same first four statements on the SID scale, but the fifth statement of each was different⁴.

The survey experiment randomly assigned participants into either the control or treatment group where they would view the control or treatment stimulus, respectively. Participants were asked to respond to an open-ended response statement after viewing either stimulus⁵. The stimuli for this research were in the form of an online social media discussion centered on voting as a woman in an "upcoming election". Social media discussion was selected as the format for the stimuli because social networking sites are often platforms where social identity pressures are exerted. Each stimulus pushed the idea that there are certain things women should do because of their gender identity as a woman. However, in the control stimulus it is pressed that women should vote because it is their womanly duty, whereas in the treatment stimulus participants are pressured to vote Democrat because it is their responsibility as a woman to do so. This pressure to align women's gender identity with Democrat partisan identity in the treatment stimulus was the only difference between the two stimuli, and phrasing was only minimally altered to accommodate this difference⁶. Partisan identity was tested before and after stimulus exposure to allow for observations of change.

³ The following statements were used to assess the degree of association with each social identity measured: (1) "When I speak about this [identity], I usually say 'we' instead of 'they'", (2) "I am interested in what other people think about this [identity]", (3) "When people criticize this [identity], it feels like a personal insult", and (4) "When I meet someone who supports this [identity], I feel connected with this person."

⁴ In measuring partisan identity "When I speak about this party, I refer to them as 'my party'" was the different statement used. In measuring gender identity, "When people praise women, it makes me feel good" was the different statement used. In measuring feminist identity, "I have a lot in common with other feminists" was the different statement used.

⁵ The open-ended response question stated "Explain how the discussion in the previous question made you feel."

Since the only difference between the two stimuli was social identity pressure to align gender and partisan identity, the only explanation for differing results between the two groups is social pressure⁷. The overall design of this survey experiment served to detect shifts in participants' identities as indication of social sorting.

Measures

Social pressure was targeted as the independent variable in the social sorting phenomenon and was exerted through a social media style discussion. The overall aim was to observe changes in participants' identity strength after their being exposed to social pressure to sort their identities. Data from the completed survey experiment was gathered and stored in Qualtrics. The data was then exported into Stata software so it could be analyzed. Several different tests were run to test my hypothesis that social pressure causes change in partisan identities. Republican and Democratic identifiers were tested separately. To assess the effect of stimulus exposure on partisan identity, participants' partisan identities were tested prior to exposure using the ANES partisan identity scale and after exposure using the SID scale. Data from the open-ended responses were coded into either positive or negative responses and compared between the control and treatment groups by partisan identity. Each response was individually coded as either a positive, negative, mixed, or neutral response. Positive, negative, and mixed responses were the responses considered in this process and mixed responses stood for both a positive and negative response. After all the data were collected, various regression analyses were run. These analyses detected shifts in partisan and gender identity strength and identified trends in positive and negative responses to the open-ended question between partisan groups.

Results

Social sorting is the process by which individuals align their various social identities. Since causal explanations of social sorting have been absent from the literature until now, findings in this study substantially aid current understandings of social sorting. This study sought not only to distinguish

⁶ These phrasing changes were not significant to the degree of having an effect on the stimulus' purpose.

⁷ Social pressure = independent variable; woman gender identity = dependent variable; partisan identity = dependent variable.

potential causes of this occurrence, but to also identify the role of sorting across gender and partisan social identity groups. Central to this research is the assumption that there are ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ ways for individuals to align their identities, which contributes toward the formation of identity norms. Identity norms can lead individuals to feel cross-pressured between their various social identities. This study demonstrates the role of cross-pressures and observes tendencies of gender and partisan identity group members to choose between their ‘conflicting’ identities and align in one direction or the other. Perceptions of how individuals ‘should’ identify give a certain validity to the assumption that ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ ways to identify exist. Furthermore, these perceptions deepen the prevalence of identity norms on a mass social level. Social pressures to conform in accordance with identity norms are emitted through social observance and interaction, which in turn leads to social sorting. The perceived ‘correct’ alignment of woman and Democrat social identities, which social pressures highlight, is used in this study to observe social sorting.

Identity Strength Before & After Stimulus Exposure

Results in Figures 1 and 2 were obtained by regression analysis of the collected data from both Democrat and Republican identifiers and display shifts in partisan identity strength of each party between control and treatment groups. The ANES identity scale labeled on the X-axis measures partisan

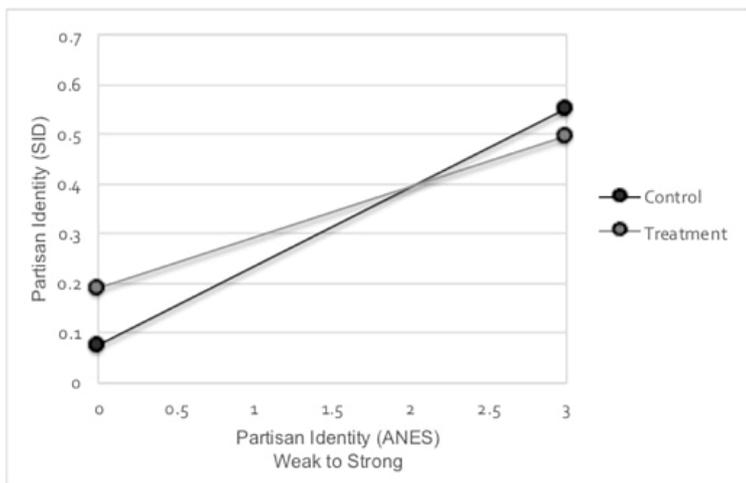


Figure 1. Strength of Democrat identity on ANES and social identity scale compared between control and treatment groups.

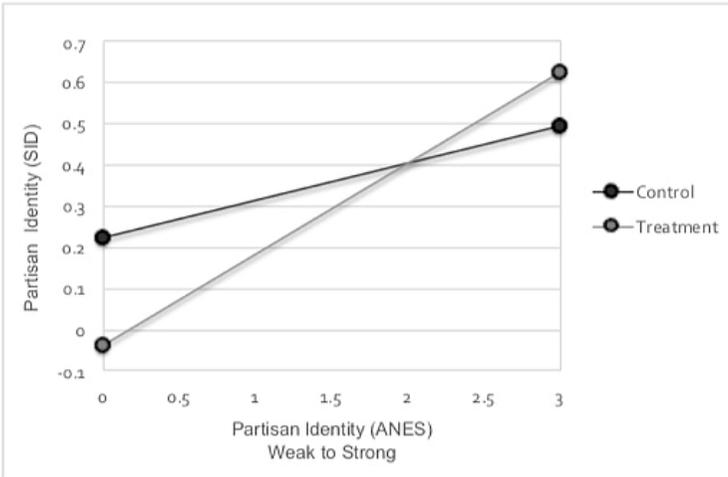


Figure 2. Strength of Republican identity on ANES and social identity scale compared between control and treatment groups.

identity from weak to strong, which was assessed prior to participants’ exposure to either stimulus. The social identity scale on the Y-axis measures partisan identity strength of participants from weak to strong as well, but after exposure to either the control or treatment stimulus. Data in Figure 1 show no statistically significant shift in identity strength between the control and treatment groups, which only allows for inconclusive interpretations of these slight variations in strength. Data represented in Figure 2, on the other hand, shows a markedly different trend in response to stimulus exposure. Where Republicans in the control group did not experience any significant shifts in partisan identity strength, Republicans exposed to the treatment stimulus did experience significant shifts in partisan identity strength

While statistically insignificant, data in Figure 2 hint that strong identifying Republicans (on ANES scale) who were exposed to the treatment stimulus—which used social pressure to push the idea that it is a woman’s duty to vote Democrat—may have increased their partisan identity strength towards even stronger Republicans on the social identity scale. Weak identifying Republicans (on ANES scale) who were exposed to the same treatment stimulus however, began identifying less as Republicans and shifted their partisan identity strength towards Democrat. While it cannot necessarily be said that weak Republicans who shifted towards Democrat now identify as Democrats, it can be said that these weak Republicans are participating in social sorting by directionally shifting their identity in accordance to

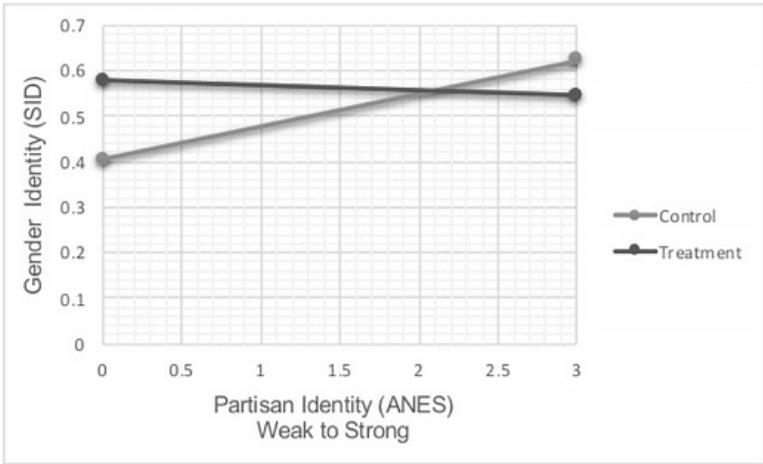


Figure 3. Strength of gender identity on social identity scale between control and treatment groups among Democrats.

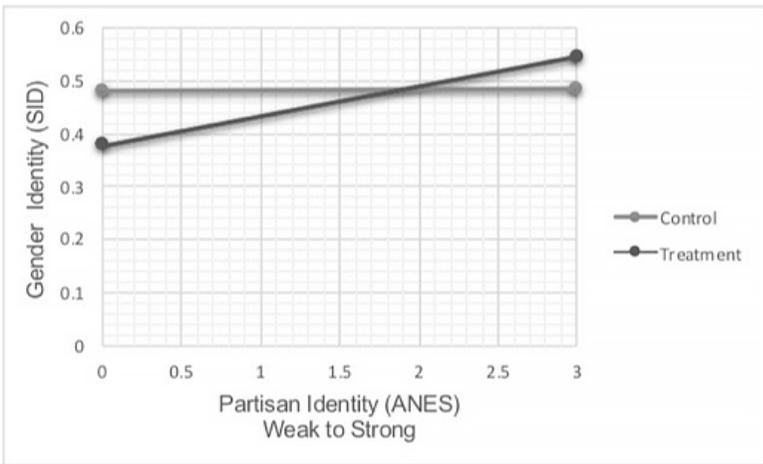


Figure 4. Strength of gender identity on social identity scale between control and treatment groups among Republicans.

the perceived ‘correct’ identity alignment. The same test was run between Democratic and Republican groups to detect potential trends of gender identity strength on the social identity scale in Figures 3 and 4, but there did not appear to be any significant shifts or trends in gender identity as a result of stimulus exposure for either. It was anticipated that strong Republicans

might shift their gender identity in response to the treatment stimulus, but this did not occur. Where significant shifts in gender identity were anticipated, only significant shifts in partisan identity occurred.

Trends in Social Identity Strength

The hypothesis that shifts would occur in identity strength of ‘misaligned’ participants after exposure to the treatment stimulus was confirmed by data of weak Republican identifiers in Figure 2. The data show a clear and significant shift in partisan identification among weak Republicans after exposure to the treatment stimulus. Since weak Republican identifiers shifted away from the Republican Party, it can be inferred that social identity pressure to align gender and Democrat identity was effective among these weak partisan women and acted as a catalyst in the social sorting process. This effect likely occurred because the ‘cross-cutting’ characteristics of participants’ identities (i.e. women’s gender identity and Republicans’ partisan identity) were highlighted by social identity pressure. Possession of cross-cutting identities thus made weak Republican identifiers consider the importance of these identities and motivated them to align in a way that would reduce cross-pressures. In other words, weak Republicans chose to identify less as Republicans because they viewed this as the acceptable and least conflicting way to socially identify.

On the other end of the Republican identity spectrum in Figure 2, the data display a slight increase in partisan identity strength amongst strong identifying Republicans after exposure to the treatment stimulus. Although this shift is statistically insignificant, it could show to be a more significant result with a larger sample size. This would indicate that social identity pressure leads strong partisan identifiers who do not conform to identity norms to resist the pressure and allow their identities to continue cross-cutting. Where weak partisans display susceptibility to sort in accordance to the identity norms, these results would indicate that strong partisans are not among those likely to participate in social sorting if the suggested identity alignment conflicts with their existing partisan identity.

Since the treatment stimulus pressured participants to vote Democrat because of their woman gender identity—and these participants already identified as Democratic women—the treatment results in Figure 1 were expected. Since social identity pressure pushed for alignment of woman and Democrat identity, this pressure likely further validated identities of participants who already met this alignment. Although statistically insignificant, it appears as though there was a slight increase in partisan identity strength of weak Democrats who were exposed to the treatment stimulus, and conversely,

an identity strength decrease among strong Democrats exposed to the same stimulus. While this slight variation could be attributed to random chance, a larger sample might show this shift to be significant.

Shifts in Figure 1, although insignificant in this data, would otherwise imply that when social pressure supports one's preexisting gender and partisan identity alignment, weak partisans may feel motivated to intensify their alignment whereas strong partisans may weaken their alignment. Interestingly, this would be the exact opposite result that occurs when social identity pressure advocates against individuals' preexisting identifications. If these results were significant, it would indicate that—in terms of partisan and gender identity—weak partisans are likely to sort and align in accordance with the pressure and strong partisans are likely to disengage with sorting and resist social identity pressures to align. In other words, where social identity pressure may contribute towards sorting in some cases, it may reverse the process in other cases. If data in Figure 1 for the treatment group and data in Figure 2 for strong identifiers in the treatment group do show to be significant in future research, this would indicate that social identity pressure only causes sorting when experienced by weak partisans. While only one significant shift was identified in the results in Figures 1 and 2, there were various statistically insignificant shifts that should be investigated further to help explain the current state of partisanship in America.

As shown in Table 1, gender identity strength data from both parties do not indicate any significant shifts after exposure to the treatment stimulus. Since the treatment suggested that women should be Democrats, it was expected that the gender identity strength of Republican women might shift in response to this pressure. But as seen in data from Figures 3 and 4 and Table 1, no shifts were detected. Since partisan identity has been noted in the literature as difficult to move, it was expected that strong identifying Republicans would cling to their partisan identity, and instead, identify less as a woman after treatment exposure. This would have indicated that gender identity is more susceptible to shift than partisan identity. However, Figure 2 suggests partisan identity is more susceptible to social identity pressure compared to gender identity. From this it can be inferred that when weak, unsorted partisans are pressured to align their partisan and gender social identities, gender identity will be more resistant to change, and partisan identity will shift in strength.

Likelihood of Positive or Negative Responses to Stimuli

In addition to observance of shifts in partisan and gender identity as a result of stimulus exposure, another test was run which assessed likelihood of participants having either a positive or negative response to the control or treatment stimulus. This section examines the mechanism underlying the effects observed in the previous section. The X-axis in Figure 5 measures partisan identity from strong Democrat to strong Republican and the Y-axis measures likelihood of having a positive response from unlikely to very likely. Data represented in Figure 5 show relatively consistent results between strong Democrats' to strong Republicans' likelihood of having a positive response to the control stimulus. There is only a slight decrease in respondents' likelihood of having a positive response as identities move closer to strong Republican. When exposed to the treatment stimulus, Democratic participants' likelihood of having a positive response remained quite high but significantly decreased as partisan identity moved closer toward strong Republican.

The X axis in Figure 6 also measures partisan identity from strong Democrat to strong Republican, but the Y axis measures respondents' likelihood of having a negative response. While the likelihood of participants having a negative response is steady across the spectrum of partisan identity for the control group—and remains quite low—the likelihood of participants having a negative response to the treatment stimulus shows clear trends. Where likelihood of strong Democrats having a negative response to the treatment stimulus only slightly increased, likelihood of strong Republicans having a negative response to the treatment stimulus shot up considerably. Overall, trends across Figures 5 and 6 show that Democrats are relatively steady in their positive and negative responses toward both the control and treatment stimulus, and that Democrats and Republicans reacted similarly towards the control stimulus. However, when responding to the treatment stimulus, Republicans were increasingly displeased as their partisan identity strengthened.

Figures 5 and 6 show consistencies between members of both parties' feelings towards the stimuli. It is not surprising that after exposure to the treatment stimulus, both the likelihood of having a positive response decreased and likelihood of having a negative response increased as participants' identities moved closer to strong Republican. Since the treatment stimulus implied that it is 'correct', or the identity norm, for women to be Democrats, the increased likelihood of Republicans' negative responses likely came from the perceived invalidation of their pre-existing identities (i.e. a Republican woman). Furthermore, it can be inferred that the increase in partisan identity strength among strong Republicans in Figure 2 may be

a result of their apparent resistance to the message in the treatment stimulus. Where strong Republican women do possess cross-cutting identities, they respond to cross-pressures differently than weak Republican women. On the one hand, weak Republican women appear to succumb to cross-pressure tensions and sort, whereas on the other hand, strong Republican women show an increased resistance to conform to identity norms and decreased likelihood to participate in social sorting.

Since the only difference between the stimuli is social identity pressure to align gender and partisan identity in the treatment stimulus, it is worth noting that both Democratic and Republican participants had similar likelihoods of responding positively or negatively to the control stimulus. While there was a slight decline in strong Republicans' likelihood of having a positive response after exposure to the control stimulus, this shift was statistically insignificant and could be attributed to random chance. Aside from this slight decrease in Republican positivity toward the control stimulus, the results in Figures 5 and 6 suggest that women across the partisan identity spectrum generally received the message in the control stimulus—that it is a woman's duty to vote—with equal amounts of positivity or negativity. This may be because voting is not viewed as an activity specific to women of one particular party over the other.

In considering voting, it could have been useful to test participants' likelihood to vote after exposure to the stimuli. Since the treatment stimulus suggested it is a woman's duty to vote as a Democrat, it would be interesting to see if Republican women's likelihood to vote shifted in response to this suggestion. Since Republican women resisted social identity pressure, it could be expected that these women may further express their resistance by either actively voting Republican in retaliation to the pressure or by choosing not to vote at all because of the idea pressed in the stimulus that it is wrong for women to vote Republican. While a shift in likelihood to vote may not affect the identities of partisans or social sorting, it could affect the actions partisans take in supporting their parties and considerably alter the state of American politics. According to these results, social identity pressures tend to be met with high to moderate positivity by individuals who already align in accordance with the pressures, and conversely, are met with increasing negativity by individuals whose identities cross-cut and go against the suggested identity alignment. Results in Figures 5 and 6 enhance understandings of how individuals across the partisan identity spectrum respond to specific social identity pressures. Furthermore, trends in this data provide further insight on the dynamics of social sorting, such as who participates in the occurrence and why.

Conclusion

Findings from this study show that social pressure influences weak partisans to participate in social sorting when their pre-existing social identities do not align with identity norms. These weak partisans aligned with women's gender identity norms to ease cross-pressure tensions between their partisan and gender identities. Identity norms and cross-pressure tensions were highlighted by social pressure in this study. While a larger sample should be tested to yield more significant results, it appears as though strong partisans with cross-cutting identities responded to this social pressure with resistance to sorting unlike weak partisans. Therefore, it can be said that weak partisans with cross-cutting identities are more likely to align with identity norms and sort as a result of social pressure than their strong partisan counterparts. Considering this, it becomes increasingly important to think about the modes by which these social identity pressures are transferred. Since social networking sites are common platforms where these pressures are transferred, the role these networks play on the composition of the electorate should not be understated. In addition to understanding the ways social sorting occurs, it is also important to consider the impacts of this phenomenon on the United States. Since social sorting affects how individuals identify and what actions are taken by members of the electorate, this phenomenon plays a significant role in American society and politics.

This study's demonstration of social identity pressure as a causal element of the social sorting phenomenon allows gaps to be filled in the literature on sorting. Where socioeconomic status, geographical location, and generational replacement are among factors correlated with widening the gender gap and increased sorting (Kaufmann, 2006; Bishop & Cushing, 2009; Putnam, 2000), research set forth in this paper identifies social identity pressure as a significant causal factor of social sorting. Since behavior of the American electorate determines the condition of America's republic, understanding the dynamics of these phenomena and their interconnectedness helps explain the existing state of American politics.

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