A MODEL OF REFERENCE GROUP INFLUENCE
ON INDIVIDUAL ISSUE ATTITUDES:
THE CASE OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION

(PROPOSAL)

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Reference groups are likely to play an important role in the formation of issue attitudes within the mass public. According to sociological theory, reference groups provide their identifiers with cues and standards for behavior. Therefore, it is reasonable that individuals look to their respective groups' issue positions as guidelines for determining their own opinions. Furthermore, the influence of a group's position should, itself, become more pronounced as individuals become more strongly attached to the group. In the proposed paper, I will develop a model of this process; the model will be tested using political parties and party identification as an example of a politically-relevant reference group.

The model is explained more fully in my enclosed paper, "The Impact of Party Identification on Issue Attitudes." The present paper, if it is accepted for the "Groups and American Politics" conference, will focus on the development and justification of the model, rather than the substantive concept of party identification. More specifically, this would include: (1) A detailed criticism of the "correlation strategy"-- an expansion of the discussion on pages 3-5 of the "Impact of ... " paper; (2) consideration of a "conditional effects" model, using a multiplicative term to gauge the effect of group identification-- this would be an expansion of footnote 3 in the "Impact" paper; and (3) derivation and explanation of the linear model with a heteroscedastic disturbance term-- an expansion on pages 5-10 of the "Impact" paper. In "The Impact of Party Identification on Issue Attitudes," I have

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already tested the model, using data from the 1980 NES. For the conference paper, I would also replicate this work with the 1984 data.

Although this paper will focus on party identification, the overall goal is to develop a general model of reference group influence; one that can be applied to a variety of different groups with minimal modification or addition to the battery of items already included in the National Election Studies. In fact, if time permits before the December 15 deadline, I will test the same model with other potential reference groups (e.g. blacks and whites, liberals and conservatives, etc.) using the appropriate data from the 1972 through 1984 Studies. A model of the type proposed here will hopefully enable us to go beyond the simple observation that group identifiers behave in distinctive ways. It should clarify how groups affect the attitudes and behavior of their adherents.

THE IMPACT OF

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

ON ISSUE ATTITUDES

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Abstract

This paper presents a simple, but theoretically appropriate model for the influence of party identification on issue attitudes. Most studies simply relate partisanship directly to issues. However, that approach does not explain how one variable affects the other. Here, party identification is modelled as a manifestation of reference group phenomena. As such, a person's issue positions are taken to be a function of perceptions about his/her party's stands on the same issues. In addition, the degree of consistency between partisan perceptions and attitudes should increase with stronger party attachments. The analysis also examines the alternative possibility that a person's beliefs about his/her own party are largely rationalized from the individual's own feelings. The model is tested using data from the 1980 CPS American National Election Study. The empirical results show that partisanship does provide cues for guiding personal political orientations. At the same time, perceptions of the parties' issue stands are not merely derived from the citizens' own attitudes. Thus, the analysis supports the conventional view of party identification as an example of reference group influence on individual behavior.

Party identification appears as an analytic variable in almost every study of public opinion or electoral behavior. Recently, however, several researchers have raised serious questions about how psychological party ties are incorporated among the various factors that shape mass political orientations. This article presents a simple, but theoretically appropriate, model of partisan influence on issue attitudes. The model is tested with data from the 1980 CPS American National Election Study. The results provide support for the traditional view of party identification as an example of reference group phenomena: Personal attachments to one of the parties provide citizens with useful information for the development of their own attitudes on political issues.

Substantive Theory and Previous Empirical Testing

The connection between partisanship and issues has always been recognized in the research literature. Indeed, the first explicit analysis of party identification was on precisely that topic (Belknap and Campbell, 1952). Since that time, virtually all of the work carried out in the field of mass political behavior has held that partisan attachments are an important source of policy orientations in the American electorate (e.g. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes, 1960; RePass, 1971; Pomper, 1972; Schulman and Pomper, 1975).

The substantive theory which accounts for the relationship between party identification and issue attitudes focuses on the concept of reference groups (e.g. Hyman and Singer, 1968; Miller, 1976). According to this theory, individuals develop psychological attachments to certain groups in their environment. These groups then provide cues for structuring attitudes and behavior on matters relevant to the group. For example, Miller and Levitin state that

"reference groups and their leaders provide norms and strategies for setting personal values and goals ... (1977, pg. 31)." Stated simply, people tend to take on the positions of the groups with which they identify (Mackie and Cooper, 1984).

The implications of reference group theory for the impact of partisan ties on issue attitudes are straightforward: An individual may develop a personal attachment to one of the parties, as a result of socialization processes (e.g. Hess and Torney, 1967; Jennings and Niemi, 1974; 1981) and previous political experiences (e.g. Fiorina, 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Franklin, 1984). If this party serves as a reference group for that citizen, then the party's position on an issue supplies a useful guide for that individual's own attitude on the same issue. Furthermore, people vary in the strength of their attachments to parties, and this should affect the impact of party-derived cues. Previous studies show that strongly held beliefs have a more pronounced effect on subsequent behavior than weakly held beliefs (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that more intense partisanship leads to a greater reliance on the party as a normative standard for guiding personal political orientations. In other words, a party's issue stands should have a greater impact on the attitudes of people who are closely tied to their party (i.e. strong identifiers) than on those who feel only weak partisan attachments (i.e. independent leaners).[1]

Until very recently, the preceding interpretation was widely accepted within the social science community. But over the past few years, a growing body of literature has raised some fundamental questions about the conceptualization (Weisberg, 1980), measurement (Lodge and Tursky, 1979), and general theoretical role of partisanship (Budge, Farlie, and Crewe, 1976). Some of these recent studies addressed the nature of the relationship between party

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identification and issue attitudes, by presenting evidence that issues affect party ties, rather than the opposite causal ordering (e.g. Jackson, 1975; Meier, 1975; Page and jones, 1979; Erikson, 1982; Weatherford, 1983). This finding appears to directly contradict the conventional wisdom derived from the classic works on electoral behavior. Certainly, such results create serious difficulties for the reference group interpretation of partisanship. The problematic aspects of the causal relations between party identification and issue attitudes have already been noted in the literature. For example, Abramson states that "... we do not know a great deal about the processes through which partisan loyalties affect attitudinal development (1983, pg. 77). Similarly, Bennett (1981) and Kessel (1984) both point out the lack of theoretical underpining in the party identification concept itself, as well as the processes through which it affects other political orientations. Thus, it is still unclear how partisanship "fits in" among the different factors that influence mass political behavior.

I would argue that a great deal of this ambiguity stems from inadequate testing of hypothesized relationships, rather than from deficiencies in the party identification concept and its theoretical status. Over the years, the usual approach employed in empirical analyses has been to relate issue attitudes directly to party identification. In some studies, issue variables are crosstabulated against the standard, seven-point index of partisanship (e.g. LeBlanc and Merrin, 1979). Others regress the issue variables on the index (e.g. Sears, Hensler, and Speer, 1979). Several recent analyses have modified the traditional approach somewhat, by postulating the existence of intervening variables between party identification and issues, and by using sophisticated simultaneous equation procedures for estimating the magnitude of partisan influence (e.g. Markus and Converse, 1979; Markus, 1982; Jackson, 1983). But,

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regardless of the exact model specification or analytical technique, this general approach implies that it is a person's position along the party identification continuum that influences his/her issue attitudes.

This approach has at least two serious problems. First, it just does not indicate <u>how</u> one variable affects the other. Crosstabulations and regressions can be used to demonstrate that party identification and issue attitudes do covary. They might also be useful as descriptive tools, for summarizing the issue attitudes held by people at each level of party identification. However, when these techniques are simply used to relate one variable to the other, they are inadequate for explicating the causal structures or psychological processes that generate the empirical covariation in the first place. The basic problem is that several different substantive explanations are all equally consistent with the same set of empirical correlations. That is, an empirical correlation of a given magnitude could be the result of partisanship affecting attitudes, attitudes affecting partisanship, or partisanship and attitudes both affected by a third factor.

A second, more important problem is that the commonly-used approach misrepresents the verbal description of partisan reference group influence (as given above) by implying that one's <u>position</u> along the party identification continuum affects issue attitudes.[2] Hence, stronger partisanship would lead to more extreme issue positions, regardless where the parties are perceived to stand on the same issue. But this is not the case, according to reference group theory. Rather, party identification should exert a more indirect influence: Individuals use cues obtained from their reference groups in order to determine their own attitudes. The direction of partisanship (Republican versus Democratic) determines <u>which</u> cues a person will use; of course, the cues are simply the Republican or Democratic party's policy stands, as per-

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ceived by their respective adherents. Simultaneously, the strength of party attachment (leaning, weak, or strong) affects the importance of the cues-- that is, their salience to the individual-- in the attitude formation process. Thus, party identification affects the sources of issue attitudes (i.e. the perceived party issue positions); it does not exert a direct influence on the issue attitudes themselves.

According to this latter interpretation, the correlation between party identification and an issue attitude is actually a spurious relationship: It only occurs because Republican identifiers' perceptions of the Republican party's issue positions tend to be different from Democratic identifiers' perceptions of the Democratic party's positions. If this is the case, and if these perceptions do influence issue attitudes, then the attitudes would be monotonically related to party identification. This would, in turn, generate a nonzero correlation between the empirical measures for these variables. Nevertheless, when such a correlation is viewed as an end in itself, it is a fundamental misspecification of the reference group explanation for partisan influence.

Modelling the Impact of Party Identification

The ambiguity about the causal structure, and the incorrect specification of partisan influence are precisely the kinds of problems that lead to questions about the theoretical role of party identification. These questions can only be answered by constructing more appropriate tests of the underlying theory.

Issue Attitudes

The reference group interpretation of party identification can easily be expressed as an empirically testable model. We begin by using the following equation to represent the influences on issue attitudes:

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$$Iss_{ij} = B_0 + B_{1i}\, Pty_{ij} + B_{ik}\, Soc_{jk} + u_{ij} \qquad (1)$$

The dependent variable in equation 1 , Iss_{ij}, is individual j's attitude on issue i, while Pty_{ij} is individual j's perception of his/her party's position on that same issue. It is assumed that Iss_{ij} and Pty_{ij} are both measured on identical scales. Although such an assumption is not absolutely necessary, it makes the predicted values of the dependent variable easier to interpret. The Soc_{jk} terms are a set of socio-demographic background variables, which are included in the equation to signify that issue attitudes can be affected by a variety of personal factors, in addition to an individual's partisan stance.

For present purposes, the most interesting feature of the equation is the B_{1i} term, which measures the impact of party perceptions. Note that the latter variable is composed of Republican party positions for Republican identifiers, and Democratic party positions for Democrats. Hence, equation 1 shows the influence of party direction through the inclusion of cues from both of the parties. If the B_1 coefficient for an issue is positive and significant, then it would indicate that people are relying on their respective parties to obtain guidelines or standards for setting their own attitudes.

Partisan strength is incorporated into equation 1 through its effect on the disturbance term, u_{ij}. The reasoning is as follows: For each individual, j, the discrepancy between party position on issue i and that person's attitude on issue i is measured by the value of u_{ij}. The absolute magnitude of this discrepancy should decrease as individuals become more strongly attached to their party, because the party's position should have an increasingly stronger effect on personal opinions. As a result, the amount of dispersion around the "baseline" of perceived party position should vary systematically, as a negative function of partisan strength. Stated differently, the disturbance term in equation 1 should be heteroscedastic, with the variance of u_i

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inversely related to the strength of party identification. Thus, the model being proposed here represents the impact of partisan direction and strength, even though neither of these two factors are explicitly included as independent variables in equation 1.[3]

Perceptions of Party Issue Positions

Although the conventional view holds that partisanship influences issues, it is also possible that the causal sequence proceeds in the opposite direction. Specifically, any correspondence between issue attitudes and perceived party positions could be due to rationalization processes, wherein people "project" their own feelings about issues onto their parties (Brody and Page, 1972). Therefore, it is important to test for reciprocal causal linkages in any model of the relationship between issue attitudes and party perceptions.

The major factors hypothesized to affect party perceptions are modelled in the following equation:

$$Pty_{ij} = B_{0i} + B_{1i} Iss_{ij} + B_{2i} Can_{ij} + u_{ij} \qquad (2)$$

In equation 2, Pty_{ij} and Iss_{ij} are defined as before. Accordingly, the B_{1i} coefficient in this equation measures the impact of personal issue attitudes on one's perception of his/her party's stand on the same issue. In this manner, it enables a direct test of the projection hypothesis.

The Can_{ij} variable in equation 2 requires more explanation. It represents individual j's perceptions about partisan candidate issue stands on issue i. Once again, the content of this variable would differ across the two partisan groups: For Republican identifiers, Can_{ij} would measure perceptions of Republican candidate positions, while it would gauge Democratic candidate stands for Democratic identifiers. With the Can_{ij} term defined in this manner, the B_{2i} coefficient tests whether people infer party positions from their beliefs about candidate positions. The assumption here is that national

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candidates are more visible, prominent political stimuli than the relatively diffuse parties, at least to the general public. As a result, citizens could easily use the policy stands of well-known candidates to estimate their party's stands on the same issues. This assumption seems intuitively reasonable.[4] More important, it is supported by other research. Feldman and Conover state that "perceptions of party issue positions are influenced by candidates' stands on those issues ... (T)he leading party figures are used to generate expectations about where the party itself stands (1983, pg. 836)." Thus, the inclusion of the Can_{ij} term in equation 2 enables us to test an inference explanation, as well as the projection hypothesis for the origins of beliefs about party issue positions.

The disturbance term in equation 2 may or may not be heteroscedastic, depending upon which process is generating the party perceptions. If people are actually projecting their own attitudes onto the parties, then the "psychological pressure" for consistency between personal issue stands and party positions should be most intense among those individuals who are strongly attached to their partisan reference group. This would be manifested as heteroscedasticity, with the variance of the disturbances again inversely related to partisan strength. On the other hand, if people are inferring the party's issue stands from the candidates' positions, then there is really no reason to expect any systematic, party-related changes in the accuracy of those inferences. That is, the "translation" from candidates' positions to party positions should be unaffected by the strength of a person's own partisan attachment. As a result, the absolute magnitude of the u_{ij} term (or its variance) should not change across independent leaners, weak-, and strong partisan identifiers.

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Model Identification

The full model is depicted in Figure 1. Because of the reciprocal linkages between issue attitudes and perceived party positions, the model is obviously nonrecursive. However, the specification is such that estimation via two-stage least squares should not be a problem. Note that while the socio-demographic variables influence personal attitudes, there is no reason to expect them to have a systematic influence on party perceptions. As a result, these background indicators can be used to create an instrumental variable for Iss_{ij} in equation 2.

The Can_{ij} variable serves a similar purpose for Pty_{ij} in equation 1, although its ability to do so is more tenuous. In order to create a valid instrumental variable, we must assume that there are no direct causal linkages between Can_{ij} and Iss_{ij}. Although such an assumption could be questionable, its use here is justified on several grounds. The causal linkages between Can_{ij} and Iss_{ij} could potentially run in two directions. On the one hand, citizens' attitudes could be influenced by their candidate perceptions (Brody and Page, 1972). However, previous studies have shown that such candidate-based persuasion is either very weak or entirely nonexistent (Markus and Converse, 1979; Markus, 1982; Feldman and Conover, 1983). On the basis of these findings, a causal path from Can_{ij} to Iss_{ij} appears unnecessary. On the other hand, a person's own issue attitude might affect his/her perceptions of candidate stands on the same issue. But once again, the empirical evidence suggests that this is not too much of a problem. Previous analyses of candidate projection have produced contradictory results, but even in cases where significant effects are found, their magnitude and impact is extremely weak (Markus and Converse, 1979; Markus, 1982). In addition, several recent studies have demonstrated that citizens are capable of ascertaining the policy

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positions of political actors in ways that are not overly biased by personal preferences (e.g. Feldman and Conover, 1983; Brady and Sniderman, 1986). Finally, there is simple pragmatism: This assumption greatly eases the problem of model identification and therefore facilitates the estimation of the structural parameters. Thus, the advantages gained in identifiability should outweigh any distortions introduced by assuming a null relationship between attitudes and candidate perceptions.

With the assumptions described here, the model does incorporate predetermined variables with sufficient information for identifying both equations. Therefore, two-stage least squares can be used to estimate the coefficients. That analysis will be carried out in the next section.

Data and Analytic Results

This model can be tested with data from the 1980 CPS American National Election Study. The issue attitude variables (Iss_{ij}) can be operationalized using survey respondents' self-placements on the seven-point issue scales included in the study. Responses to the standard battery of party identification questions can be combined with placements of the two parties on the same seven-point issue scales to obtain the variables measuring perceived party issue stands (Pty_{ij}). For each issue, the Republican party's position is used for Republican identifiers and leaners, while the Democratic party's position is used for Democratic identifiers and leaners. A similar strategy is employed for perceived candidate positions (Can_{ij}): Among Republican identifiers and leaners, Ronald Reagan's position is used for Can_{ij}; among Democrats, perceived candidate positions are defined as the _mean_ of the scores given to Jimmy Carter and Edward Kennedy.[5] In this manner, it is possible to obtain a single score for each respondent, summarizing that person's beliefs about the policy stands of his/her party's most prominent candidates. Of

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course, partisan strength is also ascertained from the standard party identi-
fication questions.[6] Finally, the socio-demographic information can be easily
obtained from the appropriate items in the interview schedule.[7]

The model is designed to represent partisan influence on issues taken
singly. The pre- and post-election waves of the 1980 Study contain scales for
seven issues: Defense spending; government service provision; inflation and
unemployment policy; aid to minorities; negotiations with Russia; equality for
women; and guaranteed jobs. In addition, both waves include a seven-point
liberal-conservative scale. While these do not correspond to specific issues,
it does seem reasonable that ideological identifications could be influenced
by cues from partisan reference groups. Therefore, the latter two items will
also be used in the analysis. In all then, the 1980 data provide nine sepa-
rate tests of the impact of partisan reference groups on individual issue
attitudes.

Let us begin by examining the results for equation 1. Two-stage least
squares is used to estimate the values of the coefficients for each issue
equation. Then, the residuals are calculated in order to test whether the
disturbances are heteroscedastic-- that is, whether the error variance changes
systematically as a function of partisan strength. This step is necessary
before the coefficient values can be meaningfully interpreted.[8] It must be
carried out separately for each of the nine issues.

Table 1 shows the relevant results from this part of the analysis. The
nine entries correspond to the different issue equations. As explained
earlier, the model predicts that the residual variance for independent leaners
should be larger than that for strong party identifiers, since these are the
groups with the weakest and strongest partisan ties, respectively. The num-
bers in the table are the ratios of the residual variance for leaners, to that

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for strong identifiers (calculated separately for each equation). The magnitude of each ratio can be compared to the F distribution as a statistical test for heteroscedasticity.[9] The data in Table 1 confirm the model-based prediction. In every case except one (government aid to minorities), the ratio exceeds 1.0. Seven of the eight remaining ratios are statistically significant (i.e. greater than 1.0) at the .05 level. The exception here occurs in the equation for attitudes on equality for women. Thus, there are only two deviations from the hypothesized pattern. This provides substantial evidence that the disturbances associated with equation 1 are heteroscedastic, exactly as implied by the model specification.

It is important to emphasize that the presence of this heteroscedasticity is an intrinsic component of the structural model itself. Indeed, the heteroscedastic disturbances are the empirical manifestation of the impact of partisan strength. To reiterate, the reference group interpretation of party identification implies that the "spread" of citizens' own issue attitudes around their perceptions of their respective parties' positions should decrease as psychological ties to the parties become stronger. As we have just seen, this assertion is clearly supported by the data.

The coefficients in equation 1 must be reestimated, using appropriate weights to correct for heteroscedasticity. Following Weisberg (1980), scores of 4, 5, and 10 are assigned to independent leaners, weak-, and strong identifiers. The disturbance variances are inversely related to the strength of party identification. Therefore, each observation is weighted by the square root of that person's partisan strength score.[10]

The results obtained from the weighted data are shown in Table 2. From left to right, the columns give the 2SLS estimates of the intercept (b_0), the impact of party perceptions (b_1), the sum of the coefficients for the socio-

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demographic variables (Summed b_k),[11] and the R^2 for each of the nine issues. Once again, the results provide strong support for the reference group inter-pretation. In each case, the b_1 value is positive and statistically signifi-cant. These coefficients are also quite substantial in magnitude. For exam-ple, the b_1 coefficient for the "government services" issue shows that a single unit change in perception of one's own party's stand leads to nearly a full unit change (.91) in the person's own attitude on that issue. The estimated coefficients on the other issues are not quite as extreme, but they are still large-- the mean value (across the nine issues) is .71, and even the smallest one is a very respectable .56 (on "aid to minorities"). These results are exactly what should occur if people are using their parties as political reference groups. Thus, party-based cues do influence issue attitudes among people who lean toward or identify with one of the parties.

Next, we will examine the influences on individual perceptions of party issue positions. The two-stage least squares estimates for equation 2 are shown in Table 3. The numbers in the columns are the intercept (b_0), the coefficient for personal issue attitudes (b_1), that for perceptions of candi-date issue stands (b_2), the R^2 value, and the ratio of residual variances between independent leaners and strong identifiers. Three features of the results stand out immediately. First, beliefs about candidate issue stands exert a consistently strong, positive influence on perceived party positions. The mean value (over the nine issues) of b_2 is .68, and every one is statisti-cally significant. The second prominent feature in the table is the consis-tently weak (and, indeed, almost nonexistent) influence of personal issue attitudes. The estimated b_1 values are all very small (the mean is a low .09), and only one is significantly greater than zero (the "inflation and unemployment" position, with a b_1 of .29). One estimate even has the wrong

direction (that on "equality for women," with a b_1 of -.08). From these results, it is clear that citizens' perceptions about party issue stands are <u>not</u> merely rationalized projections from their own issue attitudes. The third feature of the table concerns the ratio of disturbance variances for independent leaners and strong partisans. Unlike the results reported in Table 1, <u>none</u> of these ratios are statistically significant (i.e. greater than zero). This shows that the magnitude of the disturbances does not change systematically as a function of partisan strength. These homoscedastic disturbances suggest that there is <u>not</u> any noticeable psychological pressure toward cognitive consistency as one becomes more strongly attached to a partisan reference group. Instead, the findings from Table 3 nicely supplement other recent work (e.g. Feldman and Conover, 1983; Brady and Sniderman, 1986) by showing that people infer the parties' issue stands from other information sources in their environment; in this case, the policy positions of well-known partisan candidates.

Conclusions

The model tested in this analysis uses a statistical representation of the standard verbal explanations in order to clarify the structure of party identification's impact on issue attitudes. Briefly stated, a partisan tie provides an individual with a source for cues-- perceptions of the party's issue positions-- that are useful guidelines in the opinion formation process. The stronger a person's attachment to his/her party, the closer the correspondence between the perceived party issue position and the individual's own attitude. The model also shows that perceptions <u>do</u> influence attitudes, and not the reverse. This analysis produces no evidence that beliefs about the parties are simply projections from citizens' own positions.

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The model described here is not necessarily meant to replace the conventional uses of party identification in empirical analyses. The standard practice of using the seven-point index as an explanatory variable provides a convenient means of summarizing partisan influence on other political orientations. However, this strategy is not an end in itself, because it just does not explain partisan influence. It is important to remember that the observed correlations between party identification and issue attitudes are a manifestation of reference group influence. As such, these correlations can be subjected to a more direct, detailed analysis whenever the exact structure of partisan influence is of immediate interest to the researcher.

With findings like those reported above, the present model is fully consistent with more general social psychological evidence that group norms provide standards for individual behavior (Mackie and Cooper, 1984). Thus, it should strengthen the theoretical status of party identification itself. At the same time, this analysis should help to integrate the party identification concept within the growing body of research which demonstrates that group attachments affect the political lives of group adherents (Miller, Gurin, Gurin, and Malanchuk, 1981; Kinder, 1983). Of direct relevance to the present study is Conover's observation that "... (group) identifiers tend to adopt relatively extreme positions consistent with the group's interests on issues with salience to the group (1984, pg. 781)." That is exactly what is happening here, as well. The only real difference is that political parties, almost by definition, take stands on a broad variety of issues. Therefore, the parties' influence probably extends to a broader range of issues than the more narrowly-defined groups and group-related issues examined by Conover (such as blacks, women, and so on). In any event, the reference group interpretation

of party identification does help clarify the process through which partisan-ship relates to issue attitudes.

The results of this study are also relevant to the more general topic of the condition of American political parties. A great deal of scholarly attention and emphasis has recently been placed on the "decline of parties" theme. Several authors have charged that parties no longer mobilize the electorate effectively, and that citizens form their own political orientations without regard for party affiliation (for example, see Nie, Verba, and Petrocik, 1979; Crotty, 1984). The findings reported here provide strong evidence to the contrary. Party attachments provide citizens with a convenient mechanism for structuring their own responses to matters of public policy. Of course, the accuracy of partisan cues can be questioned (Lodge and Hamill, 1986); nevertheless, the evidence of their existence and usefulness is clearcut. As other researchers have shown, party-based belief structures enable partisan adherents to cope with the political world in a coherent, well-organized manner (Hamill, Lodge, and Blake, 1985; Sharp and Lodge, 1985). Even in the current period of weakened party organizations, a very large majority of the electorate continues to maintain some degree of attachment to one of the parties: In the 1984 CPS National Election Study data, only 15 percent of the respondents describe themselves as either nonleaning independents or apoliti-cals. The remaining 85 percent are comprised of leaning independents, weak, and strong partisans, all of whom are amenable to party cues. Thus, the potential for political parties to continue to affect the behavior of the American public seems quite obvious.

Finally, it is important to point out that the support for the reference group explanation provided in this analysis does not necessarily refute the "revisionist" interpretations of party identification that have been offered

over the past few years. For example, it has been argued that partisanship is based upon evaluations of experiences with the two parties (Fiorina, 1981), that it is susceptible to short-term influences (e.g. Franklin and Jackson, 1983; Franklin, 1984), and that it is a multidimensional attachment to several reference groups (Weisberg, 1980). All of these interpretations challenge the traditional understanding of party identification. However, they deal more with the origins and basis for party attachments, rather than the latter's impact on other political orientations. The present model only addresses the question of reference group influence on attitudes; it says nothing whatsoever about the longevity or lability of reference group ties, nor does it preclude the existence of multiple partisan reference groups.[12] Thus, at least to a certain extent, the newer interpretations can coexist with the more tradi-tional view. The proponents of "The Michigan School" may have overstated the case for party identification as a highly stable, long-term, unidimensional attribute, but they do appear to be correct in their assessment of its impact on issue attitudes.

Notes

1. Several different psychological processes could cause this phenomenon. For example, balance theory would hold that stronger party attachments increase the internal pressure to resolve discrepancies between perceived party positions and personal attitudes (for a related argument, see Luttbeg, 1981). Alternatively, the impact of partisan perceptions on attitudes could be an inference process; in this case, partisan cues would simply become more relevant information sources as party attachment becomes stronger (e.g. Feldman and Conover, 1983). While these two processes have different implications for understanding voter psychology, they are both entirely consistent with the reference group explanation of party identification.

2. It is assumed that party identification corresponds to an underlying continuous dimension. The variable is bipolar around a neutral position (which would represent independence from any partisan attachment). In the discussion that follows, the term "party direction" refers to an individual's location on the Republican or Democratic side of the neutral point. "Partisan strength" signifies how close a person is to one of the polar extremes (or alternatively, how far from the neutral point) along the partisanship dimension. Empirically, this underlying continuous variable is usually estimated by the standard seven-category index of party identification.

3. A possible alternative model specification would be to use a multiplicative term to express the conditional impact of party cues, at varying levels of partisan attachment. This type of model would look like the following:

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$$Iss_{ij} = (B_1 + B_2 \, Str_j) \, Pty_{ij} + u_{ij} \qquad (1a)$$

In this equation, Str_j is the strength of party attachment for individual j; the value of this variable would increase with stronger partisanship. Assume that all variables are measured as deviations around their means, so that no intercept term is necessary. The estimates of B_1 and B_2 should both be positive, in which case, the conditional impact of Pty_{ij} (measured by the sum within the parentheses) should also increase with stronger partisanship. At first glance, this equation appears to provide a suitable representation of the underlying psychological process-- that is, the impact of party perception increases with partisan strength. However, it actually misrepresents the hypothesized partisan influence in a fairly serious way. This becomes obvious when one thinks in terms of the predicted values for Iss_{ij}. Basically, the conditional effect in equation 1a produces a unidirectional "bias" in the expected value of Iss_{ij}, at each level of party identification. The magnitude and direction of this bias depends on the particular value of $B_1 + B_2 \, Str_j$. If this sum is less than 1.0, then the expected value of Iss_{ij} is smaller than the associated Pty_{ij} value, by definition. Conversely, if the conditional effect is greater than 1.0, then the expected value of Iss_{ij} will exceed the Pty_{ij} value. The problem is that this type of relationship is not consistent with the description of reference group influence which was outlined in the text. A simple example should be helpful. Assume that B_1 and B_2 are both equal to .5, and that Str is scored 0, 1.0, and 2.0 for the three increasing levels of partisan attachment. If the value of Pty_{ij} is, say, 2.0, then the predicted value of Iss_{ij} would be 1.0 for an independent leaner, 2.0 for a weak identifier, and 3.0 for a strong identifier. Substantively, this implies that leaners tend to

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exhibit issue attitudes that are less extreme than their perceptions of their party's position. At the same time, strong identifiers tend to take on positions that are systematically more extreme than their perceived party stands. In contrast to leaners and strong identifiers, weak identifiers are , on average, perfectly consistent with their party's position. These results simply do not make sense, in terms of reference group theory. For example, independent leaners could easily have <u>more</u> extreme issue positions than their party; similarly, it is the strong, rather than the weak identifiers who should exhibit the closest correspondence between personal issue attitudes and their party's position. Thus, the equation with the multiplicative term is not appropriate, and it is rejected for this analysis. The problems described here do not occur with the specification used in equation 1 (along with the appropriate assumptions about the disturbance variances). Therefore, it provides a more accurate empirical representation of partisan reference group influence on individual issue attitudes.

4. It is important to emphasize that this reasoning is only appropriate for <u>well-known</u> candidates-- those with whom the electorate is already familiar. For new candidates who have not yet developed a widespread public reputation, the dominant path of influence might well be reversed. In other words, citizens could tentatively assign traditional party stands to newly-emerging partisan candidates, at least until more specific information is available. Feldman and Conover (1983) make the same point.

5. Reagan, Carter, and Kennedy clearly fit the "well-known" criterion discussed earlier. All three had developed national reputations long before the beginning of the 1980 campaign. The use of one Republican and two

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Democratic candidates can be justified on both pragmatic and substantive
grounds. First, these are the only candidates that respondents placed on
all nine of the issues. Second, the Republican party was much more
unified than the Democrats in 1980. As the clearly preferred nominee of
his party, Ronald Reagan could reasonably be expected to dominate percep-
tions of the Republican party's issue stands. On the other hand, the
intra-party conflict between Carter and Kennedy would probably introduce
greater diversity into the perceptual linkages between candidate and
party stands. The averaging strategy used for the Democratic Can_{ij}
values is intended to tap this kind of diversity while still retaining
the specification given for equation 2.

6. By definition, this model is only appropriate for individuals who feel
some degree of attachment to one of the parties. Therefore, the analysis
below only includes independent leaners, weak partisans, and strong
partisans. All nonleaning independents were removed from the data.

7. The following socio-demographic variables are included in the model:
Years of education; head of household's occupation; family income; social
class identification; union membership (in respondent's immediate fami-
ly); father's and mother's party identification; race (white versus
nonwhite); religion (four dummy variables); and region (three dummy
variables).

8. Heteroscedasticity does not bias the estimates of the structural coeffi-
cients. However, it does affect the standard errors of the parameter
estimates. This would, in turn, render invalid any statistical infer-
ences that are based simply on the standard errors obtained from the 2SLS
estimates (Lemieux, 1976).

9. Strictly speaking, this is a test for homogeneity of variances about sample means. However, Johnston (1972) points out that it can also be used to test for heteroscedasticity in residual variances when the data are grouped into a small number of classes.

10. The disturbance variance is proportional to the inverse of partisan strength. Therefore, each variable (including the intercept) is multiplied by the square root of partisan strength. Lemieux (1976) provides a more detailed discussion of weighting schemes for dealing with heteroscedastic disturbances.

11. The third column in Table 2 contains the sum of all the coefficients for the socio-demographic variables. The coefficient estimates for these variables are not central to the objectives of this analysis, so they are combined this way for greater clarity in the presentation of the results. The specific coefficient estimates (which contain no surprises) are available from the author.

12. In order to test for possible effects of multidimensional partisan loyalties, equation 1 was modified to include each person's perception of the opposing party's stand on the issue (that is, along with each person's perception of his/her own party's stand). The coefficient estimates for the opposing party were uniformly very small, and all but one were not statistically significant (.05 level). On the basis of these findings, the variable representing perceptions of the opposing party was dropped from the model.
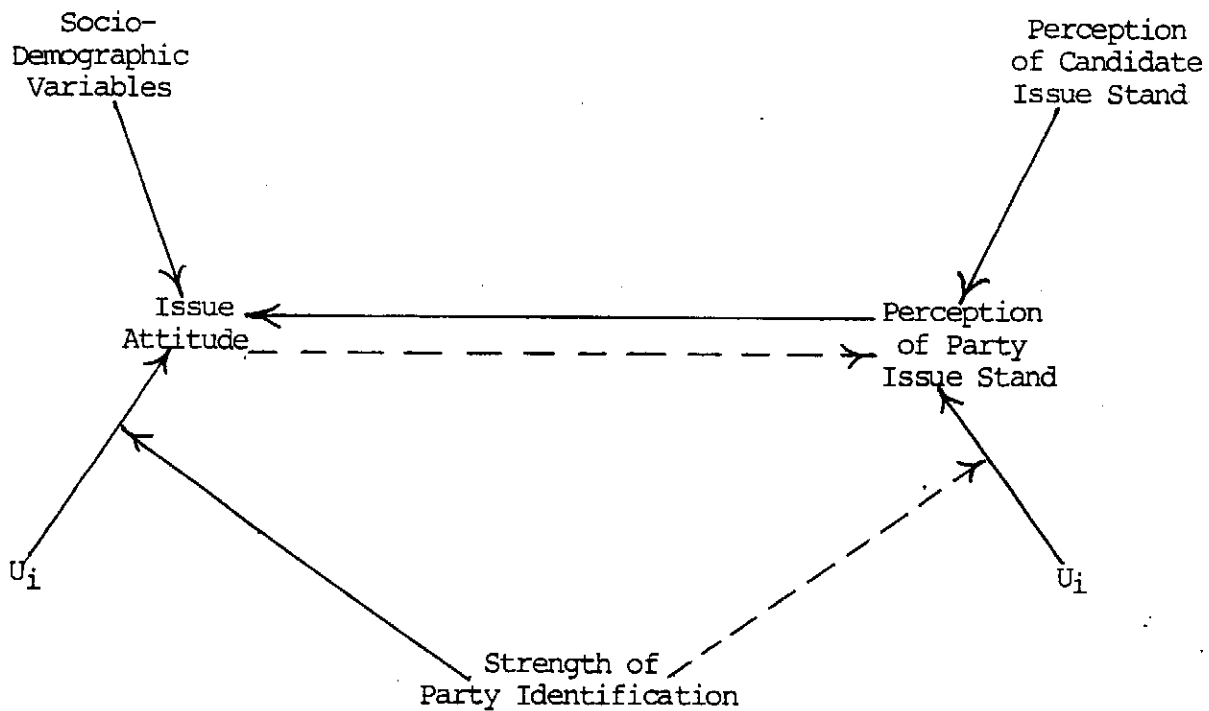
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FIGURE 1

Schematic Representation of Full Model

Socio-
Demographic
Variables

Perception
of Candidate
Issue Stand

Issue
Attitude

Perception
of Party
Issue Stand

U_i

U_i

Strength of
Party Identification

Note: Solid arrows represent causal effects that are predicted by the refer-
ence group interpretation of party identification. Dotted arrows indi-
cate other causal effects that may be present. Also, strength of party
identification is hypothesized to affect the variance of the disturbance
term on issue attitudes (and also possibly that for perceptions of party
issue positions).

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TABLE 1

Ratios of Residual Variances for
Independent Leaners and Strong Identifiers

Issue	S^2_{IL}/S^2_{SP}
Liberal-Conservative (Pre-elec)	1.53*
Defense Spending	1.38*
Government Spending and Services	1.65*
Inflation and Unemployment	1.28*
Liberal-Conservative (Post-elec)	1.38*
Aid to Minorities	0.96
Negotiations with Russia	1.58*
Equality for Women	1.04
Guaranteed Jobs	1.26*

Table entries are ratios of residual variances. The residuals are calculated from the 2SLS estimates of equation 1.

* Residual variance for independent leaners is significantly greater than that for strong partisans (.05 level).

Source: 1980 CPS National Election Study. Exact question wordings can be obtained from Volume 1 of the Codebook for the 1980 Study.

TABLE 2

Influence of Party Perceptions on Issue Attitudes
(Two-Stage Least Squares Estimates)

Issue	b_0	b_1	Summed b_k	R^2
Liberal-Conservative (Pre-elec)	2.22	.64 (.04)	-30.15	.29
Defense Spending	3.16	.57 (.06)	-20.10	.09
Government Spending and Services	.90	.91 (.06)	21.15	.28
Inflation and Unemployment	2.02	.68 (.07)	-6.45	.25
Liberal-Conservative (Post-elec)	2.65	.63 (.04)	-30.15	.28
Aid to Minorities	2.79	.56 (.05)	-20.85	.25
Negotiations with Russia	1.78	.85 (.05)	-6.00	.26
Equality for Women	2.29	.76 (.06)	-10.35	.21
Guaranteed Jobs	1.18	.80 (.05)	-19.80	.30

(Standard errors in parentheses)

Source: 1980 CPS National Election Study. Exact question wordings can be obtained from Volume 1 of the Codebook for the 1980 Study.

TABLE 3

Influence of Issue Attitudes and Candidate Perceptions
on Perceived Party Positions
(Two-Stage Least Squares Estimates)

Issue	b_0	b_1	b_2	R^2	S^2_{IL}/S^2_{SP}*
Liberal-Conservative (Pre-elec)	.05	.22 (.13)	.81 (.08)	.58	.90
Defense Spending	.94	.14 (.12)	.64 (.05)	.47	.97
Government Spending and Services	1.30	.07 (.07)	.66 (.05)	.57	1.18
Inflation and Unemployment	.95	.29 (.10)	.50 (.06)	.44	1.02
Liberal-Conservative (Post-elec)	1.22	.04 (.13)	.69 (.06)	.59	1.16
Aid to Minorities	.82	.09 (.08)	.68 (.04)	.56	.92
Negotiations with Russia	.98	.01 (.15)	.71 (.09)	.56	1.05
Equality for Women	1.19	-.08 (.08)	.69 (.05)	.44	.89
Guaranteed Jobs	.74	.04 (.08)	.75 (.05)	.66	.97

* None of the ratios are significantly different from 1.0 (at the .05 level)

(Standard errors in parentheses)

Source: 1980 CPS National Election Study. Exact question wordings can be obtained from Volume 1 of the Codebook for the 1980 Study.