Polarized *About*, Not *By*, Race and Gender: How Groups Matter in American Politics

Tyler T Reny*, Jessica Geiger*, and Sean Donovan*

*Department of Politics & Policy, Claremont Graduate University

June 26, 2026

Abstract

Recent presidential elections have prompted widespread claims that the racial divide in American politics is narrowing while the gender divide is widening. We argue that this narrative is doubly misguided. Demographic gaps in vote choice and partisan identification have remained remarkably stable over several decades. More fundamentally, ascriptive characteristics are not what drive political conflict. The meaningful axis of partisan division is not voters' gender or race, but what they believe about the proper role of these groups in society. Drawing on status threat frameworks, we argue that racial and gender attitudes are expressions of a common "group position ideology." Using cross-sectional and panel data from the last few decades, we show that while demographic gaps have changed little, gaps based on racial and gender hierarchy attitudes have grown rapidly. Panel evidence reveals bidirectional influence between attitudes and partisanship, and that racial resentment and sexism reinforce each other over time. American political coalitions are being reshaped not by who voters are but by what they believe about who should be on top.

Word Count: 7479

Notes and Acknowledgments: [Acknowledgments removed for blind peer review] The authors used Claude Sonnet 4.6 and ChatGPT 5.5 to assist with brainstorming, copyediting, and checking statistical code. All theoretical arguments, empirical analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were developed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

1 Introduction

Since Obama's victory in 2008, subsequent presidential elections have generated an extraordinary volume of commentary about the changing demographic foundations of American politics. Ahead of Election Day in 2024, analysts predicted a "gender chasm" as Kamala Harris centered her campaign on reproductive rights and Donald Trump aggressively courted male voters through appearances on podcasts oriented toward young men.[1] At the same time, Trump made notable inroads with Latino and Black voters, prompting widespread declarations that the long-dominant racial cleavage in American electoral politics was eroding.[2] These narratives coalesced around a striking claim: the racial voting gap was breaking down, supplanted by gender as a central axis of American political conflict. But the impulse to read elections through demographic crosstabs — which groups moved, by how much, and in which direction — is itself a problem. We argue that this way of understanding American politics is doubly misguided.

First, the data tell a different story. A gender gap of four to twelve points has persisted in every presidential election since the 1980s, and 2024 was no exception.[3] Racial voting patterns largely show similar continuity: white voters continue to favor Republicans, Black and Latino voters continue to favor Democrats, and Trump's gains among voters of color were real but modest in historical terms.[4]

Second, and more fundamentally, ascriptive demographic characteristics are not what drive political conflict. The meaningful axis of partisan division is not whether voters are men or women, white or Black or Latino, but a group position ideology—what they believe about the proper role of these groups in society. The movement of voters of color we see toward the Republican Party, for example, is partly among members of those groups who hold the most conservative racial attitudes (Geiger and Reny, 2024). In other words it is not about the racial or ethnic characteristics of the voters but their views on racial and ethnic hierarchies.[5] The same logic applies to gender: the parties are divided less by whether their members are men or women than by how their members view the role of men and women in society today.[6] These two attitudinal dimensions are not merely parallel phenomena. Race and gender are the two axes along which challenges to established status hierarchies have been most visible in recent decades, and the contemporary party system has increasingly organized around them. Voters have sorted into partisan camps not on the basis of their demographic characteristics but on the basis of pre-existing attitudes about which groups should have power. While these insights have emerged in public-facing commentary and in some peer-reviewed work, they have typically addressed a single dimension in isolation and without long-term systematic empirical analysis. What is missing is a theory that grounds race and gender in a common framework centered on group status hierarchy and a longitudinal analysis tracing how these dimensions structure contemporary American politics and reshape partisan coalitions.

That is what this paper provides. We begin by constructing a theoretical framework for how groups matter in politics, distinguishing between three dimensions: (1) ascriptive demography, (2) identity, and (3) group position ideology. Ascriptive demography refers to the objective and socially constructed characteristics that society uses to segment people into groups—race, gender, ethnicity, age, class, and so on. These categories describe who people are, but on their own they don't necessarily carry inherent political meaning or consequence. The second dimension, identity, captures the ways in which these categories become politically consequential. Politicized group identity is the process by which ascriptive characteristics become subjectively and politically meaningful for members of a group, shaping their sense of linked fate and political interests (Huddy, 2001; Huddy, 2003). While important—and there is a broad literature on this—this is not the focus of this project. We focus instead on the third dimension: group position ideology. More specifically, beliefs about where groups should stand in the social order—who belongs, who is central, and who should hold social, political, and economic power in American life—provide the scaffolding by which contemporary political conflict primarily operates. Race and gender are the dimensions along which status hierarchies are most actively being contested (Tesler, 2016; Sides et al., 2018). As a result, it is attitudes about racial and gender hierarchies—not ascriptive group membership—that are politically meaningful and around which American partisan coalitions are reorganizing.

Using cross-sectional data from the American National Election Study (ANES) (1988–2024) and General Social Survey (GSS) (1972–2024), alongside panel data from the Democracy Fund Voter Study (VSG Panel, 2016-2020) and ANES Panel Study (ANES Panel, 2016-2020-2024), we provide a systematic longitudinal test of this theory. We show that gaps in voting and partisan identification between demographic groups have remained remarkably stable over several decades, while gaps rooted in attitudes about racial and gender hierarchies have grown dramatically. Panel evidence from the VSG indicates that influence runs in both directions: hierarchy attitudes predict subsequent changes in partisanship, and partisanship predicts subsequent changes in hierarchy attitudes. Notably, racial resentment and sexism also reinforce each other over time—consistent with the claim that both are expressions of a common group position ideology—and this sorting pattern is specific to group hierarchy attitudes rather than a byproduct of generic ideological realignment. The stakes of these findings extend well beyond academic debates. Reading American politics through demographic crosstabs—the default lens of campaigns, journalists, and much of the scholarly literature—systematically misidentifies the dynamics that are actually reshaping our current parties. What is driving partisan change in contemporary America is not who voters are but which groups they believe should wield power.

2 Theory

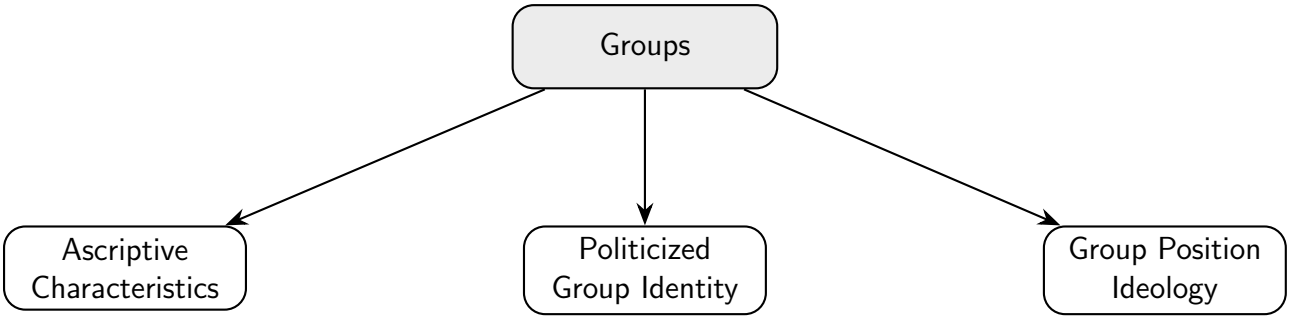
2.1 Demography Is Not Destiny

Americans learn about electoral politics not through direct experience but through mediated channels—news coverage, social media, podcasts—and these channels are overwhelmingly organized around "horserace" coverage and change: who is winning, who is losing, what has shifted, and why (Zaller, 1992; Nisbet, 2008). The raw material for these narratives increasingly comes from surveys (Mann and Orren, 1992), and surveys primarily report political change through demographic crosstabs: usually how groups defined by gender, age, race, income, education and region are shifting in their political attitudes and behaviors.[7] The default reporting on election night follows the same template: exit polls and post-election surveys are often packaged as demographic breakdowns and the questions that structure analysis are demographic. Did women increase support for Democrats? Did Black support for Democrats hold? Have Latinos, who have been trending Republican, swung back to the Democrats? What happened with young men? Ascriptive demographic categories, in other words, are often what narratives of electoral change are built around, and what dominate political debate among journalists, campaign operatives, and the public. The result is that Americans' understanding of what is happening in American politics is filtered almost entirely through demographic lenses: which groups are moving, by how much, and in which direction?

Political science often implicitly does the same. Race, gender, age, and other ascriptive group characteristics routinely enter statistical models as important independent variables or moderators. This approach treats demographic categories as if they are themselves politically meaningful, collapsing everything about group membership into a single noisy indicator (Sen and Wasow, 2016). A dummy variable for race, for example, is going to capture both individuals for whom race is a deeply politicized and meaningful identity and individuals for whom race is not politically salient at all.

It is this approach that can lead to the theory that 'demography is destiny' and its repeated predictive failures. As Kim and Zilinsky (2024) show, demographic characteristics do a poor job of predicting both two-party vote choices and party ID and this predictive validity has not improved over time. If demographic categories were inherently politically meaningful for everyone who shares that characteristic, then compositional change in the electorate should produce predictable partisan change. Following this logic, an increasingly Latino, more educated, and more female electorate should produce increasingly Democratic aggregate vote outcomes. This prediction has famously failed, most visibly in 2016 and 2024.

Figure 1: How Groups Matter in Politics



2.2 How Groups Matter in Politics

If ascriptive characteristics tell us little about political outcomes, how do demographic groups become politically consequential? As we show in Figure 1, we argue that groups can be conceptualized in two other distinct ways. First, demographic categories can become politically meaningful for members of those groups through politicized group identity (Huddy, 2001). This concept grows out of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and informs a large body of work on the political behavior of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, including research on linked fate, group consciousness, and racial solidarity (McClain et al., 2009). While politicized group identity is one of the most important predictors of political behavior in its own right, it is not the focus of the present analysis. We include it in our framework to clarify what distinguishes our central construct—group position ideology—from the related but analytically distinct concept of subjective group identification.

We argue that the more important way in which groups matter in electoral politics today, at least with respect to electoral trends, is beliefs about the proper role of different groups in society, what we label *group position ideology* (Blumer, 1958). These attitudes vary within and across demographic categories (Geiger and Reny, 2024; Becker, 2010), they are predictive of important predispositions like partisanship (Tesler, 2016), and most importantly, they are what contemporary political elites are actually organizing politics around (Sides et al., 2018).

Group position ideology is a set of beliefs about the proper ordering of groups in society: who deserves status, who belongs at the center of American life, to whom culture should cater, who should be economically successful, and who should have a voice in politics (Gest et al., 2018). There is a deep literature across a variety of social science fields on intergroup dynamics and conflict. Blumer (1958), whose work is most closely related to this idea, argues that prejudice is fundamentally rooted in a sense of group position rather than individual-level affect, a framework extended by Bobo (1999) and Bobo and Hutchings (1996) to explain how

perceived threats to group position generate political backlash in multiracial contexts. At a more general level, social dominance theory (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999) holds that individuals vary in the degree to which they prefer group-based hierarchy, and that this orientation expresses itself across multiple domains like race, gender, age, and immigration, among others. For our purposes, social dominance theory provides the general psychological scaffolding: people hold durable preferences about group-based hierarchies (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). The group position model provides the politically consequential predictions. When a group's position in the hierarchy is perceived as being challenged, whether through social movements, demographic changes, or elite rhetoric, these attitudes become politically activated and can generate backlash (Blumer, 1958; Bobo, 1999; Parker and Barreto, 2014). Because it concerns the ordering of groups rather than membership in them, group position ideology cuts across group lines and can organize partisan coalitions that group membership or group identity alone cannot explain. And critically, this is the dimension around which political elites have increasingly structured partisan competition (Sides et al., 2018).

2.3 Why Race and Gender?

Which dimensions of group hierarchy structure partisan politics is historically contingent. The theoretical framework we propose is general, but our focus on race and gender reflects the specific political conflicts of the current era. It has not always been these dimensions that mattered most. Group position ideology has structured American partisan politics in different configurations historically: around racial hierarchy and the status of Black Americans during the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the civil rights era (King and Smith, 2005); around anti-Catholic, anti-Chinese, and anti-Jewish nativism during debates over immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Tichenor, 2002); and around gender, sex, family, and cultural dominance during the rise of the Christian Right in the mid 20th century (Self, 2012). The pattern is consistent: specific dimensions of group-based hierarchy become politically salient when that hierarchy is, or is perceived to be, under active contestation.

Race and gender are the most salient dimensions of group position ideology in the contemporary period. On the racial front, large-scale immigration following the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, particularly from Latin America and Asia, has reshaped the nation's demography and raised the prospect of a white numerical minority within decades (Craig and Richeson, 2014). Massive immigration is nominally about nativity, its own axis of group-based contestation, but it is at its core about the perceived centrality of whiteness to American identity (Jardina, 2019). The election of Barack Obama, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Democratic Party's increasingly explicit embrace of policies aimed at dismantling racial hierarchies further centered race as a site of political contestation (Parker and Barreto, 2014; Tesler and Sears, 2010; Tesler,

2016). With respect to gender, a succession of prominent female presidential candidates in Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris, the #MeToo movement, the fight over reproductive rights culminating in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* in 2022, and ongoing contestation over gender roles and transgender rights have made gender hierarchy a central partisan battleground (Sides et al., 2018; Robertson, 2025; Holman and Kalmoe, 2021; Cassese et al., 2025). In both cases, the pattern is consistent with the group position framework: sustained challenges to an established hierarchy activated attitudes related to that hierarchy as predictors of partisan conflict.

Partisan elites have amplified the political salience of these battles over group-based hierarchy. On the right, Trump's political style has made both dimensions maximally explicit, from racial nostalgia (Reyna et al., 2022) to performative masculinity (Johnson, 2017) to direct appeals to status threat (Mutz, 2018; MacWilliams, 2016). Democrats have moved in the corresponding direction. Clinton, herself a woman, ran on a platform that centered expanding opportunities for marginalized racial and ethnic groups and women.[8] Biden, while less rhetorically explicit on race and gender, sent unmistakable signals through action: diversifying the racial and gender composition of his cabinet, promising to elevate a Black woman to the Supreme Court, launching a "whole-of-government equity initiative" via executive order on his first day in office (Belco, 2025). And Harris's candidacy in 2024—as a woman of color at the top of the ticket—made race and gender inescapably salient regardless of her campaign's messaging (Robertson, 2025; Knuckey and Mathews, 2024). The cumulative effect is a party system in which both sides have organized competition around racial and gender hierarchies. The result is that attitudes about racial and gender hierarchies have become increasingly predictive of partisanship and partisan behavior. Together, these arguments motivate our first two hypotheses:

H1 (Demographic Stability): *Demographic gaps in vote choice and partisan identification by race and gender have remained stable over time.*

H2 (Attitudinal Growth): *The predictive power of racial and gender hierarchy attitudes on vote choice and partisan identification has grown substantially over time.*

2.4 Bidirectional Influence and Attitudinal Reinforcement

The cross-sectional evidence we propose in H1 and H2 is consistent with multiple causal stories. If attitudes about racial and gender hierarchies are durable and prior to partisanship, as the group position framework predicts, then the growing attitudinal gap reflects voters sorting into parties that match their pre-existing beliefs. But the same pattern would emerge if voters were simply adopting their party's positions on race and

gender, a persuasion story in which attitudes follow partisanship rather than the reverse (Zaller, 1992; Lenz, 2012; Engelhardt, 2021). Distinguishing between these accounts is both theoretically important and requires panel data that can track within-person change over time.

There are good reasons to expect sorting to play a meaningful role. If group position ideology reflects crystallized beliefs about the proper ordering of society, rooted in socialization, lived experience, and psychological factors (Blumer, 1958; Sidanius and Pratto, 1999), then these attitudes should be relatively stable over time within individuals (Tesler, 2015). What changed over recent decades, on this account, is not what Americans believe about racial and gender hierarchies but how clearly the party system maps onto those beliefs. As elites organized partisan competition around these dimensions, individuals with hierarchy-preserving or reinforcing attitudes sorted into the Republican Party and those with more egalitarian attitudes in the Democratic Party, consistent with longer term trends (Carmines and Stimson, 1989) that have accelerated as partisan signals on race and gender have become more explicit (Tesler, 2016). This is consistent with Tesler's (2016) account of racialization as activation rather than persuasion: Obama's presidency did not *make* white Americans more racially resentful, but it made racial resentment a stronger predictor of their partisan behavior.

At the same time, we should not expect the influence to run entirely in one direction. A large literature documents that partisanship and in-group elites shape downstream attitudes (Zaller, 1992; Lenz, 2012; Engelhardt, 2021). As the parties clarify their positions on race and gender, partisans may also update their hierarchy attitudes to match their partisan identity. The question, then, is not whether influence is unidirectional but what the relative magnitudes are and whether the panel evidence is consistent with the broader group position ideology framework.

Our theoretical framework also generates a third prediction beyond the sorting-versus-persuasion binary. If racial resentment and sexism are both expressions of a common orientation toward group-based hierarchies, they should not only independently predict partisan change but also reinforce one another over time. Individuals who become more racially prejudiced should also become more sexist, and vice versa, as shifts along one dimension of group position ideology spill over into related dimensions. This mutual reinforcement would provide direct evidence for the theoretical claim that unites the paper: that race and gender attitudes are not parallel but connected phenomena, jointly organized by beliefs about the proper ordering of groups in society.

H3 (Bidirectional Influence): *Racial and gender hierarchy attitudes predict subsequent changes in partisan identification, and partisan identification predicts subsequent changes in hierarchy attitudes, with influence running in both directions.*

H4 (Attitudinal Reinforcement): *Racial resentment and sexism mutually reinforce each other over time: changes in one dimension of group position ideology predict subsequent changes in the other.*

3 Data and Methods

To disentangle trends in voting and partisanship *by* versus *about* race and gender, we draw on four complementary data sources that span several decades of American electoral politics. Our primary source is the American National Election Studies (ANES) Cumulative Time Series file, which pools cross-sectional survey data from presidential and midterm election years dating back to 1948 (American National Election Studies, 2026). The temporal span of this dataset allows us to track both demographic voting and partisanship gaps and attitude-based gaps over a longer time horizon than any other publicly available survey resource.

We examine two outcomes throughout the analysis: presidential Republican vote choice and Republican party identification. We include both because they capture different aspects of the coalitional dynamics we are interested in. Vote choice is the most direct measure of electoral behavior and the outcome around which media narratives about demographic gaps are typically constructed. But vote choice is noisy, can fluctuate as a function of candidate quality, campaign dynamics, and short-term economic conditions, and a single election's returns may not reflect durable coalitional change. Party identification, by contrast, is among the most stable political orientations in the mass public (Green et al., 2002) and gaps here suggest a deeper and more durable realignment of partisan coalitions rather than short term election-to-election fluctuations.

To measure the demographic gap in partisanship and vote choice, we use respondents' self-reported gender and race to construct the gender gap (the difference between men and women in Republican vote share or Republican identification) and the racial gap (the difference between white and non-white respondents along the same dimensions). To measure polarization *about* race and gender, we rely on two sets of well-known items available in the ANES. Racial attitudes are captured using the racial resentment scale (Kinder and Sanders, 1996), a four-item index that has been asked consistently since 1986. Originally developed as a measure of anti-Black affect blending racial animus with traditional values, the scale has become the most widely used measure of racial attitudes in the American public opinion literature and, for our purposes, serves as a proxy for attitudes about racial hierarchies—the racial dimension of group position ideology. Gender hierarchy attitudes are measured using the feminist feeling thermometer, the only gender-relevant attitudinal item in the ANES cumulative file that was measured before and through the current political era (1988-2024). While less precise than a multi-item scale, affect toward feminists is closely related to the hostile sexism construct. Indeed, the hostile sexism subscale of the ambivalent sexism inventory includes items tapping

opposition to the political and economic goals of contemporary feminism (Valentino et al., 2018) and captures respondents' orientation toward the movement most directly challenging established gender hierarchies. Thus we argue that affect toward feminists serves as a reasonable proxy for the gender dimension of group position ideology. For each attitude scale, we estimate its relationship to both two-party Republican presidential vote choice and partisan identification in each available election year, allowing us to trace whether attitudes have become stronger predictors of political behavior and identities over time net of standard demographic controls. We replicate these analyses in the Appendix with another large-N social science survey, the General Social Survey (GSS), which has asked similar items over a similar time span. For full item wording across all surveys, see Table A1.

Cross-sectional data, however, cannot establish whether individuals are sorting into parties on the basis of changing attitudes or whether the parties' changing compositions are driving apparent attitude gaps. To address this concern, we incorporate panel data from the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group (VSG), which has re-interviewed a nationally benchmarked panel of American adults across multiple waves including in 2016 and 2020 (Democracy Fund Voter Study Group, 2024). The VSG includes the full four-item racial resentment battery and a six-item sexism scale tapping beliefs about gender roles, workplace equality, and the legitimacy of women's complaints about discrimination, providing more precise measures of both dimensions of group position ideology than the single-item proxies available in the other datasets. The VSG panel allows us to observe within-person change in both attitudes and partisan identification over time, enabling us to assess whether shifts in racial resentment and sexism precede or follow changes in partisanship.[9] We replicate this panel analysis with the ANES 2016-2020-2024 panel dataset.

For the first set of analyses, we estimate how strongly ascriptive characteristics (sex, race) and attitude-based measures (racial resentment, gender role attitudes) predict vote choice and partisan identification in each available year, and compare how those estimates have changed over time. We also present results from regression models that include both sets of predictors simultaneously, along with standard demographic controls for age, education, income, and race. Changes in the magnitude and statistical significance of the attitude coefficients across election years constitute our primary evidence that American political coalitions are being reshaped by what voters believe, not who they are.

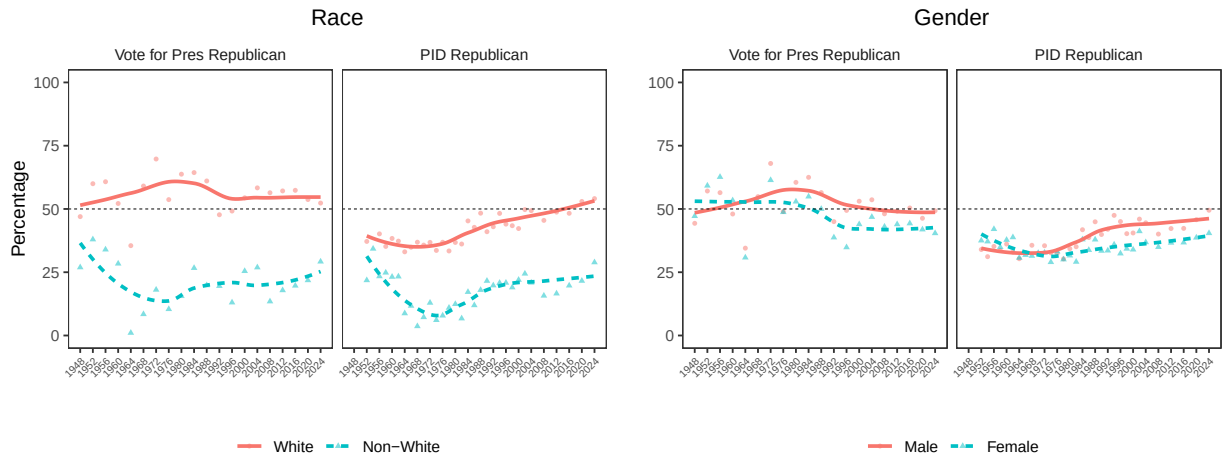
For the panel analysis, we estimate a series of cross-lagged models using the VSG panel, predicting each variable at time t as a function of its own lagged value and the lagged values of the other key variables at time $t-1$. We estimate three equations: (1) one predicting party identification from lagged party identification, lagged racial resentment, and lagged sexism; (2) a second predicting racial resentment from its lagged value, lagged party identification, and lagged sexism; and (3) a third predicting sexism from its lagged value, lagged party identification, and lagged racial resentment. All variables are standardized prior to estimation so that

coefficients are directly comparable across equations. The cross-lagged coefficients capture the degree to which each variable exerts influence on the others over time. If sorting dominates, we should observe that lagged attitudes predict subsequent partisan change more strongly than lagged partisanship predicts subsequent attitude change. If persuasion dominates, the reverse should hold. Evidence for attitudinal reinforcement (H4) would appear as positive cross-lagged effects between racial resentment and sexism in equations (2) and (3), net of prior partisanship. For full data on the questions in the VSG Panel, see Appendix Table A3.

4 Results

4.1 Demographic Gaps in Voting and Partisanship Are Stable

Figure 2: Demographic Gaps in Vote Choice and Party Identification, 1948–2024



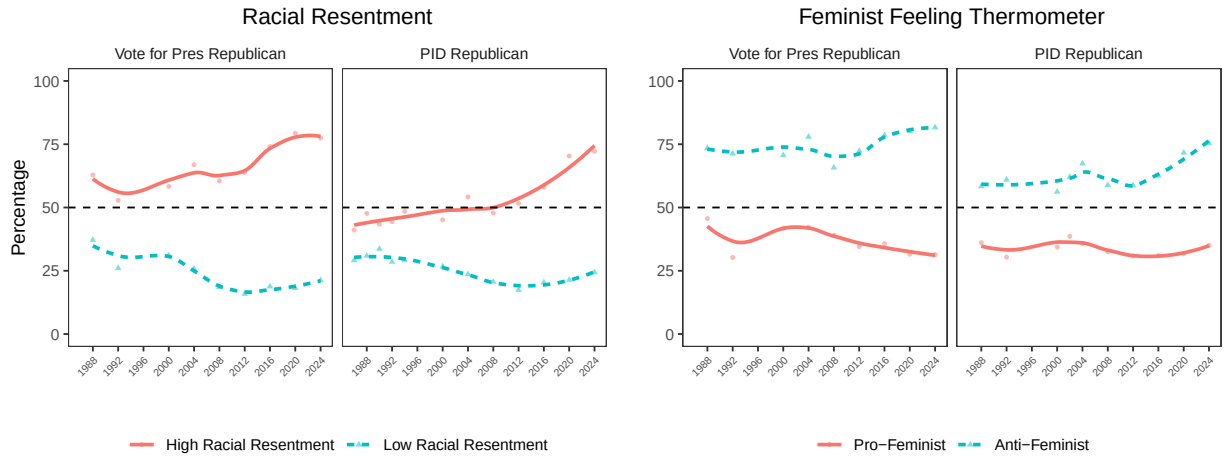
Note: the left panels show the percentage of white and non-white respondents identifying as or voting Republican (2-party presidential vote) in each ANES election year. The right panels show the same for men and women. Smoothed trend lines are estimated via local regression (LOESS). While meaningful gaps exist between demographic groups, these gaps have remained remarkably stable over several decades, with no evidence of the dramatic narrowing of the racial gap or widening of the gender gap suggested by recent post-election commentary.

Figure 2 plots the percentage of respondents voting Republican and identifying as Republican by race and gender across all available ANES election years from 1948 to 2024. The racial gap in both vote choice and party identification is large and persistent: white respondents are substantially more likely to vote Republican and identify as Republican than non-white respondents in every election year in the series.[10] But the magnitude of this gap has not changed meaningfully in recent decades. Between 2000 and 2024, the

period roughly corresponding to the rise of racial and gender issues that dominate contemporary political debate,[11] the smoothed racial gap in Republican vote choice actually narrowed slightly, from 33.9 to 29.4 percentage points, while the gap in Republican party identification widened modestly from 25.4 to 29.8 points. Neither trend suggests the kind of dramatic racial realignment that recent political commentary described. The gender gap tells a similar story of stability at a smaller scale. Men have been consistently more Republican than women in both vote choice and party identification since the early 1980s, but the magnitude of this gap has barely moved. The smoothed gender gap in Republican vote choice narrowed from 8.6 to 6.0 percentage points between 2000 and 2024, and the gap in party identification from 8.0 to 6.8 points. In short, neither the racial gap nor the gender gap shows evidence of the transformative shifts that dominate popular accounts of recent elections.

4.2 Attitude Gaps Have Grown Substantially

Figure 3: Attitudinal Gaps in Vote Choice and Party Identification, 1988–2024



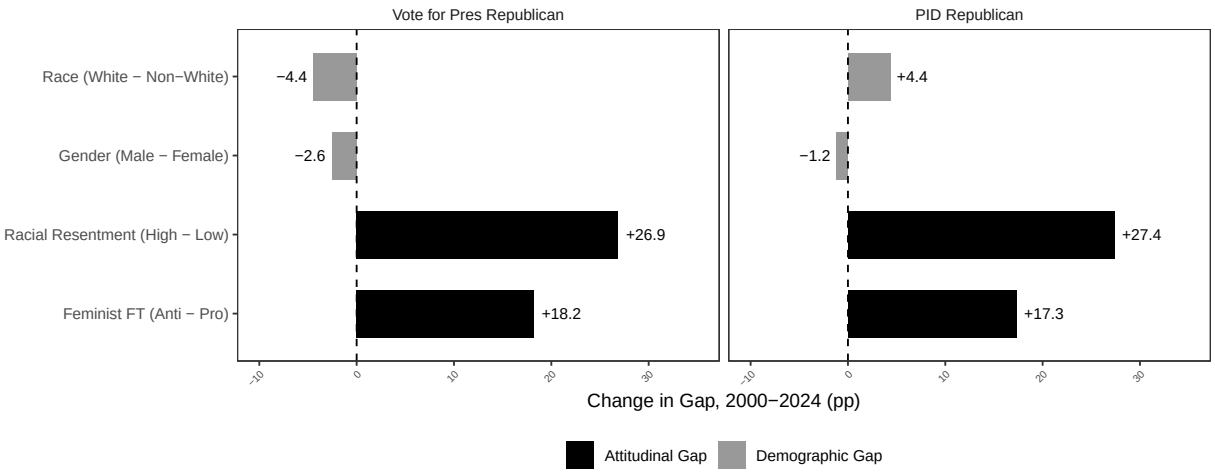
Note: the left panels show the percentage of respondents scoring above the neutral midpoint ("High") and below ("Low") of the racial resentment scale who vote Republican (2-party presidential vote) and identify as Republican. The right panels show the same for respondents scoring above and below the neutral midpoint (50) on the feminist feeling thermometer. Unlike the demographic gaps shown in Figure 2, attitudinal gaps have widened substantially over recent decades. Those with the most conservative racial and gender attitudes have become dramatically more Republican in both vote choice and party identification, while those with the most liberal attitudes have moved in the opposite direction.

Figure 3 tells a strikingly different story. To construct a comparable measure of attitudinal gaps, we divide respondents in each election year at the neutral midpoint of each scale: those scoring above 0.5 on racial resentment (scaled 0–1) are classified as "high" and those at or below as "low," and we do the same for

the feminist feeling thermometer, dividing respondents into those with favorable and unfavorable views of feminists. We then plot the weighted percentage voting Republican and identifying as Republican for each group over time. Unlike the demographic gaps in Figure 2, these attitudinal gaps have widened dramatically.

The left panels show that respondents high in racial resentment have become far more Republican over the past three decades, while those low in racial resentment have moved sharply in the opposite direction. The smoothed gap in Republican vote choice between the most and least racially resentful respondents nearly doubled between 2000 and 2024, growing from 30.2 to 57.0 percentage points—a shift of 26.9 points. The gap in Republican party identification grew by a comparable 27.4 points over the same period, from 22.5 to 49.8 points. The right panels show a parallel pattern for gender attitudes. The gap in Republican vote choice between those least and most favorable toward feminists grew from 32.1 to 50.3 percentage points between 2000 and 2024, an increase of 18.2 points. The corresponding gap in party identification grew by 17.3 points.

Figure 4: Change in Demographic and Attitudinal Gaps, 2000–2024



Note: bars show the change in the LOESS-smoothed gap between groups for each measure in the contemporary political period 2000–2024. Demographic gaps in vote choice and party identification changed by fewer than 5 percentage points. Attitudinal gaps grew by 17 to 29 points—four to seven times as much.

Figure 4 puts these trends in direct comparative perspective. Between 2000 and 2024, no demographic gap changed by 5 or more percentage points in either direction. Attitudinal gaps, by contrast, grew by 17 to 27 points—four to seven times as much. The contrast is consistent across both outcomes, whether we look at vote choice or party identification, attitudes about racial and gender hierarchies are rapidly dividing the parties while the demographic characteristics that dominate election coverage and much of the scholarly literature are doing almost nothing of the kind. Americans are not polarizing *by* race and gender, they are polarizing *about* race and gender, and it is this attitudinal polarization that is reshaping partisan coalitions.

In the appendix, we present a series of additional robustness checks. First, in Figures B2 and B3, we replicate our main findings using the 1972–2024 General Social Survey (GSS), another large-scale national survey. The GSS offers an alternate measure of sexism that was asked over a longer time period (belief that it's better for men to work and women to tend the home). We find that our main results replicate: demographic gaps by race and gender are modest and stable across the GSS timeseries while gaps based on prejudice and sexism are larger and have grown over time. Second, to address concerns that the descriptive patterns in Figures 2 and 3 could reflect compositional changes in the groups being compared rather than a genuine increase in the predictive power of attitudes, we estimate controlled regression models with our ANES data in each election year where we predict vote choice and partisanship as a function of attitudes and demographic characteristics. Appendix Figure B4 shows that the pattern of findings is consistent with the descriptive evidence: coefficients for racial resentment and anti-feminist affect have grown substantially over time while coefficients for the corresponding demographic characteristics have remained flat, net of standard demographic controls.

4.3 Panel Evidence: Bidirectional Influence and Attitudinal Reinforcement

Table 1: Cross-Lagged Panel Models: Party Identification, Racial Resentment, and Sexism

	Party ID$_t$	Sexism$_t$	Racial Resentment$_t$
Party ID$_{t-1}$	0.87***	0.09***	0.16***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Racial Resentment$_{t-1}$	0.07***	0.15***	0.66***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Sexism$_{t-1}$	0.05***	0.65***	0.14***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Intercept	0.21***	0.17**	0.17**
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)
R^2	0.83	0.70	0.78
Adj. R^2	0.83	0.70	0.77
Num. obs.	2733	2486	2714
RMSE	0.42	0.54	0.47

Note: Standardized OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables standardized prior to estimation (mean = 0, SD = 1). Data: Democracy Fund Voter Study Group panel, 2016–2020. $t-1$ = 2016; t = 2020. $^{+}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table 1 presents results from cross-lagged panel models estimated using the VSG panel. We begin with

H3, which predicted bidirectional influence between hierarchy attitudes and partisanship. The results confirm that influence runs in both directions. Looking first at the sorting pathway: we find that lagged racial resentment ($\beta = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$) and lagged sexism ($\beta = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$) both predict party identification in 2020, net of prior partisanship. These effects are modest individually but their cumulative effect is nontrivial given the stability of partisanship. Looking at the partisan updating pathway: we find that lagged party identification predicts both racial resentment ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$) and sexism ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$) in 2020, net of prior attitudes. The partisan updating coefficients are roughly twice the magnitude of the corresponding sorting coefficients, indicating that partisanship exerts somewhat more influence on hierarchy attitudes than those attitudes exert on partisanship over this period. This is consistent with prior work documenting partisan-driven attitude change on racial issues (Engelhardt, 2021) and with the expectation that Trump's presidency, which made racial and gender hierarchy unusually explicit axes of partisan competition over this time period, would strengthen the partisan updating pathway.

The results also provide support for H4, which predicted that racial resentment and sexism would mutually reinforce each other. Lagged racial resentment predicts sexism in 2020 ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.001$), and lagged sexism predicts racial resentment ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$), net of prior levels of each attitude and prior partisanship. These cross-domain effects are larger than either attitude's direct effect on party identification, and they are strikingly symmetric.[12]

This finding is consistent with a group position ideology framework. Racial resentment and sexism are not independent constructs that happen to behave similarly but connected expressions of a common orientation toward group-based hierarchies. Strawbridge et al. (2024) demonstrate this connection cross-sectionally, showing that racial resentment is correlated with gender role attitudes, modern sexism, and beliefs about gender discrimination across five presidential election cycles, and that this relationship is enduring rather than an artifact of any single electoral context. Our panel evidence extends their finding by demonstrating that the connection is not merely correlational but dynamic: shifts in one attitude predict subsequent shifts in the other within individuals over time, consistent with a shared underlying ideological structure.

We conduct a series of additional robustness checks and extensions. First, we test whether immigration attitudes fit within the same hierarchy-sorting framework. We run the same cross-lagged models adding an immigrant feeling thermometer measured in both 2016 and 2020. Appendix Table B5 shows that anti-immigrant sentiment predicts subsequent party identification net of prior partisanship, racial resentment, and sexism, and that it is itself predicted by both racial resentment and sexism. This finding is consistent with the view that immigration attitudes reflect group position ideology rather than a distinct issue domain (Kusow and DeLisi, 2020). Second, to rule out the possibility that the growing predictive power of racial resentment and sexism simply reflects general ideological sorting, we add two measures of economic conservatism —

opposition to taxing the wealthy and support for free-market principles — to the cross-lagged models. Appendix Table B6 shows mixed and generally weaker results: free-market conservatism predicts subsequent partisanship, but at a smaller magnitude than racial resentment or sexism, and opposition to taxing the wealthy does not predict subsequent partisanship at all. These patterns suggest that the sorting we document is organized specifically around group hierarchy rather than reflecting a broader rightward ideological shift.

Finally, Appendix Table B7 replicates the cross-lagged models using the ANES 2016–2020–2024 panel. The results are substantively identical to those from the VSG panel. Racial resentment and sexism both predict subsequent party identification, party identification predicts subsequent racial resentment and sexism, and the two hierarchy attitudes mutually reinforce one another across waves. These relationships hold both from 2016 to 2020 and from 2020 to 2024, as well as across the longer 2016 to 2024 interval. The ANES replication is particularly valuable because it extends the panel window to eight years and spans two distinct political contexts—the Trump presidency and its aftermath—providing additional assurance that the bidirectional dynamics we document are not artifacts of a single short-term period or a single dataset.

Taken together, these results clarify how race and gender structure contemporary partisanship. They do not operate simply as demographic categories, nor do they matter only through one-directional effects from attitudes to party identification or from party identification to attitudes. Rather, racial resentment, sexism, and partisanship form a mutually reinforcing system, with racial and gender hierarchy attitudes also dynamically linked to one another. The additional analyses show that this system extends to immigration attitudes but is not reducible to general ideological sorting on economic policy, reinforcing the claim that contemporary partisan conflict is organized centrally around group-based hierarchies.

5 Conclusion

The narratives that have surrounded recent presidential elections of a collapsing racial gap and growing gender gap share a common error: they treat the demographic composition of political coalitions as though it was the meaningful factor driving coalitional change. Our analysis suggests this is wrong. Demographic gaps in voting and partisan identification by race and gender have been remarkably stable for decades. What has changed, consistently and quite dramatically in recent years, is the degree to which attitudes about racial and gender hierarchies predict Americans' partisanship and voting behavior. Between 2000 and 2024, attitudinal gaps grew by four to seven times as much as demographic gaps.

These findings speak to a broader problem in how American politics is understood by many actors: journalists, campaign consultants, the mass public, and scholars. American political analysis, at least the way it is reported to the mass public, is built around demographic crosstabs. Surveys and exit polls are delivered

with narratives around movement across racial and ethnic, gender, age, and education groups. Political science often replicates this logic, treating ascriptive characteristics as variables that carry inherent political meaning. Our theoretical framework suggests that this approach systematically misidentifies the dynamics that matter. Ascriptive demography, politicized group identity, and group position ideology are analytically distinct. In this paper we argue that this third category, beliefs about where groups should stand in the social order, is doing the heavy lifting in electoral politics. More specifically, it is in areas where hierarchies have been recently contested—gender and race—that these groups' attitudes matter most.

Our panel evidence adds important nuance to the causal story. Rather than a clean narrative of attitudinal sorting, we find bidirectional influence: hierarchy attitudes predict subsequent changes in partisanship, and partisanship predicts subsequent changes in hierarchy attitudes. This finding suggests that the growing attitudinal gaps we document in the cross-sectional data reflect both genuine sorting and partisan-driven attitude change, reinforcing each other in a dynamic that is likely to deepen polarization about race and gender over time. More interestingly, we also find that racial resentment and sexism mutually reinforce each other within individuals over time. Shifts along one dimension of group position ideology predict subsequent shifts along the other, net of prior partisanship. This cross-domain reinforcement is consistent with our theoretical framework and with recent cross-sectional work demonstrating an enduring connection between racial and gender attitudes (Strawbridge et al., 2024), but our panel evidence provides the first demonstration that this connection operates dynamically rather than as a static correlation. It also provides the strongest justification for analyzing racial and gender attitudes jointly: these are not parallel phenomena that happen to look similar, nor are they simply expressions of an underlying general ideological conservatism, but interconnected expressions of a common orientation toward group-based hierarchies.

Our work is not without limitation. Our primary gender attitudes measure in the ANES—the feminist feeling thermometer—is a single-item affective proxy rather than a multi-item attitudinal scale, and while we validate our findings using multi-item scales in the GSS and VSG panel, the ANES time series for gender attitudes is less precise than for racial resentment. The cross-lagged panel models, while informative about relative magnitudes, are not causally identified: unmeasured confounders could drive both attitude and partisan change simultaneously, and the four-year lag between waves may obscure more rapid dynamics. Future work should extend this analysis to additional panels and to additional dimensions of group position ideology.

What is clear is that the conventional way of reading American politics largely has the story backwards. The gender gap and the racial gap in voting are not the engines of political change in contemporary America. Americans are now more polarized *about* race and gender than they have been at any point in the contemporary era, and it is that attitudinal polarization via both sorting and partisan updating—not

the ascriptive characteristics of voters themselves—that is reshaping American politics. Understanding this distinction is not merely an academic exercise. It determines whether campaigns target the right voters, whether journalists tell the right stories, and whether scholars draw the right conclusions about where American democracy is headed. The answer lies not in who voters are, but in what they believe about who should be on top.

Notes

[1] "Will the gender gap decide the 2024 election?" *ABC News*, November 4, 2024, https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/gender-gap-decide-2024-election/story?id=115272924; "The unexpected gender dynamic shaping the 2024 election," *CNN Politics*, October 8, 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2024/10/01/politics/trump-women-protector-gender-divide-analysis/index.html.

[2] "How Black, Latino and young voters shifted political leaning this election," *NPR*, November 22, 2024, https://www.npr.org/2024/11/22/nx-s1-5199119/2024-election-exit-polls-demogra

[3] Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), "Gender Differences in 2024 Vote Choice Are Similar to Most Recent Presidential Elections," Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, 2024, https://cawp.rutgers.edu/blog/gender-differences-2024-presidential-vot CAWP, "The Historic Gender Gap That Wasn't," press release, November 2024, https://cawp.rutgers.edu/news-media/press-releases/historic-gender-gap-wasnt.

[4] William H. Frey, "Trump gained some minority voters, but the GOP is hardly a multiracial coalition," *Brookings Institution*, December 13, 2024, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/trump-gained-some-minority-voters-but-the-gop-is-hardly-a-multiracial-coalitio Pew Research Center, "How voting patterns changed in the 2024 election," June 27, 2025, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2025/06/26/voting-patterns-in-the-2024-election/.

[5] See also John Sides and Michael Tesler, "America Is Less Polarized by Race — But More Polarized About Race," *Good Authority*, April 2024, https://goodauthority.org/news/america-is-less-polarized-by-race-but-more-polarized-about-race/.

[6] John Sides, Michael Tesler, and Colette Marcellin, "How Women Should Behave," *New York Times*, February 27, 2025, reprinted in *IPS Journal*, https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/democracy-and-society/how-women-should-behave-8145/.

[7] See for example: YouGov Survey: 2024 Crosstabs. Surveys also often report political attitudes and vote choice by partisanship, but this is tautological for understanding how partisan coalitions are changing.

[8]https://www.hillaryclinton.com/issues/womens-rights-and-opportunity

[9]VSG analyses focus on party identification rather than vote choice. Party identification is better suited to this test of causal direction: it is measured on a continuous scale that can capture gradual within-person movement, it is observed in every survey wave regardless of the electoral calendar, and shifts in party identification reflect the kind of lasting realignment that our theoretical framework describes.

[10]Appendix Figure B1 disaggregates the racial gap by group, showing that while Trump made modest inroads among Latino voters in recent elections, the overall pattern of stability holds across racial groups.

[11]2000 as a baseline for our comparison of gap changes represents the last presidential election before the sequence of events that, according to our theoretical framework, activated racial and gender hierarchy attitudes as central axes of partisan conflict: the post-9/11 politicization of immigration, the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and the subsequent intensification of contestation over racial and gender hierarchies through movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo.

[12]We replicate these models with demographic controls in Appendix Table B4 and show that the cross-lagged coefficients are substantively identical.

References

American National Election Studies (2026). *ANES Cumulative Data File, 1948–2024*. URL: https://electionstudies.org/data-center/.

Becker, Julia C. (2010). "Why Do Women Endorse Hostile and Benevolent Sexism? The Role of Salient Female Subtypes and Internalization of Sexist Contents". In: *Sex Roles* 62, pp. 453–467. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-009-9707-4.

Belco, Michelle H. (2025). "Moving Forward with President Biden". In: *The Administrative Presidency: Presidential Directives and Executive Policymaking*. The Evolving American Presidency. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 317–361. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-87244-0_7.

Blumer, Herbert (1958). "Race Prejudice as a Sense of Group Position". In: *The Pacific Sociological Review* 1.1, pp. 3–7. DOI: 10.2307/1388607.

Bobo, Lawrence D. (1999). "Prejudice as Group Position: Microfoundations of a Sociological Approach to Racism and Race Relations". In: *Journal of Social Issues* 55.3, pp. 445–472. DOI: 10.1111/0022-4537.00127.

Bobo, Lawrence D. and Vincent L. Hutchings (1996). "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition: Extending Blumer's Theory of Group Position to a Multiracial Social Context". In: *American Sociological Review* 61.6, pp. 951–972. DOI: 10.2307/2096302.

Carmines, Edward G. and James A. Stimson (1989). *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cassese, Erin C., Heather L. Ondercin, and Jordan Randall (2025). *Abortion Attitudes and Polarization in the American Electorate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/9781009533119.

Craig, Maureen A. and Jennifer A. Richeson (2014). "On the precipice of a "majority-minority" America: Perceived status threat from the racial demographic shift affects White Americans' political ideology." In: *Psychological Science* 25 (6), pp. 1189–1197. DOI: 10.1177/0956797614527113.

Democracy Fund Voter Study Group (2024). *Views of the Electorate Research Survey*. URL: https://www.voterstudygroup.org/data.

Engelhardt, Andrew M. (2021). "Racial Attitudes Through a Partisan Lens". In: *British Journal of Political Science* 51 (3), pp. 1062–1079. DOI: 10.1017/S0007123419000437.

Geiger, Jessica R. and Tyler T. Reny (2024). "Embracing the Status Hierarchy: How Immigration Attitudes, Prejudice, and Sexism Shaped Non-White Support for Trump". In: *Perspectives on Politics* 22.4, 1015–1030. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592724000847.

Gest, Justin, Tyler T. Reny, and Jeremy Mayer (2018). "Roots of the Radical Right: Nostalgic Deprivation in the United States and Britain". In: *Comparative Political Studies* 51 (13), pp. 1694–1719. DOI: 10.1177/0010414017720705.

Green, Donald P., Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler (2002). *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Holman, Mirya R. and Nathan P. Kalmoe (2021). "Partisanship in the #MeToo Era". In: *Perspectives on Politics* 22 (1), pp. 44–61. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592721001912.

Huddy, Leonie (2001). "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory". In: *Political Psychology* 22.1, pp. 127–156.

— (2003). "Group Identity and Political Cohesion". In: *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*. Ed. by David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 511–558.

Jardina, Ashley (2019). *White Identity Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/9781108645157.

Johnson, Paul Elliott (2017). "The Art of Masculine Victimhood: Donald Trump's Demagoguery". In: *Women's Studies in Communication* 40.3, pp. 229–250. DOI: 10.1080/07491409.2017.1346533.

Kim, Seo-Young Silvia and Jan Zilinsky (2024). "Division Does Not Imply Predictability: Demographics Continue to Reveal Little About Voting and Partisanship". In: *Political Behavior* 46 (1), pp. 67–87.

Kinder, Donald R. and Lynn M. Sanders (1996). *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

King, Desmond S. and Rogers M. Smith (2005). "Racial Orders in American Political Development". In: *American Political Science Review* 99.1, pp. 75–92. DOI: 10.1017/S0003055405051506.

Knuckey, Jonathan and Adrienne Mathews (2024). "Racial Resentment, Sexism, and Evaluations of Kamala Harris in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election". In: *Social Science Quarterly* 105 (4), pp. 1266–1279. DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.13405.

Kusow, Abdi M. and Matt DeLisi (2020). "Attitudes toward Immigration as a Sense of Group Position". In: *The Sociological Quarterly* 62 (2), pp. 323–342. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2020.1756518.

Lenz, Gabriel S. (2012). *Follow the Leader? How Voters Respond to Politicians' Policies and Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

MacWilliams, Matthew C. (2016). "Who Decides When The Party Doesn't? Authoritarian Voters and the Rise of Donald Trump". In: *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49.4, pp. 716–721. DOI: 10.1017/S1049096516001463.

Mann, Thomas E. and Gary R. Orren, eds. (1992). *Media Polls in American Politics*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution. ISBN: 9780815754565.

McClain, Paula D., Jessica D. Johnson Carew, Eugene Walton, and Candis S. Watts (2009). "Group Membership, Group Identity, and Group Consciousness: Measures of Racial Identity in American Politics?" In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, pp. 471–485. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.102452.

Mutz, Diana C. (2018). "Status Threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote". In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115.19, E4330–E4339. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.1718155115.

Nisbet, Matthew C. (2008). "Horse Race Journalism". In: *Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods*. Ed. by Paul J. Lavrakas. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 314–315. DOI: 10.4135/9781412963947.n211.

Parker, Christopher S. and Matthew A. Barreto (2014). *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691163611.

Reyna, Christine, Kara Harris, Andrea Bellovary, Angel Armenta, and Michael Zarate (2022). "The Good Ol' Days: White Identity, Racial Nostalgia, and the Perpetuation of Racial Extremism". In: *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 25.3, NP81–NP103. DOI: 10.1177/13684302211057454.

Robertson, Crystal (2025). "Paternalistic Push & Pull: The Role of Sexism in Public Opinion of Kamala Harris". In: *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*. Published online ahead of print, pp. 1–23. DOI: 10.1017/rep.2025.10036.

Self, Robert O. (2012). *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s*. New York: Hill and Wang. ISBN: 9780809026746.

Sen, Maya and Omar Wasow (2016). "Race as a Bundle of Sticks: Designs that Estimate Effects of Seemingly Immutable Characteristics". In: *Annual Review of Political Science* 19, pp. 499–522. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-032015-010015.

Sidanius, Jim and Felicia Pratto (1999). *Social Dominance: An Intergroup Theory of Social Hierarchy and Oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck (2018). *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691196435.

Strawbridge, Michael G., Heather Silber Mohamed, and Jennifer Lucas (2024). "White Racial Resentment and Gender Attitudes: An Enduring Connection or an Artifact of the 2016 Election?" In: *Political Behavior* 47 (2), pp. 801–824. DOI: 10.1007/s11109-024-09970-6.

Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner (1979). "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict". In: *The social psychology of intergroup relations*. Ed. by William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, pp. 33–37.

Tesler, Michael (2015). "Priming Predispositions and Changing Policy Positions: An Account of When Mass Opinion Is Primed or Changed". In: *American Journal of Political Science* 59.4, pp. 806–824. DOI: 10.1111/ajps.12157.

— (2016). *Post-Racial or Most-Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tesler, Michael and David O. Sears (2010). *Obama's Race: The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tichenor, Daniel J. (2002). *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Valentino, Nicholas A., Carly Wayne, and Marzia Oceno (2018). "Mobilizing Sexism: The Interaction of Emotion and Gender Attitudes in the 2016 US Presidential Election". In: *Public Opinion Quarterly* 82.S1, pp. 799–821. DOI: 10.1093/poq/nfy003.

Zaller, John R. (1992). *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appendices

Contents

A Data

A.1 ANES Cumulative Time Series and Panel Datasets

Table A1: Survey Items Used to Construct Attitudinal Scales, American National Election Studies

Construct	Variable	Question Wording	Response Scale	Reversed	Panel	TS
Prejudice	VCF9039	"'Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class"	1 – 5		✓	✓
	VCF9040	"Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should to the same without any special favors."	1 – 5	✓	✓	✓
	VCF9041	"It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites."	1 – 5	✓	✓	✓
	VCF9042	"'Over the past few years blacks have gotten less than they deserve."	1 – 5		✓	✓
Sexism	VCF0253	"Feeling Thermometer - Feminists"	1 – 97			✓
Sexism	INNOCENT	"'Many women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist"	1 – 5	✓	✓	
	CONTROL	"Women seek to gain power by getting control over men"	1 – 5	✓	✓	
	SPECFAV	"When women demand equality these days, how often are they actually seeking special favors?"	1 – 5	✓	✓	
	COMDISC	"When women complain about discrimination, how often do they cause more problems than they solve"	1 – 5	✓	✓	

Note: All items rescaled 0–1, with higher values indicating greater racial resentment or sexism. "Reversed" indicates items where the original response scale (agree-disagree Likert scale) was flipped so that agreement with the statement corresponds to the conservative direction on the final scale. ANES cumulative file feeling thermometers censor upper limits at 97. Prejudice items were identical across repeated cross-section time series (TS) and panel analyses. The second set of sexism items were only used in the panel analyses.

A.2 GSS

Table A2: Survey Items Used to Construct Attitudinal Scales, General Social Survey

Variable	Question Wording	Response Scale	Reversed
wrkwayup	"Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Black people should do the same without special favors?"	1 – 5	✓
fefam	"It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."	1 – 4	✓

Note: All items rescaled 0–1, with higher values indicating greater prejudice or sexism. "Reversed" indicates items where the original response scale (e.g. agree-disagree Likert scale) was flipped so that agreement with the statement corresponds to the conservative direction.

A.3 Voter Study Group Panel Dataset

Table A3: Survey Items Used to Construct Attitudinal Scales, Democracy Fund Voter Study Group

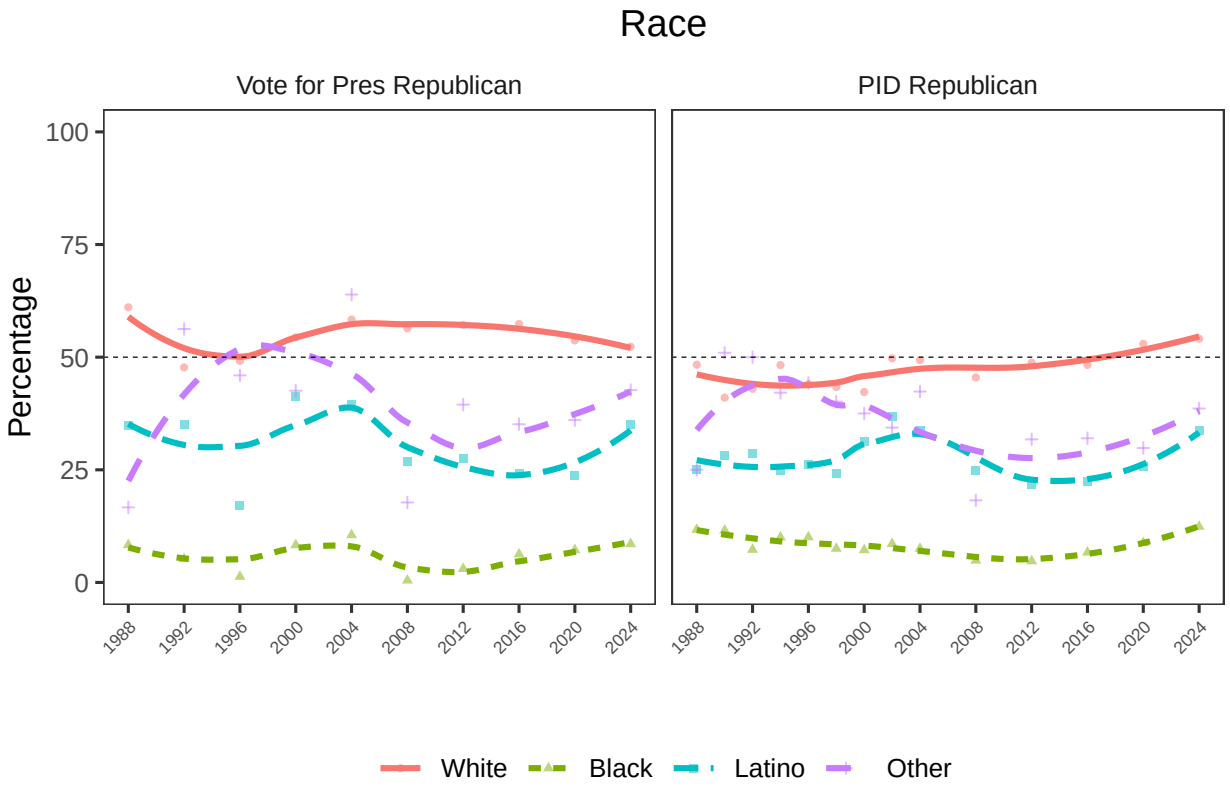
Variable	Question Wording	Response Scale	Reversed
race_overcome	"Irish, Italians, Jewish and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors."	1 – 4	
race_tryharder	"It's really a matter of some people not trying hard enough; if Blacks would only try harder they could be just as well off as whites."	1 – 4	
race_deservemore	"Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve."	1 – 4	✓
race_slave	"Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class."	1 – 4	✓
sexism_roles	"Women should return to their traditional roles in society"	1 – 4	
sexism_equality	"When women demand equality these days, they are actually seeking special favors"	1 – 4	
sexism_jobs	"Women often miss out on good jobs because of discrimination"	1 – 4	✓
sexism_complain	"Women who complain about harassment often cause more problems than they solve"	1 – 4	
sexism_workplace	"Sexual harassment against women in the workplace is no longer a problem in the United States"	1 – 4	
sexism_moreopps	"Increased opportunities for women have significantly improved the quality of life in the United States."	1 – 4	✓

Note: All items rescaled 0–1, with higher values indicating greater racial resentment or sexism. "Reversed" indicates items where the original response scale (4 point agree-disagree Likert scale) was flipped so that agreement with the statement corresponds to the conservative direction on the final scale. RR α (2016) = 0.91, α (2020) = 0.93; Sexism α (2016) = 0.81, α (2020) = 0.83

B Robustness Checks and Additional Models

B.1 ANES Results by Racial Group

Figure B1: Vote Choice and Party Identification by Racial Group, 1988–2024



Note: Panels show the weighted percentage of respondents voting Republican (left) and identifying as Republican (right) by racial group across ANES election years. Smoothed trend lines estimated via LOESS. While white respondents have consistently favored the Republican Party across the full period, the gaps between white, Black, and Latino respondents have remained largely stable. Trump-era gains among Latino voters are visible but modest in the context of the full time series, and Black support for the Republican Party remains low throughout. The pattern is consistent with the main text finding that demographic gaps in partisan behavior have not undergone the dramatic shifts suggested by post-election commentary.

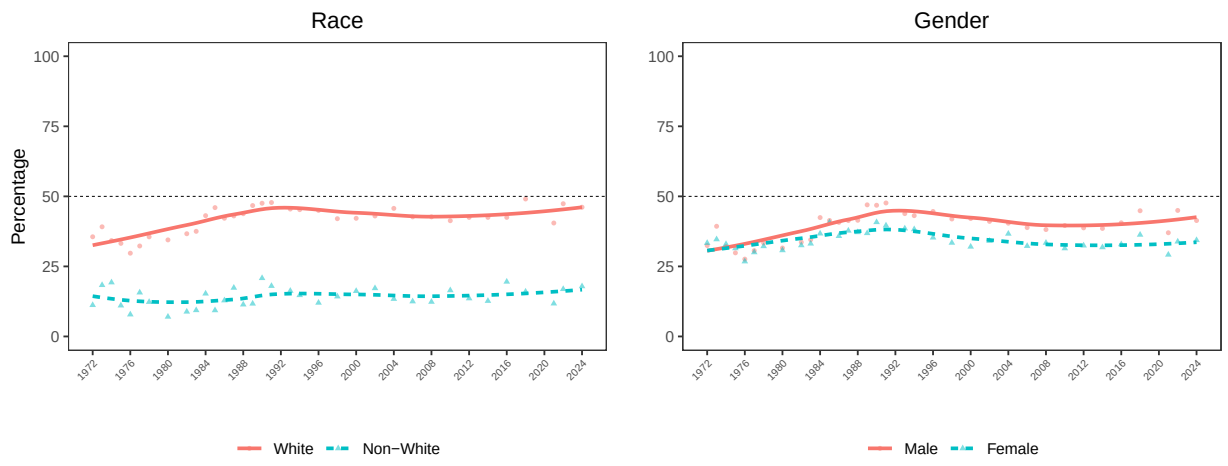
B.2 GSS Replication

To validate our main findings using an independent dataset with different measures and sampling strategy, we replicate the core analyses using the General Social Survey (GSS) cumulative file, 1972–2024. The GSS does not ask presidential vote choice, so we use Republican party identification as the main outcome. For racial attitudes, we use the "work way up" item (WRKWAYUP), which asks whether Black Americans should overcome prejudice without special favors—one of the items in the racial resentment battery, available in the GSS since 1994. For gender attitudes, we use the FEFAM item, which asks whether it is better for men to work and women to tend the home—a direct measure of beliefs about gender hierarchy available since 1977. Both items are rescaled 0–1, with higher values indicating more conservative positions, and respondents are split at the scale midpoint. Full item wording can be found in Table A2.

Figure B2 shows the demographic gaps in Republican party identification by race and gender in the GSS. Consistent with the ANES results, these gaps are present but stable over the full time series: white respondents are more Republican than non-white respondents, and men are slightly more Republican than women, but neither gap has changed substantially over several decades.

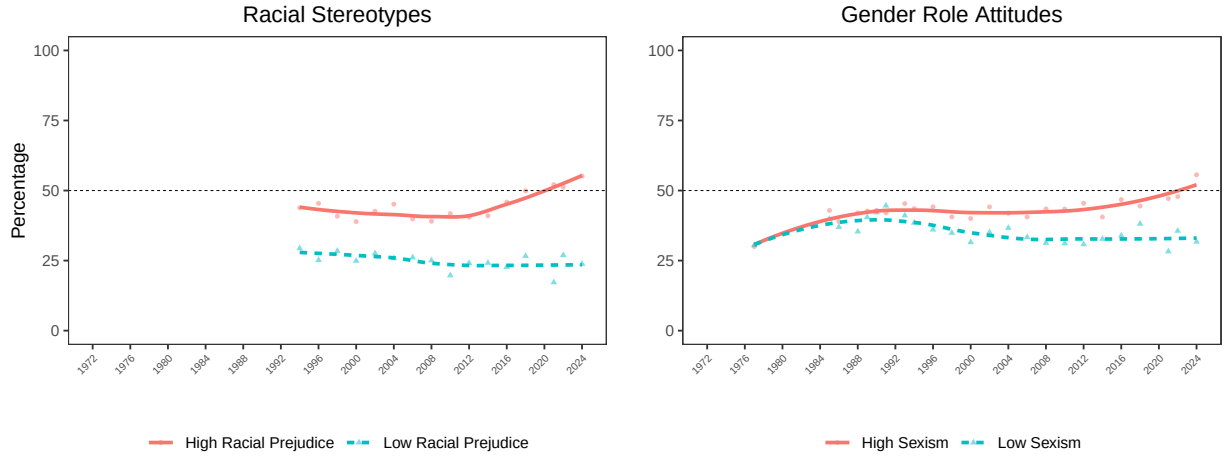
Figure B3 shows the corresponding attitudinal gaps. The pattern replicates the main findings. The gap in Republican identification between those with conservative and liberal racial attitudes has widened over time, with a notable acceleration after 2008. The gap based on gender role attitudes is smaller but follows the same trajectory: virtually nonexistent in the 1970s and 1980s, it has grown steadily over recent decades. These patterns are consistent with the ANES results despite using different attitude measures in an independent dataset, reinforcing our conclusion that American partisan coalitions are sorting along attitudinal rather than demographic lines.

Figure B2: Demographic Gaps in Party Identification, GSS 1972–2024



Note: Panels show the weighted percentage of GSS respondents identifying as Republican by race (white/non-white; left) and gender (right) across survey years. Smoothed trend lines estimated via LOESS.

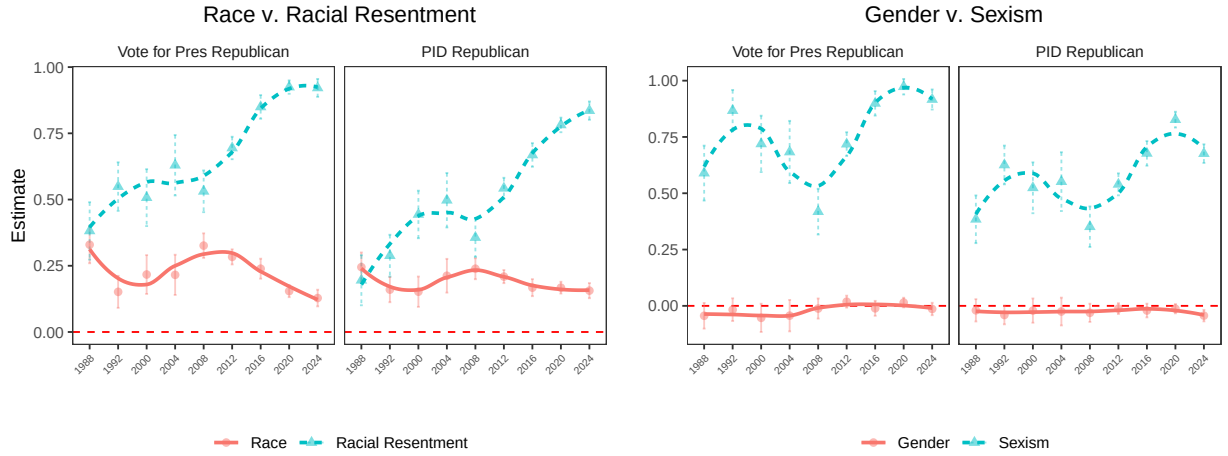
Figure B3: Attitudinal Gaps in Party Identification, GSS 1972–2024



Note: Panels show the weighted percentage of GSS respondents identifying as Republican by racial attitudes (left, WRKWAYUP item, available 1994–2024) and gender role attitudes (right, FEFAM item, available 1977–2024). Respondents are divided at the scale midpoint (0.5 on a 0–1 scale). Smoothed trend lines estimated via LOESS.

B.3 ANES Results Regression Analysis

Figure B4: Regression Coefficients for Demographic and Attitudinal Predictors of Republican Vote Choice and Party Identification, 1988–2024



Note: Each point represents the OLS coefficient from a linear probability model estimated separately by year with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. The left panels plot coefficients from models predicting Republican vote choice (left) and Republican party identification (right) as a function of a white indicator and racial resentment (scaled 0–1), controlling for gender, age, college education, and household income. The right panels plot coefficients from analogous models substituting a female indicator and the feminist feeling thermometer (reversed, scaled 0–1) for the racial variables, controlling for race (white=1, else=0), gender, age, college education, and household income. Smoothed trend lines estimated via LOESS.

B.4 VSG Panel Cross-Lagged Models with Controls

Table B4: Cross-Lagged Panel Models with Demographic Controls

	Party ID$_t$	Sexism$_t$	Racial Resentment$_t$
Party ID$_{t-1}$	0.87^{***}	0.09^{***}	0.16^{***}
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Racial Resentment$_{t-1}$	0.07^{***}	0.15^{***}	0.66^{***}
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Sexism$_{t-1}$	0.05^{***}	0.65^{***}	0.14^{***}
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Female	0.01	-0.07^{**}	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	-0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
White	0.01	-0.10^{***}	0.05^{*}
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)
College Educated	-0.03	-0.01	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Family Income	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01^{**}
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Income Refused	-0.03	0.05	-0.07^{*}
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Intercept	0.21^{***}	0.17^{**}	0.17^{**}
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.06)
R^2	0.83	0.70	0.78
Adj. R^2	0.83	0.70	0.77
Num. obs.	2733	2486	2714
RMSE	0.42	0.54	0.47

Note: Standardized OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Key predictors (party ID, racial resentment, sexism) standardized prior to estimation (mean = 0, SD = 1). Demographic controls are unstandardized. Data: Democracy Fund Voter Study Group panel, 2016–2020. $t-1 = 2016$; $t = 2020$. $^{+}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

B.5 VSG Panel Cross-Lagged Models with Immigration

Table B5: Cross-Lagged Panel Models with Immigration

	Party ID$_t$	Sexism$_t$	Racial Resentment$_t$	Anti-Immigrant$_t$
Party ID$_{t-1}$	0.87***	0.10***	0.14***	0.03$^{\cdot}$
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Racial Resentment$_{t-1}$	0.06***	0.12***	0.65***	0.05*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Sexism$_{t-1}$	0.05***	0.64***	0.12***	0.07***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Anti-Immigrant$_{t-1}$	0.04***	0.06***	0.08***	0.54***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Intercept	0.12***	0.05***	0.16***	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
R^2	0.84	0.70	0.78	0.39
Adj. R^2	0.84	0.70	0.78	0.39
Num. obs.	3488	3128	3459	3432
RMSE	0.41	0.54	0.47	0.76

Note: Standardized OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Key predictors (party ID, racial resentment, sexism, immigration FT) standardized prior to estimation (mean = 0, SD = 1). Data: Voter Study Group panel, 2016–2020. $t-1 = 2016$; $t = 2020$. $^{+}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

B.6 VSG Panel Cross-Lagged Models with Economics

Table B6: Cross-Lagged Panel Models with Economic Conservatism

	Party ID$_t$	Sexism$_t$	Racial Resentment$_t$	Free Market$_t$	Party ID$_t$	Sexism$_t$	Racial Resentment$_t$	Tax the Wealthy$_t$
Intercept	0.13***	0.06***	0.16***	0.13***	0.12***	0.05***	0.15***	0.07***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Party ID$_{t-1}$	0.86***	0.08***	0.12***	0.19***	0.86***	0.07***	0.13***	0.15***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Racial Resentment$_{t-1}$	0.07***	0.14***	0.66***	0.11***	0.08***	0.14***	0.68***	0.06***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Sexism$_{t-1}$	0.04***	0.66***	0.12***	0.11***	0.05***	0.63***	0.12***	0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Free Market$_{t-1}$	0.03**	0.03*	0.07***	0.48***				
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)				
Tax the Wealthy$_{t-1}$					0.01	0.07***	0.05***	0.62***
					(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
R^2	0.85	0.71	0.79	0.61	0.84	0.70	0.78	0.63
Adj. R^2	0.85	0.71	0.79	0.61	0.84	0.70	0.78	0.63
Num. obs.	3198	2849	3178	2923	3260	2920	3234	2693
RMSE	0.41	0.55	0.47	0.63	0.41	0.54	0.47	0.61

Note: Standardized OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables standardized prior to estimation (mean = 0, SD = 1). Data: Voter Study Group panel, 2016–2020. $t-1 = 2016$; $t = 2020$. $^{+}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

B.7 ANES 2016-2020-2024 Panel Cross-Lagged Models

For the ANES replication, we construct comparable measures of party identification, racial resentment, and sexism in 2016, 2020, and 2024. Party identification is measured using the ANES seven-point summary party identification scale in each wave, coded so that higher values indicate more Republican identification. Racial resentment is measured using three repeated items in each wave. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that Black people should work their way up without special favors, that generations of slavery and discrimination have made it difficult for Black people to work their way out of the lower class, that Black people have gotten less than they deserve, and that if black people would only work harder they could be just as well off as whites. Finally, sexism is measured using four repeated items in each wave. Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that women interpret innocent remarks or acts as sexist, that women seek to gain power by getting control over men, that women demanding equality are seeking special favors, and that women complaining about discrimination cause more problems than they solve. For each wave, we average the recoded racial resentment items and the recoded sexism items, requiring respondents to have valid responses on at least two component items. All negative ANES missing-value codes are recoded to missing before scale construction. The resulting party identification, racial resentment, and sexism measures are standardized to have mean zero and standard deviation one within wave before estimating the cross-lagged models. Full item wording can be found in Table A1.

As we show in Appendix Table B7, the results closely mirror those from the VSG panel. Racial resentment predicts subsequent party identification in the 2016–2020, 2020–2024, and 2016–2024 specifications, and sexism does so as well, though with somewhat smaller coefficients. The reverse pathway is also present: party identification predicts later racial resentment and sexism net of prior attitudes. Finally, racial resentment and sexism consistently predict one another across waves, providing further evidence that these attitudes are dynamically linked components of a broader group-position ideology rather than isolated issue-specific predispositions.

Table B7: ANES Cross-Lagged Panel Models: Party Identification, Racial Resentment, and Sexism

	Party ID$_{2020}$	Sexism$_{2020}$	Racial Resentment$_{2020}$	Party ID$_{2024}$	Sexism$_{2024}$	Racial Resentment$_{2024}$	Party ID$_{2024}$	Sexism$_{2024}$	Racial Resentment$_{2024}$
Party ID$_{2016}$	0.72***	0.06***	0.18***	0.64***	0.10***	0.16***			
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)			
Racial Resentment$_{2016}$	0.16***	0.20***	0.59***	0.18***	0.19***	0.57***			
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)			
Sexism$_{2016}$	0.05***	0.48***	0.11***	0.08***	0.46***	0.12***			
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)			
Party ID$_{2020}$							0.80***	0.11***	0.12***
							(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Racial Resentment$_{2020}$							0.11***	0.18***	0.67***
							(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Sexism$_{2020}$							0.04**	0.50***	0.11***
							(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)
R^2	0.69	0.39	0.59	0.63	0.40	0.56	0.79	0.46	0.68
Adj. R^2	0.69	0.39	0.59	0.63	0.39	0.56	0.79	0.46	0.68
Num. obs.	2814	2796	2633	2153	2142	2036	2153	2144	2038
RMSE	0.56	0.78	0.64	0.61	0.78	0.66	0.45	0.73	0.57

Note: Standardized OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All variables standardized prior to estimation (mean = 0, SD = 1). Data: ANES 2016–2020–2024 panel. $^{+}p < 0.1$; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.