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## Polarizing Issues in the American Political Parties: Women In Party Platforms

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### Abstract

This thesis is designed to investigate the relationship between the rise of cultural issues in political discussion and growing levels of polarization in the American political system. Current research within the field proposes many causes, forces, and tactics behind this growth of polarization. The corresponding increase in the prevalence of cultural issues in American politics is one such proposed cause or symptom. This thesis will provide an expansion on existing research through an exploration of the relationship between increased polarization and increasing prevalence of cultural issues in the United States.

The focus of this thesis is on the relationship between polarization and cultural issues centered on women; issues such as abortion, access to contraception, women's role within the family and society, access to healthcare, discrimination based on gender, and equal pay. An analysis of American National Election Studies data was used to establish that polarization, as defined as increased differences in the policy stances of the party, and increased ideological sorting of the electorate into these parties, is in fact growing. Then, in order to investigate the relationship between polarization and women's issues, a content analysis of party platforms from 1952 through 2012 was conducted. Using the findings from the content analysis, the parties' positions on these topics were compared and analyzed for how and where they diverge and how they have changed over time. The data compiled indicate that a political secular realignment has led to an increase in polarization where women's issues are concerned.

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