

Core Political Values and Partisan Attitude Change

Political Research Quarterly
2026, Vol. 0(0) 1–14
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DOI: 10.1177/10659129261451795
journals.sagepub.com/home/prq



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Abstract

Core political values, which reflect abstract, prescriptive beliefs about humanity, society, and public affairs, have long been recognized as central elements in belief systems. Despite their demonstrated importance, for example, in structuring issue attitudes, evidence regarding their ability to shape partisanship is surprisingly under-examined, with limited evidence to date finding, in the United States, that partisanship structures core values, with little reciprocal influence. I reexamine this here, using panel data from the 2016-2020-2024 ANES. Overall, I find that ordinary Americans do indeed update their partisan attachments, to a substantively significant degree, in order to better align their party support with their core value orientations. I also find that this relationship is not confined to a politically sophisticated minority of the public. Importantly, I find that partisanship and values dynamically influence each other, rather than the former dominating the latter. These findings have important implications for collective understanding regarding mass belief systems, as well as for the nature and dynamics of American mass partisanship.

Keywords

core values, partisanship, public opinion, political attitudes

Do ordinary people generally support the party that best matches their views regarding government and society? Here, I consider this important question, long of interest to scholars of public opinion and electoral democracy (Achen and Bartels 2016; Campbell et al., 1960; Goren 2013; Lau et al., 2014; Lenz 2012; Lucas et al., 2025; Zingher 2022), by testing how core political values, defined here as “abstract, prescriptive beliefs about humanity, society, and public affairs” (Goren 2005, 181), structure mass partisanship, here referring to attitudes toward the major political parties. I do so with panel survey data from the 2016-2020-2024 American National Election Study (ANES).¹

It is widely accepted that average citizens are, at best, moderately informed regarding public affairs, tend to engage with democratic politics as a casual observer and occasional participant, and that most people do not approach political decision-making with a great deal of ideological sophistication nor with large stores of ready-at-hand information upon which to draw (Converse 2000). However, people can overcome such cognitive limitations by drawing upon various information shortcuts, one of which is a small set of broadly accessible abstract core political values, which can facilitate principled and efficacious political reasoning (Feldman

2003). Indeed, values are widely viewed as important for public opinion and voting behavior (Alvarez and Brehm 2002; Goren 2013), due in large part to their capacity for organizing and structuring numerous specific issue attitudes (Goren et al. 2016; Jacoby 2006; McCann 1997; Vishwanath 2025), and for their ability to help voters make principled and efficacious evaluations of various candidates for elected office (Feldman 1988; Goren 2013; Macdonald 2023; Schwartz, Caprara, and Vecchione 2010).

Given that core political values have long been viewed as central elements in mass belief systems, it seems likely that someone who adopts right-leaning values, for example, favoring a society where traditional gender roles go largely unchallenged, would seemingly feel “out of step” (e.g., Carsey and Layman 2006) with a left-leaning political party that does not favor and/or does not prioritize such a society, and would thus feel pressure to

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bring their values and party loyalties into closer alignment with one another, potentially by adjusting the nature and/or strength of their partisan attachments. However, evidence regarding this is surprisingly limited, and findings to date are largely inconclusive, particularly in the United States. While past studies have found cross-sectional relationships between people's values and partisanship (e.g., Ciuk, Lupton, and Thornton 2018; Keele and Wolak 2006; Lupton, Singh, and Thornton 2015; Palmer 1995), demonstrated significant value divides between partisans on the left and right (e.g., Ciuk 2023; Heath, Evans, and Martin 1994; Jacoby 2014; Piorko, Schwartz, and Davidov 2011), and experimentally tested how external cues, for example, from social networks and partisan elites affect the endorsement of particular values (Connors 2020; Goren, Federico, and Kittilson 2009), it is not clear as to whether adopting a particular value stance leads ordinary citizens to *update* their party attachments.² To date, only two studies, to my knowledge, directly test this question with panel data, where the same respondents are interviewed at multiple points in time, and thus where we can observe *changes* in partisanship. The first, by Goren (2005) uses panel data from the United States spanning 1992–1996, and the second, by Evans and Neundorf (2020), uses panel data from the United Kingdom, spanning 1991–2007.³

Using panel data from the 1992–1994–1996 American National Election Study (ANES), Goren (2005) finds that four different values: equal opportunity, traditional family ties, moral tolerance, and limited government weakly and inconsistently shape mass partisanship, with minimal evidence to suggest that Americans' stances regarding such values lead them to update their party attachments. Instead, he finds much stronger support for the reverse relationship, writing that “core political values do not constrain partisan identities” (Goren 2005, 881) and concluding, of ordinary citizens, that party identification “colors some of their most abstract and enduring beliefs about society and public affairs” (Goren 2005, 881). In contrast, Evans and Neundorf (2020) find, using panel data from the 1991–2007 British Household Study, that “socialist vs. laissez-faire” values strongly and consistently affect party attachments among British citizens, while party identification induces substantively weak and largely non-significant changes in this core political value. Indeed, these authors acknowledge the divergence between their findings and those of Goren (2005), and write that “a re-analysis of the impact of core values in the US could be timely” and that “it might be fruitful to delve further into the partisan impact of values other than those pertaining to redistribution and equality” (Evans and Neundorf 2020, 1278).

In short, we lack clear and compelling evidence regarding core political values' ability to shape mass

partisanship, particularly in the United States. It is also not clear as to whether the aforementioned divergent findings are because, in contrast to the United Kingdom, core political values simply lack the ability to meaningfully shape partisan attitudes in the United States, or whether an alternative approach, specifically using a larger sample size that permits more statistically powerful tests, examining a more polarized time period that better reflects the nature of contemporary U.S. politics, dynamically testing these relationships over a longer time period (up to 8 years and multiple presidencies between panel waves), would yield similar results. With this in mind, I seek to reexamine the dynamic relationship between core political values and American mass partisanship. Using panel data from the 2016–2020–2024 ANES, I find strong evidence to suggest that ordinary Americans do indeed update their partisan attachments, specifically to bring them more in line with their value orientations. Moreover, I find that this relationship is balanced and dynamic, with core values and party attachments influencing each other to a roughly equivalent degree.

Overall, these findings contribute to collective knowledge regarding the dynamics of core political values and mass partisanship (Evans and Neundorf 2020; Goren 2005), showing that core values are indeed capable of shifting people's strongly held partisan attitudes, and that such values are not merely a function of, nor dominated by, their party loyalties. These findings not only underscore the important role core values play in structuring mass belief systems (Feldman 2003; Rokeach 1973; Schwartz 1992), but also advance collective knowledge regarding individual-level partisan change (Johnston 2006; Kollman and Jackson 2021).

Background and Theoretical Argument

A prominent theoretical tradition views partisanship as a psychological attachment to a party grounded largely in pre-adult socialization and affective group identities. Accordingly, partisanship serves not only as a “fundamental force” in elections, but as *the* central element in mass belief systems (Aldrich, Bae, and Saunders 2024; Campbell et al., 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002). Relatedly, this perspective views such party attachments, and corresponding cues from co-partisan elites (e.g., Lenz 2012) as the dominant manner through which ordinary citizens form political attitudes, including policy opinions, electoral choice, and retrospective performance evaluations (e.g., Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), with such attitudes exerting little reciprocal influence on individuals' strongly held and highly stable partisan loyalties (e.g., Bartels, 2002; Evans and Pickup, 2010).

Of course, this perspective regarding party identification as an “unmoved mover” that affects, but is not affected by various other political attitudes, is not universally shared (e.g., Fiorina 1981; Kollman and Jackson 2021). In particular, a growing body of work in the United States shows, across a variety of policy domains and time periods, that people significantly adjust their partisan attachments to bring them more closely in line with their issue attitudes (Carsey and Layman 2006; Chen and Goren 2016; Engelhardt 2021; Goren and Chapp 2017; Zingher 2023). This is especially true for “easier” issues regarding race and abortion, and when issue attitudes, for example, those centering around social welfare spending, are measured via multi-item scales. Given that core values are thought to underlie issue attitudes (e.g., Feldman 1988; Goren et al. 2016; Vishwanath 2025), it seems reasonable to assume that people will also seek, over time, to bring their core political values and partisanship into closer alignment. However, as previously discussed, there is little evidence, particularly in the United States, to suggest that this is the case. This is theoretically puzzling and, if true, undermines core values’ utility and centrality in mass belief systems.

I argue there are reasons to expect, in contrast to past work on this topic (Goren 2005), that ordinary people will, as a result of their core political values, meaningfully adjust the strength of their party attachments. Previous work shows that people are more likely to adjust their partisan loyalties to bring them in line with their issue attitudes during more polarized political climates (Highton and Kam 2011) and in more information-rich environments (Dancey and Goren 2010), that is, when it is clearer as to which issues “go with” which party. Indeed, Evans and Neundorf (2020, 1273–1274) find that in the comparatively more polarized 1991–1995 period of British politics, values exerted a significantly stronger influence on partisanship than in the comparatively less polarized 1997–2007 period.

Such an information environment is likely to be present in the contemporary United States, where elite party polarization has greatly increased in recent decades, something that has not been lost on the broader mass public (Zingher 2022). Indeed, ANES data shows that in 2016 and 2024 (2 years bracketing the most recent panel study), approximately 79.1 percent and 87.8 percent of Americans respectively perceived important differences between what the Democratic and Republican Parties stand for. This is nearly 20 percentage points higher than in 1992 and 1996 (2 years bracketing an earlier ANES panel study), where 63.2 percent and 54.7 percent of Americans respectively perceived such party differences. In short, these public perceptions, which are very likely to encompass perceived differences in each major party’s

more abstract value priorities, are clearly more present now than in decades past.

Taken together, these findings and evidence suggest that in the political environment of the contemporary (early twenty-first century) United States, core political values should be more likely to promote individual-level party updating, with people seeking to bring their party attachments more closely in line with their abstract beliefs regarding how government and society “should” be, and thus helping to alleviate the cognitive dissonance associated with having party attachments and value orientations that are not in sync. Of course, it is also possible that such a political environment, where partisanship has become a stronger electoral force (e.g., Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Hetherington 2001; Stapleton and Langehennig, 2024), would result in core values having an even less pronounced ability to alter citizens’ party attachments.

Panel surveys that interview the same individuals at multiple points, can help adjudicate this, and can also provide a much needed additional test of the dynamic relationship between core political values and American mass partisanship. More broadly, this makes important contributions to debates regarding whether party indeed dominates core political values, or if such values are important belief system elements that can shape people’s party attachments, an important question for public opinion and electoral democracy.

Data and Methods

To test the dynamic relationship between core political values and American mass partisanship, specifically to assess whether values can induce meaningful individual-level shifts in people’s party attachments, or if such values are instead dominated by party loyalties, I use panel data from the 2016–2020–2024 ANES. This panel study interviewed approximately 2,000 Americans (via the Internet) pre/post-election during the 2016, 2020, and 2024 U.S. presidential elections, a period of profound social change, economic upheaval, and historically high levels of partisan polarization. The ANES, which reflects a “gold standard” in public opinion research, produces a representative sample of the U.S. adult population, specifically those who are eligible to vote.⁴

While all 2020 and 2024 panel respondents participated via the Internet, a minority of respondents (approximately 1 in 4) took the 2016 ANES in-person. To maintain consistency across panel waves, and to avoid underestimating the number of “pure independents” when measuring party identification (Dyck and Santucci 2026), I only examine respondents who took the 2016 ANES via the Internet. This results in a reduction of the total potential sample size, but still yields a statistically valid

sample of approximately 1,500 respondents for my main panel analyses spanning 2016 to 2024.⁵

Beyond its exceptional quality and reasonably large sample size, this ANES panel, where the same individuals are interviewed at three different points in time, has valid measures of individuals' core political values and their partisan attitudes, my primary concepts of interest. This allows for me to conduct a compelling and appropriate test via cross-lagged regressions. This follows the modeling approach of past work (e.g., Carsey and Layman 2006; Chen and Goren 2016; Engelhardt 2021; Evans and Neundorf 2020; Goren 2005; Highton and Kam 2011; Zingher 2023), and permits a valid test of: (1) whether ordinary Americans dynamically update their partisan attachments to bring them in line with their core political values, and (2) whether core values are dominated by people's party attachments.

In my main analyses, I do so by modeling individuals' partisan attitudes (core values) in 2024 as a function of their temporally prior core values (partisan attitudes) and a lagged dependent variable, both measured 8 years prior in 2016. And while not a panacea for causal inference, this cross-lagged approach keeps with existing scholarship on this topic, yielding a valid test of the extent to which party attachments and value orientations dynamically relate to and shape one another.⁶

Measuring Partisanship

I measure partisanship via an index of three survey questions. The first is the canonical 7-point scale first introduced in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960). I reverse the coding of this variable so that it ranges from strong Republican to strong Democrat, with "pure" independents at the midpoint. The second and third are questions that ask people to rate the Democratic and Republican Parties on 10-point like vs. dislike scales, with higher scores indicating more favorable views toward that party. I keep the Democratic Party scale the same, but reverse the Republican Party like vs. dislike scale to construct my partisanship index, coding it so that higher values indicate less favorable views toward the GOP. I then combine these three questions into an index and re-scale the resulting variable to range between 0 and 1, with higher values reflecting greater Democratic Party support.

This approach is not only consistent with existing work (Goren 2005, 894), but also yields a broader measurement of partisanship. For one, this approach helps ensure that I am better capturing how people feel toward the major parties (e.g., Burden and Klofstad 2005). Second, it ensures that I can differentiate between "negative" and "positive" partisanship (e.g., Lee

et al., 2022). It is also important to note that my results are not dependent on this particular choice and that I find similar results (see Table 6) when solely using party identification (7pt scale) as an outcome variable.

Measuring Core Political Values

In my analyses, I examine the core political values of egalitarianism and moral traditionalism. I also combine responses to both in order to construct a broader measure of core value orientations. This choice of values is due in part to data availability (what is asked in the ANES), but both egalitarianism and moral traditionalism are politically relevant and consequential values in American politics (e.g., Lupton, Smallpage, and Enders 2020; Macdonald 2023; Vishwanath 2025). They are also relevant for democratic politics more broadly (e.g., Malka, Lelkes, and Soto 2019), as they touch on general themes regarding whether social and economic inequities should be tolerated vs. ameliorated, and whether lifestyles and expressions that challenge existing hierarchies and customs should be accepted vs. opposed. Indeed, the major U.S. parties take divergent positions on a host of controversies centering around both of these abstract values.⁷

Since the 1980s, the ANES has employed items to measure both of these aforementioned values. The first is egalitarianism, defined as "the extent to which one believes that social and economic equality is a problem deserving of government attention." The second is moral traditionalism, defined as "a belief in the virtue of traditional familial and social arrangements and the view that alternative lifestyles foster moral decay" (Lupton and McKee 2020, 925–926). Both of these values are measured here via two questions, with valid responses of: (strongly disagree vs. disagree vs. neither agree nor disagree vs. agree vs. strongly agree). The first question to measure egalitarianism is presented to survey respondents as follows: *this country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are*. The second question to measure egalitarianism is presented to respondents as follows: *it is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others*. The resulting egalitarianism scale is coded so that higher values indicate more left-leaning views regarding this value; it should thus be positively associated with Democratic Party support. The first question to measure moral traditionalism is presented to survey respondents as follows: *the world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes*. The second question to measure moral traditionalism is presented to respondents as follows: *this country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional*

family ties. The resulting moral traditionalism scale is coded so that higher values indicate more left-leaning views; it should also be positively associated with Democratic Party support. My combined measure of core political values thus sums respondents' attitudes toward each 2-item value (egalitarianism and moral traditionalism). This yields a single 4-item index which I re-scale to range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating more left-leaning value orientations.⁸

Preliminary Evidence

In order for people to adjust their partisan attachments as a function (in part) of their core values, there needs to be evidence of individual-level partisan change over time. Otherwise, there is simply no variation to explain, and thus no potential role for core political values as a driver of individual-level partisan change. I examine this in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#), using data from the first and third waves of the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel.

We also need compelling evidence that core political values are, at the mass level, strongly held attitudes with the ability to induce change in other belief system elements. One way of doing this is by examining the correlation between a respondent's attitude across two different time periods, with higher correlations reflecting stronger political attitudes and thus more central belief system elements (e.g., [Converse 1964](#); [Kalmoe 2020](#)). I do so in [Table 2](#), using data from the first and third waves of the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel to track the correlation between respondents' core political values (egalitarianism, moral traditionalism, and an index combining the two) in both 2016 and 2024. In short, my analyses across [Table 1](#), [Figure 1](#), and [Table 2](#) are meant to provide preliminary evidence regarding the stability of ordinary Americans' core political values, and to examine the extent to

which mass party attachments changed during this time period.

Evidence of Partisan Change

In [Table 1](#), I examine within-person partisan change by using the standard ANES party identification scale (7pt), but code it so that higher values reflect stronger attachment to the Democratic Party. In [Table 1](#), I present the distribution of ANES respondents' 2016 party identification in the columns, and the same respondents' 2024 party identification in the rows. What these data show is that, overall, party attachments are stable and resistant to drastic change. Most individuals who identified as a partisan in 2016 continued to identify with the same party in 2024. However, these data also show that there is meaningful temporal adjustment in the strength of said attachments. For instance, nearly 1 in 5 strong partisans in 2016 shifted away from this position by 2024, while approximately 2 in 3 weak partisans, 6 in 10 partisan leaners, and 8 in 10 pure independents (in 2016) adjusted the strength of their partisan loyalties over this time period, with a non-trivial share of partisans "switching" sides, and an even larger share of independents "choosing" a side.

In [Figure 1](#), I examine within-person (from 2016 to 2024) change in feelings toward the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Both are based on a post-election question that asks respondents to rate the parties on a 0 to 10 dislike vs. like scale. For both parties (Democratic and Republican), I subtract respondents' 2016 rating (0–10) from their 2024 rating (0–10), with a value of "0" indicating that they gave the same responses (on the 0–10 scale) in both the 2016 and 2024 panel waves and with lower (higher) values indicating that they report disliking (liking) the party more in 2024 vs. in 2016. In [Figure 1](#), I plot the distribution of these individual-level changes.

Table 1. Individual Changes in Party Identification, 2016 to 2024

Party ID (2024)	ANES Respondent Party Identification (2016)						
	SR	WR	LR	I	LD	WD	SD
Strong Republican	77.4%	37.2%	26.3%	10.5%	5.8%	10.6%	2.9%
Weak Republican	10.3%	27.0%	20.0%	16.8%	6.9%	8.2%	1.4%
Lean Republican	7.5%	12.6%	37.6%	21.1%	11.7%	7.1%	1.2%
Independent	0.0%	4.6%	2.3%	17.7%	4.5%	3.8%	0.7%
Lean Democrat	2.2%	7.4%	9.2%	14.7%	35.9%	12.5%	8.8%
Weak Democrat	1.4%	3.8%	1.5%	11.9%	17.0%	36.6%	8.6%
Strong Democrat	1.2%	7.4%	3.0%	7.3%	18.2%	21.2%	76.4%

Note: Shows a cross-tabulation between ANES panel respondents' party identification in 2016 (displayed in the columns) and their party identification in 2024 (displayed in the rows), with a specific focus on the percentage of respondents who exhibited some degree of change (vs. not) across this time period. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel (Internet respondents only), survey weights (V240106a) applied. $N = 1,669$.

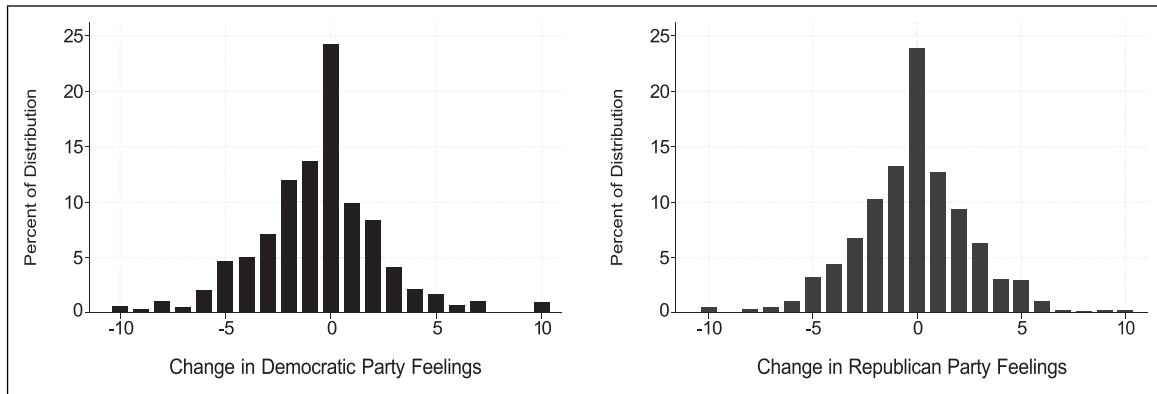


Figure 1. Individual Changes in Feelings Toward the Major Parties, 2016 to 2024. Note: Shows changes in feelings toward the Democratic Party (left histogram), and the Republican Party (right histogram) between 2016 and 2024. Scores are calculated by subtracting respondents' 2016 attitudes (ranges 0–10; dislike → like) from their 2024 attitudes (ranges 0–10; dislike → like). A value of “0” indicates no change from 2016 to 2024. Higher (lower) values on the x-axis indicate more positive (negative) changes in feelings toward each party across panel waves. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES Panel (Internet respondents only), survey weights (V240106b) applied. $N = 1,570$ (Dem Party). $N = 1,550$ (Rep Party).

Overall, the histograms in [Figure 1](#) show that while a value of “0” is the modal response, with approximately 1 in 4 ANES panel respondents giving the same exact response in both 2016 and 2024, the results in [Figure 1](#) also show that a clear majority of panel respondents (nearly 3 in 4) marginally shifted their feelings regarding the two major parties.

Taken together, the results displayed in [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#) show that meaningful individual-level partisan change, both self-identification with and feelings toward the major parties, has indeed occurred over this 8-year time period. Accordingly, there is variation to explain, and thus a potential explanatory role for core political values.

Evidence of Attitude Stability

In [Table 2](#), I test the stability of individuals' core political values and their partisan attitudes. I do so by reporting the correlation (Pearson's r) between ANES respondents' attitudes in 2016 (wave 1) and in 2024 (wave 3). Overall, the results in [Table 2](#) show that core values are only slightly less stable, over this consequential and tumultuous period in American political history, than

individuals' party identification and their feelings toward the Democratic and Republican parties. This suggests that core political values are certainly not “weak attitudes” and that they are thus likely to have the capacity to “move” ordinary citizens' strongly held partisan loyalties.⁹

For my main analyses, which I present in [Table 3](#), I use a combined 4-item core values index (the last column in [Table 2](#)) and a 3-item measure of partisanship (the fourth column in [Table 2](#)) as my variables of interest. Measuring core values in this manner also keeps with the approach of existing work on a similar topic ([Enders and Lupton 2021](#); [Lupton, Smallpage, and Enders 2020](#)), and with research showing that partisans on the left and right differentially prioritize values regarding equality and economic security vs. those centering around morality and social order ([Jacoby 2014](#)).

It is also important to note that my main results and overall findings are not dependent on this particular measurement approach. I demonstrate this in subsequent analyses (see [Table 6](#)), showing that my results are similar when I separately consider the ability of each core value (egalitarianism and moral traditionalism) to shape mass partisanship.

Table 2. Stability of Partisan Attitudes and Core Political Values, 2016 to 2024

	Attitudes Toward Major Political Parties				Core Political Values		
	Dem Pty	Rep Pty	PID7	Partisanship Index	Egal	Mor Trad	Value Index
Cor	0.608	0.681	0.715	0.771	0.604	0.623	0.701

Note: Shows the correlation (Pearson's r) between respondents' attitudes in 2016 and their attitudes in 2024. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel, survey weights (V240106b) applied. N ranges from 1,540 to 1,595.

Table 3. Dynamics of Core Values and Partisan Attitudes, 2016 to 2024

	Partisanship Index ₍₂₀₂₄₎	Core Value Index ₍₂₀₂₄₎
Core Value Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.224* (0.042)	
Partisanship Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎		0.194* (0.025)
Lagged Dependent Variable ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.783* (0.033)	0.560* (0.029)
Observations	1,532	1,540
R ²	0.610	0.534

Note: Variables of interest are a 3-item index of partisanship and a 4-item index of core political values. Both range from 0 to 1 and are coded so that higher scores reflect greater Democratic Party support and more left-leaning value orientations. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel (Internet respondents), survey weights (V240106b) and adjustments for sampling design (V240106c and V240106d) applied. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests.

Main Findings

I present my main results in Table 3. These analyses use cross-lagged regression models to test the dynamic relationship between partisanship and core political values. This approach models future (2024) partisanship/values as a function of past (2016) values/partisanship and a lagged dependent variable (also measured in 2016). Because each variable ranges from 0 to 1, the results in Table 3 can be interpreted as the change in each dependent variable resulting from a minimum to maximum increase in each independent variable. For partisanship this means a shift from the strongest possible Republican Party support to the strongest possible Democratic Party support. For core political values, this means a shift from most right-leaning orientations to the most left-leaning orientations.

Overall, I find that a minimum to maximum (0 to 1) increase in respondents' 2016 core political value orientations is associated with an approximately 0.224 pro-Democratic shift (on a 0–1 scale) in their future (2024) partisanship, a relationship that is both substantively and statistically significant. Conversely, an analogous minimum to maximum increase in respondents' partisanship (in 2016) is associated with an approximately 0.194 leftward shift (on a 0–1 scale) in their future (2024) core political value orientations.

In sum, the results in Table 3 show that core political values are indeed able to induce meaningful partisan attitude change. They also demonstrate that people's party attachments do not dominate their core values. Rather, these two important attitudes dynamically and substantively affect change in each other.

Robustness of Main Findings

In the following analyses I test how my results are affected by controlling for respondents' ideological self-identification, whether the ability of core values to induce

partisan change is conditional on political awareness, and whether the results are robust to examining an alternative dependent variable (7pt party ID) and when considering each core political value as separate predictors. These results are respectively displayed in Tables 4–6.

Controlling for Ideological Self-Identification

In Table 4, I test how my main results regarding value-party dynamics are affected when accounting for respondents' self-reported ideology. This is important to consider, given that ideological self-identification has become more electorally consequential and mentally accessible in recent years (Kollman and Jackson 2026), and because it has also been shown to be significantly linked with citizens' value orientations (Goren et al., 2022). In short, controlling for this variable helps to better ensure that core political values are actually reflecting abstract views regarding government and society rather than affective group identities and symbols (Claassen, Tucker, and Smith 2015; Ellis and Stimson 2009).

I do so in Table 4, using a post-election measure of ideological self-placement from the 2016 wave of the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel. I code this variable to be categorical (base category of *conservative* vs. *moderate* vs. *liberal* vs. *haven't thought much about this*). Overall, the results in Table 4 show that my main findings (from Table 3) hold up, that is, that core political values meaningfully shape partisan attitudes across both model specifications and that people's value orientations are not simply dominated by their partisanship.¹⁰

Heterogeneity by Political Awareness

While not the main focus of this paper, it is nevertheless important to consider the extent to which value-induced

Table 4. Dynamics of Core Values and Partisan Attitudes When Controlling for Ideological Self-Identification, 2016 to 2024

	Partisanship Index ₍₂₀₂₄₎		Core Value Index ₍₂₀₂₄₎	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Core Value Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.224* (0.042)	0.193* (0.044)		
Partisanship Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎			0.194* (0.025)	0.149* (0.030)
Lagged Dependent Variable ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.783* (0.033)	0.748* (0.042)	0.560* (0.029)	0.535* (0.032)
Control for Ideology?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	1,532	1,529	1,540	1,537
R ²	0.610	0.613	0.534	0.540

Note: Variables of interest are a 3-item index of partisanship and a 4-item index of core political values. Both range from 0 to 1 and are coded so that higher scores reflect greater Democratic Party support and more left-leaning value orientations. Ideological self-identification (four categories; measured post-election in 2016) is included as a control variable in models 2/4. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel (Internet respondents), survey weights (V240106b) and adjustments for sampling design (V240106c and V240106d) applied. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests.

changes in partisan attitudes depend on political awareness. And while ideological thinking clearly requires a good deal of political information (e.g., Kinder and Kalmoe 2017), it is less settled as to whether analogous political reasoning centered around core values is similarly dependent on such information (e.g., Goren 2012).

Here, I use two different measures of political awareness, one based on factual recall of which parties control the U.S. Congress, and another based on self-reported interest in the elections. Both are measured pre-election in the 2016 wave. I do so in order to ensure that my findings are not simply the product of one

particular measurement choice. My first measure of political awareness is based on responses to two questions about which party controlled the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate (in 2016). Respondents who correctly answered “Republicans” to both questions were assigned a value of one, while those who did not were assigned a value of zero.¹¹ My second measure of political awareness is based on a question that asks about interest in the political campaigns (in 2016). Respondents who said they were “very much” interested, were assigned a value of one, while those who said they were “somewhat” or “not much” interested were assigned a value of zero.

Table 5. Core Values, Political Awareness, and Partisan Attitudes, 2016 to 2024

	Partisanship Index ₍₂₀₂₄₎	
	(1)	(2)
Core Value Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.208* (0.059)	0.206* (0.059)
Core Value Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎ × Know Control of Congress ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.042 (0.048)	
Core Value Index ₍₂₀₁₆₎ × Very Interested in Campaigns ₍₂₀₁₆₎		0.038 (0.063)
Lagged Dependent Variable ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.773* (0.032)	0.779* (0.033)
Observations	1,527	1,532
R ²	0.611	0.616

Note: Variables of interest are a 3-item index of partisanship and a 4-item index of core political values. Both range from 0 to 1 and are coded so that higher scores reflect greater Democratic Party support and more left-leaning value orientations. Both political awareness measures are dichotomous (0/1). The mean for *Know Control of Congress* here is 0.530 (~53 percent of 1,598 respondents answered correctly). The mean for *Very Interested in Campaigns* here is 0.455 (~46 percent of 1,604 respondents answered correctly). The other constitutive terms for the interactions are included, but are not displayed here (see Appendix Table B2). OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel (Internet respondents), survey weights (V240106b) and adjustments for sampling design (V240106c and V240106d) applied. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests.

Table 6. Egalitarianism, Moral Traditionalism, and Party Identification, 2016 to 2020

	Party Identification ₍₂₀₂₀₎	
	(1)	(2)
Egalitarianism ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.234* (0.036)	
Moral Traditionalism ₍₂₀₁₆₎		0.270* (0.033)
Lagged Dependent Variable ₍₂₀₁₆₎	0.780* (0.021)	0.763* (0.022)
Observations	2,117	2,125
R ²	0.643	0.652

Note: Variables of interest are party identification (7pt) and measures of egalitarianism and moral traditionalism (both 4-item indices). All range from 0 to 1 and are coded so that higher scores reflect greater Democratic Party support and more left-leaning value orientations. OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Source is the 2016-2020-2024 ANES panel (Internet respondents), survey weights (V200011a) and adjustments for sampling design (V200011c and V200011d) applied. * $p < 0.05$, two-tailed tests.

To test the potential moderating role of political awareness, I run two separate models that regress respondents' partisanship, measured in 2024, on an interaction between their core value orientations and each aforementioned dichotomous measure of political awareness, along with a control for lagged partisanship (all measured in 2016). Overall, the results in [Table 5](#) yield little evidence to suggest that political awareness conditions the dynamic relationship between core political values and American mass partisanship. This is evidenced by the substantively small and statistically non-significant interaction terms in [Table 5](#).

While this may seem surprising at first, these results are consistent with [Evans and Neundorf \(2020\)](#), who found that values shape partisanship similarly across all education levels. They also keep with [Goren \(2005\)](#), who reported no systematic differences regarding party-value dynamics for "sophisticated" vs. "unsophisticated" respondents.¹² These findings are also consistent with work by [Zingher and Flynn \(2019\)](#), who found that even Americans at low levels of political sophistication are able, in a polarized environment, to meaningfully connect their party support with their policy orientations. In short, the dynamic relationship between core political values and American mass partisanship does not appear to be significantly moderated by political awareness, manifesting broadly across the electorate rather than only among a politically sophisticated and engaged minority.¹³

Considering Each Core Political Value Separately

In [Table 6](#), I separately examine how the two core political values of egalitarianism and moral traditionalism dynamically shape party identification rather than combining both into a single scale. I also measure each value (in 2016) via four survey items rather than two, and

measure partisan attitudes solely via the traditional ANES party identification scale (7pt; strong Republican → strong Democrat) instead of combining this variable with feelings toward each major party (as in my previous analyses). This helps to ensure that my main results are not simply the product of particular measurement choices.

As previously mentioned, the ANES does not include the same number of questions to measure each core political value over time. While the 2016 wave of this panel study includes four questions to measure moral traditionalism, the 2020 and 2024 waves only include two such questions. In contrast, there are four survey items to measure egalitarianism in all three panel waves (2016, 2020, and 2024). To maintain a consistent approach, I measure each value (egalitarianism and moral traditionalism) in the 2016 wave via four questions.¹⁴ Due primarily to question availability, specifically lacking the same number of survey items to measure moral traditionalism consistently across panel waves, I focus here on how each value (both measured in 2016) separately shape partisanship (measured in 2020), rather than the reverse. This approach also ensures that I am not glossing over potential individual-level change that might have occurred in 2020, something that a first and third wave cross-lagged analysis (from 2016 to 2024) may not be able to observe. It also permits a test of whether my main results are simply due to examining this particular 8-year time period from 2016 to 2024 (covering the Biden and first Trump presidencies).

Overall, I find similar results as in my main analyses (from [Table 3](#)). The results in [Table 6](#) show that a minimum to maximum shift (from the furthest right position to the furthest left position) in people's 2016 level of egalitarianism is, controlling for their lagged (2016) party identification, associated with a

0.234 pro-Democratic shift in their 2020 party identification (on a 0–1 scale). The analogous result for moral traditionalism is a 0.270 pro-Democratic shift in people's (2020) party identification. These results are both substantively and statistically significant. In short, the results in Table 6 should help to shore up the robustness of my main findings, further demonstrating that American mass partisanship is indeed meaningfully shaped by people's core political values.

Conclusion and Political Implications

Using high-quality panel data from the 2016–2020–2024 ANES, I have conducted a series of tests regarding the dynamic relationship between core political values and mass partisanship in the United States. Overall, these findings make a substantial contribution to a limited body of work on this topic (Evans and Neundorf 2020; Goren 2005), providing strong evidence to suggest that core values, which occupy an important place in belief systems and underlie much political reasoning (e.g., Feldman 1988; Vishwanath 2025), are stable attitudes that do indeed matter for the dynamics of individual-level partisanship. While the electoral impact of partisanship and its centrality in mass belief systems is well-established (Aldrich, Bae, and Saunders 2024; Campbell et al., 1960; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002), these results show that dynamic individual-level updating of party loyalties does indeed occur over time (Kollman and Jackson 2021; Zingher 2022), due in part to people seeking consonance between their abstract views regarding how government and society “should be” and whether they align themselves with the party that best matches up with such views.

Of course, this work is not without limitations, and future scholarship could potentially address some of them. First, these analyses use data during Donald Trump's omnipresence in American politics and his place atop three national tickets (2016, 2020, and 2024). This was certainly not a “quiet” political era and also saw Trump frequently embrace policies that run counter to traditional Republican Party orthodoxy (e.g., Barber and Pope 2019; Hopkins and Noel 2022). As such, party loyalties may be more susceptible to change than normal (Kollman and Jackson 2021). On the other hand, party attachments have, during a more polarized and sorted era of American politics, become an increasingly powerful identity (Mason 2018) and thus something that could theoretically be less susceptible to change. As such, it is not obvious whether analyses covering another time period would yield different conclusions. This is something that certainly merits attention and testing. Data permitting, future work

would do well to test the relationship between core values and partisan attitudes in other countries, taking into account the challenges associated with measuring partisanship cross-nationally (e.g., Bankert, Huddy, and Rosema 2017; Schickler and Green 1997), and how to best model such dynamics in a multi-party system.

It is also important to recognize that egalitarianism and moral traditionalism do not represent the universe of potential values (e.g., Jung and Clifford 2025; Schwartz 1992). As such, future work would do well, data permitting, to theorize about and test *which* values are capable of inducing shifts in mass partisanship, and which are not. It would also be worthwhile to further test the extent to which voters “follow the leader” (Lenz 2012), for example, by adjusting their core values to bring them in line with their attitudes toward specific candidates or whether, in contrast to previous findings from the United States during the early 1990s (McCann 1997), the reverse pattern now holds true.

Given the importance of partisan attachments and core values for public opinion and electoral behavior (Campbell et al., 1960; Goren 2013), it is important to more solidly understand how they relate to one another. Party attachments dominating and leading people to reorient their core political values arguably reflects a polity where people do not “lead” but instead one in which they are more likely to be “led by” elites. In contrast, finding that values meaningfully shaping party loyalties arguably reflects a more normatively desirable democracy, where people are more likely to make political decisions based on their abstract views regarding how government and society “should” be, rather than one in which citizens are willing to potentially abandon such views in the name of party loyalty.

Here, I have shown that core values do indeed meaningfully shape party attachments, and that while the latter also influences the former, it does not dominate. My findings here are situated largely in between those of Goren (2005) who found, in the U.S., that the influence of party on values was substantially stronger than the reverse, and those of Evans and Neundorf (2020) who found, in the U.K., that values dominated party attachments. Overall, these findings meaningfully contribute to collective understanding regarding partisanship, core values, and the nature of belief systems in mass publics.

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Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. The [supplemental appendix](#) can be found in the electronic version of the manuscript at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/prq>. The [appendix](#), along with the data/code to replicate all analyses in the main paper will also be made publicly available for download via the Harvard Dataverse at: <https://data.harvard.edu/dataverse>.
2. I use the terms core values and core political values interchangeably throughout this paper. While the American National Election Studies (ANES) has valid measures of core political values, it unfortunately does not have analogous measures of core human values ([Rokeach 1973](#); [Schwartz 1992](#)) which are related to, but also conceptually distinct from, core political values. Ideally, human values will be included in future iterations of the ANES, similarly to what is now asked in the European Social Survey (ESS).
3. [Lupton and McKee \(2020\)](#) use both cross-sectional and panel data in the United States to consider the role of two core values, egalitarianism and moral traditionalism, in shaping the partisan realignment of the U.S. South from 1988 to 2016, with a particular focus on the early 1990s (panel data from 1992 to 1996). Overall, they conclude that “one core value in particular, egalitarianism, has contributed to the movement of party identification in the dynamic setting of a realigning South” (p. 932). While this paper is valuable and informative, its focus on White Americans, Southern U.S. politics, theoretical emphasis on an interaction between core values and time, and [small N] panel analyses that only test how egalitarianism, but not moral traditionalism, shape party identification, limits its generalizability for making claims about how core political values matter, on average, for mass partisanship.
4. The ANES employs probability sampling and includes respondents from all 50 U.S. states (plus D.C.).
5. In subsequent analyses (see [Table 6](#)), I only focus on people who participated (via the Internet) in the 2016 and 2020 panel waves. This yields a valid sample size of approximately 2,000 respondents.
6. I also conduct a further panel analyses from 2016 to 2020, spanning Donald Trump’s first presidency. This analysis (see [Table 6](#)) shows that my results are similar over a shorter 4-year time period, that each of the two core values I examine here separately shape partisanship, and that my results hold up when using only the traditional 7pt party identification scale as an outcome variable.
7. From 1984 to 2012, the ANES used six questions to measure egalitarianism, but then, for reasons that are not entirely clear, only included four questions in 2016, 2020, and 2024. Similarly, from 1986 to 2016, the ANES used four questions to measure moral traditionalism, but then only included two questions in 2020 and 2024. As such, the 2016, 2020, and 2024 waves of the ANES panel includes four questions to measure egalitarianism. However, the 2016 wave includes four questions to measure moral traditionalism, while the 2020 and 2024 waves only include two questions to measure this value. To maintain consistency, I measure each value (egalitarianism and moral traditionalism) with two questions in my various analyses ([Tables 3-5](#)). Accordingly, my measure of core values is based on a total of four survey questions in each panel wave. In subsequent analyses (see [Table 6](#)), I show that my results are similar when I use 4-item measures of both egalitarianism and moral traditionalism in 2016 as my main explanatory variables.
8. See [Supplemental Appendix A](#) for detail on variable coding and creation.
9. While the comparisons are not perfect, owing to differences in samples (in-person vs. Internet), how core political values are measured in the ANES, the use of survey weights (vs. not), and making comparisons between squared continuity correlations vs. conventional measures (Pearson’s r), the correlation for core values across an 8-year time period in [Table 2](#) (from 2016 to 2024), are slightly stronger than the 2-year and 4-year correlations reported by [Kalmoe \(2020, 782\)](#) in his (full sample) analyses of the 1990–1992 and 1992–1996 ANES panels. Relatedly, the difference between value and party stability is much smaller in the 2016–2024 ANES panel than in similar ANES panels from the 1990s. Of course, relative to mass samples, politicians exhibit exceptional value stability ([Searing, Jacoby, and Tyner 2019](#)).
10. I only display my main results in [Table 4](#), illustrating how the dynamic relationship between core political values and partisan attitudes over the 2016 to 2024 time period change when including this control variable (vs. not). The full models which include the estimates for this 4-category measure of ideological self-placement are shown in [Appendix Table B1](#).
11. Those refused to answer either question (V161515 and V161516) or said that “Democrats” controlled either chamber in 2016 were coded as being incorrect. Self-reported campaign interest is based on V161004.
12. This is mentioned in [Goren \(2005, 890\)](#), specifically in footnote 16 of that paper. It is not clear, however, as to how sophistication was defined nor measured in this ultimately unreported analysis.
13. Because I am more interested in examining the ability of core political values to shape partisanship, rather than the reverse, I do not run models (in [Table 5](#)) that regress respondents’ 2024 partisanship on an interaction between

their (2016) value orientations and (2016) political awareness.

14. For my analyses in Table 6, egalitarianism is measured in 2016 via the following four survey items: V162243, V162244, V162245, and V162246. Moral traditionalism is measured in 2016 via the following four survey items: V162207, V162208, V162209, and V162210. See Appendix A for greater detail.

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