CULTURAL WARS IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Critical Reviews of a Popular Myth

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Editor

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In *Culture Wars* (1991) Hunter extends and dramatizes a claim first made by Wuthnow (1988). The claim is that in America, religious, political, and cultural tensions are becoming increasingly aligned along a single liberal-conservative dimension. Religious, political, and cultural conservatives are coming to share a common cluster of values and beliefs that stand in opposition to a cluster of values and beliefs that are increasingly shared by religious, political, and cultural liberals. According to Hunter, these liberal-conservative tensions are especially problematic since they are rooted in two different views of moral authority, a situation that makes compromise difficult, if not immoral. “The end to which these hostilities tend,” he writes, “is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others” (1991:50).

Responding to early reviewers of *Culture Wars* who rightly pointed out that Americans are not as polarized as the book implies, the preface to Hunter’s *Before the Shooting Begins* notes that the culture war is more a battle between moral visions than it is a war between persons. The culture war, he claims, “cannot be explained in terms of ordinary people’s attitudes about public issues,” but he goes on to note that “these moral visions are often enough reflected (imperfectly) in the world views of individuals” (1994:viiff.).

The goal of this chapter is to examine whether this “battle between moral visions” has left its traces (albeit “imperfectly”) in the attitudes of ordinary people toward public issues. If there is to be a culture “war,” it must involve the public as well as elites. There must be soldiers as well as generals. Without soldiers, generals can only engage in duels, not war.

In particular the goal of this chapter is to ask whether cultural tensions
as reflected in public opinion are well described by a single liberal-conservative dimension. If the one-dimensional, bipolar, liberal-conservative tension that Hunter sees in the discourse of elites has any relevance beyond the elites themselves, then it should leave its traces in the opinions of average Americans, too. If Hunter is right about the one-dimensional structure of these tensions, then knowing a person's views on one or two liberal-conservative issues should enable one to make a good prediction about the person's views on other liberal-conservative issues.

This is an important issue. Cultural warfare depends on the ability of the soldiers to identify clearly which side they are on. Further, they must not switch sides with each new issue “battle.” Those who are conservative on one issue should be conservative on other issues as well. When there is more than one dimension to cultural conflicts, people are exposed to important cross-pressures, cross-pressures that make them less willing to engage in an all out “us versus them” culture war.

I find that among the public there is a good deal of alignment on many of the religious, political, and cultural issues identified by Hunter (and earlier by Wuthnow 1988). But instead of a single liberal-conservative dimension, the issues identified by Hunter actually form two separate types of liberalism-conservatism that are unrelated in the minds of most Americans. Knowing someone's views toward the Bible will help you guess their views toward abortion, but it helps little in predicting their political party affiliation, for whom they voted for president, or their views toward welfare spending.

I begin by proposing a two-dimensional model of political division based on suggestions made long ago by Lipset (1981), and similar models used more recently by Maddox and Lilie (1984) and Fleishman (1988). Second, I use General Social Survey (GSS) data and a new graphical technique to examine the fit of the two-dimensional model with the values, opinions, religious, and demographic characteristics of the general public. I conclude by arguing that the two-dimensional structure of public opinions may actually constrain the positions taken by political and cultural elites. The unwillingness of the general public to align along a single liberal-conservative dimension defined by elites puts a brake on the type of runaway one-dimensional polarization that Hunter sees in the discourse of elites. The two-dimensional structure of public opinion may act as a preventative to culture war.

A TWO-DIMENSIONAL MODEL

In their book Beyond Liberal and Conservative (1984), Maddox and Lilie argue that scholars as well as the media have labored for too long under the
false impression that political differences vary along a single liberal-conservative dimension. Drawing on their work, I suggest that there are two separate types of liberalism and conservatism: economic-justice and personal-moral. Moreover, these two types of liberalism-conservatism are not themselves related (aligned) among the general public. Many people are conservative on one set of issues and liberal on the other. Table 1 shows these two dimensions and their cross-classification.

The first type of liberalism-conservatism concerns personal-moral issues, the extent to which people feel restrictions should be placed on personal behavior, especially life-style, sexuality, sex roles, and free speech. Personal-moral liberals (in the left-hand column of Table 1) favor greater personal freedoms because they believe that no government or church has the authority to determine what is best for an individual to think and do concerning such issues. It is an individualistic orientation having much in common with "expressive individualism" as described by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton in *Habits of the Heart* (1985). The goal of this orientation is greater individual self-actualization, discovery, and self-expression.

In contrast, personal-moral conservatives (in the right-hand column of Table 1) take a more communitarian orientation toward personal behavior, life-style, sexuality, sex roles, and free speech. They hold that it is vital for the common good of society to uphold certain standards in these areas, and thus society has a right to regulate certain individual behaviors and beliefs. Without such standards, they argue, increased "moral decay," dishonesty, corruption, sexual immorality, and irresponsibility in child rearing will result, threatening society and possibly leading to the nation's "downfall."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regulation of Lifestyle, Sexuality, Sex Roles, and Free Speech (Personal-Moral Issues)</th>
<th>Oppose (Individualistic) &quot;Liberal&quot;</th>
<th>Favor (Communitarian) &quot;Conservative&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favor (Communitarian) &quot;Liberal&quot;</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>Bicommmunitarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation of Economic and Social Behavior (Economic-Justice Issues)</td>
<td>Oppose (Individualistic) &quot;Conservative&quot;</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thus there need to be restrictions on ideas and behaviors thought to have a corrupting influence. The goal of this orientation is greater righteousness in cultural values and personal/interpersonal behavior. It is this concern for "righteousness" that explains why attitudes toward free speech also vary along this dimension. For personal-moral conservatives, unregulated free speech threatens to undermine the shared moral standards that help maintain social solidarity.

The second type of liberalism and conservatism deals with economic-justice issues. On this dimension people disagree concerning how much the government should restrict and regulate social, especially economic, behavior in order to bring about greater equality of wealth, power, and social esteem. Economic-justice liberals (in the top row of Table 1) favor affirmative action, economic regulation, and redistribution of wealth to aid the poor and the oppressed. It is a communitarian orientation in that it justifies the regulation of individual behavior for the sake of the common good. Economic-justice liberals argue that such controls are necessary to limit the inequality and injustice that hurt all members of society by fostering suspicion, hate, and violence. The goal of this orientation is equity, which is variously interpreted as equality, progress toward equality, or at least equality of opportunity.

In contrast, economic-justice conservatives (in the bottom row of Table 1) defend the right of individuals to pursue their economic self-interests in a marketplace free of government intervention. They argue that government regulations, taxation, and affirmative action stifle initiative and limit the prosperity that might otherwise accrue to rich and poor alike. It is an individualistic orientation having much in common with "utilitarian individualism" as described by Bellah et al. in *Habits of the Heart* (1985). The goal of this orientation is maximum economic utility, wealth, and happiness for the greatest number of individuals.

With regard to each issue dimension, there is an individualistic and a communitarian pole. People either oppose or favor (to varying degrees) regulation of the behaviors relevant to that dimension. Those who favor regulation argue that it is for the common good of society. Those who oppose it argue that society has no authority to regulate such behaviors. Thus, for example, personal-moral liberals oppose the regulation of behavior related to life-style, sexuality, sex roles, and free speech while personal-moral conservatives favor certain restrictions on these behaviors. Table 1 identifies the individualistic and communitarian ends of each dimension and shows what liberal and conservative mean with regard to each set of issues. Note that the term liberal is associated with opposing the regulation of personal-moral behavior but is associated with favoring regulation of economic-justice behavior. Similarly, the term conservative is commonly associated with opposing regulation of economic-justice behavior but also
with favoring regulation of personal-moral behavior. This explains why many political commentators have attacked the inconsistency of both liberals and conservatives with regard to support for government “interference” in various types of behavior.

Table 1 cross-classifies these two forms of liberalism-conservatism to create a fourfold table that more adequately maps current political and cultural positions. Each of the four cells represents a combined position on the two types of liberalism-conservatism. Those in the upper left-hand cell are part of the Left: they are liberals in both personal-moral matters (opposing regulation) and economic-justice matters (favoring regulation). In contrast persons in the lower right-hand cell are part of the Right: they are conservatives in both personal-moral matters (favoring regulation) and economic-justice matters (opposing regulation).

If there were fundamentally only one liberal-conservative dimension in American politics, these two cells (left and right) would be sufficient to map the major differences between people and policies. However, Table 1 shows two other positions. Libertarians in the lower left-hand cell are liberals on personal-moral matters but conservatives on economic-justice matters. They consistently oppose the regulation of both types of behavior. Bicomunitarians are found in the upper right-hand cell and are personal-moral conservatives but liberal on economic-justice matters. They are bicomunitarians because they consistently favor the regulation of both types of behavior for the overall good of the society.

Of course, I am not the first to recognize these two sets of issues in American politics (e.g., Lipset 1981). Political commentators frequently refer to these different issue domains, but often assume that the two types of liberalism-conservatism go together, that people who are conservative on one set of issues are usually conservative on the other issues, too. However, Maddox and Lilie review national surveys of opinion and voting behavior going back to the 1950s and 1960s and conclude that there are actually more bicomunitarian and libertarian voters than there are persons in the Left and the Right. They further suggest that the preoccupation of the two major political parties with the concerns of the Left and the Right ignores the interests of libertarians and bicomunitarians and leads to the kinds of voter frustrations that make third-party candidacies common. Other survey research (e.g., Fleishman 1988; Olson and Carroll 1992) and cultural analyses (Platt and Williams 1988) confirm the statistical and conceptual independence of these two dimensions among the general public. Among the general public one cannot predict how liberal or conservative a person will be on economic-justice issues based on knowing their position on personal-moral issues.

Individualism and communitarianism receive relatively little attention in Hunter’s analysis. This is because he sees the two communitarian orienta-
tions (as defined here) as standing at opposite ends of a single conservative-liberal dimension. This leaves no room for individualism. In contrast, a two-dimensional model makes it easier to see that many cultural conflicts are related to tensions between individualism and concern for the common good, a theme emphasized by many other cultural commentators, especially Bellah et al. (1985).

TWO DIMENSIONS OR ONE?

Conceptually the two-dimensional scheme fits together quite nicely, but does it fit with the views of the American public? Much of the analysis presented here is an extension of an earlier analysis (Olson and Carroll 1992). In that analysis Jackson Carroll and I identified thirty-one items used in the 1988 GSS that appear to measure values and beliefs identified by Wuthnow (1988) in his descriptions of conservatives and liberals. [See Olson and Carroll (1992) for a full description of these items.] We used the 1988 GSS since this version of the survey includes a special set of questions relating to religion.

We found that many of these items are strongly correlated with one another in a manner consistent with Wuthnow's, and later Hunter's (1991), descriptions. Yet, many pairs of these items were not correlated at all. Contrary to a one-dimensional model of cultural and political value alignment, we found that the items could be grouped into two subsets or factors such that the items in each subset were quite highly correlated with other items in the same subset but not very correlated with items in the other subset.

The first subset of items we identified corresponds fairly well with the personal-moral dimension. It includes items dealing with sexuality (premarital, extramarital, homosexual, and teen sex), abortion (under a variety of circumstances), women's roles, and civil liberties—free speech (whether people with certain viewpoints should be allowed to speak in the respondent's community).

The second subset corresponds quite closely with the economic-justice dimension and includes views on federal programs designed to equalize income inequalities, help the poor, the sick, and minorities, and items related to defense spending, government spending on welfare, the environment, education, foreign aid, big cities, and assistance to Blacks. Of these items, those dealing with defense spending, the environment, education, and certain racial issues fit the least well (both empirically and theoretically) with the others in this group. Thus in the analysis presented below I use an economic-justice scale that differs somewhat from those described in Olson.
and Carroll (1992). Specifically, it does not include items related to defense spending, the environment, education, and certain racial issues. I consider these issues separately.

Because the items within each subset have fairly high intercorrelations, I combined the items in each subset to form a scale, a single score for each respondent representing their average views on all the items in the subset. Cronbach's alpha for the first scale, the economic-justice dimension, is .7311. Cronbach's alpha for the second scale, the personal-moral dimension, is .8599.4

In Hunter's analysis the issues represented by the two scales stand in opposition to one another, suggesting that the two scales should have a strong negative correlation. In fact, the two scales used here have almost no correlation (Pearson's $r = -.059$, $R^2 = .004$). Less than half of one percent of the variation in people's attitudes toward personal-moral issues is associated with variation in their views toward economic-justice issues. This is consistent with Maddox and Lilie (1984), who claim that the dimensions are essentially independent, and with Fleishman (1988), who used LISREL to perform confirmatory factor analysis on a nearly identical set of GSS items and found essentially the same two statistically independent dimensions. Fleishman concludes that a two-dimensional model fits the attitude variation of the American public quite well and much better than a one-dimensional model.

Figure 1 shows a scatterplot of respondents' views on the two scales created from these two sets of items. Both scales have been standardized. The horizontal axis measures respondent's views on the personal-moral issue domain. I have labeled this axis to show that scores higher than zero reflect viewpoints that are more consistent with personal-moral conservatism while scores less than zero reflect personal-moral liberalism. The vertical axis measures respondent's views on economic-justice issues. Scores higher than zero reflect economic-justice liberalism while scores of less than zero reflect economic-justice conservatism. For both cases, positive scores indicate more communitarian positions.

Consistent with Table 1, I divide the plot into four regions to represent the four combinations of viewpoints they identify. Each of the dots simultaneously represents one of the 1481 GSS respondent's views on both scales. Thus, for example, people plotted in the lower right corner are part of the Right. Respondents plotted in the upper right region are bicomunitarians, and so on. The scatterplot also shows an almost flat regression line sloping slightly down and to the right. This line represents the best fit of a straight line to the 1481 points plotted on the scatterplot. It is nearly flat because of the virtual lack of relationship between the two scales.

Two important conclusions emerge from Figure 1. First, the public does not appear polarized into two warring groups of Left and Right. The center is
the most densely populated region of the scatterplot. Second, respondents' views on the two sets of issues are not related to one another. If they were, most people would be plotted in the upper-left or lower right, they would either be part of the Left or the Right. However, consistent with a two-dimensional model, about equal percentages of the respondents fall into each of the four regions (libertarian 25 percent, bicomunitarian, 24 percent, the Right 24 percent, and the Left 27 percent).

The failure of the two scales to be aligned is not due to their being based on poor-quality items that do not belong together. Nor does it reflect an inability of people in the general public to connect related issues in their minds, as Converse (1964) might suggest. The items used in each scale are strongly correlated with other items within the same scale, even among the general public.

This analysis suggests that Hunter is correct in terms of the themes he identifies as forming important clusters of related viewpoints. The difference is that, at least among the public, these themes do not sit at opposite ends of a single conservative-liberal issue dimension. They form two separate, unrelated, issue dimensions.
THE PUBLIC: UNDERLYING DIFFERENCES

Hunter (1991) and Wuthnow before him (1988) warn that cultural tensions could become especially intense since they are now aligned with important religious, educational, and political differences. But even if they are correct, Figure 1 suggests that there is more than one dimension with which these differences may be aligned. If so, then it becomes especially important to see how religious, educational, and political differences are associated with these two dimensions. Figures 2 and 3 examine the linkages between these issues and the two dimensions described above.

Figure 2 is based on Figure 1. The two axes are, like Figure 1, based on personal-moral and the economic-justice scales (though they are numbered somewhat differently). Figure 2 also shows the boundaries of the four regions. The main difference is that, in order to reduce clutter Figure 2 does not show the dots representing each respondent in the scatterplot. Instead, Figure 2 shows arrows drawn from the center of the figure pointing in the directions in which the values of other variables increase most rapidly among the survey respondents.

I determined the directions and lengths of these arrows using multiple regression. Each arrow is drawn from the center of the scatterplot to a point representing the two standardized regression betas from a regression having the following form: dependent variable = constant + (beta1 * score on personal-moral scale) + (beta2 * score on economic-justice scale). The horizontal and vertical axes of Figure 2 have been renumbered to correspond to these standardized betas.

Thus for example, the arrow labeled Education corresponds to a GSS variable asking respondents how many years of formal education they have received. When education is regressed on the personal-moral and the economic-justice scales, the standardized beta for the personal-moral scale is \(-0.386\), while the standardized beta for the economic-justice scale is \(-0.015\). Thus, the arrow for education is drawn from the center of the plot at (0, 0) to the point \((-0.386, -0.015)\). Regressions of this type and their corresponding standardized betas show how strongly and in what way the dependent variable (in this case, education) is related, in a linear relationship, to respondents' locations on the two-dimensional scatterplot of personal-moral and economic-justice issues shown in Figure 1. The arrows quickly sum up visually long lists of numerical results.

One can gain a better understanding of this and other figures in this paper if one imagines that it is a map of a large field on which all the GSS respondents are standing (in the positions indicated by the dots in Figure 1). Imagine further that one is standing at the center of this field, the position from which the arrows originate and the position which represents average
views on both personal-moral and economic-justice issues. Now imagine that one would like to find those respondents with the most years of formal education. In which direction should one begin walking across the field to most quickly find respondents with more years of formal education?

The arrow labeled “Education” can be viewed as the compass course one should follow to best accomplish this task. If one began to walk outward along this line one would encounter and pass many respondents standing in the locations shown by the dots in Figure 1. If one were to ask these respondents how many years of formal education they had received one would find that the average number of years increases the farther one progresses in the direction of the line.

If instead of following the line in the direction of the arrow toward the left side of the figure, one were to make an about-face and march in the opposite direction away from the center toward the right, the respondents one would encounter would, on average, have fewer and fewer years of formal education.

Suppose once again that one is progressing outward along the line labeled Education. If at any point along this line one were to make a ninety-
degree turn to the left or right and start walking in a direction perpendicular to the line, the average number of years of formal education among the respondents would encounter would stay about the same.

The line labeled Education can thus be viewed as the direction one should take from the center of the figure if one wants the average number of years of formal education of the respondents one passes to increase at the fastest rate possible.

The length of the arrows is also significant. The longer arrows represent stronger patterns (higher $R^2$) among the respondents, whereas the shorter arrows represent weaker patterns. Going back to the analogy of walking outward along one of the longer arrows, say the arrow labeled Theol&. Consrv., average support for items used in the conservative theology scale (described below) would increase quite rapidly and the respondents one would encounter as one approached the outer edge of the field (near the right side of Figure 2) would hold positions that are very different from the leaders near the center or the opposite side of the field (on the left side of Figure 2).

If instead, one walked away from the center in the direction of one of the shorter arrows, say the arrow labeled Relig. Practice, one would find that respondent’s scores on a religious participation scale (also described below) would increase at a slower rate. Also one would find that even though the respondents near the edge of the field (on the right side of Figure 2) generally had higher rates of religious participation than those at the center or the opposite side of the field, the differences would not be as marked as the differences among views on conservative theology.

Figure 2 shows the patterns for several demographic, political, and religious variables. The arrow labeled Youth is based on respondents’ ages (in all cases older than eighteen). The arrow indicates that younger respondents are more likely to be members of the Left, in the upper left region of the figure, while older respondents are more likely to be members of the Right, in the opposite, lower-right region of the figure. Non-White respondents, principally African Americans, are more likely to be bicomunitarians, conservatives on personal-moral issues but liberal on economic-justice issues. Women are slightly more likely to be bicomunitarians, while men are slightly more likely to be libertarians.

The arrow labeled Income is based on annual family income. Income and education often go together. Both appear to be associated with personal-moral liberalism, but people with more income are also more likely to be influenced by economic-justice conservatism (an orientation that places a high value on private property).

Two of the arrows in Figure 2 reflect aspects of respondents’ religiosity. The arrow labeled Relig. Practice is based on several items asking how often respondents say they attend religious services, pray, and read the Bible. The
arrow labeled Theolgcl. Consrv. is based on nine items from the 1988 GSS that ask about a respondent's interpretation of the Bible (literal vs. other), whether their faith is free of doubts, whether those who violate God's rules must be punished, and whether, when making important life decisions, the Bible and the teachings of one's church or synagogue are important factors in reaching a decision [see Olson and Carroll (1992) for details]. The arrows for both these scales point in a nearly horizontal direction toward the right side of Figure 2.

One nice feature of the items used in the theological conservatism scale is that they correspond fairly closely with Hunter's description of orthodox versus progressive orientations toward (in this case) religious truth. The horizontal orientation of this scale suggests that the primary underlying division identified in Hunter's analysis is almost entirely aligned with the horizontal, personal-moral, dimension and has virtually no relationship to the vertical, economic-justice dimension. Such a result is consistent with Steve Hart's (1992) analysis in which he argues that theological conservatism has no clear relationship to cultural conflicts over social justice issues. In terms of the two-dimensional model employed in this chapter, religious conservatives are just as likely to be bicomunitarians as part of the Right. To the extent that religious conservatism plays a role in cultural conflicts, most of the tension it generates appears to be in a "horizontal" direction, that is, along the personal-moral issue dimension.

Students of New Christian Right organizations often point out that the target audience of these groups is the most religiously active sector of the American public and is thus a rich potential resource if this religious activism can be converted into political activism. The direction of the religious participation arrow, and its alignment with the conservative theology arrow, is consistent with such analyses.

In the "horizontal" tension between personal-moral conservatism and personal-moral liberalism, the most visible opponents of theological conservatives appear to be those with more education and (to some degree) income. Differences along this dimension have been noted by others (Maddox and Lilie 1984; Hargrove 1986; Schmalzbauer 1993) who describe it as a "new" class division. Whereas the old class division was "vertical" between the wealthy, who are conservative on economic-justice issues, and the less wealthy, who support economic-justice liberalism, the new class divisions are horizontal between the more educated elites, who support personal-moral liberalism, and the less educated (on average) theological conservatives (regardless of denomination), who tend toward personal-moral conservatism.

In his book Why Americans Hate Politics, Dionne (1991) cites Maddox and Lilie's argument that many Americans are frustrated with the political process in part because their views differ along two separate dimensions, but
only two major political parties are available to represent their diverse positions. Thus each party must build fairly complex coalitions among people with quite different points of view or, failing that, the parties are simply unable to represent the views of many Americans.

Figure 2 shows an arrow labeled Republican, which points in a downward direction. This is based on responses to a single item that asks people whether they usually think of themselves as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else. The item is coded with Strong Democrat as a 1, Strong Republican as a 6, Independent as a 3, and intermediate responses (e.g., “Independent, close to Democrat”) for other points in between. Very few choose Other Party.

The downward arrow in Figure 2 indicates that self-identified Republicans are more likely to be in the lower portion of the figure and Democrats in the upper portions. In 1988, self-identified Republicans were almost equally likely to be libertarians as members of the Right. Republicans appear united on economic-justice issues, but they differ on personal-moral issues, a point that became painfully obvious to many party regulars at the 1992 Republican National Convention, where personal-moral conservatives took control of the party platform. Whereas religious differences appear to animate the horizontal, personal-moral dimension, political party differences appear to animate the vertical, economic-justice dimension. Put another way, taking the American public as a whole, religious belief has almost no association with political party affiliation (correlation = .0103).

Figure 2 also shows an arrow labeled Reagan. This shows (for those who said they voted in 1984) the direction in which one is most likely to find people who voted for Reagan. For the sake of convenience I also show the arrow representing the direction in which one is most likely to find people who voted for Mondale. Like the Republican arrow, the orientation of the Reagan arrow is largely downward, suggesting that economic-justice issues played a much greater role in the 1984 election than did personal-moral issues. However, the arrow points slightly more to the Right and slightly away from the libertarian cell. This tilt confirms the effectiveness of Reagan’s appeal to personal-moral conservatives (even if he did not enact much of their legislation once in office). The so-called Reagan Democrats located in the bicomunitarian cell played a critical role.6

A similar analysis using 1993 GSS data, not shown here, shows that an analogous arrow for the 1992 Clinton vote is almost identical to the Mondale arrow shown here. However, the arrow for the Bush vote points even more to the right than does the Reagan arrow in Figure 2. While this may reflect an increase in religious Right voters for Bush, it may also be due to the loss of many Republican voters in the libertarian region who voted for Perot. An arrow representing the Perot vote points toward the Libertarian cell, a
group of mostly Republican voters Bush should have been able to rely on but could not.

DENOMINATIONAL IDENTITY

While Figure 2 shows the influence of theological viewpoints, it reveals little concerning religious affiliation and how this might be connected to these two dimensions. Hunter (1991) reiterates a claim made by Wuthnow that liberal-conservative divisions now supersede denominational divisions in terms of their importance for influencing political and cultural values. Differences between denominations have declined in relevance as the division between progressives and orthodox increasingly dominates not only public debates, but divisions within denominations.

Figure 3 is based on a set of questions that begin by asking respondents, "What is your religious preference? Is it Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, some other religion, or no religion?" Respondents who answer Protestant or Jewish are asked to further specify what denomination. I classified the Protestant respondents based on whether they identified with a liberal or an evangelical Protestant denomination. I further subdivided Evangelicals into White and Black Evangelicals based on the respondent's ethnic background (see Olson and Carroll (1992) for details).

Figure 3 shows the directions in which one is most likely to find people from various types of religious backgrounds. As with Figure 2, the longer arrows represent stronger patterns. White Evangelicals are more likely to be part of the Right, in the lower-right part of the figure, but Black Evangelicals are more likely to be bicomunitarians. Many African Americans combine personal-moral conservatism with economic-justice liberalism. The liberal Protestants (mostly laypeople) in the GSS tend to be more common in the libertarian region combining personal-moral liberalism with economic-justice conservatism.

Affiliates of non-Christian groups, principally Jews, are more likely to fit in the Left region of our map, in the upper-left, combining economic-justice liberalism with personal-moral liberalism. The same is true of those who said they preferred "no religion." Figure 3 includes no arrow for Catholics since Catholics are internally very diverse and are equally likely to be found in all four regions. Thus with the exception of Catholics, each of the four cells is the most likely region to find members of at least one of the major religious groupings in America.

Figure 3 suggests that even if they have declined in importance, denomi-
Dimensions of Cultural Tension among the American Public

Figure 3. Directions in which one is most likely to find people from various types of religious backgrounds.

national differences are still strongly linked to attitudinal differences among the public. While Figure 2 shows that theological belief is primarily aligned with the horizontal, personal-moral dimension, Figure 3 shows that denominational identity has a more complex relationship to the two types of liberalism-conservatism. Contrary to Hunter, not all forms of religiously based division cut the same way nor is belief the only aspect of religion that continues to make a difference in attitudes toward public issues.

RACE AND OTHER NATIONAL DEBATES

While the personal-moral and economic-justice scales include items reflecting many issues of national debate, several important issues are only partly included in the two scales or not included at all. The most important of these is race. In their key works on cultural and religious division, neither Wuthnow (1988) nor Hunter (1991) focuses much attention on race. Yet, the riots following the Rodney King beating suggest that racial tensions have
more potential to divide the country than does abortion. How are racial
issues related to the two scales described above?

I identified eleven items in the 1988 GSS dealing with race. Two of these
items (HELPBLK and NATRACE) ask whether or not the federal government
should give assistance to minorities. Because these two items correlate espe-
cially well with the other items in the economic-justice scale, I included
them in the scale itself.

The arrows in Figure 4 are based on regressions similar to the arrow
diagrams in earlier figures and show (in the lower right region), for each of
the remaining nine race items, the directions in which one is most likely to
find respondents who support racial differences and oppose efforts to equal-
ize racial differences. The betas for most of these items are stronger for the
economic-justice dimension than the personal-moral dimension. These in-
clude views on busing, support for open housing laws, whether or not
respondents believe that economic differences between Whites and Blacks
are due to discrimination, differences in educational opportunities, and dif-
f erences in motivation and willpower. Three of the race items have about
equal associations with both dimensions. These items ask whether resi-
dential segregation is acceptable, whether the respondent would vote for a
Black presidential candidate, and whether respondents view economic dif-
f erences between Whites and Blacks as being due to inborn differences in
ability to learn. One item correlates most strongly with the personal moral
dimension and asks about the respondent’s view of legally banning inter-
racial marriage.

The most important result from the pattern of these arrows is that if race is
a separate, third dimension in public attitudes [as some, for example, Knoke
(1979), have suggested], it is not an independent dimension. The length of
these arrows suggests the strength of association between the racial items
and the two issue dimensions.

The differing directions of the arrows suggests that racial issues are linked,
in a complex way, to both the economic-justice and the personal-moral
dimensions. Consistent with the description of the economic-justice dimen-
sion above as dealing with issues of equity, most of the items are more
strongly linked to the economic-justice dimension. But some are also linked
to the personal-moral dimension, especially views on interracial marriage.

Figure 4 shows four arrows in the upper-left quadrant. These represent
four issues of national debate that also do not neatly fit, either theoretically
or empirically, in the personal-moral or the economic-justice scales. The
issue closest to the economic-justice dimension is represented by the arrow
labeled Foreign Aid. It is based on two items that reflect support for federal
spending on foreign aid. The arrow labeled Decrease Arms Spending shows
the direction in which one is most likely to find respondents who feel that
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![Diagram]

Figure 4. Arrows are based on regressions similar to the arrow diagrams in earlier figures and show the directions in which one is most likely to find respondents who support racial differences and oppose efforts to equalize racial differences.

arms spending should be reduced. The Fund Education arrow reflects support for increasing federal funding to education, and the Fund Environment arrow reflects support for increased federal funding for environmental protection.

While many issues of national debate are clearly associated with either the personal-moral or the economic dimension, Figure 4 shows that some issues are related to both, especially the economic-justice dimension.

PUBLIC OPINION RESTRAINTS ON ELITE POLARIZATION

The above analyses imply that there are at least two important dimensions underlying cultural tensions among the public. But Hunter's main evidence for the existence of a culture war comes not from the public but
from the polarized discourse of culture elites. Does public opinion really matter? The logic of Hunter’s argument implies that public opinion will tend to be shaped by and follow elite opinion. If the elites are quite polarized, then it is only a matter of time before public opinion becomes quite polarized as well. But this may not be the whole story.

First of all, the greater polarization of elites may be nothing new. A long research tradition beginning with Converse (1964) and continuing with others (e.g., McClosky 1964; Knight 1985; Jennings 1992) suggests that elites have attitudes and beliefs that are much more highly organized than those of the general public. The classic explanation of this phenomenon is that elites, as opposed to the “masses,” are better informed and are forced to justify their positions and their opposition to competing positions more frequently. This causes them to think through the various implications of their beliefs more carefully and construct a more consistent, and thus more defensible, system of beliefs. The implication is that elites and more educated persons see the “true” connections between ideas that others, who spend less time thinking about their beliefs, can safely ignore.

While plausible, it is equally plausible to assume that issue alignment arises among elites because they are under greater pressure than the public to conflate and merge issues that are conceptually separate. This can happen for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most important is the need for coalition building in majority-rule voting systems. In order to achieve a majority coalition, leaders are pressured to take positions on a broad package of issues that may have no intrinsic relationship but come to be associated in leaders’ decisions in order to avoid losing the votes of other coalition members on other issues. Thus a Republican legislator who wants to convince others to vote conservatively on tax cuts may find in exchange that he or she is expected to vote conservatively on legislation dealing with abortion and sexual morality. By merging several issue domains into a single package, political parties can mostly satisfy a broad constituency across a range of issues and gain the majority that is necessary to get elected and enact legislation.

In short, the greater issue alignment of elites may well reflect the social processes and organizations to which elites are exposed more than it reflects their greater intelligence, education, and knowledge of the underlying logical connections among issues. While a lower level of issue constraint among the general public undoubtedly reflects, as Converse suggested, a good deal of simple ignorance concerning political issues, it may also reflect the public’s lower exposure to the social pressures of coalition building. This could actually free public attitudes to follow patterns of organization more consistent with the logic of the issues. This is important because it suggests that the structure of public attitudes may be more reflective of the “true” linkages among issues than the one-dimensional, liberal-conservative structure exhibited by politicians.
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This opens the possibility that instead of passively following elite opinion, public opinion may act back upon and reshape elite opinion. More specifically, the two-dimensional structure of public opinion may act to retard the tendency toward issue alignment among elites.

How might this happen? Leaders depend on followers for resources and votes and can only lead where followers are willing to go. This is certainly the case for legislators and their constituents. While legislators may serve their own interests and the interests of pressure groups or wealthy donors, abundant research suggests that the roll call votes of legislators (and thus public policy) are heavily influenced by legislators' perceived views of voter opinions (Stokes and Miller 1962; Erikson et al. 1991:278ff.) especially as the time for reelection approaches (Thomas 1985). Politicians and leaders of religious and special interest groups cannot stray too far or for too long from their supporters' agenda, at least not in public, visible ways. They are tethered, perhaps on a long leash, to public opinion.

Politicians, cultural elites, and special interest groups may align along a single dimension running from the left to the right, but if they do, they risk frustrating libertarians, bicommitarians, and others whose views are not well represented in a bipolar, two-party cultural or political system. By withholding support, switching support, or supporting alternative or even "third party" candidates and policies, these frustrated segments of public can act to retard the tendency toward all-out, bipolar, winner-take-all, cultural conflict that Hunter sees as the nearly inevitable outcome of discourse among elites. In order to get their support, elites must moderate their discourse to take the views of these frustrated groups into account.

Thus, when the Democratic party turned solidly toward the agenda of the Left during and following the 1972 presidential campaign (Dionne 1991) bicommitarian Democrats began to defect to the Republican party. In order to win back the support of these "Reagan Democrats" many successful Democratic candidates such as Clinton have had to move toward more moderate and even sometimes conservative views on personal-moral issues. A similar pattern of adjustment, realignment, and balancing of interests goes on in the Republican party. The Christian Coalition draws its support from among personal-moral conservatives and is appreciated for the newfound financial and organizational resources it brings to the party. However, some blame Bush's 1992 loss partly on the high visibility of personal-moral conservatives at the 1992 convention and a resulting desertion of Republicans in the libertarian cell to Perot and Clinton. Worried about again losing personal-moral liberals, Republicans tried to keep the Christian Coalition in the background during the 1996 campaign.

Hunter emphasizes the especially divisive role of special interest groups like Right to Life, People for the American Way, the Eagle Forum, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Such groups are not constrained by the
need to win elections and thus they can grow organizationally while appealing only to a small, committed, subgroup of the public. Though such groups can do much to inflame debate (as Hunter documents), if they wish to enact policy, they must still press their claims through the legislative and judicial systems, where they can rarely be successful in enacting long-lasting policy changes without moderating their positions to take into account the complex, cross-cutting variety of public opinion. In short, the two-dimensional structure of public opinion could well prevent a one-dimensional culture war.

CONCLUSION

This somewhat more complex view of cultural division suggests that rather than being pulled toward opposite ends of a single liberal-conservative dimension, the public is exposed to important cross-pressures, cross-pressures that may cause them to switch sides on different issue debates. Moreover, the cross-pressures present among the public may also constrain the tendency of elites to align along a single liberal-conservative dimension. If so, severe “us” versus “them” cultural conflicts, the type warned of by Hunter in his book Before the Shooting Begins (1994), seem less likely.

My analysis suggests that more caution may be needed in making predictions of cultural warfare. This is partly because predictions of an impending culture war may help to bring about a culture war in much the same way that rumors of an impending bank failure help to create a real bank failure. Instead of listening, learning, and working out our disagreements together, we become suspicious, antagonistic, and divisive. By arming ourselves for war we make war more likely.

NOTES

1. Within personal-moral conservatism righteousness is usually thought of as behavior and belief that is consistent with some collectively held external standard most often based on an interpretation of religious scriptures and/or tradition, or some standard that is thought to be “natural” or self-evident.

2. Admittedly, bicomunitarian is an awkward label, but it avoids some of the misunderstandings involved in the term populist, the term used by Maddox and Lilie.

3. We used factor analysis to identify the subsets of items.
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4. Because of space limitations I do not include the details of scale construction here, but they are available upon request. Briefly, the scales are nearly identical to those described in Olson and Carroll (1992) except that the economic-justice scale used in this chapter does not include the following GSS items that were part of the “Peace and Justice” scale in Olson and Carroll: NATARMS and NATARMSY, NATENVIR and NATENVY, NATEDUC and NATEDUCY, NATOID and NATAIDY.

5. In regressions of the form, dependent variable = constant + (beta1 * score on personal-moral scale) + (beta2 * score on economic-justice scale), the regression betas define the best regression plane for predicting the values of the dependent variable from the personal-moral and the economic-justice scales. The arrows in Figure 2 are drawn in the direction of the “steepest” climb up the regression plane. This is a direction perpendicular to the line formed by the intersection of the regression plane and the “flat” plane where the dependent variable = 0. Simple algebra shows that the slope (direction) of this perpendicular line is formed by the ratio of the beta for the y-variable (in this case the economic-justice scale) divided by the x-variable (the personal-moral scale). This is the same direction as that formed by a line originating at (0,0) and running to the point defined by the two standardized regression betas as is done in Figure 2.

6. Among those in the bicomunitarian cell who say they voted, 54 percent voted for Reagan versus 43 percent for Mondale. Even though the Reagan vote among bicomunitarians is less than among all respondents (63 percent), it is significant that Reagan won a majority among people who, on average, self-identify as Democrats (56 percent Democrats to 30 percent Republicans in 1988). Only among the Left did Mondale voters outnumber Reagan voters (54 to 44 percent).

7. The moderately high correlation of these items with the economic-justice dimension persists even when the two race-related items (HELPBLK and HELPRACE) are removed from the economic-justice scale.


REFERENCES


