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Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations

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Two of the most important influences on adult political orientations are the political proclivities of their family of origin and the pressures of the times in which they first enter the electorate. Drawing upon a three-wave panel study of young Americans over the 1965–1982 time period and conceiving of parental orientations as producing a broad familial environment, this article traces the influence of parents on the partisanship and politicization of their children as the youth mature from adolescence to middle adulthood during a particularly turbulent period of American politics. The parental partisan legacy remained strong even though it was eroded by the antipartisan period pressures of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By contrast, family levels of politicization were reproduced only modestly throughout, leaving ample room for attentiveness to politics to develop outside of the family tradition. However, the interaction between the partisanship and the politicization of the family environment governs the dealignment of the youth generation after 1965. Youth from politicized Republican and Democratic families were affected most by the powerful antipartisan pressures of the post-1965 period.

The sources of citizen political dispositions have long been a major area of inquiry for students of politics. Because political outlooks are not carried by the genes, it is to the environment that scholars have turned to understand their origins. Two environmental forces that have received considerable attention are the family of origin and the times in which an individual lives. They are similar in being imposed upon, rather than chosen by, the individual. But they also differ in myriad ways, not the least of which is that the family is a proximal source of influence while the influence of the times is more diffuse and indirect.

Most inquiry into the sources of political outlooks has focused on the influence of the family of origin on children. The accident of birth places the

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individual into a particular family political environment, which nurtures political (or apolitical) outlooks early in life and locates the individual in a sociopolitical setting that may last a lifetime. Other individuals may have profound influence on a person's political outlooks, but none of them is typically credited with as much influence as the child's parents.

Yet it is also recognized that political outlooks are shaped by the times. These "times" are usually conceptualized in terms of period and generational effects. The former represent far-reaching sociopolitical forces and events that touch the lives of most contemporary individuals. By contrast, generational effects are more specific. Being born into a particular generation and passing through certain life stages at critical moments in history is an important, albeit hard to demonstrate, source of political beliefs (e.g., Delli Carpini 1988; Holsti and Rosenau 1980; Inglehart 1981; Mannheim 1952). Few individuals are insulated from this external political world. Moreover, at certain life stages, particularly the passage from adolescence into early adulthood (Beck 1974), people seem to be especially susceptible to its influences.

This study brings together these alternative approaches to explore the development of two key political dispositions, political attentiveness and partisanship. Such an inquiry is made possible by the existence of data that at once link parental and filial generations and follow the filial generation through various life stages during an especially turbulent historical period. We shall concentrate most of our attention on the immediate and lasting impact of the family, because the family environments vary across the individuals we have studied. But we shall also explore the influence of the times through which these individuals have moved, especially the sweeping changes in the party system that began in the mid-1960s.

The data supporting this inquiry come from a national three-wave panel survey of parents and their children conducted in 1965, 1973, and 1982. The first wave of the panel was based on personal interviews with a probability sample of 1,669 high school seniors and 1,562 of their parents. Offspring data will be drawn from this and subsequent waves, but we will use parental data only from 1965. Underlying this decision is the fact that, in terms of our study design, parental influence had attained its maximum in 1965 (Jennings and Niemi 1981; Niemi and Jennings 1990). Subsequent family influence does not cease, of course, once children leave the home, but to the extent that children carry on the family tradition, it is largely the tradition as represented in their late adolescence.

Interviews were conducted with 1,562 parent-child pairs in 1965. From these original pairs, additional information was collected for 1,074 youths in 1973, when they were 25–26 years of age, and again in 1982, when they had reached the age of 34–35. These 1,074 parent-youth pairs—parents inter-

viewed in 1965 and children interviewed at all three waves—comprise the focus of our analysis as is portrayed here:¹

Parent	1965	1965	1965
	X	X	X
Student	1965	1973	1982

CONCEPTUALIZING THE INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY

Various approaches have been taken to assessing the influence the family may have on political orientations. One approach is to recognize that the family provides the child with a social identity and a location within the social structure, which in turn affects political orientations (Glass, Bengston, and Dunham 1986; Sigel and Hoskin 1981, chap. 8; Solomon and Steinitz 1979). Another approach emphasizes how power and affective relationships and communication patterns within the family influence the political personality (Chaffee, McCleod, and Wackman, 1973; Wolfenstein 1970). A third approach, commonly known as the transmission model, sees children as being more or less direct recipients or inheritors of parental political traits. This approach frames the present paper, in part because of its pre-eminent position in many theories of political change and stability and in part because available evidence suggests that it is a fruitful mode of accounting for the pre-adult development of political orientations (Dalton 1982; Jennings 1984).

The transmission model of socialization typically has been tested by looking for similarities in specific parent and child political orientations. Strong correlations between parent and child political orientations have been found in some domains and under certain conditions (e.g., Jennings and Niemi 1974, chap. 6; Jennings and Niemi 1981, chap. 4; Tedin 1974), but in general these similarities are modest, especially by the time the children have attained adulthood (but see Dalton 1980). So many nonfamilial forces contribute to the political development of the individual that the early contri-

¹Panel attrition seems to produce relatively little bias in our results (Jennings and Markus 1984). However, some bias results from two other sources: (1) Because a high school senior sample excludes the quarter of the youth cohort which already had left school, the sample has an upward bias in education. To the degree that education affects our results, this bias imposes a modest limitation on generalization. (2) We necessarily rely upon one parent's report to characterize the overall parental environment. This bias probably attenuates the relationships between the parent environment and offspring characteristics (Acock and Bengston 1978; Niemi, Newman, and Weiner 1982). Moreover, the panel is distinctive in one other respect: Reflecting the incidence of single-parent families headed by the mother for this generation of youth, the single parent is the mother in 57% of all pairs in our sample. The complete gender pairings are 312 mothers-daughters, 295 mothers-sons, 225 fathers-daughters, and 242 fathers-sons.

butions of the family of origin can be easily submerged (e.g., Altemeyer 1988, chap. 3). Social and political conditions also change between childhood and adulthood, sometimes rendering early learning irrelevant to contemporary demands.

Beyond these factors, however, we suspect that the traditional approach to transmission, relying as it does on a strict one-to-one reproduction of parental attitudes, is overly demanding and thereby underestimates parental influence. Our version of the transmission model differs in two ways from the traditional one. First, it is grounded in a broader conceptualization and measurement of the parental political environment than usually is employed. Following this approach, the parental legacy is to be found in similarities of broad orientations toward politics rather than the one-to-one correspondence between particular parental and offspring traits. This approach is more sensitive to the way in which the family tradition interacts with contemporary political and personal pressures as the child ages. It also recognizes the functional equivalence among different political orientations.

A second, more fundamental way in which we have modified the transmission model is to assess the consequences of the family environment with respect to future behavior and attitudes that are conditioned by the interaction among multiple aspects of that environment. That is, family environments may be important not only for direct transmission—especially in the more expanded form just described—but also for providing children with sets of predispositions that will affect their later reactions to political events and forces at work in the polity. In particular, we might expect important consequences for the interaction of different aspects of the family environment. For example, preadult family communication styles might condition later modes of participation, which are themselves also influenced by parental participation. Or religious convictions “inherited” from the family of origin might later interact with acquired beliefs about the role of the state in governing private behavior. Thus, the transmission model is modified to allow for the inclusion of what might be termed conditioning factors that sensitize the individual to new political situations.

In order to assess the short- and long-term effects of the family, we will focus on two broad orientations—attention to politics and loyalties to a political party. These orientations are two of the most fundamental dimensions of citizen involvement in democratic politics. One references cognitive and behavioral involvement in political affairs; the other taps affective orientations toward highly salient and enduring political objects, the political parties.

POLITICIZED FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS AND SUBSEQUENT POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

A politicized family environment is characterized by parental attention to political matters, especially as manifested in ways that a child growing up in

that environment can perceive. Because there are a variety of ways in which a home may be politicized, and they may be both substitutable and reinforcing, a multiple-item approach to measurement is necessary.

Family politicization in the present study is assessed as of 1965, when all members of the filial generation were high school seniors and lived in the parental home. Parent politicization is measured directly by relying on parent reports of political interest and activity, especially where expressed in ways likely to be visible to the child. We begin with the parent's subjective report of interest in politics and public affairs. To this is added parental use of the print media for gathering information about politics: regular reading of newspapers and of magazines. Regular reading about politics is considerably more demanding than gaining political information from radio or television and, consequently, differentiates families much more sharply in terms of political attentiveness.

The measure of parental politicization also contains three indicators of political participation: whether the parent voted for president, was active in politics beyond voting, and participated frequently in political affairs. That these behaviors actually may be observed enhances their importance for the child's political learning. Finally, political interaction among family members was included, as indicated by reported regular discussion of politics with the spouse and attempts by the parent to persuade family members to vote a particular way.

An index of parent politicization was created by counting the number of these eight different activities engaged in by parents (see the appendix for more details). This index has an approximately normal distribution, with most families clustering at relatively moderate levels of politicization. High attentiveness to politics is rare within families of this generation. Correspondingly rare is a complete absence of attention to politics. Information about the correlates of this index validates it nicely as a measure of parental politicization. Politicized parents are better educated ($r = .42$), more knowledgeable about politics ($r = .43$ with scores on a six-item test), and more likely to conceptualize politics in ideological terms ($r = .40$ with a measure of levels of conceptualization).

Our primary interest at this point lies in whether the politicization of parental environments contributes to the politicization of their children. Are children from politicized homes more politicized themselves? Does this relationship wax or wane with the passage of time as adolescents mature into adults? To answer these questions, we turn to the youth panel and parallel measurements of youth politicization in 1965, 1973, and 1982 (see the appendix for more detail).

As is shown in table 1, parental politicization in 1965 is significantly related to the politicization of the youth in all three years. Because the level of measurement of our data lies between ordinal and interval, we report both the ordinal tau- b and interval-level r correlations here and subsequently.

TABLE 1
 PARENT-YOUTH SIMILARITY IN POLITICIZATION:
 1965, 1973, AND 1982

Parents:	1965	1965	1965
Youth:	1965	1973	1982
Pearson <i>r</i>	.16	.26	.17
tau- <i>b</i>	.13	.19	.14

Note: All correlations in bold face are significant at the .05 level. Cases = 1,074.

These coefficients tell the same story—of a relationship that begins at a modest level when the youths are still in the home, rises in early adulthood, then falls off when they have reached the age of 34 or 35, presumably as rival influences (such as from the spouse) become more important and the diversions of that life stage exert their will.²

Even at its peak level in 1973, though, the relationship between parent and offspring politicization is modest. Perhaps this result is a function of the times. The post-1965 period was a time of mobilization into political protest for many members of this age group, which may have drawn in people from even the most apolitical homes. It was also a time of declining political trust, which may have driven many with politicized roots out of politics. Or perhaps politicization is so dependent upon immediate stimulation that the orientations of the family of origin quickly become irrelevant.

Whatever the explanation, the inheritance of politicization was limited for this generation of young Americans. A model of politicization that depends upon the transmission of political orientations from parent to child, even broadly conceptualized and measured, is not directly applicable to attentiveness to politics. Other forces, presumably lodged in post-adolescent experiences, are responsible for the politicization or depoliticization of young people relative to their family inheritances. As we soon shall see, however, the hand of parental influence is not completely stilled. Parental levels of politicization play important mediating and conditioning roles in how young adults respond to period forces during their formative years.

PARTISAN FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS AND SUBSEQUENT PARTISANSHIP

A second key dimension of the political behavior of American citizens is their identification with a political party. Partisanship is known to be a

²The increase in parent-child agreement in politicization between 1965 and 1973 may be attributable to the replacement of the "childhood participation" items used in 1965, such as high school activities and *anticipated* adult participation, by measures of real adult political activity by 1973.

prominent feature of family political life, and parents agree in their partisan loyalties more than they do on any other political orientation (Niemi, Hedges, and Jennings 1977). Consequently, no other political outlook seems more likely to be passed on from parents to children. Even at a time when the youth generation was leading the way in the pervasive dealignment of the American electorate that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s,³ this expectation was confirmed in analysis of the 1973 wave of the panel (Jennings and Niemi 1981, chap. 4). Thus, one should expect the family political environment to attain its maximum influence with partisanship.

The main component for the measure of parental partisanship is the standard party identification scale. Included in our measure are the identifications of both the mother and the father, one obtained by a self-report and the other by the spouse's perception.⁴ But the nature of the parental partisan environment as it impinges upon the child is not completely captured by party identification. Partisanship is an attitude. How the attitude is manifested is what influences the perception the child gains of parental party orientations. How parents vote is one manifestation of partisanship, on the reasonable assumption that in one way or another parents usually reveal their vote preferences to their children. Because the last vote taken before the adolescent leaves home appears to be an especially important one, the partisan direction of the parent's vote in the 1964 presidential election also was included in our measure (see the appendix for the exact specifications).⁵

The resulting measure of the parental partisan environment ranges from the strongest Republican environments, through nonpartisan families, and on to the strongest Democratic environments. That its distribution was

³The surge in independents and other nonpartisans that began after 1964 was led by the youngest members of the electorate. According to figures from NES surveys, the 18–29 age cohort was almost 30% less partisan in 1968 than it had been in 1964 and stayed at that level in 1972, thus accounting for much of the decline in partisanship that occurred between 1964 and 1972. Of these young people, the members of the 1965 high school senior cohort (aged 18–21 in 1968) entered the electorate at an unprecedentedly low level of partisanship (48% in 1968) and remained at about this level as they matured. Consequently, the generation that contained the “class of 1965” played a vital role in the dealignment that began in the mid-1960s and carried over into the 1970s. Intensive examination of the slice of that generation that is available to us, therefore, can give us insight into the forces propelling the dealignment.

⁴The high reliability of the respondent's perception of spouse's party identification means that relying upon it does not unduly bias our results. Based on the 430 mother-father pairs in the 1965 survey, the *r*'s were .74 for wives' reports of husbands and .71 for husbands' reports of wives (Niemi 1974, 162).

⁵Previous research on the 1965 wave of the panel has demonstrated the importance of the parent's 1964 vote on the child's perception of parent partisanship (Converse 1975; Denney 1971), so it is important to include it in a measure of the parental partisan environment. Unfortunately, we have only the responding parent's report of his or her vote, because the perceived vote of the spouse was not asked for in the interview. Since 89% of the 430 mother-father pairs interviewed in 1965 agreed on their 1964 presidential preferences, however, this single report will characterize the 1964 parental vote for both parents in almost all cases.

TABLE 2
PARENT-YOUTH SIMILARITY IN PARTISANSHIP:
1965, 1973, AND 1982

Parents:	1965	1965	1965
Youth:	1965	1973	1982
Pearson <i>r</i>	.61	.42	.39
tau- <i>b</i>	.51	.35	.32

Note: All correlations in bold face are significant at the .05 level. Cases = 1,074.

skewed in a pro-Democratic direction in 1965 reflected the longstanding Democratic advantage within the American electorate plus the short-term Democratic surge after Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory in 1964. Because of this surge, these figures may well constitute the high point for Democratic partisanship in the parent generation during the postwar period. Parent party identifications and their most recent presidential vote understandably were less Democratic in 1973 and 1982. Consequently, the class of 1965 received an unusually strong pro-Democratic push as it left the home—which makes its subsequent partisan behavior all the more striking.

Youth-parent partisan similarity is depicted in table 2, again with both ordinal and interval correlation coefficients. When the youths were still at home in 1965, the parental partisan environment was strongly related to child party identification. But intergenerational partisan similarity eroded significantly after 1965, even as youth were entering the adult political world and were becoming more similar to their parents in politicization. Most of the decay in the family partisan tradition had occurred by 1973, as the correlations declined only slightly afterward.

Although we have no adequate benchmark for comparison with earlier times except upwardly-biased correlations of parent respondents with their *perceptions* of parents in the first wave of our survey (Niemi 1974), it seems reasonable to suppose that the decay of parent-child partisan similarities has been more pronounced for this youth generation than for any previous generation since the realignment of the 1930s (Beck 1974). This follows in part from the fact that partisan changes were in general rather high during this period and also from the fact that intergenerational conflict as expressed in a variety of sociopolitical movements was extraordinarily high during this era.

THE JOINT EFFECTS OF POLITICIZED AND PARTISAN FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS

Two central dimensions of the parental political environment, politicization and partisanship, have been shown to be related to the political dispositions of the children at three different stages of the life cycle. Although the

magnitude of these relationships differs considerably across both disposition and time, each dimension of the environment has been shown to contribute to the political development of young adults. At the same time, postadolescent forces have restricted the political inheritance process. Youth do not become much more like their parents in politicization as they enter the adult political world. For partisanship, maturation after 1965, presumably keyed to powerful period forces, actually reduced parent-youth similarity.

Up to this point, we have assumed politicization and partisanship were independent dimensions of the family political environment. It is now time to relax that assumption and to explore their joint effects. The first question to examine is: do politicization and partisanship reflect a common dimension of family life? That is, are politicized families also partisan families?

We should expect only modest overlap between these two important dimensions of the parental environment. Because conventional politics in America is monopolized by political parties in a strict two-party system, one should expect the highly politicized to be partisans. Diluting this tendency, though, are the uniquely American phenomena of political independence and of widespread ticket splitting and candidate-oriented voting in American elections. These practices give Americans a legitimate way to combine high levels of political attentiveness with weak partisan ties.

This hypothesis can be tested quite simply by determining the empirical relationship between parental partisanship and politicization. Because two different aspects of partisanship are relevant, the relationship is computed in two different ways. When the partisan variable is folded at its pure independent midpoint so that Democratic and Republican partisans of equal intensity are assigned the same score, the resulting partisan *intensity* measure correlates modestly ($r = .21$) with parental politicization. Partisan *direction* also is related to politicization. The correlation between the original, unfolded measure of parental partisanship and politicization in 1965 is $r = -.16$. The sign indicates that Republican partisan environments are somewhat more politicized than Democratic environments, a relationship which undoubtedly reflects the higher status of Republican parents and the tendency of higher status Americans to be more politicized.

Although parental politicization is related both to the direction and intensity of partisanship, the modest size of the associations indicates limited overlap of these two key orientations. For most purposes, partisanship and politicization may be treated as separate dimensions of the parental political culture. The next step, therefore, is to explore the joint contributions of these two dimensions to the political orientations of the younger generation.

There is good theoretical reason to expect intergenerational similarities in partisanship to be affected by the nature of the parental politicization environment. In particular, the principles of observational learning (Bandura 1969; Jennings and Niemi 1974, 15-17) in political socialization theory

would lead us to expect partisanship to be passed on from parents to children more effectively in those families that are most attentive to politics. That is, children are more likely to imitate, model, or identify with those attributes of a socializing agent that are most consistent and reinforced. Intensity of political attentiveness presumably should heighten the likelihood of successful partisan transmission. On the other hand, there is no obvious reason why the direction of family partisanship should condition the inheritance of politicization. At best we might anticipate a socialization "bandwagon" effect in response to the 1964 Democratic landslide, with children from Democratic families becoming more like their parents than children from Republican homes.

These hypotheses are tested by correlating parent and child partisanship under different parental politicization conditions and parent and child politicization under different parental partisanship conditions. When utilized as control variables, each dimension has been trichotomized into three roughly equal categories in order to preserve sufficient cases for analysis.⁶ The correlations that measure parent-child agreement under different control conditions are presented in table 3.

The results for politicization at different levels of parent partisanship, based on comparisons across control categories for each year, are easily summarized (panel A of table 3). In line with our expectations, variations in the family's partisan environment had, for the most part, little effect on the relationship between parent and child politicization. Only in 1965, in the wake of Lyndon Johnson's landslide victory, was there anything approaching a meaningful difference, with parents and offspring from Democratic homes more alike than pairs from nonpartisan or Republican homes. This is most likely a consequence of the times rather than more successful Democratic socialization in general, and it vanishes in subsequent years. In any event the differences are quite modest, especially using the ordinal-level coefficient.

By contrast, the results for partisanship at different levels of family politicization, again reading across control categories within each year, reveal clear evidence for the influence of parental politicization (panel B of table 3). For all three years, parent-child agreement increases with increases in family politicization, especially between the low and medium levels. These relationships seem likely to be a consequence of social learning principles in that parent involvement in political life strengthens parental transmission of partisanship to children and makes this transmission more resistant to change after the children have become adults.

Panel B also shows that the effects of parental politicization on parent-

⁶For parental politicization, the categories are nonpoliticized (0-2), moderately politicized (3-4), and highly politicized (5-8). For parental partisanship, the categories are Republican (-5 to -2), nonpartisan (-1 to +1), and Democratic (+2 to +5). Most families (83%) in the nonpartisan category exhibit negligible or no partisanship rather than offsetting Democratic and Republican disagreement.

TABLE 3
JOINT EFFECTS OF PARENTAL ENVIRONMENTS

Panel A									
Youth-Parent Politicization Similarity across Different Partisan Environments									
Parent Partisan Environment									
Parents:	1965			1965			1965		
Youth:	1965			1973			1982		
	D	N	R	D	N	R	D	N	R
Pearson <i>r</i>	.22	.13	.13	.23	.26	.28	.16	.18	.17
tau- <i>b</i>	.16	.11	.11	.18	.20	.21	.12	.14	.13

Panel B									
Youth-Parent Partisan Similarity across Different Politicization Environments									
Parent Politicization Environment									
Parents:	1965			1965			1965		
Youth:	1965			1973			1982		
	Low	Med	Hi	Low	Med	Hi	Low	Med	Hi
Pearson <i>r</i>	.56	.65	.74	.39	.48	.52	.36	.45	.46
tau- <i>b</i>	.43	.51	.59	.29	.36	.41	.26	.34	.35

Note: In the headings for panel A, D = Democrats, N = nonpartisans, and R = Republicans. In the headings for Panel B, Low = apolitical, Med = weakly politicized, and Hi = strongly politicized. All correlations in bold face are significant at the .05 level. Cases = 1,074.

youth partisanship erode over time no matter how politicized the family. The amount of erosion is greatest within families that were highly politicized in 1965. A healthy gap of .18 between the *r*'s of the most and least politicized families in 1965 had narrowed to .10 by 1983. This suggests that youths from the most politicized homes were influenced more than other youths by the postadolescent forces operating after 1965. Such an implication of our results warrants more careful investigation, this time centering on the signal electoral phenomenon of the post-1965 era—the decline of partisanship in the American electorate.

FAMILY SOCIALIZATION AND REACTION TO CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PRESSURES

The 1965–1982 period was a particularly turbulent time for American political parties, which suffered serious setbacks in public standing (Converse 1976; Wattenberg 1986). These years were especially troublesome for the

Democrats, although the GOP too had its share of vicissitudes, especially after the Watergate affair was exposed in 1973 and 1974. Overall, the declines in the partisanship of the American electorate were so sizable (self-declared partisans in the National Election Study, or NES, biennial election surveys declined from 77% in 1964 to 58% by 1978) that the period came to be characterized as a “dealignment.” This dealigning movement seems to have run its course by the early 1980s, however, as slight gains in both Democratic and Republican partisanship were recorded in the 1980 and 1982 NES surveys—the latter several months after the third-wave youth interviews.

Competing explanations for these partisan changes have been a “growth industry” in both political science (see, *inter alia*, Abramson 1975; Beck 1988; Burnham 1982; Wattenberg 1986) and the popular press. While this debate is too complex to be resolved entirely by the application of any single approach or empirical materials, considerable insight into the nature and sources of the partisan dealignment during this period can be gained from examining the behavior of our panel.

The generation that came of voting age in the decade or so after 1965 was so heavily influenced by the period forces or *Zeitgeist* (Mannheim 1952) that prevailed at this crucial time for the formation of their partisan identities that it may be thought of, in partisan terms at least, as a distinct political generation. The flight from partisanship of this generation contributed substantially to the post-1964 dealignment of the American electorate (see footnote 3). The youth sample in our panel, in all respects but its higher levels of education, can be taken as reasonably representative of this generation. As high school seniors, these members of the “class of 1965” expressed partisan loyalties that were highly congruent with their family environment, providing no forewarning of the partisan dealignment that was to come.

During passage from late adolescence to adulthood, partisanship normally is thought to strengthen (e.g., Converse 1969; Claggett 1981; Cassel 1988). In an apparent departure from patterns for previous generations, however, the partisanship of the 1965 seniors declined after they left the parental home. This decline can be summarized best by examining changes in the *nonpartisanship* of the youth generation. It grew from 38% in 1965 to 48% in 1973, and 47% in 1982. From an already high baseline of nonpartisanship while high school seniors, the youth generation had become even more nonpartisan by the time they reached adulthood, a far cry from the proportions of nonpartisans in older generations then or at the same stage in the life cycle at earlier times.

Viewed in aggregate terms, these figures show the reaction by the class of 1965 to powerful antipartisan period forces. But the aggregate picture was produced by movements of individuals, not all of them in the same direction. By analyzing these individuals in different circumstances, we may gain further insight into the dynamics of the post-1965 partisan dealignment. Many different circumstances are viable candidates for inclusion in such an

analysis. Our attention will continue to be focused, however, on the nature of the family of origin—in particular, its politicization and its partisanship. How might these important characteristics of the home environment have contributed to the decay in partisanship of the youth generation after 1965?

For this analysis, parent politicization and partisanship are combined to create a general family political environment. Each parental dimension is trichotomized for sake of simplicity, and their joint distribution yields nine different parental environments characterized by various combinations of family politicization and partisanship.

Table 4 presents evidence on how youth from the different family environments responded to these period forces. As a starting point, the percentage of youth-generation nonpartisans within each environment for each year is presented in panel A of the table. What interests us most, though, is not the absolute level of nonpartisanship at any time, but rather changes in partisanship from one wave to the next. Therefore, panel B reports the differences in the panel A figures between successive pairs of years. Primary attention will be focused on the changes between 1965 and 1973, because they encompass the “dealignment” years. By 1982, the dealigning period had ended, and partisanship (we see clearly in retrospect) was beginning to shift in a Republican direction.

The increase in nonpartisanship of the class of 1965 occurred between 1965 and 1973, as one might expect. Examination of the marginal totals of panel B enables us to determine how much the youth from different home environments contributed to this change. First, it is obvious that growing nonpartisanship was concentrated wholly among those from partisan homes. Youth from nonpartisan homes seemed immune to the effects of the period, except perhaps that their earlier acquired nonpartisanship was reinforced. Second, the 1965–1973 move to nonpartisanship took place among youths from both *Democratic and Republican* homes. Third, the increase in nonpartisanship among partisans was registered in roughly equal amounts at all levels of family politicization.

These marginal totals, however, obscure important interactions between the partisan and politicization dimensions of the family environment. Youths from Democratic homes became more nonpartisan between 1965 and 1973 in about equal measure regardless of the politicization of their family of origin. By contrast, youths from Republican homes became significantly more nonpartisan *only* when home was strongly politicized. The partisanship of youths from less politicized Republican homes was left pretty much undisturbed by the 1965–1973 period.⁷

⁷These results are paralleled by a multiple regression analysis of partisan intensity (i.e., the partisanship measure folded at its 0 point so that it ranges from strong partisans to pure independents) on the different categories of parent partisanship and politicization, measured as dummy variables. Each of the categories that produced significant changes between 1965 and 1973 in table 4 except one had a significant effect on partisan intensity in the regression analysis.

TABLE 4

YOUTH NONPARTISANSHIP WITHIN DIFFERENT PARENTAL POLITICAL ENVIRONMENTS

Panel A												
Youth Generation Nonpartisans (%)												
Parental Politicization												
	Apolitical			Weakly Politicized			Strongly Politicized			Total		
Parental												
Partisanship	65	73	82	65	73	82	65	73	82	65	73	82
Democratic	27%	42	44	30	48	45	20	35	41	27	43	44
Nonpartisan	48	48	50	59	62	54	57	54	60	54	54	54
Republican	35	44	50	40	46	35	33	52	44	36	48	44
Total	37	45	47	41	52	46	35	46	48	38	48	47

Panel B												
Change in % of Youth Generation Nonpartisans												
Parental Politicization												
	Apolitical			Weakly Politicized			Strongly Politicized			Total		
Parental												
Partisanship	65	73	82	65	73	82	65	73	82	65	73	82
Democratic	+15%	+2		+18	-3		+15	+6		+16	+1	
Nonpartisan	0	+2		+3	-8		-3	+6		0	0	
Republican	+9	+6		+6	-11		+19	-8		+12	-4	
Total	+8	+2		+11	-6		+11	+2		+10	-1	

Note: Panel A contains the percentages of youth in each year and for each category of family politicization and family partisanship who are nonpartisans (defined as neither weak nor strong partisans). Panel B displays the differences in these percentages between each successive pair of years. Differences in bold face are significant at the .05 level. Cases = 1,060.

The movement toward nonpartisanship by the class of 1965 had abated by 1982. Table 4 shows no significant change between 1973 and 1982 in the percentage of nonpartisan youths in any family environment. Youth from both weakly and strongly politicized Republican homes, though, exhibited a drift back toward (mostly Republican) partisanship that approaches significance. As the early successes of the Reagan Administration brought about a period partisan environment favorable to the GOP, in short, it was the young adults from politicized Republican homes who responded.

Several explanations can be offered for the stability that ensued after 1973. One is that the power of period forces declined after 1973. In the face of the Watergate revelations and their clear negative effects on Republican party fortunes in 1974 and 1976, as well as the GOP successes of the early Reagan years, this explanation is difficult to accept. A second explanation is that partisan effects of the Watergate ebb and Reagan flow of GOP fortunes may have cancelled each other out in the 1973–1982 comparison. The Watergate affair did not come to dominate politics until after the 1973 interviews had been completed. Thus, both the anti-Republican shocks it produced and the beginnings of a counter trend of GOP ascendancy in the 1980s are bracketed by our 1973 and 1982 measurements. A third explanation is that the youth generation was less open to change after 1973 than it had been before. The reason is that their partisan inclinations began to harden with maturation and political experience, leaving period influences to have their greatest sway over an even newer generation of voters.

Two pieces of circumstantial evidence support this third hypothesis. First, partisan stability was substantially greater for the youth generation between 1973 and 1982 ($r = .64$) than it had been between 1965 and 1973 ($r = .50$), a necessary precondition for this line of argument. Parents remained more stable than their children in both years ($r = .78$ and $.83$ respectively, Jennings and Markus 1984), but the difference in stability between parent and youth generations had narrowed considerably by 1982. Second, the cohort containing the class of '65 did not participate in the surge of GOP identifiers among the young in the 1980s. Republican growth instead was concentrated among younger voters in the post-1954 birth cohorts (Norpoth 1987). While space limitations do not permit us to explore this hypothesis further, it is a fair surmise that the class of 1965 was less vulnerable to period forces after 1973 than it had been before.

The diverse patterns of change reported in table 4 suggest that the nature of the times impinges differentially upon people from different familial environments and at different life stages. Given the sequence of events from 1965 to 1973, it is hardly surprising to find considerable movement of chil-

The exception was for politicized Democratic homes, in which the effect falls just short of significance for the full partisan intensity variable—suggesting that the difference between partisan and nonpartisan in this category is a qualitative one.

dren from Democratic homes away from the parental party. So powerful were the anti-Democratic period forces that even youth from apolitical Democratic homes were swept along.

But it is surprising to find so little movement in a nonpartisan direction among children from nonpartisan homes. The times, after all, reinforced their family inheritances and should have facilitated even greater flight from partisanship. Perhaps they already had attained maximal nonpartisanship in 1965, although this interpretation is difficult to sustain when at most only 54% of them are nonpartisans in any given year.

Most intriguing is the differential response of youths from Republican homes to period pressures. Children from the most politicized GOP environments responded to the antipartisan period forces between 1965 and 1973 very much like children from Democratic homes—by forsaking their inherited partisanship. Republican losses, therefore, were concentrated in the most attentive core of its constituency. Youth from less politicized GOP families, on the other hand, seem to have been insulated from the prevailing period forces. This insulation prevented the decline of partisanship from being a completely bipartisan movement.

In realignments and to a more modest extent in normal times, it seems likely that powerful partisan period forces operate to pull young adults from nonpartisan homes into partisanship and to intensify the inheritances of those who grew up in partisan homes. Through this process, the partisanship of the electorate may be renewed in spite of the inexorable replacement of generations.

During the 1965–1973 period, a very different process appears to have been at work. Partisan period forces were replaced by powerful antipartisan pressures and seem to have produced a threefold disruption in the regular process of socialization. First, children from nonpartisan families were not mobilized into partisanship as their predecessors presumably had been in more partisan times. Second, many children from partisan homes were so responsive to the prevailing antipartisan climate that their partisanship failed to harden as they matured, as it probably had for previous generations at the same life stage. Third, many youths from partisan backgrounds, especially from Democratic and politicized Republican home environments, went even further—they deserted the parental tradition after having adopted it in 1965. These patterns of partisan change demonstrate how the traditional influence of parent socialization can be modified in face of a powerful competing *Zeitgeist* at a critical point in the life cycle. They attest to striking intergenerational discontinuities in even the most stable of political systems.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis has focused on the relationship between the family political environments of high school seniors in 1965 and the political orientations of

these youths as they matured into adults in particularly turbulent political times. In addition to chronicling the political journey of the class of 1965 across an important 17-year period, it illuminates the general contributions of parents and political periods to key dimensions of adult political life. Bearing in mind the limitations of a study of a single generation within a single time period, we now turn to an assessment of the general implications of our analysis.

It comes as a surprise perhaps to find that parental political involvement bears only a modest relationship to the politicization levels of offspring in late adolescence and well into adulthood. In this sense our elaborated conception of the transmission model "failed," in that even though multiple indicators of politicization were used, the parent-youth similarity was weak. We should not be misled by highly publicized instances of family political dynasties or stereotypical assumptions about chronically politically uninvolved families. Habits of political attentiveness are not nurtured successfully in many a politicized home; nor does coming from a nonpoliticized home environment preclude subsequent adult political involvement and interest.

Politically turbulent times, which may have fostered a sense of alienation in young people, may have attenuated this relationship to some degree. But it was not very large to begin with, in part because dissonant cues about the importance of politics are often emitted in the home (e.g., mother-father agreement in subjective political interest is a modest $\tau\text{-}b = .27$).⁸ What seems more likely is that adult politicization springs as much or more so from extrafamilial experiences and more contemporaneous forces. As a consequence, there is considerable intergenerational turnover in the politicized stratum of the population, which serves, in turn, as a source of political pluralism and change.

By contrast, the partisan loyalties of the filial generation strongly resemble the partisan environments of their family of origin, even under the adverse conditions of the 1965–1973 period. The parental partisan legacy was powerful when the youth were in the home and, although it suffered considerable erosion, remained at a still substantial level even after they had become adults. This continuity is all the more remarkable considering the powerful antipartisan period forces of the time.

The parental partisan legacy may have remained so resilient in spite of the vulnerability of the younger generation to powerful period forces after 1965

⁸Same sex parent-child socialization patterns and changing political gender roles may also be interacting to help generate the overall modest intergenerational continuity. In 1965 the correlations involving father-son pairs and mother-daughter pairs were about the same: $\tau\text{-}b = .20$ and $.26$, respectively. But sons carried on their father's traditions much better later on, the correlations being $.44$ in 1973 and $.36$ in 1982. By contrast the daughters, if anything, retreated from the mother's tradition even more, with $\tau\text{-}b$'s of $.25$ in 1973 and $.19$ in 1982.

because of the homogeneity of the partisan political environment. As a consequence of assortative mating and reciprocal spouse influence, there is probably no political orientation on which greater husband-wife agreement is achieved than partisanship; for example, the 1965 tau-*b* for the 430 mother-father pairs embedded in our sample is .60 (Niemi 1974). Because similar and thus reinforcing partisan cues usually emanate from parents, most members of the filial generation must break with a clear family tradition to adopt contrary partisan viewpoints later in life.

In spite of early evidence of considerable intergenerational partisan continuity, though, the over-time pattern is one of substantial decay in parent-youth similarity. We think this pattern marks an abnormal departure, peculiar to this generation, from the "normal" development of inherited partisan tendencies, although without comparable data from non-dealignment periods it is difficult to know with any certainty. In any event, this result shows that even apparently well-inculcated partisan habits are not immune to change under the pressure of strong period forces. This leads to substantial intergenerational movement across party lines, which is yet another force softening party conflict in the American public.

We have shown that politicization and partisanship, alike in their importance in defining the adult's political world, nonetheless differ in the strength of their roots in the childhood family environment. Perhaps this is but a specific example of a general tendency for affective orientations to be transmitted more readily than cognitive orientations from parents to children. Perhaps it is a result of differential parental tendencies toward political agreement. Whatever the reason, this differential in legacies of family politicization and partisanship is an important principle of political socialization.

Finally, our analysis has revealed that the interaction of parent partisanship and politicization underlies the particular movements of youth partisanship in the post-1965 period, especially its differential decay across various parental environments. In this respect our elaborated conception of the transmission model was more successful, for we demonstrated the conditioning or mediating effects of one family environment characteristic on subsequent changes in a separate political trait. While children from highly politicized families were most likely to carry the family partisan tradition with them as they left the home, the partisans among them were also most likely to desert this tradition in the face of powerful antipartisan period forces.

The political climate of the times seems to affect young people from politicized families the most, perhaps because that very politicization instills an early sensitivity to changes in the political environment.⁹ Youth from Democratic and Republican politicized families were alike in their move-

⁹No such pattern occurs among the highly politicized parents, due in great part to the "immunization" acquired after years of experience with the party system.

ment to nonpartisanship between 1965 and 1973. In deserting family partisan inheritances these youth may be demonstrating, ironically enough, the influence of their families.

There is an important implication for the study of partisan politics in these results. Youth often are regarded as the vanguard of revolutionary political change, with the most politicized among them leading the way. But studies of student movements in democratic societies also demonstrate the cutting edge role of the politicized young. Based on what we have observed here, we may extend that observation to alterations in the party system. Young people from more politicized family environments may be a leading force behind long-term partisan changes in America.

Our findings also have broad implications for the role of the family in the political socialization process. People do tend to carry important political dispositions "inherited" from their parents into adulthood—in conformity with the parent-to-child transmission model. Yet this inheritance is far from determinative, as the nature of the post-childhood political environment also weighs upon the maturing adult's orientations to politics. It is hardly surprising that many parents fail to prepare their children fully for a future political world that can present challenges the parents never knew, especially in the absence of deep political cleavages. Socialization to politics surely assumes a lower priority in most families than other concerns about the maturation of their children. In light of these considerations, then, what should be surprising is that the transmission model works as well as it does.

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APPENDIX

Similar procedures were followed to create the indices of parent and youth politicization and family partisanship used in the analysis. First, items were identified that appeared, on their face, to reflect attitudinal or behavioral attentiveness to politics. While we expected considerable commonality among these items, in that they were selected to represent the same underlying construct, we also tried to choose items that tapped different kinds of politicization—even at the risk of reducing the internal consistency of the index. Second, the items selected for inclusion in each index were examined for internal consistency by subjecting them to factor analysis and calculating the coefficient alpha. In the factor analysis, our test was loadings on the principal component, because we had hypothesized unidimensionality among the items. Third, the index was created by adding its constituent items. These general procedures produced the following specific results.

Parent Politicization Index. The eight items used in this measure loaded from .33 to .67 on the principal component, which accounted for 30% of the interitem variance, more than twice that of the second factor. This second factor had an eigenvalue barely exceeding one. When the first two factors were rotated (using varimax), however, a clear two-dimensional solution did not emerge, and several items had substantial loadings on both factors. This led us to conclude that a unidimensional index was justified. The alpha coefficient for the index is .65, which falls within the acceptable range for survey data using variegated items. Rather than eliminating single-parent families in creating the index, some items were scored as zero to represent the absence of a contribution by the missing parent. This decision had no substantive effect, as is demonstrated by comparison of the results for all families with those for dual-parent families.

Youth Politicization Indices. The 1965 measure is based on seven items: political interest, reading of newspapers and magazines for political information, political conversations with friends and with adults, participation in school activities, and anticipated participation in adult politics. The items loaded from .31 to .67 on the principal component, which explained 27% of the interitem variance, almost twice the amount explained by the second factor which barely passed the eigenvalue = 1 criterion. In the varimax rotation of these two factors, all items but one enjoyed substantial loadings on the first factor; the exception, conversation with adults, had a high enough loading on the principal component, though, to be retained in the index. The alpha coefficient for the 1965 youth politicization index is a barely acceptable .53. The 1973 and 1982 measures are based on the same five items in each year: newspaper and magazine reading, political interest, presidential voting, and political activity beyond voting. The principal component accounts for 37% and 38% of the item variance in 1973 and 1982, respectively, with loadings from .50 to .67 in 1973 and from .46 to .73 in 1982. In neither case, did a second factor emerge with an eigenvalue of 1 or greater, so multidimensionality among the items is unquestionably absent. The alpha coefficients are .57 for the 1973 measure and .48 for the 1982 measure.

Parent Partisanship Index. The correlations among the three constituent items of this index range from $r = .45$ to $r = .67$, and the principal components analysis yields a first factor explaining over 70% of the item variance and loadings that range from .80 to .87. Further evidence for the unidimensionality of these items comes from the fact that no second factor emerges using an eigenvalue cutoff of one (the equivalent of the variance in one item). The coefficient alpha is a relatively high .78.

In calculating the index, partisanship was weighted more than voting: strong partisans received a score of (+, for Democrats/−, for Republicans) 2, weak partisans (+/−) 1, and nonpartisans 0; Democratic votes were scored +1, nonvoters as 0, and Republican votes as −1. Rather than eliminating single-parent families from this index, some items were scored as zero to represent the absence of a contribution by the missing parent. This decision had no substantive effect, as is demonstrated by comparison of the results for all families with those for dual-parent families.

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