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Kaufmann, Eric (2022) The new culture wars: why critical race theory matters more than cancel culture. *Social Science Quarterly* 103 (4), pp. 773-788. ISSN 0038-4941.

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A set of what I term ‘New Culture Wars’ have arisen since 2015. These center around whether forms of speech, traditional narratives or national symbols harm minorities and should be restricted or reformed by social norms, critical pedagogy, speech codes or hate speech laws. This paper makes the case that these issues are now important electorally, but that it is vital to differentiate between a cluster of concerns labelled ‘Critical Race Theory’ which turn on the defense of traditional American and white identities and a second suite of issues around ‘cancel culture’ that concentrate on defending freedom of speech. This work suggests that the former arouses stronger partisan divisions than the latter.

The Rise of the New Culture Wars

The election of Donald Trump, first as Republican leader in 2015, then as president in 2016, arguably energized the grassroots left. The result has been a pronounced liberalization of Democratic voters’ attitudes on race and immigration since 2015, traceable in opinion surveys such as the American National Election Study (ANES), and in the frequency of identity-based terms such as ‘racism’ or ‘sexism’ in news content (Rozado and al-Gharbi 2021). What former Vox journalist Matthew Yglesias termed the ‘Great Awakening’ has arguably shifted opinion among a wider contingent of Democratic voters beyond an activist core (Yglesias 2019; Goldberg 2020; Mitchell 2020).

In addition, the protests over the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer in mid-2020, following on from a series of police killings of African-Americans subsequent to that of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, galvanized progressive politics in the country. The rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, involving nationwide multiracial demonstrations, coincided with an increase in the salience of race relations in

national politics and shifted the attitudes of liberal Democrats toward the police (Brenan 2021; Reny and Newman 2021). As of July 2021, 86 percent of white Democrats supported BLM while 86 percent of white Republicans opposed it (Civicqs 2021). Few issues, even immigration, divide the American electorate as sharply along partisan lines.

Post-2014 mobilization on the left has coincided with a series of high-profile ‘cancel culture’ incidents involving the firing, boycotting or deplatforming of controversial individuals and entities in the media, publishing, corporate world and universities. This includes celebrities like Gina Carano, dropped by Lucasfilm for comparing discrimination against conservatives with anti-Semitism, or employees like Google programmer James Damore, fired for circulating a memo arguing that psychological rather than structural factors or discrimination explained women’s underrepresentation in his field. A number of websites, such as *canceledpeople.com*, catalogue the phenomenon. Though cancellation incidents have been instigated by both left and right, the issue became an important focus for right-wing media outlets such as Fox News after 2015, and Donald Trump routinely attacked political correctness on the campaign trail.¹ Perhaps the most celebrated cancel culture incident was the decision by Twitter in January 2021 to delete ex-president Trump’s account (Fung 2021).

Another front in this second-order values conflict is the rise of a debate over so-called ‘Critical Race Theory’ (CRT) in diversity training and, especially, K-12 school instruction. Conservative mobilization against CRT (as they define it) appears to be more recent than the focus on cancel culture. While CRT originates in the critical legal scholarship of the 1970s, critical pedagogy around identity issues has become more common in fields such as Human Resources and Education (Delgado and Stefancic 1998). The new post-2014 energy on the

left identified by Yglesias, Rozado and al-Gharbi, alongside the BLM protests and rise of Trump, may have played a role in spreading these ideas.

The meanings attributed to CRT vary: it is a popular trope as well as a body of academic theory. This analysis focuses on the former, that is, ‘Critical Race Theory’ as a political term associated with certain concrete manifestations of the critical approach toward race in history and society. CRT, for conservatives, is less concerned with the substance of theory than pedagogical practices such as focusing on White people’s privilege and the oppression of minorities, identifying pupils by race for instructional purposes, or centering racism in American history.

In September 2020, in a segment on the popular Tucker Carlson show on right-leaning Fox News, conservative film-maker Christopher Rufo called for President Trump to ban CRT. Trump, who watched the show, swiftly responded with an executive order banning ‘efforts to indoctrinate government employees with divisive and harmful sex- and race-based ideologies’ and inaugurating a new ‘1776 Committee’ to support patriotic education.² Both initiatives were rescinded by the newly-elected Democratic president Joe Biden in January 2021. The initiative then shifted to the state level, where, as of writing, 41 states have introduced anti-CRT bills, and 15 have been signed into law. In Democratic-held states, bills have been introduced by Republican lawmakers but are unlikely to succeed. All successful bills have been passed in Republican states.³ At school board level, there have also been protracted battles over the teaching of CRT. Overall, attention to ‘critical race theory’ greatly expanded after late 2020, whether measured by the frequency of Google searches or Lexis-Nexis news stories.⁴

Locating the New Culture Wars

Where do these issues fall within the study of public opinion and elections? The value change paradigm theorizes new post-1960s cultural divides between those who welcome and oppose liberal value change (Inglehart 1990, Norris and Inglehart 2019). Liberalizing value changes have been accompanied by protracted ‘culture wars’ between those who have embraced such changes – typically newer cohorts or the university-educated – and older, more traditionalist voters (Hunter 1991). Castle (2019) updates this older religiously-focused literature to encompass contemporary battles over the rights of religious businesses to refuse service to gay people and the issue of transgender bathrooms. Whereas the first generation of value conflicts – extending to the contemporary issues raised by Castle - typically concerned religion and family values, as well as questions of militarism and political nationalism, the energy in the culture wars has arguably shifted away from religion and social conservatism towards more secular issues revolving around ethnic nationalism (Bonikowski 2017; Sides et al. 2019; Mutz 2018; Thompson 2021). This is not to say that religion is no longer important, only that more secular, even pagan, ethno-nationalist concerns have become more prominent, with regular religious attenders in western countries generally less likely, or no more likely, to support populist parties and candidates than non-attenders (Roy 2016; Ekins 2018; Siegers and Jedinger 2021). Electoral realignments occur as a result of the rising profile of cultural questions compared to economic ones. These processes are reconfiguring the class composition of parties such as Britain’s Conservatives and Labour, or, to a lesser extent, Republicans and Democrats in America, and altering the basis of western politics (Kriesi 2006; Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Sides et al. 2019).

Scholars have also probed the post-1960s ‘cultural turn’ of the left from class to identity as playing a part in consequent electoral realignments. This has been accompanied, since 2013, by the rise of social media and online partisan news sites (Jameson 1998; Kriesi 2006; Goodwin and Eatwell 2018; Klein 2020: 150-58). The oft-discussed ‘open-closed’ or ‘globalist-nationalist’ difference in value publics’ response to ethnic change has therefore been overlaid with a less-discussed second-order conflict over the ethics of speech and symbolic representation. That is, whether it is morally acceptable to center immigration restriction and traditional identities in political campaigns or whether this reinforces structures of oppression in society; and, on the other side, whether attempts to narrow the Overton Window of acceptable debate represent an infringement of expressive liberty and the denigration of White or American identity.

While there is considerable scholarly work on the disparate responses to ethnic change, there has been less attention paid to the second-order moral discourse pitting what Sobolewska and Ford (2020: 44, 47) term ‘identity liberals’ against free speech libertarians and nativist conservatives (Sobolewska and Ford 2020: 44, 47). Many identity liberals emphasize the importance of limiting forms of speech perceived as harmful to minorities. They simultaneously urge society to expose and confront forms of White, male or heterosexual privilege. These stances lead to conflict with those who defend freedom of speech and traditional narratives and symbols of nationhood - extending to the protection of statues and proper names.

There is only a modest amount of academic research on the impact of New Culture Wars issues on public opinion and political choice. Perceived ‘politically correct’ restrictions on speech have been shown in experiments to sometimes produce reactance effects that boost prejudice (Legault et al. 2011), support for Donald Trump, or support for conservative

policies (Conway et. al. 2017; Jardina 2017; Sobolewska and Ford 2020: 79-82). Analyses of the 2016 ANES pilot study report that political correctness was second only to immigration attitudes in predicting support for Donald Trump in the Republican primary (Kaufmann 2019: 364).

Yet these phenomena have not received much scholarly attention among quantitative scholars of public opinion and voting. For instance, while concepts such as the Overton Window of acceptable discourse or political correctness are frequently used by journalists, these have received scant coverage from political scientists.⁵ While work on affective polarization has emphasized the alignment or ‘stacking’ of group identities and even consumer choices with ideology and party identity, this literature has not generally mapped tensions over the boundaries of free expression and the deconstruction or protection of traditional narratives and symbols (Mason 2018; Hetherington and Weiler 2018; Abramowitz 2018; Klein 2020). This research seeks to address this oversight.

Why Cancel Culture is not Critical Race Theory

One aim of this work is to explore levels of support and partisan divisions over New Culture Wars issues. The second, more theoretically substantive, aim is to advance and test a distinction between two facets of these questions. Namely, that while cancel culture and ‘Critical Race Theory’ are often viewed as part of the same ‘culture wars’ suite of issues, the former addresses freedom of speech while the latter is concerned with defending identities such as White and American against critical speech. Given these distinctive orientations, with the first seeking fewer, and the second more, speech restraints, there are reasons to expect that the motivation behind the free speech and anti-CRT campaigns have different sources.

The theoretical basis for this thesis lies in moral foundations theory in psychology. Moral Foundations argues that both progressives and conservatives manifest the psychological foundations of care/harm, fairness/equality and liberty/oppression, but only conservatives place great value on loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation. Thus there are only modest differences between liberals and conservatives in their desire to defend freedom and equality, but powerful differences with regard to protecting in-group loyalty and respect for tradition (Haidt 2012: 203-4, 212-13). Reflecting the importance of the sacred for conservatives, long-running data series such as the General Social Survey generally show that liberals are more willing to permit controversial speech than conservatives, even for racists (Twenge et al. 2013). However, permitting a racist to speak is the one GSS item that has bucked the trend toward liberalization, beginning in 2006 and continuing through 2020, with restriction led by the young, college-educated and liberals (Chong and Levy 2018; Stevens 2020; Chong, Citrin and Levy 2021). We should therefore not expect to see as large a partisan divide over free speech as we would over defending traditional group identities.

There are three aims of this paper. First, to establish that new culture wars issues are not just a media talking point but are now a salient issue for many American voters, especially Republicans. Second, to test the empirical basis for analytically distinguishing attitudes toward cancel culture from those pertaining to Critical Race Theory, with the latter more politically-polarizing than the former. Third, to examine whether, following on from Moral Foundations Theory, White attachment to racial identity leads to divergent motivations toward the two culture wars constructs because those who value identity protection are more likely to accept the need to limit free speech while weak identifiers are less supportive of speech restrictions. This leads to the following set of hypotheses:

H1 New Culture Wars issues are a salient issue among some voters, especially Republicans

H2 Republican voters are more concerned about Critical Race Theory than cancel culture

H3 Partisan division is wider over Critical Race Theory than cancel culture

H4 Strong White identifiers are *more* likely to oppose Critical Race Theory than weak White identifiers

H5 Strong White identifiers are *less* likely to oppose cancel culture than weak White identifiers

Data

Data is primarily drawn from two surveys. The first is a survey of 959 currently employed Americans conducted on the Qualtrics platform between April 19 and June 1, 2021. The survey aimed to study partisan differences of opinion of cancel culture among knowledge workers, with a non-college comparison sample. Thus college-educated (72 percent) respondents are oversampled and those who did not vote or opted for third parties (13 percent) are undersampled. The survey contains numerous questions related to free speech and dismissal for speech, encompassing many actual or hypothetical cases. A number ask forced-choice binary questions such as ‘Minnesota professor Philip Adamo was suspended in early 2019 after student complaints that he used the N-word when quoting black writer James Baldwin. Should he have been suspended? Yes/No’; or ‘If someone uses a racial slur against

a White person in a meeting, should they be prosecuted for hate speech? Yes/No.’ Some are designed to elicit heightened responses from conservatives, others from progressives. A full list of questions used in this analysis is provided in Appendix I.

The second is a sample of 808 voters conducted by Competitive Edge Research (CER) in cooperation with the educational research and advocacy group Parents Defending Education between April 9 and 19, 2021. This was designed as a politically-representative sample, weighted on age, mode of contact, party affiliation, education and Latino share. Nonvoters are excluded from the survey. Variables tap many aspects of support for teaching K-12 schoolchildren themes that conservatives associate with Critical Race Theory (CRT). The data contains independent variables for liberal-conservative ideology, usual voting preference and party identification, with the first two on 5-point Likert scales and the third as a dichotomous variable. There is no data on reported 2020 vote. A full list of questions used in this analysis is provided in Appendix II.

In addition, aggregate results from five other surveys are used in the analysis. A summary of these appears in Appendix III.

Method

The analytical strategy begins with descriptive analysis of how partisans differ in their fear of being punished for speech as well as their attitudes toward cancel culture and CRT. I then move to a series of ordered logistic regressions of measures of attitudes to cancel culture and issues popularly associated with Critical Race Theory on party identification, controlling for a series of standard demographic variables (age, gender, race, education). The dependent

variables are drawn from survey items measuring cancel culture and CRT. The aim is to test whether partisanship is more closely associated with attitudes to cancel culture or attitudes to CRT.

This is followed by a further set of ordered logistic regressions of cancel culture and CRT-related outcome measures on White identity. Dependent variables are again drawn from survey items measuring cancel culture and CRT. In this case the aim is to examine whether White identity has a disparate effect on attitudes toward cancel culture and CRT.

Saliency

Given the novelty of this phenomenon, our knowledge base is largely limited to recent polls, many conducted only in the past few years. The first task is therefore to summarize the state of our knowledge of partisan variation in public opinion in this emerging area of inquiry.

While numerous surveys have recently been conducted by polling organizations on various dimensions of the culture wars, and a module on political correctness was part of the 2016 ANES pilot study, established surveys have not tended to include culture wars items in their Most Important Issue (Mii) measures. Yet in order to assess the electoral importance of this phenomenon, it is vital to shift from a focus on attitudes to examining where this issue ranks alongside voters' other priorities. This is because new culture wars issues are considerably less important if they merely serve as a passive badge of party identity rather than a motivating consideration in their own right.

On April 27-29, 2021, Harvard-Harris polled a nationally-representative sample of 1,872 voters on 24 issues. Respondents were asked to select the top three issues facing the country. Table 1 shows how voters ranked various issues, sorted by Republican voters' top priorities. 'Political correctness / cancel culture' scored ninth out of 24 for Republicans, with 14 percent mentioning it as a top 3 issue. 11 percent of Independents (ranking 13/24) and 7 percent of Democrats (ranking 18/24) also selected the issue. For Republicans, 'political correctness / cancel culture' placed above terrorism and just below civil disorder and crime, signifying its importance for conservatives. Overall, 'political correctness / cancel culture' ranked 13th out of 24, a solidly mid-ranking issue. This furnishes evidence for H1.

[Table 1 here]

In the Qualtrics survey, fielded between April 19 and June 1, 2021, respondents were also asked to choose a leading issue from a list of 9. The culture wars category employed a more expanded set of words to tap into the broader range of ways that people understand cancel culture. The options read as follows:

'Which, for you, is the MOST important problem facing the country?' The results, with frequencies in brackets, are listed in order from the most to least important. In this formulation, cancel culture placed fourth of nine issues listed, just above religion and moral values. However, the mid-range ranking is relatively similar to the Harvard-Harris data:

1. COVID-19 and the Economy (41%)

2. Health Care, Share of People without Health Insurance, Cost of Health Insurance (12%)
3. Immigration, Border Issues, Amnesty, Birthright Citizenship (10%)
- 4. Political Correctness, Free Speech, Cancel Culture, Wokeness, People Falsely Accused of Racism and Sexism (10%)**
5. Moral Values, Turning Away from Religion, Family Values (8%)
6. White Nationalist Terrorism or Insurgency, Far Right Misinformation (6%)
7. Environment, Global Warming, Man-Made Climate Change (6%)
8. Equality for historically disadvantaged race, gender and sexuality groups (4%)
9. Foreign Policy, China, Iran, Russia, Overseas Threats (3%)

Respondents were asked to also identify their second and third choice issues. 48 percent of those who voted for Donald Trump selected cancel culture as a top 3 priority, placing it third after COVID/Economy (62%) and immigration (60%) and lending further support for H1. Democrats ranked the issue considerably lower, with 17 percent naming it a leading issue, similar to immigration, but above foreign policy and moral values. Independents were in the middle, with 33 percent, placing the issue fourth. Results largely replicate those from the Harvard-Harris poll in table 1. Note that frequencies for all issues are higher because respondents had only 9 issues to choose from instead of 24. In addition, the more extensive range of descriptors used for the cancel culture variable may have captured more attention. Overall, cancel culture / political correctness was a mid-ranking issue with 2 to 3 times higher salience among Republicans than Democrats.

A logistic regression of a dummy variable for ranking this issue in one's top 3 on demographic variables and partisanship shows that no demographic variable is statistically significant, but partisanship is at the $p < .001$ level, with a Strong Republican having a predicted probability of .52 of ranking culture war issues in their top 3 compared to .13 for a Strong Democrat. This provides further evidence for H1.

Public Opinion on Cancel Culture

In the next section, I move from issue salience to issue attitudes, reviewing support for discrete questions associated with cancel culture. The datasets analysed for this analysis are the Qualtrics and CER surveys. However, with such a recent phenomenon, it is useful to triangulate these results with crosstabular aggregate data from other surveys to ensure that the two surveys I analyse are externally valid. A full list of the surveys I reference appears in Appendix III, with discussion below.

First, at an abstract level, the Hidden Tribes report of 2017 found that 80 percent of Americans think political correctness (PC) has ‘gone too far’ though 82 percent also think hate speech is a problem (Hawkins 2018). The 2021 Qualtrics survey replicates this finding, with 74 percent of respondents saying PC has gone too far. In addition, the distance between Strong Democrats and Weak Democrats is an impressive 20 points, identical to that separating Weak Democrats from Strong Republicans.

Nevertheless, when the question is rephrased as, ‘Thinking about political correctness, are you generally in favor of it (it protects against discrimination), or against it (it stifles freedom of speech)?’, just 41 percent now oppose PC with 37 percent are in favour. Even 21 percent of Republicans emerge as pro-PC on this measure. This suggests that questions around political correctness and cancel culture reflect a tension between competing values such that a change of wording can alter the ranking of threshold values, shifting the balance of responses substantially.

Answers are also affected somewhat by the concreteness of the question. Thus the February 2021 wave of the Harvard-Harris poll asked a set of binary forced-choice questions reflecting real-world instances of speech restriction. Results, by party identification, appear in figure 1. These show only a modest difference between Republicans and Independents. Across the five items, between 67 and 80 percent of Republicans report that they are opposed to cancel culture. On the flipside, this means that there is no question in which Republican *support* for the cancel culture position is below 20 percent. Democrats divide relatively evenly between support and opposition, and are between 15 and 20 points less opposed than Republicans except with respect to the question of employers firing workers for their online content or speech, where the partisan gap reaches 40 points. The lowest level of Democratic opposition to speech restrictions is 29 percent. Unfortunately, finer-grained distinctions between strong and weak Democrats are not available in the Harvard-Harris data.

[Figure 1 here]

The Qualtrics survey permits a more fine-grained parsing of party identification. Probing crosstabulations across a battery of 20 cancel culture-oriented questions in figure 2 involving real-world cases or hypothetical examples shows that those identifying as a Strong Democrats on a five-point partisanship scale stand out for their weaker opposition to cancel culture. While around 70 percent of respondents express opposition to most items, with only modest differences between Weak Democrats, Independents and Republicans, Strong Democrats are relatively evenly allocated between pro- and anti-cancel positions. This is not to deny that there remains a partisan divide: for instance, on the first cluster of questions concerning actual cases of people who have lost their jobs, Democrats are between 18 points (Cafferty) and 34 points (Damore) less opposed to dismissing a given individual for speech than are

Republicans. Yet it is Strong Democrats that stand out as most distinctive on cancel culture issues.

[Figure 2 here]

Are People Afraid to Speak?

The threat to free speech implied by cancel culture should mean that those with politically-incorrect views, presumably Republicans more than Democrats, care more about the issue than others. Before conducting However, the data below suggests that this relationship is weak to non-existent.

When asked by Harvard-Harris in February 2021, ‘Are you concerned that if you were to express your true viewpoints on Twitter that you might be banned or fired from your job,’ 47 percent of Republicans and 35 percent of Democrats and Independents replied in the affirmative. A slightly different question, excluding the arguably less consequential concern about being banned on social media, was asked by Cato/YouGov in July 2020: ‘Are you worried about losing your job or missing out on job opportunities if your political opinions became known?’ 27 percent said yes, including 30 percent of 2016 Trump voters and 21 percent of Clinton voters.

The April-June 2021 Qualtrics survey replicated the Cato question, finding that 27 percent of 2020 Trump voters and 25 percent of Biden voters agreed. A second question on the Qualtrics survey asked, ‘Are you worried about losing your job or reputation because someone misunderstands something you have said or done, takes it out of context, or posts

something from your past online?’ 35 percent of 2020 Trump voters and 36 percent of Biden voters responded in the affirmative. With controls for age, education, gender and race, there was no significant difference on either of the aforementioned questions by party identification, ideology or 2020 vote. While Trump voters working in very liberal workplaces were significantly more worried than others, just 23 percent of Trump voters were employed in self-described Democratic-majority work environments (even fewer were in Strong Democrat organizations), with nearly 60 percent in Republican workplaces - thereby limiting chilling effects. This moderate level of personal fear, coupled with the lack of partisan differences, helps explain why free speech issues may not have as high a resonance for Republican voters as some analysts might expect.

Critical Race Theory

The previous exploration of cancel culture finds that Democrats are generally between 20 and 30 points less opposed to firing or banning dissenters for controversial speech around race and gender than Republicans. This said, there is virtually no question where fewer than 30 percent of Democrats oppose cancellation or less than 20 percent of Republicans support it. There are also minimal partisan differences when it comes to fears of being cancelled.

How does this compare to questions pertaining to media discourses around Critical Race Theory (CRT)? YouGov/Economist data from June 2021 finds that 64 percent of people were at least somewhat familiar with CRT, though only just over half of this 64 percent said they had a ‘good idea’ what CRT was. Even so, of those who had heard of CRT (N=583), a third viewed it favourably.

Opinion divided sharply on partisan lines. 85 percent of Democrats supported CRT, but fewer than 10 percent of Republicans did. In addition, responses on the Republican side are extremely skewed toward the ‘very unfavourable’ category on a 4-point scale from ‘very unfavourable’ to ‘very favourable’. 91 percent of Trump voters said they were ‘very unfavourable’ and just 6 percent were favourable. By contrast, 58 percent of Biden voters were ‘very favourable’ and a further 24 percent the more lukewarm ‘somewhat favourable’.¹ A Politico/Morning Consult survey conducted in the same month shows a similar pattern. Of those who said they knew what CRT was (N=1,408), 76 percent of Republicans said they were ‘very unfavourable’, 11 percent ‘somewhat unfavourable’ and just 13 percent favourable. Democrats were spread across response categories more, with 33 percent ‘very favourable’, 42 percent ‘somewhat favourable’ and 26 percent unfavourable.

The Republican-Democratic partisan split on these CRT questions, among those who claim to have heard of CRT, is 73 points for the YouGov/Economist data and 63 points for Politico/Morning Consult, with Republican opposition between 85 and 91 percent (91 and 94 percent for 2020 Trump voters). This 63-73 point difference compares with a 20-30 point partisan gap on the cancel culture items in the Qualtrics data where Republican opposition to cancel culture was generally in the 70 to 80 percent opposed range (compared to 85-94 percent for CRT), providing evidence for H3. Whether this reflects deep-seated value conflicts or ‘conflict extension’ whereby partisans respond to party cues about which positions to hold (i.e. Carsey and Layman 2006; Hooghe 2007) is unclear.

To further examine these opinion dynamics, I explore a wide battery of questions around curriculum content, presented in figure 3, drawn from the Competitive Edge Research (CER)

¹ ‘Americans who have heard of critical race theory don’t like it,’ *Economist*, June 17, 2021

survey in April 2021. This shows that among Republicans, 79 percent have an unfavourable view of CRT, 5 percent are positive and 16 percent are unsure or haven't heard of it. For Democrats, 38 percent are unfavourable, 18 percent favourable and 44 percent unsure/unaware.²

Figure 3 sorts opinion by strength of opposition to the CRT item, from where consensus is greatest, as with the question of whether schools should 'Assign White students the status of "privileged" and assign non-white students the status of "oppressed".' Note that the figure shows the share *opposed* to each statement only. While most of the balance support these statements, there is an important 'unsure' category which was used more by Democratic than Republican respondents. In the CER data, party identification is arrayed on a 5-point scale from 'always vote Republican' to 'always vote Democratic' which approximates to the 5-point Strong Republican to Strong Democrat scale used in the Qualtrics survey.

Pedagogical questions pertaining to the teaching of race or gender perspectives on American history and society generally elicited substantial Democratic support and overwhelming Republican opposition, resulting in wide partisan division. For instance, the proposal to 'Teach that White people are inherently privileged, while Black and other people of color are inherently oppressed and victimized,' was endorsed by 43 percent of Democratic respondents. 29 percent of Democrats said it was 'extremely' or 'very' important that changes based on Critical Race Theory (CRT) be instituted in school, with 90 percent saying this was at least 'somewhat important'. While the 5-point scale used in the CER survey, in which the middle category is 'somewhat important', makes it difficult to easily dichotomize the results, these items produced some of the widest partisan differences.

² 'Parents Defending Education National Poll: Americans Overwhelmingly Reject "Woke" Race and Gender Policies in K-12 Education,' defendinged.org, May 10, 2021.

Centering shameful episodes in American history, and reading these as having contemporary effects on American society, also produced large partisan gaps. Comparing Republicans and Democrats, we find considerable differences in the share opposed to schools teaching that the US is founded on racism and remains racist (97 percent for Republicans, 42 percent for Democrats), is built on stolen land (93-35), or that US history classes should ‘focus on race and power and promote social justice political issues’ (92-19). Large partisan divisions were also present over whether to teach political or social activism, promote equity or teach about race and gender more.

Several patterns are apparent from the chart. First, Strong and Weak Democrats resemble each other far more on CRT issues than is the case in the Qualtrics cancel culture data in figure 2. Dichotomous party identification as Republican or Democratic matters more for CRT-themed questions in the CER than for cancel culture ones in the Qualtrics data. Second, most partisan divisions over CRT-themed questions are on the order of 50 to 60 points, about twice as large as is true for the cancel culture modules in figure 2. Finally, Republican opinion is generally over 80 percent opposed on CRT questions, rising above 90 percent for numerous items. This indicates a higher level of opposition than the 70-80 percent range for cancel culture items in figure, in line with the predictions of H2.

While many questions in figure 2 are dichotomous forced-choice items, it is noteworthy that in the 5-point CER questions, Republicans cluster heavily in the ‘strongly against’ category while Democratic answers are distributed more evenly across support categories, encompassing both support and opposition. There are methodological issues regarding the wording of some questions in the CER survey, but the partisan spread and Republican sentiment levels are generally similar to those recorded in the YouGov/Economist and Politico/Morning Consult data.

In short, the CRT and cancel culture line graphs in figures 2 and 3 look very different, with the latter varying considerably more by partisanship. Strong Democrats no longer diverge sharply from Weak Democrats the way they do over cancel culture questions in figure 2. This provides evidence for H3.

[Figure 3 here]

In order to evaluate H2, I regress a series of cancel culture and CRT outcome measures on party identification, which is measured in both the Competitive Edge Research (CER) and Qualtrics datasets. The CER question asks ‘Please tell me whether you have heard of the following and, if so, whether you have a favorable or unfavorable impression.’ ‘Cancel Culture’ is listed as one of the items for evaluation. 27 percent of respondents replied that they had not heard of it or were unsure about it. These individuals were coded as the middle category to minimize listwise deletion as the sample consists of just 776 individuals.

A series of questions pertaining to CRT (bracketing the question of whether they accurately derive from its postulates) were also asked, including:

‘Here are some things administrators at kindergarten through 12th grade schools in your area could do. Please tell me whether you know what each one is, and, if so, how important it is that administrators implement each of them.’ One item was ‘Institute Changes Based on Critical Race Theory’.

‘Teach students that America was founded on racism and remains structurally racist today, and that racism is the cause of all differences in outcomes and achievement between racial groups. Should schools in your area teach that or not?’

‘Teach students that the United States was stolen from other people and inform them the school they attend and the houses they live in are built on stolen land. Should schools in your area teach that or not?’

‘Teach that White people are inherently privileged, while Black and other people of color are inherently oppressed and victimized. Should schools in your area teach that or not?’

The four CRT items in the CER data load onto a single principal component with correlations of between .72 and .86 whereas the cancel culture question loads onto this component at just .46.

Modelling the results on individual items in an ordered logistic regression in table 2 shows that the partisanship coefficient for the cancel culture question in the CER data, at -.435, is considerably smaller than for the CRT-themed questions in the same dataset (in a linear regression specification, this carries a standardized beta of -.27 compared to -.37, -.47, -.53 and -.57 for the four subsequent CRT items). Model fit is only a quarter to a fifth as large. Running a logistic regression model on the Qualtrics dummy variable for support or opposition to Professor Philip Adamo’s firing (in column one of the table) exhibits a smaller coefficient than in the CRT models (confirmed using standardized coefficients in linear regression specifications).

In order to develop a cancel culture index, I decided to use concrete examples of individuals who had lost their position for speech. In my view this provides a more accurate picture of how people make value tradeoffs than using abstract questions which often elicit support for free speech but do not assess the decisions people make in the breach. In addition, the cases used (Charles Negy, Philip Adamo, James Damore, Brandon Eich, Gina Carano) blend a number of higher and lower profile individuals as the more famous cases such as Carano may be more tainted by partisan framing than the lesser-known instances. Unfortunately there are no CRT items in the Qualtrics survey to directly compare, but cancel culture questions using the real-world examples listed above produced coefficients in the -.040 to -.433 range. The lesser-known academic examples (Adamo, Negy) resulted in lower coefficients (-.184, -.040) than the more public and politicized cases. This indicates that even within cancel culture, the political valence of a case may matter as much or more than free speech principles in accounting for partisan differences of opinion. This comports with the predictions of H2.

In addition, it is noteworthy that the Strong Democrat parameter, measured as a dummy variable for point 1 on comparable 5-point partisanship scales, has a powerful effect in the Adamo (cancel culture) case, but has either no significant association or is reverse-signed when it comes to the CRT outcome measures. This tallies with visual inspection of the data in figure 2, where Strong Democrats show a distinctive profile, and figure 3, where they do not. This said, there is no significant effect of Strong Democrat on responses to the cancel culture question in the CER data.

In the CER data, moving one point on the 5-point party identification scale corresponds to a shift of between a third and a half a scale-point on the four CRT outcome measures but only half as much for the cancel culture scale.³ In a CER model with party

³ Cancel culture

identification as the dependent variable (not shown), an index of the four CRT items run alongside the cancel culture variable results in cancel culture falling out of the model entirely. These results lend further support to H2, that CRT is a stronger partisan issue than cancel culture/free speech.

[Table 2 here.]

In a subsequent UK survey I conducted in January 2022 (summarised in Appendix IV) which contains versions of both the Qualtrics and CER items, results are similar to those in Table 2. That is, the coefficient on partisan differences is substantially larger on questions pertaining to CRT and contentious historical figures than on Cancel Culture. Moreover, in a model predicting 2019 UK election vote, attitudes to Cancel Culture fall out of the model entirely while those for CRT and historical figures are strong predictors.

Group Identity and Culture Wars Attitudes

Loyalty to a traditional group, be it ethnic, racial, national or religious, is a key moral foundation for conservatives. Early in the Qualtrics survey, respondents were asked for their ethnoracial group identity, using the standard classification of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian or Other. This was followed by an item asking, ‘How important is your racial background to your sense of who you are?’ Response categories were distributed on a 5-point scale from ‘not at all important’ to ‘extremely important.’ A third of whites said their White identity was very or extremely important, including 14 percent who said it was ‘extremely important.’ This is broadly in line with previous work – as Jardina (2019: 62) writes, ‘30 to 40 percent of

White Americans indicate that their racial identity is very, if not extremely, important to them.’

In order to test H4 and H5 on the relationship between White identity and cancel culture or CRT, I regress several outcome measures on White identity alongside demographic controls. The first outcome measure is an index comprised of a principal component which accounts for .46 of the variation in five real-world cancel culture cases (Damore, Eich, Negy, Carano, Adamo). The second is a question on policy that approximates to a measure of support for CRT. The latter reads, ‘The government should ban forms of mandatory diversity training which tell White employees that they are upholding White supremacy and structural racism if they refuse to acknowledge their White privilege.’ Since this question asks respondents about government policy, and some conservatives may have a negative response to government intervention, the question does not measure attitudes to CRT as directly as the CER does. Even so, the substance of this item embodies the kind of example cited frequently in media discourses around CRT.

Two other questions help assess whether group defense and free speech concerns compete. The first, which would be expected to elicit a defensive White response, reads, ‘Should a public debate over whether all white people are racist be permitted, or should it be prevented because it offends white people?’ The second would not be expected to trigger a conservative White protective response, as it merely asks, ‘Should a public debate over whether trans women are women be permitted, or should it be prevented because it offends trans women?’

Results are presented in Table 3. Model 1 shows that higher White identity predicts greater *support* for cancel culture for the five real-world dismissal cases that comprise the cancel culture index. The effect is significant at the $p < .001$ level. This confirms H4. Turning to the CRT proxy measure in model 2, results also show opposition to the free speech

position. This time strong White identity is positively associated with support for banning diversity training in White privilege and structural racism. The effect is again significant at the $p < .01$ level. These results confirm, respectively, that strong White identity is associated with being more opposed to CRT (H5) but less opposed to cancel culture (H4).

Turning to the third model, whose outcome variable is whether a debate about whether all Whites are racist should be prevented, we find that, as H4 and H5 would predict, White identification is correlated with significant opposition to the holding of such a debate. For a strong White identifier, this would be perceived as an attack on the White in-group. In model 4, high White identifiers are not more likely than weak White identifiers to wish to stop a debate over whether transwomen are women, so H5 does not receive support in this instance.

[Table 3 here]

Critical approaches to race and American society would be expected to engender a negative response not just from White identifiers but from those with a strong American national identity. While the Qualtrics survey does not have a measure of American identity, the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES) shows that White identity has a .143 bivariate correlation with American national identity. The mean response for American identity among Whites in the 2016 ANES was ‘very important’ and for White identity, slightly less than ‘moderately important’. Among Whites who said their White identity was ‘extremely important,’ 93 percent rated their American identity similarly, whereas for Whites who said their White identity was ‘not at all important,’ just 35 percent said their American identity was extremely important. White identity has twice the standardized effect size as party identification when it comes to predicting the strength of a respondent’s American

identity. Importantly, the ANES also shows that stronger levels of American national identity, and feelings toward the flag, predict higher opposition to Black Lives Matter, a movement critical of aspects of American history and society. This is so even when controlling for party identification, 2016 vote, ideology, feelings toward black people and demographics. From this, I would predict that stronger American identity is associated with higher opposition to CRT but reduced hostility to cancel culture.

Discussion

The data reviewed here show that New Culture Wars issues focusing on resisting ‘cancel culture’ threats to free speech, and combatting ‘Critical Race Theory’ by calling for limits to certain forms of speech, are important concerns in the American electorate. Indeed, these are now a mid-ranking issue overall and a leading issue for Republican voters. Media coverage and legislative activity on these questions has risen substantially in recent years. These secular New Culture Wars issues deserve more attention from political science, and from social scientists more broadly.

However, of the two New Culture Wars issues, conservative voters appear to place more emphasis on limiting speech that is perceived to be derogatory to the White and American identities to which many are attached. Republicans are not more fearful of losing their job or reputation for their views than Democrats and they do not differ as much from Democrats in their opposition to the dismissal of employees for speech as they do in their hostility to perceived attacks on White and American identity. This accords with Moral Foundations Theory, which postulates that conservatives do not differ widely from liberals in their orientations toward freedom and fairness, but diverge substantially on questions of group

loyalty and respect for tradition. Further evidence of this can be seen in British data, which corroborates the pattern, suggesting that this pattern may be of international significance.

Strong White identifiers are more protective of White group identity than weak White identifiers, and this is associated with greater opposition to Critical Race Theory but *weaker* opposition to cancel culture. Since White and American group identities are related, and both relate to conservatism and Republican voting, the effect of group protectiveness against harmful speech is to moderate Republican opposition to cancel culture while stimulating opposition to CRT.

A new research agenda could explore whether higher levels of American identity are correlated with opposition to CRT and relative support for cancel culture, and whether this accounts for why partisan divisions over CRT are greater than they are over cancel culture.

Finally, these results suggest that CRT is viewed by conservatives as an assault on racial and national identity, and by progressives as a necessary corrective to the historical record. Cancel culture is perceived by conservatives and classical liberals as a threat to liberty, while progressives consider it a means of protecting the marginalized. These moral conflicts overlay and reinforce other forms of identity-based value conflict: over immigration and affirmative action, for instance. Thus the American electorate has polarized over immigration both because partisans hold genuine policy differences arising from divergent authoritarian vs. liberal cultural-psychological profiles (i.e. Stenner 2005; Sides et. al 2019) and due to a second-order symbolic conflict. Namely, one in which progressives view anti-immigration measures as racist while conservatives perceive charges of racism to be an attack on their party, racial group and nation, as well as an attempt to ‘cancel’ their freedom of expression.

Future research might thereby explore how the New Culture Wars ‘stack’ with other forms of polarization, and whether they are fuelling a process of recursive radicalization.

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