

Feminist and Anti-Feminist Identification in the 21st Century United States

Feminism and anti-feminism, as ideologies and social movements in the United States, stretch back hundreds of years (Friedan 1963; Kraditor 1981; Swanson 1998). Yet both ideologies remain relevant in the 21st century. Although definitions of feminism abound among scholars, as well as everyday Americans, a widely cited definition comes from historian Nancy Cott (1987) who defines feminism as a belief in sex/gender equality, a belief that historical inequality is socially constructed, and the recognition of shared experience among women, which ought to inspire a desire for change. More recent, third or fourth wave feminism, builds on this definition by broadening feminism to be more inclusive, paying particular attention to the experiences of women of color (Crenshaw 1989; Simien 2007; Smooth 2013; Snyder 2008).

Several different forces have given prominence to feminism in the 21st century. The #MeToo movement has brought high profile, sustained attention to gender inequalities in power, and the issues of sexual harassment and sexual assault. During the 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton, the first female major party candidate, self-identified as a feminist and spoke openly about the challenges facing women and the unfinished gender equality agenda (Bazelon 2016; Rafferty and Dann 2015). Indeed, many see feminist activism as necessary as ever, as women continue to work longer hours outside the home while also carrying the majority of the childcare responsibilities, and doing so without government supported childcare or national paid family leave. The embrace of feminism by high profile celebrities, including Beyoncé, has also raised its profile in the 21st century (Hobson 2017; Siddiqui 2016).

At the same time, and in large part in response to the heightened prominence of feminism, anti-feminism has also been highly visible in the 21st century. Anti-feminism in America was prominent during the 19th and 20th centuries where it manifested as opposition to

women's suffrage, education for women, and women's rights, and was driven by an ideological framework positing that women would be harmed by laws mandating equality (Kraditor 1981; Swanson 1998). In the latter half of the 20th century, anti-feminist activism centered on opposition to the Equal Right Amendment and abortion (Himmelstein 1986; Mansbridge 1986). And in the 21st century, anti-feminism has been defined as the embrace of misogynistic beliefs including the ideas that feminism is no longer needed, that women actually benefit from their status as women, and that it is now men who are having a tougher time (Anderson 2015; Blais and Dupuis-Deri 2012).

The growth of the digital age has brought anti-feminist sentiments greater visibility (Ging and Siapera 2018). Women journalists, especially those who write about gender issues, face vicious misogynistic attacks. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump gave voice to anti-feminist sentiments such as the idea that women have it easier these days, accused Clinton of using her gender to get ahead, and made explicitly sexist and misogynistic statements (Gearan and Zezima 2016). The prominence of Trump's anti-feminist rhetoric has created more space and legitimacy for anti-feminist thought and activism (Junn 2017; Strolovitch, Wong and Proctor 2017).

This study employs American National Election Study (ANES) data to better understand the factors driving feminist and anti-feminist identification today, and to place contemporary feminist identification in recent historical context, comparing levels of feminist identity in 2016 to those in 1992. This study asks a series of related questions: who identifies as a feminist today and how is this similar or different than who identified as a feminist in the previous generation? What does it mean to be anti-feminist in modern America and who identifies as such? Further, are anti-feminists simply a mirror reflection of feminists or does anti-feminism represent a

distinctive social identity? Finally, the study explores the meaning of these labels by looking at what self-identified feminists and anti-feminists believe in terms of feminist public policy and attitudes about gender equality. By addressing these questions, this study provides insights into the state of modern feminism and anti-feminism in contemporary American politics.

Literature Review and Hypotheses: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Identification

Understanding the extent to which Americans view themselves as feminists, and how this has or has not changed over time, is challenging as researchers have measured feminist consciousness and identification in different ways (see Fassinger 1994 for one review of these approaches). Much of the public opinion research about feminist identification uses attitudes towards issues such as abortion, perceptions of discrimination against women, gender roles attitudes, or belief in the need for more women in positions of political power as a proxy for feminist identification (e.g. Banaszak and Plutzer 1993; Bolzendahl and Myers 2004; Huddy and Willmann 2016).

This study stands apart from most previous work by focusing on an individual's decision to self-identify as a feminist rather than measuring feminism on the basis of policy beliefs or perceptions of gender discrimination. We argue that the focus on self-identification is most appropriate in that while feminist identification and feminist beliefs are correlated concepts, they are distinct phenomena (Rhodebeck 1996). Studies consistently show that support for feminist policy positions and for the broad ideal of gender equality surpass feminist identification (Burn, Aboud and Moyles 2000; McCabe 2005). Likewise, whether it is ideology (Ellis and Stimson 2012), partisanship (Greene 2004), or other political distinctions, political scientists have found that group identification and social identity often are distinct from related policy attitudes. Just like there is symbolic value in labeling oneself a conservative or progressive regardless of one's

specific issue positions (Mason 2018) it is crucial to understand whether one chooses to identify as feminist or anti-feminist, regardless of one's views on gender equality and/or specific issue positions. This is particularly the case for a term such as feminist, which is emotionally loaded and has strong symbolic meaning.

Our explicit focus on who self-identifies as a feminist (and who identifies as anti-feminist) is likewise supported by recent research showing that people's group-based social identifications have taken on increased importance in contemporary American politics as Americans have increasingly sorted themselves politically based on these social identities (Bauer, Klar, and Schmitt 2018; Mason and Wronski 2018). Whereas personal and political identities in the past often had minimal overlap, increasingly, our identities related to occupation, place of residence, lifestyle, consumer choices, etc., overlap and reinforce each other (Mason 2018; Hetherington and Weiler 2018). Thus a feminist identity and anti-feminist identity should map onto political identities as never before.

Determinants of Feminist Identification and Change over Time

Regardless of how feminist identification is measured, research has found a number of factors are associated with feminist identification. In this study we focus on four of these factors—partisanship, gender, race/ethnicity, and age—as we believe these variables are central to understanding change in feminist identification over time, as well as the distinctive contours of contemporary feminist and anti-feminist identification.

One of the most profound forces in American politics over the last several decades has been partisan polarization and the growing role of partisanship in shaping people's views and perceptions about political phenomena (Abramowitz 2018; Campbell 2016; Lewis-Beck et al 2008). Therefore, understanding the role of partisanship in shaping feminist identification, and

exploring how this relationship has changed from 1992 to 2016 is imperative. Studies exploring the determinants of feminist orientations have consistently found a relationship between partisanship, ideology and feminist identification (Reingold and Foust 2008). Particularly since the 1980s, when the Republican party began to champion family values over feminist positions (Freeman 1986, 1993), liberals and Democrats have been more likely to hold feminist beliefs and identify as feminists than conservatives and Republicans (e.g. Rhodebeck 1996). Given the profound and increasing role partisanship plays in driving attitudes and perceptions in contemporary American politics (Abramowitz 2018; Lewis-Beck et al 2008), we expect to find that partisanship has increasingly come to shape people's decision to identify as a feminist or anti-feminist. In our increasingly polarized political environment, Republicans in particular, may be unwilling to identify as feminist, regardless of whether they support gender equality and pro-feminist policies. Meanwhile, the embrace of feminism by high profile Democratic leaders, such as Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi, is likely to have influenced an increasing number of Democrats to see themselves as part of the feminist movement today than a generation ago.

Understanding feminist identification in the 21st century also requires a close look at the historical gender gap in feminist identification. A consistent finding is that women are more likely to identify as feminist and/or express higher levels of feminist consciousness than men (e.g. Huddy, Neely and Lafay 2000; McCabe 2005; Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003). Although third and fourth wave feminism has sought to be more inclusive, in part by integrating men into its activism, due to the heightened role of sorting by social and group identity discussed previously, as well as consistent emphasis in conservative media that feminism is anti-men, we anticipate the gender gap in feminist identification to have grown from 1992 to 2016.

Understanding feminist identification also requires explicit attention to the ways race, ethnicity and gender work together to shape feminist identification (Crenshaw 1998; Nash 2008). This is important due to the privileged position of whiteness within the feminist movement (Brewer and Dundes 2018), as well as the ways that racism and sexism intersect in American politics to create marginalization and privilege (Crenshaw 1989; Junn 2017; Smooth 2013). Carter, Corra and Carter (2009) looked at both race and gender to assess attitudes towards the changing role of women in U.S. society and found that black women held less traditional gender role attitudes than white women and men of both races, although the differences between these groups diminished over time as an increasing number of white women joined the workforce. Along similar lines, Bolzendahl and Myers (2004) found that African American women held more egalitarian views than white women. Results concerning feminist identification specifically have been mixed with some studies finding race is not a predictor of feminist identification (Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003) while others finding that both Black Americans and Latinx Americans have higher levels of feminist identification than whites (Huddy and Willmann 2017; Rhodebeck 1996). Particularly given the continued endorsement of sexist beliefs among many white women (Cassese and Barnes 2018) women of color, in comparison to white women, may increasingly come to see feminist identification as a way to respond to continued racism and sexism in American society, including but by no means limited to Donald Trump's embrace of both misogynistic and racist rhetoric during the 2016 campaign (Brewer and Dundes 2018).

Finally, in order to understand potential change in feminist identification over time, we believe it is important to investigate the role of age, given that generational replacement has acted to liberalize societal attitudes about gender roles and gender equality (Bennett and Bennett 1999). Previous academic studies have not found a consistent connection between age and

feminism (e.g. Huddy, Neely and Lafay 2000; Rhodebeck 1995; Schnittker, Freese and Powell 2003). And, in the 21st century, there have been a number of news stories asserting that younger women are more reluctant to identify as feminists than older generations of women. In 2012, for example *CNN* ran a story titled “Where are all the millennial feminists?” (Weinberger 2012). In 2016, the decision of so many young women to support Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton in the Democratic presidential nomination process led high profile feminists and Democrats to criticize younger women for their apparent lack of feminism (Cummins 2016). Yet there are compelling theoretical reasons to think young Americans today may be more likely than older Americans to identify as feminist than older Americans. After all, young people today have grown up during a more socially progressive time, when core feminist ideas such as gender equality are widely accepted, and when many high profile figures in popular culture have embraced the term feminist (Hobson 2017). Therefore, despite some media narratives to the contrary, we expect to find young people today to be more likely than older generations to embrace the label feminist due to the forces of socialization.

Determinants of Anti-feminist Beliefs

Studies seeking to measure and understand the determinants of anti-feminist beliefs are few in number, and similar to studies on feminist identification typically operationalize anti-feminism through policy beliefs. In his 1986 study, Himmelstein operationalized antifeminist ideology as opposing the ERA and abortion rights, and found that degree of religious involvement was the strongest determinant of anti-feminist attitudes. In more recent work, Cassese and Holman (2016) find that religious identification shapes attitudes differentially across gender, and has been associated with lower level of gender consciousness among women. Blais

and Dupuis-Deri (2012) argue that anti-feminism in Canada, the UK, and the United States has emerged specifically in opposition to feminism and can best be understood through the theory of counter-movements. Thus anti-feminists are often those who feel most threatened by feminism, which can include women who work at home as well as men. A number of studies have also revealed a strong correlation between support for Donald Trump in the 2016 election and the embrace of anti-feminist beliefs (Cassese and Barnes 2018).

Drawing on this review of the existing literature, we offer three main hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Feminist identification in 2016 will be more polarized along partisan, gender, racial, ethnic, and generational lines compared to 1992. Specifically:

- a. Republicans and Democrats will be further apart in terms of feminist identification and feelings towards feminism in 2016 than in 1992.
- b. Women of color will be more likely to identify as feminist than white women in 2016 compared to 1992.
- c. Younger people will be more likely to embrace feminist identification in 2016 than older generations.

Hypothesis 2: Anti-feminists will look like the mirror image of feminists in that Republicans, white men, older people, homemakers, and the highly religious will be most likely to identify as anti-feminists.

Hypothesis 3: Feminist and anti-feminist identification will be more symbolic, associated primarily with partisanship and vote choice, than a substantive predictor of attitudes on public policies related to feminism.

Methods

This study seeks to understand the contours of contemporary feminist identification and place it in recent historical context. By exploring the change and continuity in feminist identification among key political and demographic groups between 1992 and 2016, we can much better understand the politics of contemporary feminism. Furthermore, while many studies measure feminism through attitudes on policy issues or gender equality/discrimination, this study looks specifically at feminist *identification*, which we argue is the most appropriate way to explore the concept. We also break new ground investigating anti-feminist identification and the determinants of self-identifying as anti-feminist. Finally, this study looks at issue position differences among feminists (those that identify themselves as feminists), non-feminists (those that do not identify as feminists) and anti-feminists (those that explicitly identify as antifeminists).

The most notable constraint on using historical context to ground this research is the surprising lack of a consistent measures of feminist identification. The American National Election Study only asked respondents about their feminist identification twice in modern times, in 1992, and then again in 2016,¹ when the survey included multiple measures of feminist identification. In order to assess change in feminist identification among key groups this study uses as its central dependent variable the question “do you consider yourself a feminist or not?” The 2016 version of this question allowed respondents to respond that they were a “feminist” or “strong feminist” which we collapse into a single category of “feminist” to parallel 1992, when “strong feminist” was not a response option. Huddy et al. (2000) show that any gradation in feminist identity response options increases feminism identification, which suggests that raw

¹ The General Social Survey only queried about feminist identification in 1996. No other comprehensive political surveys appear to ask about feminism over this time period.

percentages of “feminist identification” will be inflated in 2016 as compared to 1992, however, insofar as we are comparing relative changes in sub-groups over this time, which is a key goal of this study, examining the change remains valid.

Additionally, we examine two other feminist identity variables that are only included in the 2016 data. The first asks all respondents how well the term feminist describes them. There are five response options coded from 1) not at all to 5) extremely well. The second, asked of all respondents except those who said feminist described them “not at all,” queried respondents about how important feminist identification is to them. The response options for this question are coded from 1) not at all important to 5) extremely important. Exploring the determinants of these attitudes allows us to create a fuller picture of contemporary feminist identification.

Using similarly structured questions, the 2016 ANES also asked all respondents how well the term anti-feminist describes them, from 1) not at all to 5) extremely well. Next, it asked respondents, except those who responded “not at all,” how important anti-feminist identification is to them from 1) not at all to 5) extremely important. Although we do not have anti-feminist results from prior years, we use these two items as a way to explore the determinants of anti-feminist identification and whether anti-feminism is just the mirror of feminism, or something uniquely compelling as a political identity.

As our first and second hypotheses articulated, we are particularly interested in exploring the role of partisanship, gender, race, ethnicity, and age in shaping feminist and antifeminist identification. Thus our analyses include the standard seven-point party identification measure, as well as measures of sex, race (Black or not), ethnicity (Latinx or not), and age (by age cohort). (See appendix for a full description of variables).

Our first set of analyses, presented in Table 1, compares feminist identification in 1992 with feminist identification in 2016 among Americans overall, as well as among the groups that represent the focus of our study. Following the work of Cassese and Barnes (2018) and Gay and Tate (1998) we break our results down by both race/ethnicity and gender simultaneously.

Additionally, for each of our dependent variables—feminist identification, how well the term feminist describes you, importance of feminist identity, anti-feminist identification, and importance of anti-feminist identification—we present three multivariate models: one including all respondents, one of women only, and one of men only. Running separate models by gender provides insights into the ways race and ethnicity relate to feminist and anti-feminist identification separately for men and women. Running separate models for women and men also allows us to more accurately explore the role of other variables, which may affect the attitudes of women and men differently.²

In addition to the key independent variables discussed above, our models control for other political, demographic and contextual variables, which may correlate with feminist and anti-feminist identification. Our models include the standard ANES demographic measures for marital status, parental status, whether one identifies as a stay at home parent (which ANES labels as homemaker) or not, frequency of church attendance, whether one identifies as a born again Christian or not, whether one is living in the South or not, education (college degree or not), and income.³ We anticipate religion, being from the south, being a conservative, lower

² Alternative models were run with gender x race and gender x latinx interactions, and they showed similar results and almost no significant interaction effects. The one exception is that the gender x latinx interaction was significant and positive for importance of feminist identification.

³ We choose not to include ideology in our models because of a high degree of ‘don’t know’ responses resulting in the loss of 1,437 cases. Additionally, alternative models including ideology did not meaningfully alter results. We have included as a supplemental appendix all of the multivariate results (Tables 2-4) with the inclusion of the ideology variable.

levels of education, and being a homemaker to predict lower levels of feminist identify and greater anti-feminist identification.

Finally we present a set of analyses to explore how a feminist or anti-feminist identity is related to attitudes about feminism itself, gender equality, and specific policies with a gender component, e.g., abortion, parental leave, equal pay, and sexism in order to more directly explore how the symbolic aspects of a feminist/anti-feminist identification map onto actual policy positions.

Results: *Feminist Identification over Time*

Table 1 compares feminist identification in 1992 with feminist identification in 2016 among Americans overall, as well as among the key groups in our analysis. While feminist identification remains an identity embraced by only a minority of Americans, feminist identification is higher in 2016 than in 1992. In 2016, 38 percent of respondents identified as a feminist as compared to only 24 percent in 1992. Some of the increase may be an artifact from the additional response options offered in 2016 compared to 1992, but a portion may be a genuine increase.⁴ In other words, despite the negative stereotypes surrounding the term feminist, leading to serious discussions among feminists themselves as to whether they should abandon the term for something else (E.g. Rine 2013), Americans are at least as feminist, and likely more so, than they were a quarter century ago.

Table 1 about here

⁴ In an attempt to understand how feminist identification evolved from 1992 to 2016 we also examined every poll available in Roper Ipoll, as well as publicly available YouGov surveys, from 1991 through 2018 that explicitly ask respondents if they identify as a feminist. If one exempts the results where the “strong feminist” category was offered, the results suggest mostly continuity in feminist identification, with some signs of a modest upward trend. For example, Gallup/USA Today found in 2003 that 23 percent of Americans consider themselves to be feminists, and in 2008, 30 percent did so.

Table 1 also shows changes in feminist identification over time among key demographic and political groups. As hypothesized, we find that Republicans and Democrats have become more polarized in terms of their level of feminist identification. In 1992, the partisan gap was modest with 24 percent of Democrats and 17 percent of Republicans identifying as feminists. Feminist identification increased 31 percent among Democrats from 1992 to 2016 while only increasing five percentage points among Republicans. As of 2016, the majority of Democrats, 55 percent, identify as feminists, while less than a quarter, 22 percent, of Republicans identify as feminists.

Within both parties, women have driven the increases in feminist identification, although this is especially the case among Republicans. In 1992, only 12 percent of Republican men identified as feminist and in 2016, once again, only 12 percent of Republican men identified as feminists. Thus, Republican women are completely responsible for the uptick in feminist identification among Republicans. While American society as a whole appears to have become more feminist, Republican men have been uniquely resistant to this trend. This may be because Republican men are particularly reluctant to support an ideology that challenges male privilege and/or it may be the product of continued stigma, perpetuated in conservative media, that feminism is anti-men and that identifying as a feminist is un-masculine.

Women are more likely to identify as feminists in both 1992 and 2016, but as hypothesized, the gender gap in feminist identification doubled in size over the last quarter century. From 1992 to 2016, feminist identification increased by 21 percentage points for women whereas feminist identification increased by only seven percentage points for men. As of 2016, half of women identify as feminists compared to only 25 percent of men, indicating a dramatic gender-based polarization of feminist identification.

The increase in feminist identification over time is larger among white women than black women, although this essentially results in white women catching up to black women in terms of their identification as feminists. As of 2016, about half of all women—white women, black women, and Latinas—identify as feminist. Despite many 2016 election post-mortems seeking to explain white women’s support for Republican President Donald Trump, as of 2016, feminist identification is an identity embraced at roughly equal rates by women of different races and ethnicities. Feminist identification also does not differ for men across racial and ethnic groups. About one quarter of white men, black men and Latino men identify as feminist.

The differences in feminist identification among age groups are modest, yet as hypothesized, as of 2016, younger Americans have slightly higher levels of feminist identification than older Americans.

Perhaps the most striking result in Table 1 is one we did not explicitly hypothesize—the strong relationship between education, gender, and feminist identification. In 1992, women with a college degree were slightly more likely to identify as feminist than women overall. However, over the past 24 years, the level of feminist identification among college educated women increased by 27 percentage points. As of 2016, 61 percent of college-educated women identify as feminist. In contrast, feminist identification among college educated men actually *decreased* slightly over the past quarter century, from 37 percent in 1992 to 35 percent in 2016 (this is even more marked given the measurement change). Men with college degrees are not more likely to identify as feminist in 2016 than men overall or non-college educated men. Previous studies show a positive correlation between education and feminist identification (McCabe 2005), but our results show that education operates very differently for women and men.

Table 2 presents multivariate models using feminist identification in 1992 and 2016 as dependent variables. These results are quite complementary to those in Table 1 discussed above. First, Table 2 shows that partisanship plays a much bigger role in shaping feminist identification in 2016 than in 1992. In other analyses, not shown here, party identification (Republicans higher) and feminist identification are correlated at .08 in 1992 compared to -.32 in 2016, once again indicating a stronger relationship between the two social identities in 2016. In terms of predicted values, in 1992 a strong Democrat had a .25 probability of identifying as a feminist, compared to a probability of .59 in 2016. For strong Republicans the probability of identifying as a feminist was .17 in 1992 and in 2016 it was .16. Overall these results support to our hypotheses that feminist identification has become more polarized around partisan lines.

The multivariate results also show that gender has come to play a larger role in shaping feminist identification. In 1992, gender is only a marginally significant predictor of feminist identification. By 2016, gender has become a robust predictor with women far more likely to identify as feminist than men. Thus, feminism as an identity has polarized over gender lines as predicted.

Table 2 about here

The role of race and ethnicity in shaping feminist identification is more complicated. In 1992, in the models containing all respondents, the coefficient for the race variable (Black) is positive and significant (there were too few Latinos identifying as feminist in the 1992 ANES for meaningful analysis) indicating that Black respondents were more likely than whites to identification as feminist. By 2016 this coefficient is negative and significant, indicating that, all else being equal, Black Americans are less likely than White Americans to identify as feminist. These results, however, obscure different dynamics among women and men.

In 1992, the women only model shows a positive coefficient for the Black variable indicating that, all else being equal, Black women were more likely to identify as feminist than white women, whereas in 2016 the Black coefficient is not significant. This indicates that race is no longer a predictor of feminist identification for women. Latinx identification is also not a significant predictor of feminist identification for women in 2016. Taken together, the results in tables 1 and 2 suggest that women have been galvanized to identify as feminists in 2016, but this identification is no greater among women of color than white women. Gender far more so than race and ethnicity are key drivers of feminist identification for women in 2016. For men, however, race was not a significant predictor of feminist identification in 1992, but in 2016, being Black or Latinx predicts lower levels of feminist identification among men. In other words, once their heavily Democratic partisanship is controlled for, Black men and Latino men are less likely than white men to identify as feminists.

The results for age are also consistent with our expectations. In 1992, age does not act as a significant predictor of feminist attitudes in the model with all respondents. Among women, individuals 35 to 60 years old are marginally significantly more likely than older individuals to identify as feminist, and younger men are less likely to identify as feminist than older men. In 2016, however, young women and young men are more likely to identify as feminist than their older counterparts. Even after controlling for the fact that young people are a more Democratic generation, Table 2 shows that young people are still more likely to identify as feminist. Thus, media accounts suggesting that millennials are not as feminist as their elders are not grounded in empirical reality.

Table 2 also shows that in 1992 having a college degree did not predict feminist attitudes, yet in 2016 having a college education or more is a highly robust predictor of identifying as a

feminist for women. In 2016, individuals with higher household incomes are more likely to identify as feminist while those attending religious services more frequently are less likely to identify as a feminist. Being a stay at home parent is not a significant predictor of feminist identification, neither are born again identity and marital status.⁵ In the women only model, being a parent in 2016 also predicts less feminist identification. Lastly, for men region matters with being from the South associated with a lower likelihood of identifying as a feminist.

Table 3 presents the results for the two other feminist identity measures: how well does feminist describe you and how important is feminist identity to you. Turning first to how well feminist describes individuals, there is a significant gender gap with women more likely than men to respond that feminist describes them well. Black respondents are less likely to state that feminist describes them well compared to whites. This suggests that while black women are just as likely as white women to identify as feminist, white women feel greater comfort with this label. This may be rooted in the long held perception that feminism is a largely a middle-class white movement (Aronson 2003) resulting in black women feeling more ambivalent about their feminist identification, preferring instead terms such as womanist or humanist (Collins 2002). In contrast, Latinas are actually more likely than white women to say that feminist describes them well. Echoing the earlier 2016 findings, education, age, and party identification are also important predictors. More education, being young, and being Democratic is associated with a feeling that feminism describes one well.

Table 3 about here

The results for the third feminist identity variable, how important being a feminist is, are similar to the results for feminist identity and how well does feminist describe you. Women are

⁵ Homemaker drops out of the analysis for the men only model in 1992 and not in 2016 because of a lack of men in that role in 1992.

more likely to say that being feminist is important to them. Identification as a Black American is not significant, but interestingly, Latinas are once again more likely than White women to say that being feminist is important to them. The college educated and young women are more likely to say that being a feminist is important to them. Republicans are significantly less likely to state that being feminist is important to them. In sum, the results in table 3 provide further support of the importance of gender, race, education, age, and especially partisanship in explaining contemporary feminism while using additional measures, thereby giving us further confidence in these demographic and political patterns.

Who is an Anti-Feminist?

The 2016 ANES data also allow us to explore the concept of anti-feminism and to thus assess the degree to which feminist backlash has accreted into its own meaningful identity. Table 4 illustrates who is more likely to identify as an anti-feminist and who is more likely to state that being anti-feminist is important to them. It is useful to start by pointing out that only 16 percent of Americans identify as anti-feminist. This means that while a majority of Americans do not identify as feminists (a group we refer to as non-feminists) only a minority of these non-feminists explicitly identify as anti-feminist.

Table 4 here

Table 4 shows that anti-feminist identity is not just a mirror image of feminist identity but its own distinctive social identity. A striking difference between feminist and anti-feminist identification is that while gender is a huge driver in feminist identification in 2016, there is essentially no gender gap among anti-feminists. Indeed, bivariate analysis shows that 16 percent of women and 17 percent of men identify as anti-feminists. However, for how important being

an anti-feminist is to an individual, there is a significant gender gap with men more likely than women to state that being an anti-feminist is important to them.

Table 4 also shows interesting race and age results for anti-feminist identity. There is a racial gap in anti-feminist identification with people of color more likely to identify as anti-feminist than their white counterparts. People of color, specifically African Americans, are also more likely than whites to say that this identity is important to them. Finally, while young people were more likely to identify as feminists than older generations in 2016, young people, particularly young women, also have a higher level of anti-feminist identification compared to older groups.

Where the results for anti-feminist identification are more the mirror image of feminist identification, is that highly educated individuals have lower levels of anti-feminist identification, Republicans are more likely to identify as anti-feminists compared to Democrats, and stay at home parents/homemakers, those who identify as born again, and those who attend church frequently were more anti-feminist. Interestingly, being born again is the only of these variables that is significant in the anti-feminist important models. In short then, “anti-feminism” is distinct in how it is shaped by race and gender, but mostly the opposite of feminism when it comes to education, partisanship, and religiosity.

What do Feminists and Anti-Feminists Believe?

Our final analysis, Table 5, reports what feminists, non-feminists, and antifeminists actually believe about policy issues relating to gender equality as well as where they stand on the traditional and modern sexism scales.⁶ The most compelling findings would seem to be the areas where even avowedly anti-feminists overwhelmingly share the broader attitudes and issue

⁶ Feminist identification and anti-feminist identification remain significant predictors of attitudes on these issues even when a full set of controls are added, except in the case of working hurts the maternal bond.

positions (though, admittedly at always lower levels) than self-identified feminists. Most notably, the belief in equal pay for women (social desirability effects aside) is so universal that in addition to the 94% of feminists with this position, 85% of non-feminists and even 88% of anti-feminists support this position. Likewise, when it comes to employees providing parental leave—a specific policy at the forefront of the feminist political agenda—feminists, non-feminists, and anti-feminists endorse this almost as strongly. The majority of all three groups also believe that more women need to be elected and that abortion should be always, or in most circumstances, legal. In short, opposition to feminism would seem to decidedly *not* be about pursuing a true anti-feminist political agenda. Additionally, measuring “feminism” by support for feminist *policy* positions will likely yield dramatically different results than conceptualizing feminism as an identity.

Table 5 about here

Where there are larger differences, which may help explain why those who endorse feminist policy outcomes choose not to identify as feminist, are in views about sexism and roles in the home. Across the range of questions, whether framing sexism in modern sexism terms, e.g., “innocent remarks are deemed sexist” or in more traditional sexist framing, e.g., “better for children if women stay home” we typically see much larger differences between feminists and the other two groups than on the specific policy issues at the top of table 5. Likewise, feminists were dramatically more likely to vote for Clinton and less likely to vote for Trump in comparison to non-feminists and anti-feminists, which supports hypothesis 3 that feminist and anti-feminist identification is more symbolic and associated primarily with partisanship and vote choice, more so than substantively meaningful positions on public policy related to feminism.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study began by asking, who identifies as a feminist today and how is this similar or different than who identified as a feminist in the previous generation? We hypothesized that feminist identification in 2016 would be polarized along partisan, gender, racial, and generational lines compared to 1992. Supporting our hypotheses we find an increased gender gap, one especially heightened by education, as college-educated women have moved dramatically more feminist. Like almost everything politically related, feminism has also decidedly been a part of partisan polarization. Whether this polarization over feminist identification will continue is an interesting question. The fact that young Republican women were the most feminist group among Republicans in 2016 suggests there is some possibility that feminist identification may become more common within the party, or conversely a sign that the Republican party's struggle to retain women supporters, especially young women, may intensify.

We also expected to see feminist identification polarize along racial lines from 1992 to 2016, and we were surprised to find this was not the case for women. The relationship between race and feminist identification lessened over the period of our study, and, as of 2016, white women are as likely to identify as feminist as women of color. The multiple measures of feminist identification available in the 2016 ANES allowed us to see that while levels of feminist identification are similar for women across major racial and ethnic lines, that Black women are less likely than White women, and Latinas are more likely than White women to feel the term feminist described them very well, suggesting varying levels of comfort with the idea of feminism as an identity. Levels of feminist identification among men of all races and ethnicities remains at roughly the same low levels in 2016 as in 1992, but today, after confounds are controlled for, Black and Latino men are less likely than White men to identify as feminist. The

contrasting trends for women and men, as well as across racial and ethnic lines, illustrate the importance of considering the role of race when attempting to understand feminist identification.

This study also sought to understand what it means to be anti-feminist in modern America and who identifies as such. We had expected anti-feminist identity to be largely the mirror of feminist identification. Though we were correct that Republicans are more likely to identify as anti-feminist, in many ways our second hypothesis on anti-feminism was contradicted. Surprisingly, we found both young people and people of color more likely to embrace the label anti-feminist. Also contrary to our expectations, we found no difference between men and women in their willingness to embrace this identification. Although only a small portion of Americans embrace the anti-feminist label, this seems to be a politically desirable identity for less-educated Republicans, but also has some appeal among the young and people of color, groups that will form a greater share of the electorate in coming years.

With regards to our third hypothesis, the totality of our results strongly support the idea of feminism and anti-feminism as *identities*, rather than a set of beliefs supporting or opposing policies that empower women and bring about gender equality. Regardless of a feminist or anti-feminist identification, the broad goals of feminism are very popular and several of the core policy goals of the feminist movement have robust support from feminists and anti-feminists alike. The willingness of non-feminists and even anti-feminists to support operationally feminist policies indicates that the distinctive feature of feminist identification in contemporary America is not a distinctive set of policy beliefs. Rather, our results suggest that feminist and anti-feminist identification is tied to perceptions of gender roles as well as a signal for partisan and candidate preferences.

A significant challenge for our understanding of the dynamism of feminist identification is the lack of a consistent measure over time. Major political data sets have not asked questions about feminist identification on a consistent basis leaving us unable to create a complete picture of how and why feminist identification has changed over the last quarter century. It is our hope that ANES and other politically oriented surveys will employ consistent measures of feminist and anti-feminist identification going forward. In particular it will be important to explore how Donald Trump's time as president has influenced feminist and anti-feminist identification. The election of Donald Trump sparked a record number of feminist women to run for office in 2018, as well as mobilizing large-scale women's marches, and it will be important to see if this also results in a surge in feminist or anti-feminist identification.

In the contemporary political context, feminism and anti-feminism are arguably as important as ever. This study helps move our understanding forward by demonstrating how feminist identification and anti-feminist identification is related to other demographics, identities, and beliefs, and how in the case of feminist identification this has evolved in notable ways in recent decades. Hopefully as researchers and scholars come to see the value of understanding feminist and anti-feminist identification, the data will exist in future years to continue to answer important questions about the role of feminism in American society and politics.

Appendix: Measures

2016 American National Election Study

Parent (v161324): Coded 1 if children under 18 living in household, 0 otherwise

Trump feeling thermometer (v162079): cold/warm feelings towards “Donald Trump” 1-100.

Clinton feeling thermometer (v162078): cold/warm feelings towards “Hillary Clinton” 1-100.

Party Identification (V161158x): 7 point scale from 0, strong Democrat to 6, strong Republican

South (v163003): 1, lives in the South; 0 otherwise.

Income (v161361x): Household income across 28 categories.

College degree (v161270): 1 if bachelor’s degree or higher; 0 otherwise

Church Attendance (v161245, v161245a): 1 through 5 scale with higher values indicating greater attendance.

Born Again (v161263): 1, identifies as born again; 0 otherwise.

Marital status (v161268): 1, currently married; 0 otherwise.

Homemaker (v161275x): 1, if female currently employed; 0 otherwise.

White (v161310x): 1, for white respondent; 0 otherwise

Black (v161310x): 1, for Black respondent; 0 otherwise

Latinx (v161310x): 1, for Latinx respondent; 0 otherwise

Female (v161342): 1 for female; 0 for male

Age (v161267): 18-34, 35-60, 60+

Feminist Identity (v161345): 1 if respondents considers self “strong feminist” or “feminist” 0 for “not feminist” or “anti-feminist.”

Feminist Identity scale (v161346): how well the term “feminist” describes self from 1, not at all, to 5, extremely well.

Feminist Importance (v161347): how important is it to self to be a feminist from 1, not at all important, to 5, extremely important. (Not asked of those answering “not at all” in previous).

Anti-feminist Identity Scale (v161348): how well the term “anti-feminist” describes self from 1, not at all, to 5, extremely well.

Anti-feminist Importance (v161349): how important is being anti-feminist from 1, not at all, to 5, extremely important.

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Table 1: Feminist Identification in 1992 vs. 2016

	Percent Identifying as Feminist in 1992	Percent Identifying as Feminist in 2016	Change over time
Overall	24	38	+14
Women Overall	29	50	+21
White Women	27	49	+22
Black Women	37	52	+15
Latina Women	*	53	*
Men Overall	18	25	+7
White Men	18	25	+7
Black Men	22	24	+2
Latino Men	*	23	*
18-34	21	42	+21
35-59	23	38	+15
60+	24	35	+11
Bachelor's Degree	29	49	+20
Women	34	61	+27
Men	37	35	-2
Democrats	24	55	+31
Democratic women	30	65	+35
Democratic Men	20	41	+21
Republicans	17	22	+5
Republican women	22	32	+10
Republican men	12	12	0

Source: American National Election Study. * There are only 12 Latinx in the 1992 ANES sample and only eight answered the feminist identity question (3 women and 5 men). There are 450 Latinx in the 2016 ANES sample.

Table 2: Feminist Identification in 1992 and 2016

	1992 All	1992 Women	1992 Men	2016 All	2016 Women	2016 Men
Female	0.455 (0.264)*			1.273 (0.095)***		
Black	0.529 (0.232)**	0.585 (0.302)*	0.271 (0.385)	-0.342 (0.136)**	-0.253 (0.170)	-0.450 (0.229)**
Latinx				-0.188 (0.131)	-0.034 (0.175)	-0.361 (0.204)*
South	0.128 (0.177)	0.176 (0.235)	0.066 (0.281)	-0.055 (0.080)	0.128 (0.103)	-0.345 (0.131)***
Income	-0.031 (0.014)**	-0.039 (0.019)**	-0.020 (0.023)	0.014 (0.005)***	0.015 (0.007)**	0.013 (0.008)
Party ID	-0.108 (0.040)***	-0.089 (0.052)*	-0.130 (0.062)**	-0.325 (0.020)***	-0.278 (0.025)***	-0.397 (0.033)***
College	0.763 (0.194)***	0.837 (0.275)***	0.719 (0.284)**	0.741 (0.082)***	0.652 (0.107)***	0.879 (0.129)***
Church	-0.054 (0.041)	-0.043 (0.053)	-0.096 (0.066)	-0.097 (0.026)***	-0.117 (0.032)***	-0.066 (0.046)
Born Again	-0.167 (0.190)	-0.342 (0.252)	0.092 (0.299)	-0.096 (0.095)	-0.028 (0.117)	-0.261 (0.169)
Parent	-0.374 (0.258)	-0.276 (0.235)	-0.640 (0.287)**	-0.215 (0.132)	-0.257 (0.114)**	-0.246 (0.146)*
Mother	-0.001 (0.333)			-0.053 (0.163)		
Under35	-0.251 (0.215)	0.291 (0.278)	-1.133 (0.354)***	0.436 (0.109)***	0.331 (0.143)**	0.596 (0.172)***
35to60	0.047 (0.214)	0.545 (0.290)*	-0.644 (0.321)**	0.146 (0.097)	0.152 (0.125)	0.154 (0.157)
Married	-0.217 (0.174)	-0.380 (0.226)*	-0.056 (0.291)	0.028 (0.086)	-0.018 (0.110)	0.104 (0.140)
Homemaker	-0.068 (0.273)	0.010 (0.279)		-0.249 (0.171)	-0.276 (0.172)	-0.556 (1.136)
Constant	-0.515 (0.311)*	-0.427 (0.373)	0.129 (0.435)	-0.360 (0.138)***	0.719 (0.158)***	-0.122 (0.209)
Pseudo R ²	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.16	0.10	0.15
N	1,097	570	527	3,835	2,016	1,819

Note: Dependent variable for 1992 is coded 1=yes identifies as feminist and 0=no, does not identify as feminist. Dependent variable for 2016 is coded 1=strong feminist or feminist and 0=not a feminist. Logistic regression is used for the 1992 and 2016 analysis. Only 10 respondents in 1992 identified as Latinx and is therefore excluded in the 1992 analysis. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: How well does Feminist Identification describe you and how important is Feminist Identification

	Describe All	Describe Women	Describe Men	Important All	Important Women	Important Men
Female	0.714 (0.042)***			0.200 (0.066)***		
Black	-0.201 (0.064)***	-0.174 (0.090)*	-0.236 (0.088)***	0.048 (0.094)	0.049 (0.115)	0.042 (0.165)
Latinx	0.066 (0.060)	0.179 (0.093)*	-0.032 (0.076)	0.148 (0.087)*	0.233 (0.113)**	0.012 (0.139)
South	0.009 (0.036)	0.108 (0.054)**	-0.097 (0.048)**	0.101 (0.055)*	0.202 (0.067)***	-0.109 (0.094)
Income	0.002 (0.002)	0.004 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.004)	0.002 (0.004)	0.002 (0.006)
Party ID	-0.168 (0.009)***	-0.168 (0.013)***	-0.164 (0.012)***	-0.169 (0.013)***	-0.167 (0.016)***	-0.171 (0.022)***
College	0.433 (0.037)***	0.445 (0.056)***	0.416 (0.049)***	0.314 (0.056)***	0.328 (0.070)***	0.313 (0.093)***
Church	-0.044 (0.012)***	-0.074 (0.017)***	-0.005 (0.016)	-0.026 (0.018)	-0.039 (0.022)*	0.004 (0.033)
Born Again	-0.021 (0.043)	-0.011 (0.062)	-0.058 (0.059)	-0.014 (0.065)	-0.020 (0.079)	-0.010 (0.118)
Parent	-0.101 (0.056)*	-0.122 (0.060)**	-0.116 (0.055)**	-0.213 (0.098)**	-0.107 (0.075)	-0.189 (0.104)*
Mother	-0.032 (0.073)			0.110 (0.115)		
Under35	0.178 (0.050)***	0.100 (0.075)	0.267 (0.066)***	0.187 (0.073)**	0.181 (0.092)*	0.179 (0.124)
35to60	0.067 (0.044)	0.048 (0.065)	0.081 (0.057)	-0.055 (0.066)	-0.074 (0.082)	-0.028 (0.113)
Married	0.024 (0.039)	-0.027 (0.057)	0.086 (0.052)*	0.064 (0.058)	0.100 (0.073)	-0.018 (0.100)
Homemaker	-0.121 (0.080)	-0.102 (0.089)	-0.242 (0.392)	0.047 (0.116)	0.033 (0.119)	0.403 (1.147)
Constant	2.228 (0.064)***	2.948 (0.083)***	2.217 (0.081)***	2.866 (0.099)***	3.032 (0.106)***	2.957 (0.154)***
R ²	0.23	0.16	0.16	0.12	0.12	0.12
N	3,836	2,019	1,817	2,162	1,437	725

Note: How well does feminist identification describe you coded as 1-5 with higher values indicating feminist describes individual more. How important is feminist identity coded as 1-5 with higher values indicating more importance. Both dependent variables from the 2016 ANES. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 4: Anti-Feminist Identification and How important is Anti-Feminist Identification

	Anti All	Anti Women	Anti Men	Important All	Important Women	Important Men
Female	-0.002 (0.040)			-0.253 (0.087)***		
Black	0.101 (0.060)*	0.119 (0.077)	0.086 (0.095)	0.580 (0.134)***	0.641 (0.165)***	0.507 (0.224)**
Latinx	0.109 (0.056)*	0.200 (0.079)**	0.023 (0.081)	0.044 (0.115)	0.165 (0.149)	-0.111 (0.180)
South	0.040 (0.034)	0.050 (0.045)	0.031 (0.051)	0.111 (0.072)	0.106 (0.090)	0.127 (0.117)
Income	-0.004 (0.002)*	-0.008 (0.003)***	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.007 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.005 (0.008)
Party ID	0.077 (0.008)***	0.083 (0.011)***	0.069 (0.012)***	0.029 (0.018)	0.030 (0.023)	0.025 (0.030)
College	-0.177 (0.035)***	-0.125 (0.048)***	-0.225 (0.052)***	-0.251 (0.078)***	-0.214 (0.101)**	-0.282 (0.124)**
Church	0.023 (0.011)**	0.020 (0.014)	0.025 (0.018)	0.023 (0.022)	0.033 (0.027)	0.007 (0.038)
Born Again	0.219 (0.040)***	0.200 (0.052)***	0.245 (0.063)***	0.323 (0.079)***	0.305 (0.097)***	0.378 (0.134)***
Parent	0.058 (0.053)	0.042 (0.051)	0.083 (0.058)	-0.018 (0.115)	0.008 (0.103)	0.046 (0.132)
Mother	-0.006 (0.068)			0.056 (0.145)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Under35	0.146 (0.047)***	0.154 (0.063)**	0.113 (0.070)	0.086 (0.100)	0.105 (0.130)	0.027 (0.156)
35to60	-0.008 (0.041)	-0.009 (0.055)	-0.019 (0.061)	-0.023 (0.090)	-0.025 (0.116)	-0.036 (0.143)
Married	0.004 (0.037)	0.075 (0.049)	-0.078 (0.056)	0.092 (0.077)	0.216 (0.097)**	-0.076 (0.127)
Homemaker	0.231 (0.076)***	0.219 (0.075)***	0.045 (0.418)	0.134 (0.139)	0.135 (0.134)	-1.446 (1.301)
Constant	1.227 (0.060)***	1.199 (0.071)***	1.280 (0.086)***	1.838 (0.135)***	1.517 (0.152)***	1.957 (0.205)***
R ²	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.06
N	3,830	2,015	1,815	1,270	706	564

Note: Antifeminist identification coded as 1-5 with higher values indicating greater anti-feminist identity. How important is anti-feminist identity coded as 1-5 with higher values indicating more importance. Both dependent variables from the 2016 ANES. * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 5 Issue Positions of Feminists, non-Feminists, and Anti-Feminists

	“Feminist”	“Not Feminist”	“Anti-Feminist”
Favor equal pay for men and women	94	85	80
Employees should provide parental leave	77	63	61
Increase government spending on childcare	59	42	42
Abortion always/mostly legal	76	51	65
More Women Need to be Elected	93	76	75
Average: Modern Sexism items	54	31	24
Disagree innocent remarks are deemed sexist	38	18	16
Disagree women fail to appreciate what men do for them	56	31	20
Disagree women seek power by controlling men	58	34	28
Disagree women put men on tight leash	64	41	31
Average: Traditional Sexism items	50	30	24
Women complaining about discrimination do not cause more problems	35	15	9
Women demanding equality not seeking special favors	44	21	15
Media should pay more attention to pay discrimination against women	60	29	24
Working makes no difference to mother’s bond with children	44	36	32
Not better if women stay home and men work	69	52	41
Vote for Trump	22	61	77
Vote for Clinton	71	32	20

Note: 2016 ANES Data