

# Conditional Party Loyalty

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## Abstract

Scholars have long debated the strength of voters' partisan attachments, asking whether party identification plays a near-deterministic role in political decisions. A large literature argues that partisan cues dominate political choice, but other studies show that competing information can rival, and even sometimes outweigh, the effects of partisanship. We reconcile this conflicting evidence by theorizing that variation in the dominance of partisanship is due to the salience of the other considerations pitted against it. Using survey experiments that characterize the role of partisanship relative to both high and low salience issues, we demonstrate a pattern of "Conditional Party Loyalty." Partisan dominance occurs when political choice is centered around issues with low public salience. However, partisans defect from co-partisan candidates if they disagree on enough high-salience issues. These findings illuminate when and why partisanship fails to dominate political choice. They also suggest that, on many issues, public opinion minimally constrains politicians.

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Partisanship serves as the preeminent cue voters use to navigate politics—it offers a powerful heuristic that shapes candidate choice, opinion toward policy proposals and even perceptions of social conditions in the mass public. For decades, scholars of American Politics have debated both the empirical strength and normative implications of voters’ partisan attachments, asking whether—in an increasingly polarized context—party identification plays a near-deterministic role in how voters make decisions (e.g., Campbell et al., 1960; Bartels, 2000; Cohen, 2003)

Despite scholarly agreement that partisanship serves as the central cue voters use to navigate politics, a long-standing and unresolved debate centers on the strength of partisan attachments. Pioneering studies offers evidence that partisanship dominates political choice (Campbell et al., 1960). These studies show that voters select co-partisan candidates at high rates (Bartels, 2000), respond less to other information when party labels are available (Rahn, 1993) and depend on partisan cues, rather than ideological principles, to evaluate policy (Zaller, 1992; Cohen, 2003). However, these accounts of partisan dominance are inconsistent with some contemporary evidence. Experimental studies demonstrate that competing considerations can rival, and even exceed, the effect of party labels on political decisions (Malhotra and Kuo, 2008; Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Bullock, 2011; Nicholson, 2011; Arceneaux, 2008). And even in an increasingly polarized political context, close to 10% of partisan voters in recent American National Election Studies (ANES) opposed their co-partisan presidential candidate—defections that are linked to issue-based disagreement with their party’s nominee (Gooch and Huber, 2018; Fowler, 2018; Rogers, 2017; Jessee, 2012).

In this paper, we reconcile this conflicting evidence by developing a theory of “Conditional Party Loyalty.” We theorize that variation in the prominence of partisanship in political decision-making is explained by the salience of the other considerations pitted against it. While patterns of partisan dominance occur when political choice is centered around issues with low public salience—i.e., issues that, while potentially policy relevant, are not top-of-mind for voters when evaluating candidates—issue-based disagreement with their party’s nominee on enough high-salience issues can compel partisans to defect to an out-party candidate.

We focus on one important manifestation of party loyalty, an individual's tendency to prefer co-partisan candidates for office. We then test our theory of conditional party loyalty using conjoint survey experiments that evaluate the relative contributions made by partisan cues and policy positions to candidate choice. In assessing the conditional nature of this relationship, these new studies overcome several methodological challenges that limit the ability of prior research to speak to this question. We first differentiate high and low salience issues using experimental pre-tests that identify the issues most consequential in this specific choice setting. This direct, behavioral assessment of choice-specific issue salience avoids concerns about measurement error present in self-reported or indirect measures of issue salience. Having empirically validated this issue typology, we then use paired-choice candidate conjoint experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014) to evaluate the relative influence of a candidate's positions on these issues, as well as their party label, for candidate choice. Finally, we measure a participant's policy preferences for each issue, allowing us to measure when they oppose a candidate's issue position.

Our results explain when and why partisans are willing to defect from the party line. While sharing a party label with a candidate remains the single largest determinant of vote choice in these studies, *voter loyalty is not inexhaustible* and public opinion remains responsive to other considerations. Voters show strong allegiance to their party when selecting which candidates to support, but will defect from the party line if candidates diverge from the voter on enough high-salience issues. At the same time, even disagreement with the voter on several low-salience political issues fails to offset the gain in support a candidate receives from a shared party label, a pattern consistent with prior studies that show the dominance of partisanship over public opinion.

Beyond offering an explanation that synthesizes a mixed body of prior evidence, these findings make two important amendments to prior studies of how partisanship affects public opinion. First, in contrast to accounts in which the availability of party labels leads citizens to completely ignore other choice-relevant attributes (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Rahn, 1993), we show that public opinion remains responsive in the presence of party labels, in the sense that even low-salience political issues exert a small effect on candidate choice. Second, we offer a crucial supplement to recent studies

demonstrating that other information can sometimes rival the effects of party labels (e.g., Bullock, 2011; Nicholson, 2011; Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Mullinix, 2016). Here we show that even on a set of political issues where public opinion is highly responsive to policy considerations, voters are ultimately still more likely than not to support a co-partisan in a general election-style contest until the point at which they disagree with them on four or more high-salience issues. Politicians receive even greater latitude from their co-partisans on a host of issues with a lower degree of public salience, including trade policy, education standards and access to birth control. This suggests that in many areas with important policy implications, public opinion only minimally constrains politicians.

## **The Role of Partisanship in Political Decisions**

The public often depends on expert cues to engage with politics (Downs, 1957; Schattschneider, 1960; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, 1991; Lupia, 1994). A candidate's partisanship represents a particularly wide-ranging heuristic for simplifying complex decisions (Downs, 1957; Popkin, 1991; Snyder and Ting, 2002). While party labels convey useful information, the public's heavy dependence on them also raises concerns. If politicians can support whichever political causes they please and still receive support from co-partisans, these cues arguably pose a significant obstacle for representative governance (Achen and Bartels, 2016; Lenz, 2012; Zaller, 1992). In contrast, if divergence from public preferences on a certain set of issue positions results in substantial losses in electoral support, partisan cues, while formidable, may not threaten democratic accountability to the extent some have theorized (Gerber and Green, 1999; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen, 2012; Arceneaux and Wielen, 2017). This tension underlies two lines of research that offer fundamentally different characterizations of what partisanship means for democratic accountability.

### **Perspective 1: Partisan Dominance**

A large body of research argues that partisanship—in the form of a candidate's party label or a partisan endorsement that accompanies a policy proposal—dominates public opinion (Campbell et al., 1960; Zaller, 1992). In the presence of partisan cues, the politically sophisticated engage in “partisan motivated reasoning” and interpret information so as to bolster their partisan attachments

(Lodge and Taber, 2013; Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook, 2014). Their less sophisticated counterparts use partisanship as a heuristic to avoid processing political information, leading them to support co-partisan politicians and conform to their policy views (Popkin, 1991; ?; Riggle, 1992; Rahn, 1993; Kam, 2005). The combination of these processes produces substantial partisan influence over public opinion. The availability of party labels reduces the importance of other criteria for political choice (Rahn, 1993) and results in partisanship receiving a greater weight than other considerations when voters make decisions (Cohen, 2003).

An array of observational evidence is consistent with this perspective. In cross-sectional surveys, partisanship is more predictive of candidate support than an individual's ideology (Campbell et al., 1960; Bartels, 2000; Kinder and Kalmoe, 2017). Relatedly, when partisans hold issue positions at odds with their preferred candidate or political party, they often shift these views to bring them into alignment with their partisan attachments (Lenz, 2012; Levendusky, 2009; Zaller, 1992).

Some experimental evidence is also supportive. With respect to candidate choice, Rahn (1993) finds that introducing party labels into an experiment reduces consideration of a candidate's other characteristics (see also, Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen, 2012; Kirkland and Coppock, 2018). Cohen (2003) experimentally varies a policy proposal's content and the partisan endorsement it receives and finds that partisanship overwhelms content in determining support. These patterns of partisan dominance are especially pronounced in the state of heightened elite polarization that characterize contemporary American politics. More consistent party cues produce larger effects on the preferences of party supporters (Levendusky, 2010; Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook, 2014) and crowd out the influence of policy considerations (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, 2013). There is also evidence that emotions tied to civic participation are more strongly activated by partisan identity than issue-based concerns. Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe (2015) shows that threatening strong partisans with electoral losses evokes stronger emotional reactions than among those who hold ideologically consistent views, which may in turn foster electoral engagement. Similarly, Mason (2015) argues that mass polarization is caused by sorting that has strengthened partisanship as a social identity, not by issue disagreement between the parties.

This evidence inverts views of democratic accountability in which public opinion serves as a constraint on political elites (e.g., Dahl, 1971). It reveals a number of instances in which public opinion follows from the viewpoints of co-partisan politicians, leaving these officials with “considerable freedom in the policies they choose” (Lenz, 2012, 235). Moreover, the manner in which partisanship induces non-responsiveness to other considerations is worrisome as “people tend to adopt beliefs, attitudes, and values that reinforce and rationalize their partisan loyalties” (Achen and Bartels, 2016, 296). Even for accounts that portray partisan cues as a useful heuristic, the prevalence of cue-taking present in these studies is problematic as the public follows partisan cues even when they may be a poor source of guidance (e.g., Downs 1957, 233-234; Lupia and McCubbins 1998, 206-208; Hochschild 2012, 532-534; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000).

## **Perspective 2: Continued Responsiveness Despite Partisanship**

While the preceding work gives partisanship a privileged role in information processing, an alternative perspective is that partisan cues are simply one more, albeit influential, piece of information individuals incorporate into their political judgments even as they remain responsive to other considerations (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2002; Fiorina, 1981; Downs, 1957). When partisanship conflicts with an individual’s other preferences (e.g., their policy views), these other criteria can still compel them to oppose candidates and policy proposals that share their party label, although elite-level candidate selection and the anticipatory actions of politicians may limit opportunities for this to occur during campaigns (e.g., Fowler, 2018; Zaller, 2012; Lenz, 2012).

A number of recent studies are inconsistent with the canonical accounts of partisan dominance detailed in perspective 1, showing that, while party labels exert a strong influence on political decisions, they do not blind individuals to other relevant attributes. In several experiments that vary the availability of partisan cues and other information (e.g., policy content, expert evaluations), individuals incorporate these other considerations to the same extent whether or not partisan cues are available (Malhotra and Kuo, 2008; Tomz and Houweling, 2009; Nicholson, 2011, 2012; Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014). The effects of these other choice attributes rival, and at times exceed, the role of partisanship in political decisions (Riggle et al., 1992; Arceneaux, 2008;

Bullock, 2011; Sniderman and Stiglitz, 2012; Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2018; Boudreau, Elmen-dorf, and MacKenzie, ND). As more relevant information about a candidate beyond their party label becomes available, the effects of partisanship on political decision-making diminish (Peter-son, 2017). Observational studies also reveal instances in which moderate electorates penalize ideologically extreme politicians (Hall, 2015; Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan, 2002) and vot-ers fail to support co-partisan candidates who diverge from their issue preferences (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder, 2006; Ansolabehere and Jones, 2010; Jessee, 2012). There is also evidence that other aspects of voters' social identities can mute partisan concerns in some settings (Leven-dusky, 2018). For example, Klar (2013) shows that among Democrats, priming concerns relevant to parenting can cause sharp reductions in support for traditional Democratic policies.

## **A Theory of Conditional Partisan Loyalty**

Rather than stipulate the appropriateness of a single perspective on partisan cues, we instead offer an explanation for when accounts of partisan dominance over public opinion do and do not apply. What explains this variation in the role of partisanship in political choice? Our argument is simple: the dominance of partisanship in political decision-making depends on the salience of the considerations that are counter-posed against it. In this case, we focus on the contribution of a candidate's party label and issues positions to the assessments they receive from the public.

We argue that the influence of party labels on candidate choice depends on the degree to which voters are cross-pressured by a candidate's positions on highly salient issues: issues which polarize partisans in the mass public and are thus the focus of contestation in campaigns and top-of-mind at the ballot box. In situations where a voter's preferred partisan candidate takes traditional positions on high-salience issues, partisan dominance is likely to occur. However, when partisanship is pitted against low-salience political issues, the relative influence of party labels will be less pronounced.

A central implication of our theory is that persistent high rates of co-partisan voting in the U.S. are a product of a polarized candidate pool that almost always holds the party line on salient issues of the day. While these patterns make voters appear to be blind party loyalists, they are observationally equivalent to a scenario in which voters simply have not been given a reason to

defect to the out-party because candidates tend to take familiar issue stances (see also, Fowler, 2018). However, Conditional Partisan Loyalty theory posits that voters' allegiance to their parties is finite, and that in the event candidates take divergent stances on key issues, the relative influence of shared party labels will be diminished. At the same time, politicians should have much greater discretion, more in line with prior accounts of partisan dominance over public opinion, when they take positions on issues that fall below this degree of prominence.

While straightforward, this attribute-focused explanation differs in important ways from prior research on factors that moderate the role of partisanship in public opinion which either focus on individual personality differences (Arceneaux and Wielen, 2017; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen, 2012; Kam, 2005) or contextual variation in the amount of available information (Bullock, 2011). Instead, our theory centers on how the *types* of information competing against party labels influence whether partisanship dominates political choice. This foregrounds a point that receives limited attention in the prior literature (Arceneaux, 2008; Ciuk and Yost, 2016 are notable exceptions).

In the next section, we elaborate on the underpinnings of this theoretical perspective. We then demonstrate how it helps to reconcile the conflicting bodies of evidence cited above, as well as otherwise anomalous within-study variation that has emerged in some prior work. Finally, we note several issues that limit the ability of existing research to fully test this account, motivating the design of the new studies we employ here.

## **What Can Partisanship Dominate?**

Conditional Partisan Loyalty theory argues that only highly salient information can offset the effect of partisan cues—possibly to the point of inducing partisan defections. By “salient” we mean information that voters deem important and that is top-of-mind at the ballot box. We operationalize this concept by focusing on political issues that sit at the center of core policy disagreements among the voting public. We contrast these important issues with low-salience pieces of information, by which we mean political issues that most individuals do not incorporate into their political decisions. We expect patterns of partisan dominance to occur in candidate choice when the influence

of partisanship is considered relative to low-salience political issues.

Our use of this distinction between high and low-salience political issues to understand variation in the relative contribution of party labels and issues to candidate choice builds on prior research that proposes a bifurcated role for policy issues in voting behavior. A core insight to emerge from this research is that there is substantial heterogeneity in the contribution that issues make to the public's candidate assessments.

At one end of the spectrum are political issues that broad segments of the public understand, consider important and bring to bear on their political judgments. These considerations receive a variety of labels in prior scholarship—"latent" opinions in Key (1961), "crystallized" attitudes in Sears (1975), "easy" issues in Carmines and Stimson (1980)—but for our present purpose they all reference the same underlying concept, a set of political issues with a high degree of salience for political decision-making. The political stakes of position-taking on these types of issues are so powerful that public officials tread carefully on them and take anticipatory actions so as to offset their later importance for political decisions (e.g., Zaller, 2012, 588; Fowler, 2018). For example, Lenz (2012, Ch. 6) identifies several instances in which political parties switched positions on major issues where they were out of step with public opinion (e.g., nuclear power during the Dutch 1986 elections), limiting the subsequent opportunity for the public to vote on these issues.

In contrast, this typology also points to other issues with a relatively limited importance for preference formation among the public. Whether due to their novelty, technical nature, or limited visibility in political discourse, these "hard" issues (Carmines and Stimson, 1980) are relevant to only a small segment of the electorate and are unlikely to factor into the political decision-making of most of the public, particularly if they lack the confidence in their own opinions needed to assess politicians along this dimension (see also, Gilens, 2001; Hacker and Pierson, 2005, 39-43, Gerber et al. 2011).

Prior work uses this distinction to offer insight into variation in the role of issues for candidate assessment. While this point is made in issue voting studies, its implications have received limited attention in studies focused on how partisanship affects political decision-making relative to other

types of information (but see, Arceneaux, 2008; Ciuk and Yost, 2016).

We argue that Conditional Partisan Loyalty theory offers a simple, but theoretically critical, point of departure for understanding when partisanship is likely to dominate political decisions. Our expectation is that when the influence of partisanship is compared relative to that of low-salience issues voters make limited use of in their political decisions, partisanship will dominate political choice. In contrast, we expect that issues with a high degree of salience will remain relevant even in the presence of partisan cues.

While prior studies have focused on how information levels and individual differences moderate the effects of partisan cues, our theory departs from the literature by focusing on the *types* of information pitted against partisanship. And though attempts to directly assess variation in issue salience within a single study are rare, several points of evidence from prior studies are consistent with Conditional Partisan Loyalty theory. Demonstrations of partisan dominance tend to highlight the influence of party labels on political issues with novel and technical aspects (i.e., low-salience issues, as defined above). For instance, Lenz (2012) observes that a surge in the prominence of the candidates' positions on social security privatization in the 2000 presidential election led individuals to adopt the viewpoint of their preferred candidate, rather than move their support toward a candidate that better aligned with their view. Cohen (2003) examines support for a state health care policy and shows that partisan cues overpower brief statements regarding the policy's content in determining the support it received. In contrast, recent evidence demonstrating greater constraints on the influence of partisanship tends to incorporate salient, "easy" political issues, such as abortion or government spending, that lie at the core of contemporary policy divides (Tomz and Houweling, 2009).

In a few instances, within-study heterogeneity in the effects of partisanship follows a similar pattern. Tesler (2015) finds that individuals "follow" their preferred candidates' view on low-salience issues, but fail to do so for high-salience social issues. Carsey and Layman (2006) observe a similar dynamic based on self-reported issue importance. Finally, Arceneaux (2008) shows that survey respondents punish candidates who are out of step with party reputations on a high-salience

political issue (abortion), while tolerating discrepancies on federalism, a lower salience issue (see also, Ciuk and Yost, 2016). However, this last study does not directly contrast the effects of issues and party labels on vote choice.

## **The Need for New Evidence**

Focusing on the types of considerations against which partisanship is counter-posed offers a chance to reconcile opposing perspectives on partisan loyalty. While generally loyal to their party, members of the public may be willing to defect from their party when co-partisan politicians diverge from their preferred viewpoints on a set of key, high-salience issue positions. However, there is a need for new, more direct tests of conditional party loyalty. In this section we identify three necessary elements to assess this claim. Prior research on this topic fails to incorporate at least one of these elements, requiring a new research design that we later introduce.

## **The Relative Influence of Party and Policy**

A first requirement is the ability to jointly estimate the effects of party labels and issue positions on candidate choice to assess their relative influence. Observational studies can only examine the correspondence between party, candidate positioning and candidate preferences for the types of politicians available for voters to assess in each political party. To the extent counter-stereotypical politicians are screened out prior to general elections or voters lack information on the characteristics of individual candidates, observational evidence offers limited insight into how voters would respond when they know that co-partisan candidates diverge from their preferred stance on high-salience issues (Lenz, 2012, 212; see also Fowler, 2018).

This points us towards the use of an experimental research design that—after measuring a respondent’s own partisanship and issue positions so as to understand their subsequent relationship to the candidates they evaluate—purposely uses randomization to break familiar links between a candidate’s party label and their issue positions to assess the relative contribution each of these elements makes to an individual’s candidate preferences. Prior experimental studies that examine the effects of partisanship and other considerations often purposely select relatively low-salience political issues. This choice can be useful, for instance, when attempting to understand the process

of public opinion formation. But the degree of partisan influence over decision-making in such settings may not generalize to scenarios in which higher-salience political issues are at stake. While experimental studies offer a crucial opportunity to distinguish the link between partisanship and policy in a way that is not feasible with observational data, it has less seldom been put to use for these purposes on issues that correspond to major political divides in the mass public (but see e.g., Arceneaux, 2008; Tomz and Houweling, 2009).

## **Competitive Decision Settings**

Second, in order to characterize the limits of partisan loyalty, we need to assess the effects of these attributes in the context of competitive political choice over two alternatives. This enables an examination of not only the *effects* of these candidate attributes, but also the *levels* (i.e., candidate choice probability) that result from different common candidate choice scenarios. This facet distinguishes the present study from most recent work demonstrating that other information can rival the effect of party labels. In those studies individuals evaluate a single policy proposal or candidate without the presentation of a clear, out-party alternative (e.g. Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Bullock, 2011; Arceneaux, 2008). It is one thing to oppose co-partisan policies or candidates relative to an unclear alternative or the status-quo, it is another when, as for many important political choices, doing so simultaneously requires individuals to support a candidate from the other party. Compared to studies in which respondents assess an individual candidate or policy, the competitive setting used here creates a very different context for understanding the relative influence of partisanship and issues on political decisions.

## **Variation in Issue Salience**

A final requirement is variation in the choice-specific salience of the considerations placed against party labels. This aspect of the study design poses several difficulties. First, “meta-attitudinal” approaches in which individuals self-report the relevance of an issue (e.g., Petty and Krosnick, 1995) are subject to social desirability concerns (i.e., nearly all issues are rated as at least “somewhat” important in this approach) and require substantial introspection from respondents. While we use this approach to identify issues for inclusion in the first experiment we conduct,

these problems limit the utility of self-report measures for the choice-specific voting context we focus on (Leeper and Robison, 2018). Second, assessing issue salience based on media coverage may fail to capture variation in an issue's salience for voters (e.g., Ciuk and Yost, 2016; Arceneaux, 2008) and ignores high-salience issues that elites strategically work to keep off of the policy agenda out of anticipatory concerns about their electoral costs (e.g. Key, 1961; Zaller, 2012). Finally, a post-hoc approach that labels issues as high or low salience based on the results of the main experiments introduces concern about researcher degrees of freedom and leaves unclear if the set of issues incorporated into the experiments will strike an appropriate balance of low and high salience issue-based considerations for candidate choice. To avoid these problems, in Study 2 we use experimental pre-tests to create a behavioral measure of issue salience that is uniquely suited to our decision context and assesses the salience of various political issues prior to our main study.

Before detailing a research design that incorporates all these necessary elements, several aspects of our treatment of issue salience deserve attention. First, our focus will be on categorizing issues by their salience and incorporating them into studies of candidate assessment to offer within-study variation on this dimension, a task that is not clearly specified in prior work on the influence of partisanship in political decision-making. We do not offer a comprehensive explanation of why these issues differ in terms of their applicability to candidate choice (e.g., their cognitive accessibility, prominence in public discussion or technical features) as it is outside our current focus. We leave this as a topic for future work. Second, while we go on to categorize several issues that receive a prominent place in national discourse and elite political discussion as "low-salience" relative to others, this label narrowly refers to their relevance for choices by the public in this setting. This label is not an assessment of issues' broader importance to other political actors or the eventual consequences of policy-making in these areas. Indeed, we will show that many issues with broad policy implications nonetheless exert limited effects on candidate choice, a point we return to when discussing the implications of our findings.

## **A Research Design to Study Conditional Party Loyalty**

These requirements motivate a unique research design that brings together these three features for the first time. While there are some differences across the two studies we conduct, here we focus on several features common to both experiments. We examine the relative influence of partisanship and issue agreement on candidate choice using a conjoint experimental framework in which respondents evaluated two politicians and indicated which they preferred (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014). The two candidates in the data we analyze always came from opposing political parties. In addition to partisanship, respondents learned other information, in this case the candidates' positions on five (Study 1) or eight (Study 2) issues and some demographic information (i.e., gender and race/ethnicity). These candidate attributes were randomly assigned.

A key requirement is variation in the political salience of the other candidate attributes counterposed against a candidate's party label. We accomplish this in Study 2 by including information about the candidates' issue positions on multiple issues that vary with respect to their political salience (i.e., either high or low-salience issues). This classification is based on a pre-test experiment, discussed in more detail later, and allows a comparison of the effects of partisanship to issue agreement with a candidate on both low and high-salience political issues.

Embedding variation in political salience within a single design allows a clear assessment of our conjectures that partisanship may fail to dominate decisions on core political issues while also revealing the breadth of outcomes for which such dominance is feasible. We use two studies to probe this account. Study 1 examines the relative weight of party labels and candidate positions on a set of high-salience issues to understand if position-taking can offset party labels. Study 2 elaborates on this by also incorporating issues with low political salience, offering the opportunity to examine variation in partisan dominance across different types of issues.

### **Study 1: Partisanship vs. High-Salience Political Issues**

Study 1, conducted in July 2016 ( $N=3,074$  respondents from Research Now/SSI collected via Qualtrics Panels), evaluated opposing political candidates in a series of seven conjoint tasks.

The two candidates in each conjoint task took positions on five different political issues. These consisted of one economic issue (i.e., raising or lowering the corporate income tax), two aspects of health care coverage (i.e., repealing Obamacare, requiring health insurance providers to cover birth control), and two aspects of immigration policy (i.e., a path to citizenship/deportation for undocumented immigrants, banning immigration by Muslims). Prior to evaluating these candidates, respondents offered their own positions on the issues.<sup>1</sup>

While we later turn to a behavioral measure of issue salience in Study 2, the issues included in Study 1 were chosen because contemporary polling indicated they were the most important issues on voters minds during the 2016 presidential election.<sup>2</sup> In our survey, respondents placed these issues at 2.8 on a 4-pt issue salience scale (ranging between 1 and 4)—close to the value of “Very important” which corresponded to the scale’s third point. This experiment examines the interplay between partisan cues and position-taking on a set of highly salient issues.

In addition to these issue positions, respondents learned about the candidate’s partisanship and race/ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> Consistent with the approach throughout this paper, a candidate’s partisanship and issue positions were independently randomized within profiles. This meant these candidates could take issue positions consistent with their party’s reputation on these issues or depart from the party line. This offers an opportunity to distinguish the relative effects of partisanship and issue disagreement on high-salience issues.

## Study 1 Results

We begin by following prior work that examines the role of partisanship in political decisions by assessing the relative weight that partisanship receives compared to other criteria for political choice among the roughly 10,728 conjoint tasks where respondents evaluated candidates from opposing political parties, simulating a general election match-up.<sup>4</sup> This analysis does not include any “pure” independents as there are ambiguous expectations about the effects of party labels

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix B provides an example of how these profiles looked to respondents.

<sup>2</sup><http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2016/images/05/04/rel6b.-.2016.general.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>The race/ethnicity of the candidate profiles was weighted to resemble the distribution of members of Congress at the time the survey was run.

<sup>4</sup>Because of our focus on choice in settings with opposing party candidates we exclude 10,778 profiles pairs in which the candidate’s had the same party label and individuals were unable to choose between them on this factor.

among this group (see Mullinix 2016, Bullock 2011 for other examples of this approach).

The outcome is an indicator variable for whether the respondent preferred a candidate out of the pair they evaluated. We regress this outcome on two sets of independent variables. The first captures partisan considerations using an indicator variable for whether the candidate shared a respondent's partisanship. The second operationalizes issue considerations with a series of separate indicator variables for the number of issue positions on which the candidate and respondent agreed. This ranges from zero, when an individual disagreed with every position a candidate took, to four, when a respondent agreed with each of the candidate's issue positions.<sup>5</sup> These sets of variables were randomly assigned through the conjoint experiment.

Figure 1 displays the coefficients obtained from regressing candidate choice on these variables. We follow previous work and cluster standard errors for this analysis at the respondent level to account for the multiple observations available for each respondent (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014). The 95% confidence intervals that indicate this uncertainty are displayed along with the coefficients in Figure 1.<sup>6</sup> Tabular results with the regressions used to produce these figures are included in Appendix C.

The coefficients in Figure 1 indicate the increase in the probability an individual preferred a candidate based on that variable relative to the reference condition: an out-party candidate with whom they did not agree on any issues. The top row of Figure 1 shows the effect of sharing a party label with a candidate. Relative to candidates from the opposing party, a shared party label increases the probability a candidate was preferred by 35 percentage points.

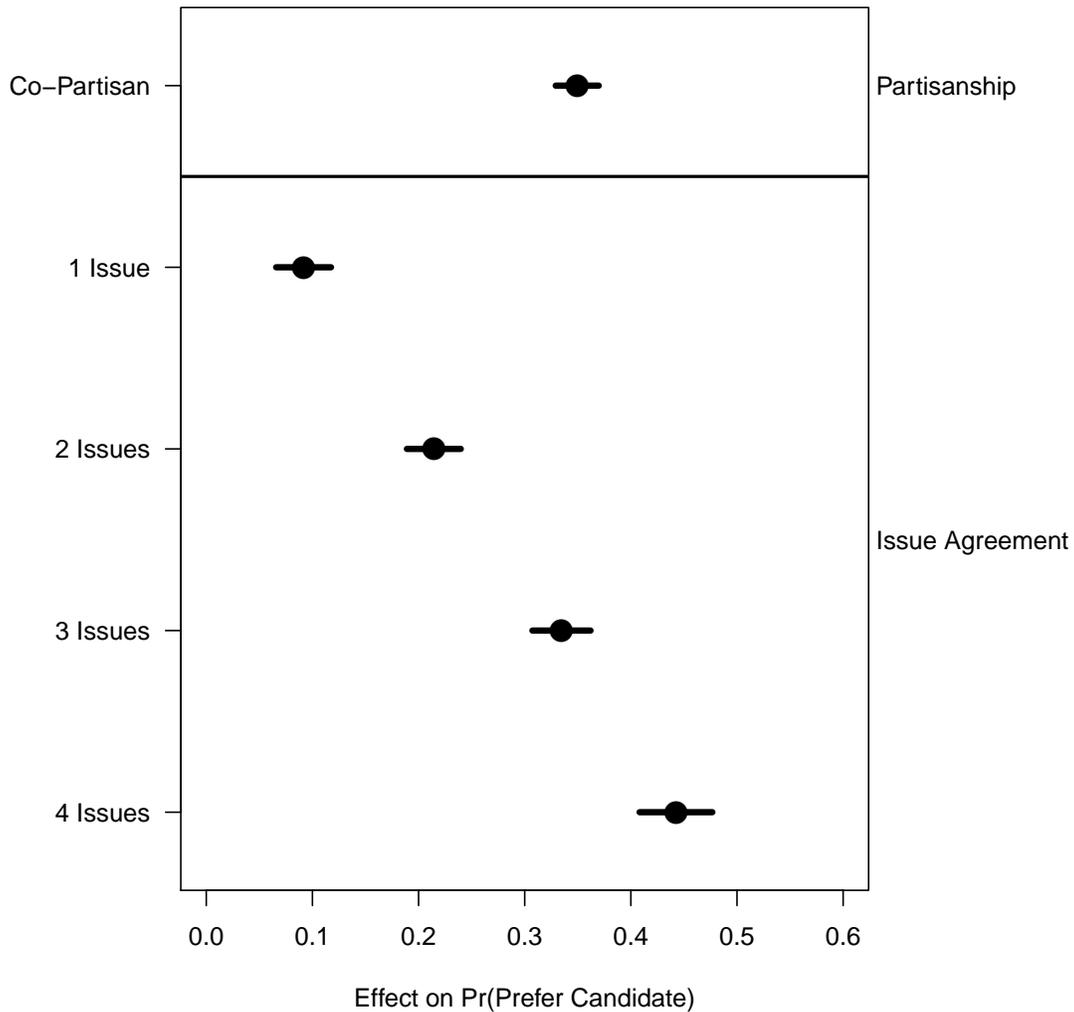
The bottom four rows of Figure 1 display changes in candidate preferences due to issue-based considerations, in this instance increasing levels of issue agreement with a candidate. Relative to a candidate with whom they did not agree on any issues, agreeing on one issue produced a 9 percentage point increase in the probability a candidate was selected. Agreeing on three issue positions produces a 33 percentage point increase in the probability a candidate was selected, an

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<sup>5</sup>For this analysis we are only able to examine up to 4 issue agreements because one candidate position item (immigration policy) could not be mapped back to the individual policy position question.

<sup>6</sup>We note here that there is minimal heterogeneity in these results by party, separate results for each set of partisans are presented in Appendix C.

Figure 1: Partisanship, Issue Agreement and Candidate Choice in Study 1



Changes in candidate support are relative to the reference condition: a respondent's evaluation of an out-party candidate where they did not agree on any issues.

effect of roughly the same magnitude as sharing a party label (35 percentage points). Further levels of issue agreement beyond this point have an even larger influence. The effect of agreeing with a candidate on four issue positions, relative to not agreeing with them on any, increases the probability they are preferred by 45 percentage points.

Figure 1 also makes clear that candidates pay a penalty for diverging from the positions of voters on high-salience issues. After diverging on three or more issues, the advantage gained by sharing a party label with a voter is eclipsed. But what implications does this responsiveness have

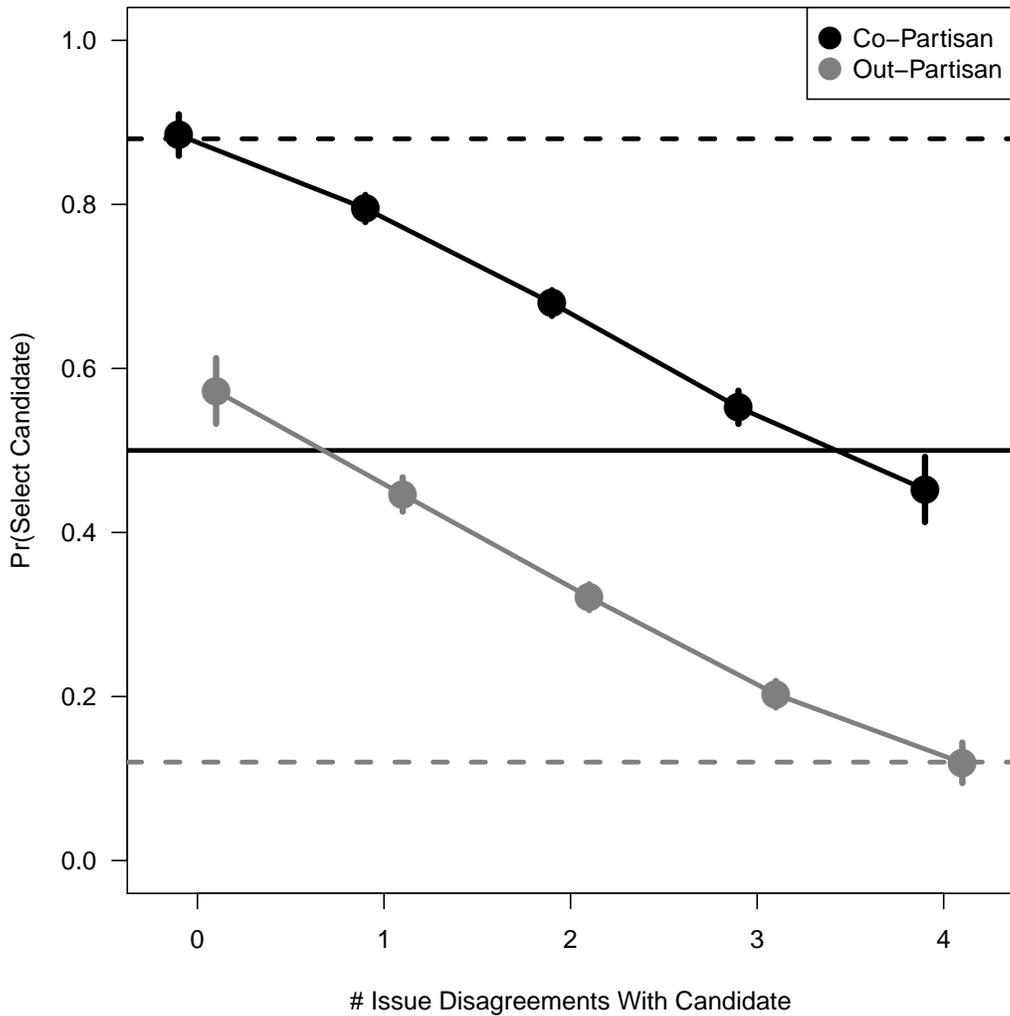
for political decision-making? That is, can issue disagreement make a voter more likely than not to defect to the out-partisan candidate? To examine this, Figure 2 shows the predicted probability of voting for a co-partisan or out-partisan candidate by the degree of issue disagreement. For reference, the solid black line in the figure indicates the choice probability of 0.5—the point at which individuals are equally likely to select a co-partisan or out-party candidate. For reference, the dashed black line represents the probability of selecting a co-partisan congressional candidate in the 2016 American National Election Study (0.88) while the dashed gray line displays the probability of selecting a congressional candidate from another party (0.12).

Figure 2 reveals that partisans are, in general, extremely loyal to their co-partisan candidates. Even after a co-partisan candidate takes dissonant positions on three extremely high-salience issues, voters are ultimately still more likely than not to select this candidate. Defection only becomes more likely than selecting a co-partisan when a respondent disagrees with their party's candidate on four major issues. Conversely, voters only seem to become more inclined to vote for the out-partisan candidate than their co-partisan option if that candidate aligns with their views on all major issues—an unlikely scenario in general elections in contemporary U.S. politics given substantial elite polarization and partisan sorting on issues among the public.

With respect to the observational benchmarks, an individual's predicted probability of supporting their co-partisan nominee when they agree on every issue (0.88) is the same as the levels of co-partisan voting observed among 2016 ANES respondents. There is a similar correspondence between the experimental scenario where respondents disagreed with the out-party candidate on each of the issues and levels of out-party voting in the 2016 ANES.

This first study shows that important insights can be gained by breaking the link between party and candidate issue positions to understand public responsiveness to both dimensions. In a number of prior studies, partisan dominance is determined by the relative weight that partisanship receives compared to other considerations in political decisions (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Bullock, 2011). Assessed relative to agreement on individual issues, party labels have a larger effect on candidate choice. However, the combined weight of agreement across multiple issues outstrips the role of

Figure 2: Tolerance for Issue Disagreement by Partisan Status in Study 1



The figure displays the probability of selecting candidates conditional on their level of agreement with survey respondents on the issues presented. For comparison, the top dashed line shows the rate of co-partisan voting in the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES). The bottom dashed line shows the rate of out-party voting in the 2016 ANES.

partisanship. The availability of partisanship does not eliminate responsiveness to a candidate's issue positions. Indeed, the advantage a candidate gains via a shared party label is lost by the time respondents disagree with their stance on at least three of these high-salience issues. By this criterion, we find little evidence of partisan dominance over these high-salience issues for candidate choice. Individuals make substantial use of these issues to assess candidates even given the availability of party labels. The combined weight of issues on candidate choice exceeds the

effect of party labels.

However, the ability to directly examine resulting levels of political choice in this study also offers an important insight into some of the limits of this responsiveness for political decision-making. In the event the candidate diverges from voters on four or more key issues, the voter is more likely than not to defect to the out-party. However, even in this extreme scenario where they disagree with their co-partisan nominee on every issue, respondents are still predicted to select that candidate 45% of the time, indicating a substantial baseline affinity for co-partisan nominees that persists even when they are in opposition on a number of important policy issues.

Study 1 offers an important demonstration of responsiveness to candidate characteristics on these high-salience issues and evidence that should such large-scale deviations on policy occur, voters would not ignore them when assessing co-partisan candidates. However, this experiment does not fully test the conditional party loyalty perspective, and leaves open the question of whether partisan dominance over public opinion can occur relative to *any* set of political issues. In line with our theoretical discussion, the next section introduces variation in issue salience.

## **Study 2: Partisanship and Variable Issue Salience**

Study 2 incorporates variation in issue salience to assess whether partisan cues would be sufficient to overwhelm the use of less salient characteristics for political choice.

### **Pre-Testing to Categorize Issues**

The issues in this experiment were chosen through a pre-test on Amazon's Mechanical Turk that sought to identify a set of issues with high (low) degrees of partisan salience, which we operationalize here as issues where there is large (small) disagreement between members of the two major parties. This operationalization captures our definition of salient issues: policy areas that polarize partisans in the public, are a point of contention in campaigns and are top-of-mind at the ballot box. During this pre-test, we conducted candidate choice conjoint experiments that omitted all candidates' party labels, but randomly assigned their positions on 21 issues. In total, 453 respondents evaluated a series of candidates taking positions on these issues in a series of 10 conjoint tasks.

Based on these results, we classified the issues that caused the largest divergence between Democrats and Republicans, in terms of the effect that position-taking on that issue had on a candidate’s probability of being preferred, as high-salience. In contrast, we labeled the four issues that caused the smallest divergence between the members of different parties as low-salience. By using heterogeneity in the treatment effects of candidate position-taking on an issue to classify issue salience, we focus on how these issues matter for candidate choice. The use of an experimental pre-test to identify these issues guards against social desirability bias and other forms of insincere response that limit the usefulness of self-reported measures of salience in this context. The eight issues selected through this process are described in Table 1.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1: Issues by Salience in Study 2

Issue	Specific Focus	Type
Abortion	Make Abortion Illegal	High-Salience
Gun Control	Ban Assault Rifles	High-Salience
Health Care	Repeal Obamacare	High-Salience
LGBT Discrimination	Pass Anti-Discrimination Law	High-Salience
Birth Control	Require Insurance to Cover	Low-Salience
Dept. of Interior	Increase Department Spending	Low-Salience
Education	Support Common Core	Low-Salience
Trade	Tariff on Chinese Imports	Low-Salience

In Study 2 the effect of issue agreement on one of the high-salience issues ranged between a 9 and 14 percentage point increase in candidate support (mean=12). In contrast, on the low-salience issues, issue agreement produced between a 3 and 7 percentage point increase in candidate support (mean=4.5). On average, the effect of issue agreement on candidate support for one of the high-salience issues was roughly three times the size of the effect of agreement with the candidate on one of the low-salience issues.

While we prefer this behavioral approach, the issue classifications it produces are also robust to alternative operationalizations of issue salience. If we assess this typology using items that measure an issue’s self-reported importance for candidate choice measured in Study 2, the issues categorized as high-salience in our pre-tests were rated 2.7 on a 4-pt importance scale by respondents,

<sup>7</sup>While self-reports placed the Birth Control issue as high-salience for Study 1, our approach in Study 2 categorizes it as less salient than the other potential issues.

higher than the 2.2 point rating that low-salience issues received—evidence of a clear demarcation that fits the typology needed for tests of conditional party loyalty.<sup>8</sup>

## Study 2 Results

Study 2 was conducted in March 2018 ( $N=1,439$  respondents from Research Now/SSI collected via Qualtrics Panels). The design of the study was similar to the previous study in that respondents evaluated pairs of candidates from opposing parties in seven conjoint tasks. However, in this case the candidates took positions on the eight issues identified as either high or low salience in the aforementioned pre-test.

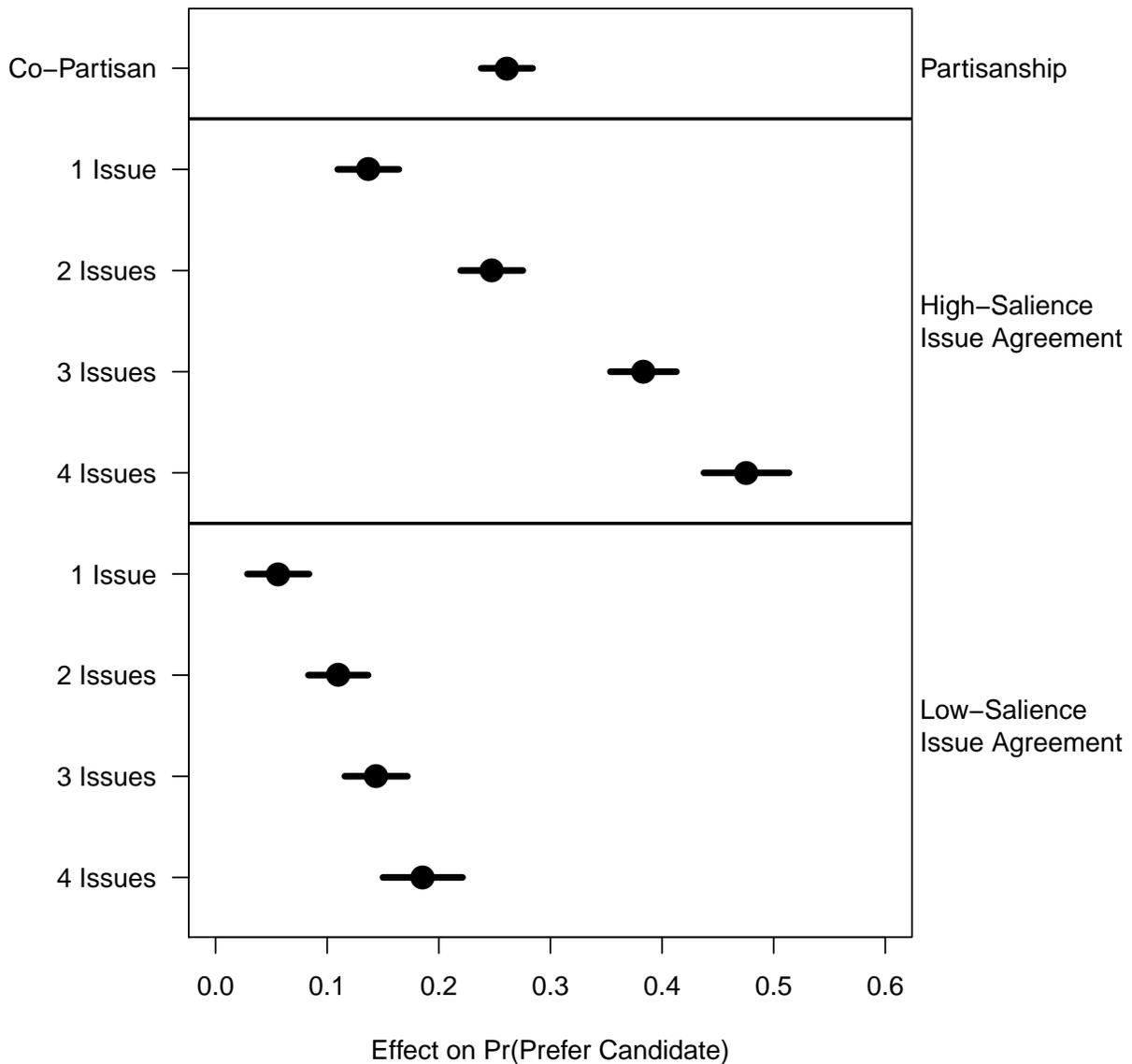
The top row of Figure 3 displays the effect of co-partisanship on candidate choice. Sharing a candidate's party label produces a 26 percentage point increase in the probability they are preferred by a respondent, a similar magnitude to the effect of partisanship in Study 1. The next four rows in the figure display changes in the probability a candidate is preferred based on agreement on the set of high-salience issues considered in this study. Agreement on one of these issues increases candidate support by 14 percentage points. Relative to the same baseline, the effect of agreement on two of these high-salience issues is 25 percentage points—roughly the same magnitude as the effect of shared partisanship, as in Study 1. Further increases in issue agreement continue to improve candidate support, with agreement on 4 issue positions leading to a 48 percentage point increase in the probability an individual supports a candidate.

Thus far the results mirror Study 1. A key distinction in Study 2, however, is the introduction of the set of lower salience issues into the candidate profiles. When examining low-salience issues, we see a very different portrait of the capacity of these issues to offset the role of candidate partisanship on support. While the effect of agreement on one high-salience issue was 14 percentage points, the effect of agreement on one of these lower-salience issues is a mere 6 percentage point increase in candidate support. Further agreement on these lower-salience issues only modestly increases the probability of selecting a candidate, and the effect of agreeing on all four low-salience issues, 19 percentage points, fails to match the effect of sharing a candidate's party label. These results are

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix A for additional information on the pre-testing procedure and validation of this issue typology.

Figure 3: Partisanship, Issue Agreement and Candidate Choice in Study 2

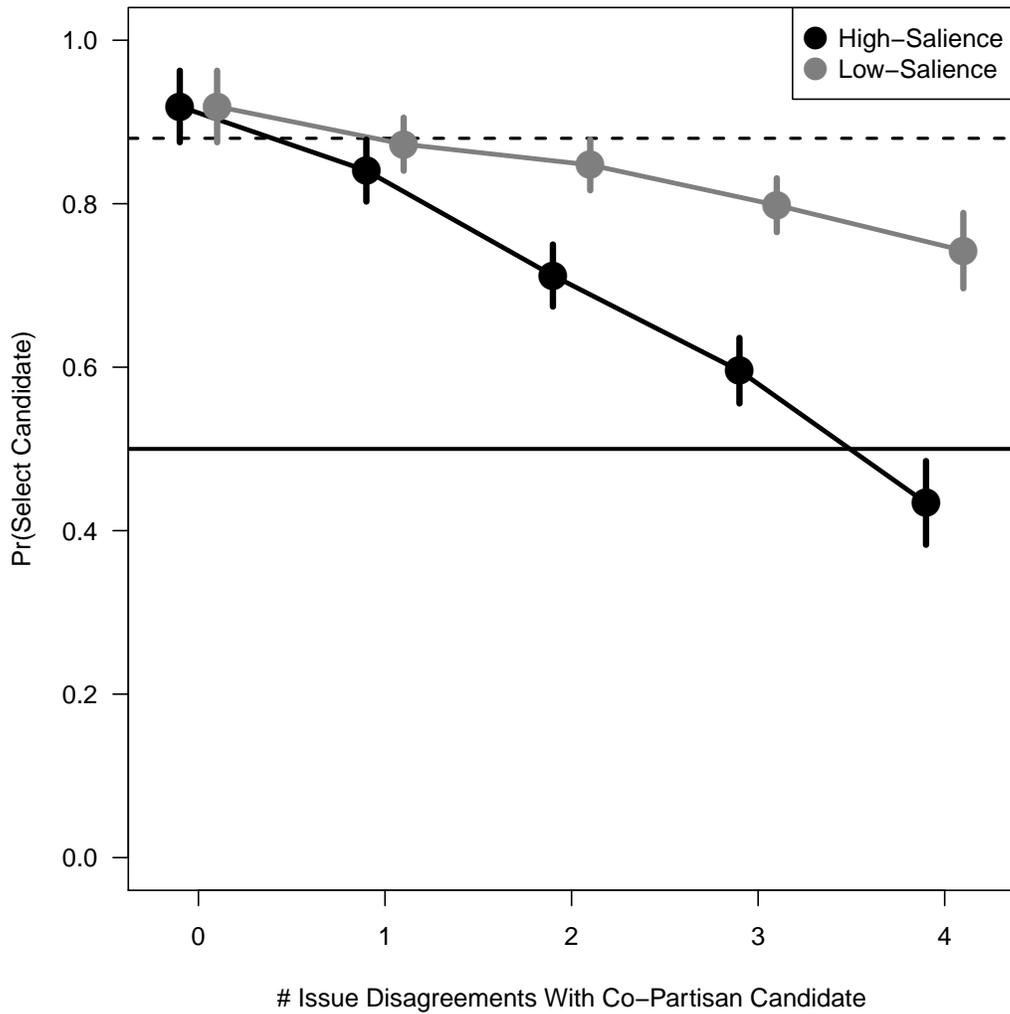


Changes in candidate support are relative to the reference condition: a respondent's evaluation of an out-party candidate where they did not agree on any issues.

much more line with prior studies emphasizing the dominance of partisanship over other political considerations. At least collectively, disagreement on a set of high-saliency issues has the power to overwhelm a party label. The same pattern fails to occur for the low-saliency issues, although candidates do face a smaller penalty for deviating on them.

We now turn to assessing the implications of these patterns of responsiveness for candidate

Figure 4: Tolerance for Issue Disagreement on High and Low-Salience Issues in Study 2



The figure displays the probability of selecting the co-partisan candidate conditional on a respondents' level of agreement with them on the issues presented. In each case the predicted probabilities assume agreement on all issues in the other category of issue salience. For comparison, the top dashed line shows the rate of co-partisan voting in the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES)

choice. Figure 4 shows the predicted probability of supporting a co-partisan candidate by the degree of disagreement on high and low-salience issues.<sup>9</sup> Replicating the findings of Study 1, we see in the left panel of Figure C.3 that, on average, individuals remain more supportive of their co-partisan candidate (the probability of selection remains above 0.5) than the out-party candidate

<sup>9</sup>These dynamics are similar when examining support for out-partisan candidates, but there is a substantially lower baseline level of support across these conditions. These results are presented in Appendix C.

up until the point that the candidate diverges on four high-salience issues. However, contrary to the defections that occur at high levels of disagreement on high-salience issues (the baseline condition here), co-partisan candidates retain high levels of electoral support regardless of the number of low-salience issues on which they diverge from the positions of voters. Even in the event that a voter disagrees with a candidate on four low-salience issues, if they share a party label with that candidate and agree with them on the high-salience issues, they support that candidate, on average, 74% of the time.

These results demonstrate strong support for the theory of Conditional Party Loyalty. Voters generally support their co-partisan candidates, but enough divergence on high-salience issues *is* capable of inducing defections to the out-party. However, when it comes to low-salience issues, politicians enjoy far more latitude to take different issue positions while still maintaining high levels of co-partisan electoral support.

It is important to note that these low-salience issues, while less consequential than their counterparts for candidate choice, are still extremely important from a policy standpoint. They include central tasks of government such as defining regulation of trade, education standards and access to birth control. Our results indicate that so long as candidates toe the line on a key set of issues, they receive a relatively limited penalty from their co-partisans for the positions they take on other crucial responsibilities of the state.

## **External Validity Concerns**

There are reasons to question whether our experiments are adequately approximating real-world behavior. A crucial feature of Studies 1 and 2 is that they break familiar links between candidate positioning and party reputations. As previously discussed, this is essential for understanding the extent to which individuals tolerate issue-based disagreements with co-partisan candidates. However, this approach does require individuals to respond to very different types of profiles than they typically encounter in real-world candidate decision-making. Given this unusual choice environment, are respondents behaving as they would if they encountered such choices in the real world?

We believe our experiments are recovering externally valid estimates for several reasons. For one, results from the type of conjoint experiments we use here have been shown to closely mirror real-world decision-making in other contexts (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto, 2015). And in this instance, the candidate profiles we offer provide survey respondents information of the same type and in a similar format to what they may counter through widely-available information sources such as online voter guides (Mummolo and Peterson, 2017).

One way of assessing external validity in this setting is to compare rates of candidate selection in scenarios which *do* reflect real world choices to the rates we have observed in recent elections. If participants are selecting typical partisan candidates in our studies at rates comparable to the real world, we can be more confident that their decisions regarding unusual candidates shed light on how they would behave in a real election should such candidates emerge.

Consistent with this reasoning, the rates of selecting a co-partisan candidate that agrees with the survey respondent on the issues in play closely mirrors the rates of co-partisan voting observed in recent elections, as measured in the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES). As Figures 2 and 4 show, when the respondent agreed with the co-partisan candidate on all available issues in the experiments, they preferred their party's candidate 88% of the time in Study 1 and 92% of the time in Study 2. This is highly similar to the rate of co-partisan voting in congressional elections in the 2016 ANES, where 88% of those voting in these races preferred their co-partisan candidate. Given this close correspondence in the base rates of voting for a like-minded co-partisan, we believe the candidate selection exercise, while obviously artificial, offers reasonably valid estimates. In addition, we find highly similar results with respect to the effects of partisan cues, low-salience issues and high-salience issues after re-weighting the samples in Studies 1 and 2 to conform to the demographic traits of the 2016 National Election Study (see Appendix C for results).

As a final check for whether our candidate selection exercise was externally valid, we conducted a third study in which 1,001 respondents from the same sample as Studies 1 and 2 were asked to indicate which of two candidates for office they preferred.<sup>10</sup> The candidates came from

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<sup>10</sup>This sample only included 'Strong' or 'Not very strong' partisans, excluding partisan leaners and independents.

opposing political parties and, as in Study 2, took positions on eight different issues. Respondents first completed a set of tasks identical to Study 2. As a final task, however, they assessed a profile pair that did not contain any randomized components. Instead, the candidate positions were entirely reputation-consistent (i.e., the Republican candidate always took conservative issue positions and the Democrat always took liberal positions). This reputation-consistent task offers an alternative approximation for candidate alignment in general election competition in the United States, especially given the high levels of elite polarization present in contemporary politics.<sup>11</sup> Using this alternative conception of “real-world” co-partisan candidates—ones who take the party’s position rather than the survey respondents’—we observe slightly lower base rates of co-partisan voting. When faced with a reputation-consistent Republican against a reputation-consistent Democrat, 78% of partisan respondents preferred their co-partisan candidate (see Table 2).<sup>12</sup>

Table 2: Support for Co-Partisan Candidates: 2016 Elections and Survey Benchmark

Study	Prefer Co-Partisan Candidate
ANES Presidential (2016)	93%
ANES Congressional (2016)	88%
CCES Presidential (2016)	89%
CCES Congressional (2016)	89%
Survey 1 (No Issue Disagreement)	88%
Survey 2 (No Issue Disagreement)	92%
Survey 3 (Reputation-Consistent)	78%

We believe the close correspondence between rates of co-partisan voting in Studies 1 and 2 and the ANES offer the most compelling evidence of external validity. However, if we embrace this final test using reputation-consistent candidates, it means our findings regarding the ability of issues to offset party labels in candidate choice may represent an upper-bound for the role of political issues in decision-making. In other words, if the base rate of voting for a co-partisan is

<sup>11</sup>For instance, comparing the ideology of general election candidates for Congress using measures of ideology based on a candidate’s campaign finance receipts, shows that no races in 2014 (the most recent year available) involved a Democratic candidate that was more conservative than their Republican opponent (Bonica, 2014).

<sup>12</sup>As in other work, we include partisan “leaners” with the party they are closest with and exclude “pure” independents.

understated in our studies, then it may take disagreement on even more than four salient issues to cause a partisan defection.<sup>13</sup>

Despite some uncertainty about the precise number of issues necessary for a defection to the out-party, our central conclusion remains unchanged. Voters strongly prefer co-partisan candidates, but their loyalty has limits. Disagreement on salient issues can erode the influence of a shared party label, and if enough disagreement is present, voters will defect for the out-party. However, because of the high level of elite polarization in U.S. politics today, this rarely occurs. That is, voters are rarely faced with co-partisan candidates who take reputationally inconsistent positions that would cross-pressure them in this way. The high rates of voting for co-partisans observed in the U.S., then, are likely a function of a polarized candidate pool, not blind partisan loyalty in the electorate.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Extensive inquiry into the role of partisanship in political decision-making has produced a large literature with mixed results. In some settings partisanship appears to be the sole characteristic used by members of the public to make political decisions. In others there are clear alternative considerations that are as, if not more, influential than partisanship. In this paper we reconciled this conflict in the literature by generating a theory for when and why issue positions can strain party loyalty. We tested it using survey experiments that devote careful attention to the types of issues that are placed in tension with partisanship in a given setting based on new, behavioral measures of choice-specific issue salience. We show that, when considered relative to low-salience political considerations, partisanship appears dominant in political decision-making. In contrast, when compared to central, high-salience issues, it appears much less influential as these other considerations also exert considerable influence on candidate choice. In extreme cases—disagreement with a co-partisan on four or more high-salience issues—members of the public are more likely to support out-party politicians than their co-partisan. This attribute-focused explanation identifies a key moderator—alongside recent accounts that focus on the role of individual differences

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<sup>13</sup>We note that this divergence in base rates would not affect the marginal effects we display above, (since the baseline divergence would difference out in those estimates), but may impact our analysis of the likelihood of partisan defection (Figures 2 and 4) which relies on predicted probabilities.

and political context in shaping the influence of partisanship (e.g., Arceneaux and Wielen, 2017; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen, 2012; Bullock, 2011)—to help make sense of when and why partisanship fails to dominate political choice.

Beyond our explanation, which synthesizes a mixed body of evidence present in prior research, these findings make two important amendments to prior studies on how partisanship affects public opinion. First, these studies fail to support perspectives emphasizing that the introduction of partisanship to a choice setting eliminates the assessment of other considerations (e.g., Rahn, 1993; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus, 2013). Although the penalty they face is small, politicians do suffer a cost for discrepant position taking even on low-salience political issues, indicating some responsiveness to these considerations. Second, these results offer new insights into the implications of responsive public opinion for decision-making about political candidates. In particular, despite the responsiveness of public opinion to high salience political issues, substantial disagreement is still required to compel mass partisans to diverge from the party line. Significant majorities still prefer co-partisan candidates even when they take a dissonant position on high-salience issues like immigration. These same candidates suffer an even smaller penalty to their support for abandoning their constituents' preferences on low-salience issues like trade or birth control.

Finally, our findings have important implications for normative discussions regarding the role of partisanship in political decision-making. Our results demonstrate the conditional nature of assessments regarding partisan loyalty among the public. On the one hand, our results give reason for optimism regarding democratic competence, showing that partisanship fails to dominate political choice when key issues are at the core of decision-making. At the same time, we show that patterns of partisan dominance over public opinion *can* occur when political choices center around issues and candidate attributes that, despite having important policy implications and often serving as mainstays of political news, are not utilized by voters when making political decisions. In many electoral scenarios, the public can be expected to offer little resistance to the actions of their elite co-partisans, a finding which casts the partisan heuristic in a new, perhaps dimmer light.

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## **Online Appendix for “Conditional Party Loyalty”**

## A Validating Issue Salience Divide In Study 2

The design of Study 2 hinges on a clear divide in the salience of the political importance of the issues that are available for assessing candidates. We go about validating this issue in several ways that involve 1) a pre-test assessment to aid in the selection the issues for study 2, 2) the use of self-reported importance among study 2 participants and 3) a behavioral assessment of issue importance based on the relevance of these issues for candidate choice in the conjoints. We present each piece of evidence below.

### A.1 Pre-Test Assessment

A pre-test prior to Study 2 identified a contrasting set of high and low-salience political issues to incorporate into the candidate conjoints. In this pre-test a set of 453 respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk evaluated 10 pairs of candidates who took positions on all 21 of these issues. Candidate partisanship was not included in these experiments.

We identify issues based on the degree to which candidate position-taking produces heterogeneous responses among Republicans and Democratic respondents in our sample. This enables us to examine issues that divide the electorate while also avoiding the need to administer a lengthy pre-test questionnaire that asks for a respondents' own issue positions on all 21 of these items, which was infeasible in this setting.

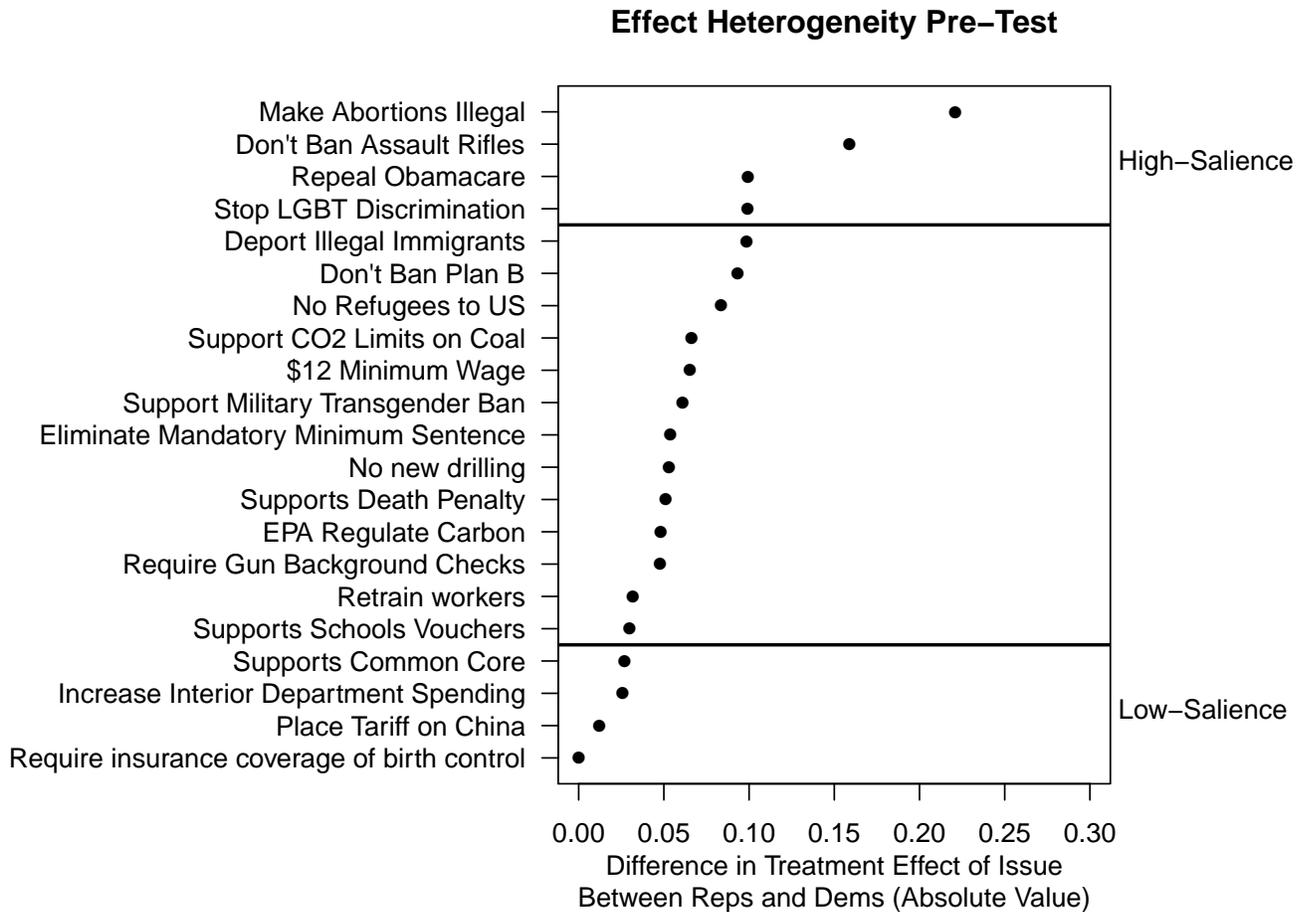
The figure below displays the issues included in the pre-test with respect to to how heterogeneous of a response they drew from Republicans and Democrats in the sample. This is assessed by the interaction coefficient between the candidate position on that issue and respondent partisanship in the following model, which was estimated separately for each of the issues in the experiment:

$$\text{Prefer Candidate} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Issue Agreement} + \beta_2 \text{Democrat} + \beta_3 \text{Issue Agreement} \times \text{Democrat} + \epsilon$$

Since we are interested in the divides in responses between Democrats and Republicans on

an issue, and not necessarily the direction of these divides, we display the absolute value of the coefficient of interest ( $\beta_3$ ) in the figure below for clarity. This coefficient indicates the magnitude of the divide in between-party responsiveness to candidate position-taking on this issue which is our primary interest here.

Figure A1: Effect of Co-Partisanship on Candidate Support

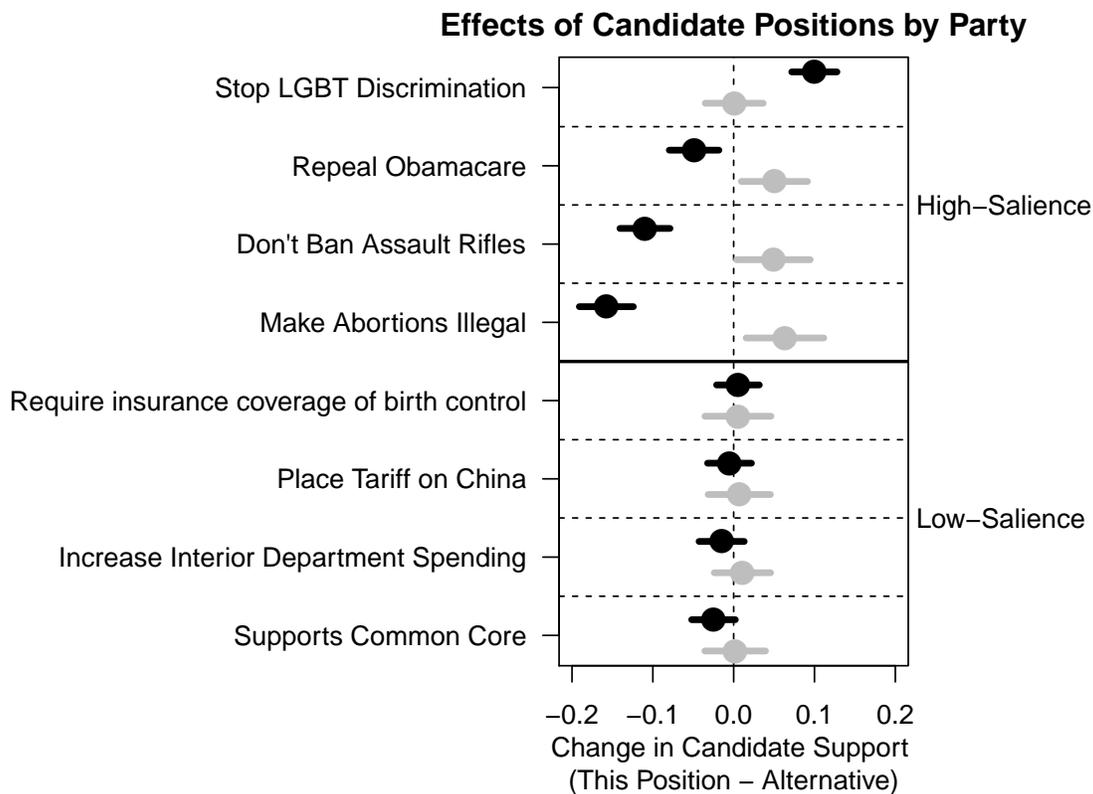


This reveals a set of issues at the very top of the plot that generate very difference responses among Republicans and Democrats. We include the top 4 of these issues as high-salience issues in Study 2. At the bottom of the plot are a set of issues that produce relatively similar responses between Republicans and Democrats. We use the bottom four issues in Study 2 as the low-salience issues.

This categorization produces a clean divide in the political importance of these issues for candidate choice, at least as measured with respect to how groups of partisans respond to these issues on average. This is further established in the figure below which displays the effects of candidate position-taking on these issues on the support they receive from respondents in that group. Effects among Democrats are indicated with the black points while effects among Republicans are indicated with the gray points.

The high-salience issues generally produce opposing effects of reasonable magnitude among each set of partisans. The exception here is the effect of a candidate supporting a law to stop LGBT discrimination, which produces an increase in the support they receive from Democrats but does not produce changes in the support they receive among Republicans.

Figure A2: Effect of Co-Partisanship on Candidate Support



In contrast the low-salience issues produce no change in candidate support among either Republicans or Democrats. While we are unable to condition on an individual’s own issue positions for this assessment, this establishes a broadly useful divide in the importance of these two sets of issues for candidate choice.

## A.2 Self-Reported Importance in Study 2 Survey

In addition to this pre-test, Study 2 included a set of self-reports in which individuals were asked how important an issue was for their candidate choices prior to the conjoint experiments.

Consistent with a clear bifurcation in the importance of these two sets of issues. The average self-reported importance for the high-salience issues was 2.7 when assessed on a 4-pt scale. For the low-salience issues the average self-reported importance is 2.2.

This measure of importance is displayed for each of these issues below. Issues that we categorized as high-salience are displayed in bold. The one reversal from the expected ordering is the higher importance rating for birth control relative to abortion. However, we do not observe this same pattern when looking at how respondents actually used these issues in Study 2.

Table A1: Average Self-Reported Issue Importance - Study 2

Issue	Self-Reported Importance
1 <b>Assault Rifle</b>	3.00
2 <b>Obamacare</b>	2.75
3 <b>LGBT Discrimination</b>	2.73
4 Birth Control coverage by Insurance	2.55
5 <b>Abortion</b>	2.43
6 Tariff on China	2.26
7 Common Core	2.20
8 Interior Spending	1.94

## A.3 Impact on Candidate Candidate Choice in Study 2

A final way to assess the political importance of these issues for candidate choice is to examine how they were used in Study 2 for deciding between candidates. In this case, because individuals

completed a pre-conjoint questionnaire of their own positions, we can assess political salience by looking at how important agreement on these issues was for candidate choice.

Again there is a clear divide between how important these two sets of issues were for candidate choice. This is displayed in the table below. The magnitudes of the coefficients for the issues identified as high-salience prior to Study 2 are the four highest, the effects of the low-salience issues on candidate choice are smaller.

Table A2: Effect of Issue Agreement on Pr(Select Candidate)

	Model 1
(Intercept)	0.17* (0.01)
<b>Rifle</b>	0.14* (0.01)
<b>Abortion</b>	0.12* (0.01)
<b>LGBT Discrimination</b>	0.12* (0.01)
<b>Obamacare</b>	0.09* (0.01)
Birth Control	0.07* (0.01)
Tariff	0.04* (0.01)
Common Core	0.04* (0.01)
Dept. of Interior Spending	0.03* (0.01)
<i>N</i>	21712

Issues labeled as High-Salience prior to Study 2 in bold

Robust standard errors, clustered by Respondent, in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

This offers further behavioral evidence that is consistent with our characterization of issues prior to Study 2.

## B Example Profile

The profile below shows an example of the information about candidates that was available in Studies 2 and 3.

Figure B1: Stereotypical Candidate Pairing in Study 3

Which of these two candidates do you prefer?

	<b>Candidate 1</b>	<b>Candidate 2</b>
<b>Political Party</b>	Republican	Democrat
<b>Abortion</b>	Make abortions illegal	Do not make abortions illegal
<b>Assault Rifle Ban</b>	Do not ban assault rifles	Ban assault rifles
<b>Obamacare</b>	Supports Obamacare repeal	Opposes Obamacare repeal
<b>LGBT Protection</b>	Opposes laws protecting LGBT people against discrimination	Supports laws protecting LGBT people against discrimination
<b>Health Insurance</b>	Do not require insurance to cover birth control	Require insurance to cover birth control
<b>Trade Policy</b>	Place a tariff on imported goods from China	Do not place a tariff on imported goods from China
<b>Interior Department</b>	Opposes spending increase at the Department of the Interior	Supports spending increase at the Department of Interior
<b>Common Core</b>	Opposes Common Core standards	Supports Common Core standards
<b>Gender</b>	Male	Male
<b>Race</b>	White	White

Candidate 1

Candidate 2

## C Additional Analyses

### C.1 Study Demographics

The table below displays the demographics of the survey respondents we analyze in Study 1 and Study 2. As mentioned in the main text, we focus only on those individuals with a party affiliation to examine the effects of party cues. The next section provides a supplementary analysis in which we re-weight the data to targets from the 2016 National Election Study to ensure that our pattern of findings is not driven by demographic differences between these quote-sampled online pools and a nationally representative sample.

Table C1: Study Demographics

	Study 1	Study 2
Black	0.08	0.09
Hispanic	0.05	0.11
White	0.83	0.73
Other Race	0.05	0.07
College or More	0.48	0.64
Female	0.52	0.51
Age	52.68	46.61
Income (\$)	61520.33	75195.76
Democrat	0.49	0.52
Republican	0.51	0.48
Sample Size	3075	1439

### C.2 Limited Effect Heterogeneity by Party in Studies 1 and 2

The next two tables display the regression models we use to produce the figures in the main text. In this case we break out the results using all partisan respondents (Column 1), data that is reweighted to resemble partisan respondents to the 2016 National Election Study (Column 2)<sup>1</sup>, only Democrats (Column 3), and only Republicans (Column 4).

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<sup>1</sup>For this analysis we generate raking weights to re-weight the demographics of our survey respondents in Study 1 and Study 2 to targets taken from the face-to-face portion of the 2016 National Election Study. The covariates used to produce these weights are Partisanship, Ideology, Education, Age, Race and Gender.

This exercise shows that there is minimal heterogeneity in either the effects of a shared party label or issue agreement by party across these studies. The patterns we describe in the main text are similar when examining the entire sample of partisan respondents, incorporating the raking weights or separately assessing the effects among both sets of partisans.

Table C2: Effect of Co-Partisanship and Issue Agreement on Candidate Choice - Study 1

	All	All - Reweighted	Democrats Only	Republican Only
(Intercept)	0.11*	0.12*	0.13*	0.09*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Co-Partisan	0.35*	0.34*	0.34*	0.36*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
High-Salience Agree - 1 Issue	0.09*	0.09*	0.07*	0.11*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 2 Issues	0.21*	0.22*	0.20*	0.23*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 3 Issues	0.33*	0.33*	0.31*	0.35*
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 4 Issues	0.44*	0.41*	0.42*	0.46*
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)
<i>N</i>	21456	21456	10592	10864

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

Reference Condition is Out-Party Candidate with No Issue Agreement

Table C3: Effect of Co-Partisanship and Issue Agreement on Candidate Choice - Study 2

	All	All - Reweighted	Democrats Only	Republican Only
(Intercept)	0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.05* (0.03)
Co-Partisan	0.26* (0.01)	0.22* (0.03)	0.24* (0.02)	0.28* (0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 1 Issue	0.14* (0.01)	0.18* (0.02)	0.18* (0.02)	0.10* (0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 2 Issues	0.25* (0.01)	0.30* (0.03)	0.30* (0.02)	0.19* (0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 3 Issues	0.38* (0.01)	0.41* (0.03)	0.45* (0.02)	0.31* (0.02)
High-Salience Agree - 4 Issues	0.48* (0.02)	0.49* (0.03)	0.54* (0.03)	0.40* (0.03)
Low-Salience Agree - 1 Issue	0.06* (0.01)	0.05 (0.03)	0.06* (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)
Low-Salience Agree - 2 Issues	0.11* (0.01)	0.09* (0.03)	0.11* (0.02)	0.11* (0.02)
Low-Salience Agree - 3 Issues	0.14* (0.01)	0.14* (0.03)	0.12* (0.02)	0.17* (0.02)
Low-Salience Agree - 4 Issues	0.19* (0.02)	0.22* (0.04)	0.18* (0.02)	0.19* (0.03)
<i>N</i>	21100	21100	11048	10052

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\* indicates significance at  $p < 0.05$

Reference Condition is Out-Party Candidate with No Issue Agreement

### C.3 Out-Party Support by Low and High Salience Issue Disagreement in

#### Study 2

The figure below displays the predicted levels of support for out-party candidates in Study 2 based on disagreement across low and high salience political issues.

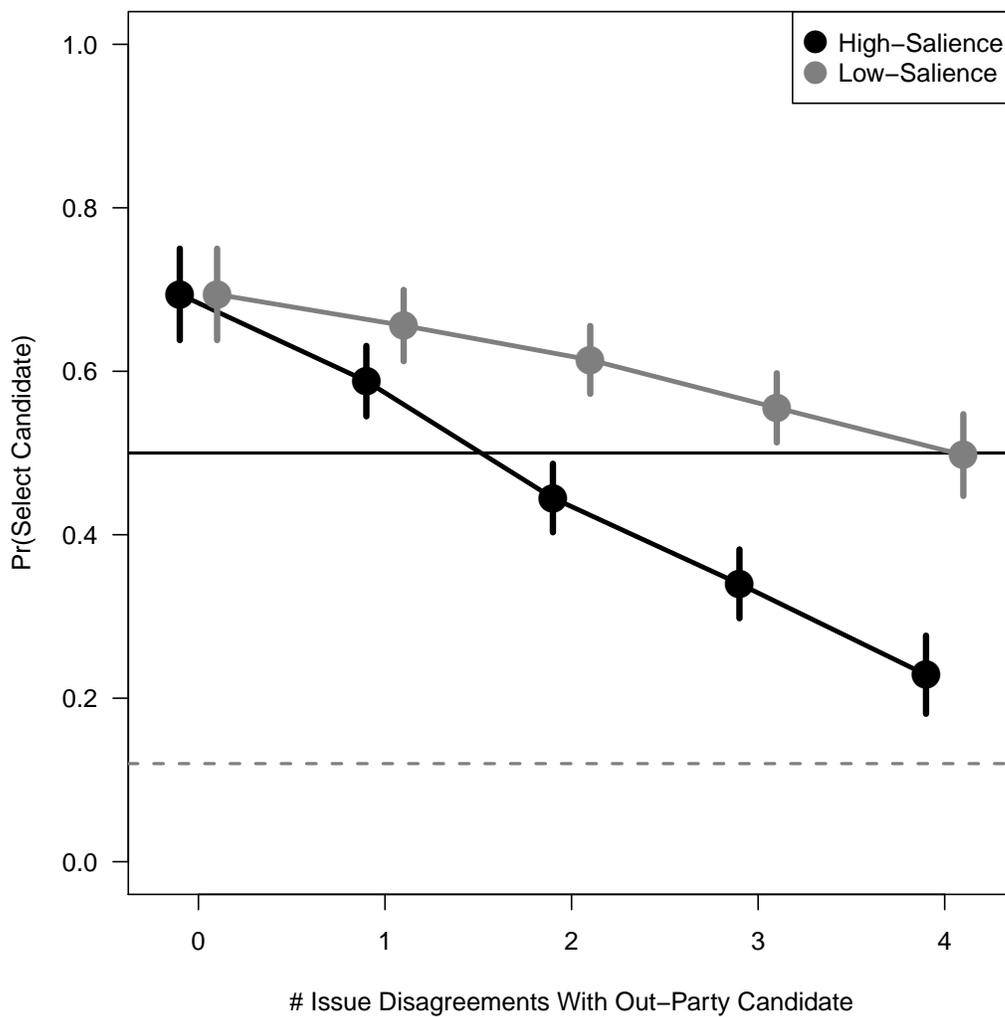
There are similar dynamics to co-partisan candidate support – disagreement on high-salience issues exerts a large effect on candidate support while low-salience issues have a much more limited role in reducing candidate support – but overall levels of support for out-party candidates across all of these conditions are lower.

Levels of candidate support in the condition in which a respondent disagreed with a candidate on four high-salience issues are higher than the observational benchmark from the 2016 ANES,

although in this case this is because these predicted probabilities assume the respondent still agreed with the candidate on all four low-salience issues.

When a candidate and the voter disagree on all eight issues included in the experiment (both high and low salience issues) they were only predicted to receive support 1% of the time, well below the observational benchmark.

Figure C1: Tolerance for Issue Disagreement on High and Low-Salience Issues in Study 2



The figure displays the probability of selecting the co-partisan candidate conditional on a respondents' level of agreement with them on the issues presented. In each case the predicted probabilities assume agreement on all issues in the other category of issue salience. For comparison, the top dashed line shows the rate of voting for candidate from the other party in the 2016 American National Election Study (ANES)