

What Goes with Red and Blue?

Mapping Partisan and Ideological Associations in the Minds of Voters

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Abstract

To what extent do voters grasp “what goes with what” among key political objects as they attempt to understand the choices they face at the ballot box? Is recognition of these associations limited to only the most informed citizens? We design a novel conjoint classification experiment that minimizes partisan boosting and allows for the relative comparison of attribute effect when mapping voter *associative networks*, the cluster of attributes linked to parties and ideological labels. We ask respondents to ‘guess’ the party or ideology of hypothetical candidates with fully randomized issue priorities and biographical details. There is remarkable agreement among both high- and low-knowledge voters in linking issues to each party and ideology, suggesting this minimalist form of associative competence is more widely held in the mass public than perhaps previously thought. We find less agreement about biographical traits which appear to pose greater information challenges for voters. Notably, nearly identical issue priorities and traits are associated with party and ideology, indicating these two dimensions are largely fused in the minds of today’s American voters.

Introduction

Increasingly, simpler forms of information about ‘what goes with what’ (or even information about the simple identity of objects) turn up missing (Converse 1964, p. 213).

Partisan stereotypes are rich cognitive categories, containing not only policy information but group alliances, trait judgments, specific examples of group members, and performance assessments (Rahn 1993, p. 474).

To what extent do voters grasp “what goes with what” among key objects in the political world? Is a recognition of these associations limited to only the most informed citizens? When voters do associate objects with the parties and ideologies, which associations are strongest? Do these relationships held in the minds of voters align with our theoretical expectations or the distributions of actual candidates? Despite extensive focus, there remains surprisingly little scholarly agreement about how much basic heuristic information voters have at their disposal as they attempt to understand the electoral choices faced at the ballot box. In fact, various related political science research programs could be characterized as sending somewhat mixed messages in this regard, sometimes depicting most voters as having very limited awareness of what goes with partisan or ideological labels, and at other times endowing voters with vast stores of stereotypes about Democrats and Republicans. Using a novel conjoint experimental design uniquely suited to measure even weak, implicit-level associations, we find that voters possess a coherent, *if minimalist*, organization of the political world, and are capable of linking important facts about candidates, policies and groups to Democratic and Republican candidates. We find that these same associations apply nearly identically to ideological labels. And, perhaps most strikingly, we show that even the least informed voters are able to make the ‘correct’ associations.

Since at least Converse’s (1964) classic study, many scholars writing on democratic competence have viewed the American mass public as largely unable to recognize the basic connec-

tions between distinct political ideas that drive party conflict. While Converse's (1964) most noted finding is that voters generally do not think in internally or temporally coherent policy terms, he begins by highlighting remarkable limitations in their abilities to make accurate associations with the parties or their ideological currents. Subsequent work on voter competence has refined, but generally reinforced this result, showing voters often possess shallow or biased mental images of the parties and ideologies in general (Bullock et al. 2015; Converse 1964; Dancey and Sheagley 2016; Freeder et al. Forthcoming; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Kuklinski et al. 2000), and are woefully uninformed about the particular issue positions, priorities, or coalitions they champion (Ahler and Sood 2018; Levendusky 2010; Zaller 1992). A recent, influential work in this vein sees voters, including the informed, as 'blind partisans' – those who lack substantive knowledge about the parties' policies, have inconsistent and flexible issue attitudes, reason from their partisan attitudes to political facts, and reward or punish politicians in light of irrelevant events (Achen and Bartels 2016). At most pessimistic, such a limited grasp of policy substance coupled with strong partisan motivations could easily lead voters to make faulty judgments about the candidates who run with a party, the composition of people who support them, and the priorities they would advance in office. On the other hand, however, work on partisan schemata, brands and ownership (e.g., Ansolabehere and Jones 2010; Conover and Feldman 1984; Egan 2013; Hayes 2005; Heit and Nicholson 2016; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Petrocik 1996; Rahn 1993) often depicts voters as carrying around in their minds complex, detailed images of the parties. Enough voters are said to sufficiently associate certain issues, priorities, candidate traits and even genders (Winter 2010) with the parties so as to shape their electoral decisions and complicate the choices of elites. These literatures do not speak directly to each other and are not always in direct conflict. However, the differences in the overall characterization of voters is stark, implying some empirical tension.

Reconciling these disparate depictions, we examine partisan and ideological *associations*

as a minimal form of voter competence. Unlike other kinds of political competencies, information about the parties' *associative networks* is both relatively cheap and accessible to voters, and directly relevant to voting. We conceptualize these associative networks as the many-dimensional cluster of durable associations that cognitively cohere with partisan or ideological objects, and that come to mind when features in the network are referenced (e.g., Conover and Feldman 1984; Lodge and Hamill 1986). Following a logic of heuristic reasoning, voters try to make quick and effective judgments about political alternatives, while simultaneously avoiding evaluative errors. Rather than compiling encyclopedic knowledge about a party's roster of candidates or policy proposals, voters keep track of which political objects are typically associated with the parties. This can allow for quick, and reasonably accurate evaluations of politicians and legislative proposals (Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Knowledge about general political facts, or the ability to explicitly recall or recognize them, may not be necessary when deciding in the ballot box or understanding political discourse. However, total ignorance, even at an implicit level, of basic partisan associations can pose significant challenges for voters when evaluating electoral alternatives.

Our focus here is on what Converse (1964) identified as his root motivation: evaluating the ability of voters to comprehend the dimensions along which elites tend to operate and discuss policy. This is important for assessing whether voters possess the wherewithal to even grasp the choices presented to them by elites and whether their votes, individually or in aggregate, are properly interpreted as support for the proposals of one side or the other. Thus, we examine the ability of voters to associate candidate traits and issue priorities with parties and ideologies. Relatedly, other work has looked, using different methods and with mixed findings, at the extent to which voters properly characterize party electoral coalitions and supporters (Ahler and Sood 2018; Heit and Nicholson 2016; Rothschild et al. 2018). This is likely also very important for understanding whether voters grasp modern partisan conflict, for

which group identity is central (Abramowitz 2018; Klar 2013; Mason 2018; Theodoridis 2012, 2013, 2017), but it is not our subject here. Nor are we seeking to determine whether voters constrain their own thinking ideologically, either cross-sectionally or longitudinally. And, we are *not* focused on learning whether voters conceptualize themselves along ideological lines and whether that conceptualization is predictive of other elements of political cognition or behavior. (For an exhaustive treatment of these topics, see Kinder and Kalmoe (2017).) Our examination here is decidedly *not* a replication of Converse’s (1964) canonical division of voters into “Levels of Conceptualization” ranging from “Ideologues” to those with “No Issue Content.” Where Converse uses open- and closed-ended survey items to measure recall and recognition of political associations, we employ a survey experimental approach only relatively recently available to examine a more implicit-level version of conceptualization that matches up nicely with what Converse called “static constraint.” Thus, we are *not* seeking to make assertions about changes in democratic competence since the era about which Converse was writing. We are proposing and examining a level and form of competence distinct from that which Converse, or any other scholars since, measured. While one can speculate about the likely effects of observed trends in polarization and partisan-ideological sorting (Levendusky 2009, 2010) on the associational competence we demonstrate here, assertions regarding change over time would stray substantially out of our sample.

We present an innovative survey experimental approach that extends a Converse-like inquiry to these less formalized *associative networks*. Operationalizing Converse’s notion of static constraint, we ask respondents to guess the party or ideology of fictional candidates given a set of randomly generated issue priorities and candidate attributes in a conjoint experimental framework (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Hainmueller et al. 2014). Our novel experimental approach, by design, decreases partisan boosting when mapping voter stereotypes about the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as liberal and conservative ideologies.

Since no party is specified for the target candidates, any partisan boosting that emerges is a product of the very associations we seek to measure. This is in contrast with measurement paradigms that more directly ask respondents to link the parties with traits and issues. Those approaches leave open the possibility that observed associations are the result (rather than the cause) of partisan boosting. Our method also allows us to measure both the partisan direction and relative strength of associations across a wide variety of issues and traits simultaneously, accounting for their inter-correlation and holding them constant in a design-based rather than model-based manner. We are also able to assess how respondents' political knowledge and party identity (PID) moderates these associative networks, both of which we expect to impact the formation and activation of associative networks.

Using our design, we find that voters indeed possess a coherent mental image of the partisan networks, systematically linking candidate features and issue priorities to the appropriate parties. Issue associations mirror cleavages that define party conflict in Congress, conforming to expectations from other work on stereotyping and ownership (e.g., Egan 2013). Voters also associate a number of candidate traits with the parties, though some are more consistently linked (gender, religion, occupation) than others (family background, military service). While we expected issue priorities to be more strongly associated than traits (Goggin and Theodoridis 2017), the candidate characteristic and trait associations are perhaps more limited than we anticipated (Hayes 2005).

We find remarkably similar results when analyzing inferences about ideology – voters consistently map issues and traits to liberal and conservative labels. This result runs counter to our expectation that partisan labels would be more meaningful than ideological ones, and suggests voters have some grasp of how elites use ideological constructs, even if the voters themselves may not necessarily constrain their own beliefs along this dimension (Kinder and Kalmoe 2017). This correspondence between party and ideology may uncover a downstream

effect of the recently documented sorting of party and ideology and ideology’s potential impact as an identity of its own (Abramowitz 2011, 2018; Bishop 2008; Hetherington and Weiler 2009, 2018; Klar 2013, 2014; Levendusky 2009; Malka and Lelkes 2010; Mason 2015, 2016, 2018; Mason and Wronski 2018). Further, we find virtually identical results when stratifying by PID, providing strong evidence that both Democrats and Republicans agree about which issue priorities go with which parties and ideological orientations.

Importantly, we find that even the least informed have some coherent sense of “what goes with what.” While we do find slightly clearer ideological and partisan images for those with greater political knowledge, reflecting a better understanding of associational networks, the contrast between those with high and low knowledge is much less stark than that found in prior research (e.g., Converse 1964; Levendusky 2010; Zaller 1992). Thus, our examination of associative networks rejects the rather strong expectation that low scores on knowledge measures would preclude the presence of detailed networks. Lastly, in breaking down *candidate evaluations* by PID we see clear evidence of polarization in affective orientations, bolstering concerns that partisan boosting could be introducing bias in previous studies of party stereotyping. This also offers suggestive evidence for why voters might seek out such associative information about in- and out-group members in the first place – to minimize unintentionally negative evaluations of co-partisans.

Understanding Partisan and Ideological Associations

Much of the research on belief systems and stereotyping, including Converse’s (1964) seminal study, concludes that voters possess shallow and inconsistent policy attitudes, alongside a weak understanding of how distinct political ideas ‘fit’ together. These shortcomings are often attributed to voters’ limited knowledge, interest or experience in politics. Such limitations can mediate the amount and type of information voters receive or accept, and in turn, sub-

stantially distort their mental images of parties, ideologies, and candidates (Converse 1964; Kinder and Kalmoe 2017; Levendusky 2010; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Zaller 1992). At least in part, early interest in party stereotyping processes originated from its central role in opinion formation and voting. Exposure to political information is a predicate to stereotyping about the parties, whether driven by an elite-led process or through political engagement alongside other voters. These stereotypes could be necessary for forming and changing policy attitudes, at least for voters who update their views in line with their partisanship (Carsey and Layman 2006; Freeder et al. Forthcoming; Levendusky 2010; Zaller 1992). Importantly, the absence of these associations would likely pose fundamental limits to voter capacity, by making it difficult to coherently punish (or reward) candidates who deviate from their party's priorities or coalitions.

Given accumulating evidence that voters face significant information shortfalls, researchers increasingly investigated whether people use the party label, and the cluster of information associated with it, as a heuristic to help them vote as if they were more fully informed (Bartels 1996; Brady and Sniderman 1985; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012). Some of this work depicts voters as having a wider grasp of the connections that link parties and policy together (e.g., Ansolabehere and Jones 2010; Conover and Feldman 1984; Henderson 2018; Lodge and Hamill 1986; Rahn 1993). However, there is considerable scholarly debate about whether voters possess or effectively use party heuristic information. Indeed, a great deal of scholarly research is deeply skeptical of voters' abilities to form reasonably accurate impressions of parties, policies and candidates (Achen and Bartels 2016; Ahler and Sood 2018; Bartels 1996; Freeder et al. Forthcoming; Kuklinski et al. 2000).

In the extreme, voters may be wildly misinformed about the kinds of stereotypical information they would most require to effectively use the party label. Achen and Bartels's (2016) recent work in this vein suggests that voters, as 'blind partisans', largely rely on in-group

tribalism to form beliefs about politicians and policies. Such partisans, lacking substantive policy knowledge, instead use prior partisan attitudes to reason about political facts (Achen and Bartels 2016). This form of motivated reasoning could significantly distort voter impressions of parties, candidates and coalitions. This distortion could be compounded by the role partisanship plays as an information screen yielding selectivity in the kinds of information voters seek out or avoid (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Henderson and Theodoridis 2017). Or it could distort the impressions voters possess about the demographic traits of party voters or candidates (Ahler and Sood 2018; Goggin and Theodoridis 2017), or their policy attitudes and ideological extremity (Feldman and Conover 1983; Rahn 1993).

Associative Networks

We examine whether voters possess a minimalist form of competence about stereotypical information they associate with the parties. Associative competence is rooted in a basic idea: voters possess, or fail to possess, certain mental images of the parties, which they use to evaluate partisan policies or candidates (Arceneaux 2009; Feldman and Conover 1983; Rahn 1993; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012; Snyder and Ting 2002; Woon and Pope 2008). Fundamental to the partisan stereotyping process, these mental images can be signaled simply through reference to the party or ideological label. This notion of stereotyping underpins many important theoretical claims in political science, including how parties manage elite ambition (Fiorina 1980; Snyder and Ting 2002) and facilitate electoral competition (Petrocik 1996; Sniderman and Stiglitz 2012), as well as how voters incorporate and use heuristic information (Lee 2009; Lupia and McCubbins 1998), or come to form and change opinions on policies (Carsey and Layman 2006; Levendusky 2010; Nicholson 2011). While many of these theories consider knowledge of party stereotypes as improving representation, others explore more problematic implications of party reputations, including biases in voter decision-making (Rahn

1993), learning (Dancey and Sheagley 2013), and information recall (Coronel et al. 2014), as well as broader concerns about democratic accountability (Arceneaux 2009; Damore 2004). Nevertheless, a common thread throughout this work is that voters have some fundamental comprehension of key stereotypical facts about the parties.

In this study, we aim to clarify what information voters incorporate into their mental images of the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as the liberal and conservative ideological labels, and whether such information systematically varies across the electorate. To this end, we synthesize a number of findings from prior research on party stereotyping and ideological constraint into what we call *associative networks*. By associative networks, we mean the multi-dimensional cluster of political information that tends to cohere at a cognitive level with other related objects in voters' minds.¹ We focus primarily on the *content* of these networks, which includes the issues, positions, biographical attributes, and personality traits that get associated with the party labels, or affiliated ideologies. Most prior research on party stereotypes studies the consequences of activating particular associations in the political world. In contrast, our focus is on conceptualizing broader characteristics of this network as a whole, including how such durable associations form and relate to each other, as well as interact with voter partisanship or political interest.

Associative networks define “what goes with what” in voters' minds when thinking about the two parties and their related ideologies. This concept is rooted in Converse's (1964) work on belief systems, which offers a framework for considering the presence, strength and consistency of associations between “idea elements.” Using a variety of survey techniques, Converse (1964) examines the extent to which voters grasp how ideas fit together, and are

¹We conceive of a party or ideological label as a central node in this network, and we measure the strength of all connections with that node. To our knowledge, the only existing study that seeks to measure party-issue associations is Walgrave et al. (2012). The authors directly survey Belgian respondents about which issues they associate with particular parties. Unfortunately, they do not address how respondents' partisan affiliations can color their responses about party associations, particularly relevant in the U.S.

unconstrained in their own thinking, both at a given moment and longitudinally. We are *not* speaking to Converse's arguments about the internal consistency of voter beliefs. We focus instead on his broader motivation to understand whether voters are sufficiently versed in the "belief systems" referenced by elites to comprehend public discourse and have their opinions and votes interpreted as mandates in favor of one side or another.

Converse (1964, 18) writes of "recognition, recall, and habitual use of cognized objects or concepts." To examine awareness of ideological constraint, he employs open- and closed-ended survey items to measure recall and recognition, respectively. Of course a major finding of his is that voters are largely not able to recall or recognize affiliated *attitudes* between parties, candidates, issues and ideologies.² We employ a new method designed to tap into a type of "awareness" by voters that represents perhaps an even lower bar than recognition, but which may be sufficient for understanding elite discourse. What Converse referenced as "habitual use" might today be classified as implicit memory, which is in contrast with the explicit, semantic memory suggested by recall and recognition (Perrig 2001). Neither Converse's examination nor ours is deeply rooted in the neurocognitive sources of these various forms of memory, but they are useful in distinguishing the level of conscious associational awareness required. The relevant point is that we are seeking to measure a set of associations that could well express themselves at a less conscious level than is required for either recall or recognition.

We focus upon and extend what Converse calls "static constraint" into thinking about the cluster of political information voters map together: "In the static case, 'constraint' may be taken to mean the success we would have in predicting, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specific attitude, that he holds certain further ideas and attitudes"

²In addition to the obvious conceptual differences between parties and ideologies, he also finds variation in strength of affiliations between them. It is for this reason we assess the relative strength of partisan and ideological associations, as we might expect that ideological thinking is not as deeply rooted and connected to other political information.

(Converse 1964, p. 207). In linking this constraint to information rather than opinion, we aim to exploit the predictive value of particular dimensions to estimate the relative weight of that association in voters' minds. The richness of associative networks, thus, speaks to the associative competence of voters. Similarly, we extend the Converseian concept of "centrality" to this static constraint. In the dynamic case, centrality refers to the relative importance of idea elements in terms of affecting change in others. In the static case, we think of centrality as the predictive weight, *ceteris paribus*, of a given element.

In the experiments below, we aim to add some conceptual and empirical clarity to the examination of party and ideological brands. We do so by mapping which personal traits and issues get linked to party and ideology, and assessing how these linkages influence voter evaluations of particular candidates who exemplify those features. The conjoint experimental task we develop allows us to consider a large number of features simultaneously. In this study, we examine two particular dimensions in the associative network: issue priorities and candidates' biographical traits. This focus is motivated by major theoretical findings and challenges in work on both ownership and party policy brands, including distinguishing the independent influence of traits and issues, as well as whether these carry any ideological or positional information. By providing issue priorities, we examine a hard test for respondents – as we should expect mapping positional information requires less-developed associations. By providing biographical attributes, we assess whether the personal information that often undergirds candidate trait inferences is integrated into associative networks of party or ideology. Because of its individuating nature, we might expect less clear associations with biographical information. Additionally, these two features are central to nearly all political campaigns and advertising for all levels of office. In contrast to these literatures on the consequences of stereotyping, however, we aim to investigate the extent to which the central associations advanced in this work are present in voters minds in order to function as hypothesized.

Developing a Robust Measure of Cognitive Associations

When measuring associations in the minds of voters in today’s hyper-polarized context, separating out partisan motivations from genuine beliefs about the parties can be challenging, particularly using survey instruments that prime participants to think about their party affiliations in an evaluative mode (e.g., Petrocik 1996; Walgrave et al. 2012). Such questions commonly elicit expressive or unthinking responses that distort our understanding of voter beliefs, by partially measuring partisan attitudes (Ahler and Sood 2018; Arceneaux 2009; Arceneaux and Vander Wielen 2017; Berinsky 2015; Bolsen et al. 2014; Bullock et al. 2015; Dancey and Sheagley 2016; Goggin and Theodoridis 2018; Hartman and Newmark 2012; Theodoridis 2013, 2017). Another source of disagreement is the importance of general political knowledge in driving associational competence. Shortcomings among the least politically knowledgeable are widely accepted, though more recent work suggests even the relatively informed face deficits in information, cognition and reasoning (e.g., Achen and Bartels 2016; Kuklinski et al. 2000). Finally, in Conversian irony, virtually all prior work investigating voter associations, does so one feature at a time, ignoring the dynamic or interconnected relationships that exist between parties, ideological orientations, issues and candidate traits. Consequently, we know rather little about the relative *magnitudes* of associations between attributes and parties, or how these are impacted by connections *between* attributes themselves. We know even less about these relative associations when freed from partisan bias or taken at different levels of voter sophistication. A full understanding of ‘what goes with what’ requires some sense of the relative associative weight of each element and dimension.

To provide a robust measure of associative networks, we utilize a novel conjoint experimental design (Hainmueller et al. 2014), asking respondents to *infer* the party and ideology of fictional candidates given a set of issues and attributes randomly presented to them. Inferences are fundamental to our design – using a quiz-like framework reduces the saliency

of partisan attitudes, allowing us to capture stereotypes while minimizing PID bias (e.g., Henderson 2018).³ The method allows us to measure both the direction and strength of associations across a wide variety of issues and traits, as well as to assess how respondents' characteristics influence these associations. Conjoint studies, long used in product marketing research, have recently been introduced in political science (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Hainmueller et al. 2014). This method is especially well-suited to our analysis, as it allows for manipulation of multiple attributes within a variety of factors. Our study differs from previous applications of the conjoint design in that we do not use paired comparisons. Rather, in each task, respondents are asked to assign a single fictional candidate to one of two categories – either the two parties (Democrat or Republican), or the two ideological labels (Liberal or Conservative).⁴ Paired comparisons, while common in conjoint studies, are not an essential feature of the method. In fact, the single target actually reduces the number of assumptions necessary for analysis.⁵

In our experimental frame, respondents are shown a set of hypothetical candidate char-

³A pervasive problem in past research is that PID can significantly distort measures of party stereotypes. One standard question drawn from work on issue ownership, asks voters which party they think would “do a better job handling” a number of specific issues (Petrocik 1996). Responses are usually interpreted as tapping unbiased evaluations of the parties' abilities, though an obvious concern is that many partisans will (expressively or genuinely) state they trust their own party to handle *every* issue (Egan 2013; Goggin and Theodoridis 2017). We illustrate this partisan bias in Figure I in the Appendix, using the standard issue ownership question from a poll in 2010. Here partisans' responses have polarized, canceling each other out so that measures depend almost entirely on relatively uninformed independents. We are not the first to address this concern. Walgrave et al. (2012) directly ask voters which issues come to mind when thinking about parties in Belgium, though this wording could prime partisan attitudes as well.

⁴This task could easily be adapted to accommodate more than two parties. Researchers could ask respondents to indicate which party is *more* appropriate, with only two of the total parties displayed, or could choose amongst the full set.

⁵A standard assumption in conjoint designs is no interactions exist between attributes, though this can be relaxed to exclude more complex effects. We rule out virtually all two-way interactions empirically, including all interactions between issues, gender and the other biographical traits. A second assumption is evaluation stability, so there are no profile-order effects (Hainmueller et al. 2014). Statistical power is obtained under these assumptions by having respondents evaluate multiple hypothetical candidates. Here, paired comparison would be unwieldy for respondents, since unlike the paired choices in other conjoint tasks (e.g., selecting which candidate to support), there are few real-world analogues for guessing which candidate is *more* Democratic or Republican.

acteristics, presented in a table format that includes the randomly manipulated candidate attributes drawn from a number of trait and issue dimensions.⁶ Figure 1 shows both the introductory page seen by respondents prior to the task and a sample candidate categorization page. In prefacing the experiment, we describe the candidate information as coming from a questionnaire to increase the verisimilitude of the task. The left side of the table shown to respondents indicates the category of attribute information requested in our fictitious questionnaire (e.g., Gender, 1st Issue Priority), while the right side presents the fictional candidates’ response to that particular item. The full list of categories and levels in the experiment is shown in Table I in the Appendix.⁷ Each candidate had one of the levels for each factor randomly inserted into each category with equal probability.⁸ The order of the factors was randomly assigned (with the three issue priorities always listed together) at the level of the respondent. The wording of the issue priorities was designed to avoid signaling a position or policy direction, while still specifying a priority. For example, “Tax reform” was used as opposed to language referencing either tax cuts or increases.

We examine results from two separate conjoint experiments. The first of these was fielded in two pre-election survey modules (Henderson 2015; Theodoridis 2015) of the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) (Ansolabehere 2015).⁹ In this experiment, we ask respondents to guess whether each presented candidate was a Democrat or Republican, rate how sure they were about their guess, and evaluate the candidate from “very unfavorable” to “very favorable” on a 11-point scale. A total of 2000 respondents completed this task

⁶Following Egan (2013), we include issue priorities, not positions. This provides a harder test of party associations, and indicates that even minimal cues can prime partisanship.

⁷We selected factors that provide a reasonably detailed candidate description, based on characteristics considered relevant to candidates’ electoral or policy performance. A notable omission is race. We excluded race information for fear that the anticipated massive Democratic effect for black candidates would mask associations on other dimensions.

⁸Each candidate had a 1st Issue Priority, a 2nd Issue Priority, and a 3rd Issue Priority, with these issues sampled without replacement from the list in Table I.

⁹The CCES is fielded online by YouGov in the weeks prior to and just after Election Day. In keeping with the suggestions of Miratrix et al. (2018) the analyses presented here do not use sampling weights.

YouGov

On the next few screens, you will be shown information about randomly selected candidates for political office.

This information is based upon a questionnaire filled out by each candidate. The responses are designed to provide voters with information about the candidate's policy priorities and their personal and professional background. They were asked for their top 3 issue priorities (in order) and about their background.

We want to see how well people do at guessing the political parties of the candidates with just these pieces of information. For each profile, we will ask you a few short questions. Please read the profiles carefully.



(a) Intro

YouGov

Candidate 1 of 4

Candidate Questionnaire Responses	
Occupation	Political Staffer
Military Experience	National Guard
1st Issue Priority	Promoting strong moral values
2nd Issue Priority	Strengthening the economy
3rd Issue Priority	Preventing future terrorist attacks
Religion	Catholic
Gender	Female
Family	Married with three daughters

If you had to guess, do you think this candidate is a Democrat or Republican?

- Democrat
 Republican

How sure are you about the candidate's party?

- Very sure
 Somewhat sure
 Somewhat unsure
 Very unsure

How favorably or unfavorably do you feel toward this candidate?

Very Unfavorable Very Favorable

Not sure



(b) Conjoint Task

Figure 1: **Conjoint Task:** This is how the conjoint task was presented to respondents.

four times in the survey, resulting in 8000 observations. The second was identical in design, except respondents were asked to guess the candidate's ideology (liberal or conservative) rather

than party. This conjoint experiment was fielded as part of a post-election CCES module (Henderson 2015) and yielded 4000 observations from 1000 respondents each completing the task four times.¹⁰ Our massive (relative to other conjoint studies) sample allows for very detailed analysis of aggregate-level relationships. Examination of individual-level networks would require many more repetitions of the task by each respondent. For all analyses, standard errors are clustered at the level of the respondent.

Mapping Partisan and Ideological Associations

We present the first-order results of our conjoint task asking respondents to guess the party of hypothetical candidates in Figure 2. The figure displays the marginal effect each attribute had on the probability a respondent classified the candidate as a Republican, relative to the omitted level of each experimental factor.¹¹ Within each, the omitted variable is displayed first, with no 95% confidence interval. Estimated effects are interpreted relative to the omitted categories. If we omit a different level for each category, the direction and appearance of the plot can change, but the relative distance between levels will not. Several important patterns among the personal attributes emerge in Figure 2. First, female candidates were guessed to be more likely Democratic candidates. Yet, spousal or family status appears to have little effect

¹⁰Roughly 48% of respondents identified as Democrats (including leaners), 14% as pure independents, and 33% as Republicans (including leaners).

¹¹An alternative way to present these effects is by estimating how the presence of each factor level changes the probability that a given respondent assigns the target candidate the “correct” party. In order to assess this, the sample is split and used to generate predicted probabilities of the overall candidate profile being a Democrat (0) or Republican (1) in the other half of the sample. Once recombined, we can then change the dependent variable to a measure of “correctness” where we assess if respondents correctly guessed “Democrat” for profiles with a predicted value below 0.4 and “Republican” for profile with a predicted value above 0.6. We exclude the 0.4-0.6 range as these profiles would be harder to predict. The correct prediction rate is 64.0% for the full sample and 70.6% when profiles in the 0.4-0.6 range are excluded. If we excluded all profiles in the 0.2-0.8 range, thus leaving only the most clear-cut Democratic and Republican profiles, we see the correct prediction rate improve to 80.7%. These analyses for both partisanship and ideology can be seen in Figures VIII, IX, X, and XI in the Appendix. Table II in the Appendix displays the average “correctness” for all factor levels when 0.4-0.6 profiles are excluded. Notably, counter-stereotypical attributes relative to the party/ideology of a profile produce substantially lower rates of correctness.

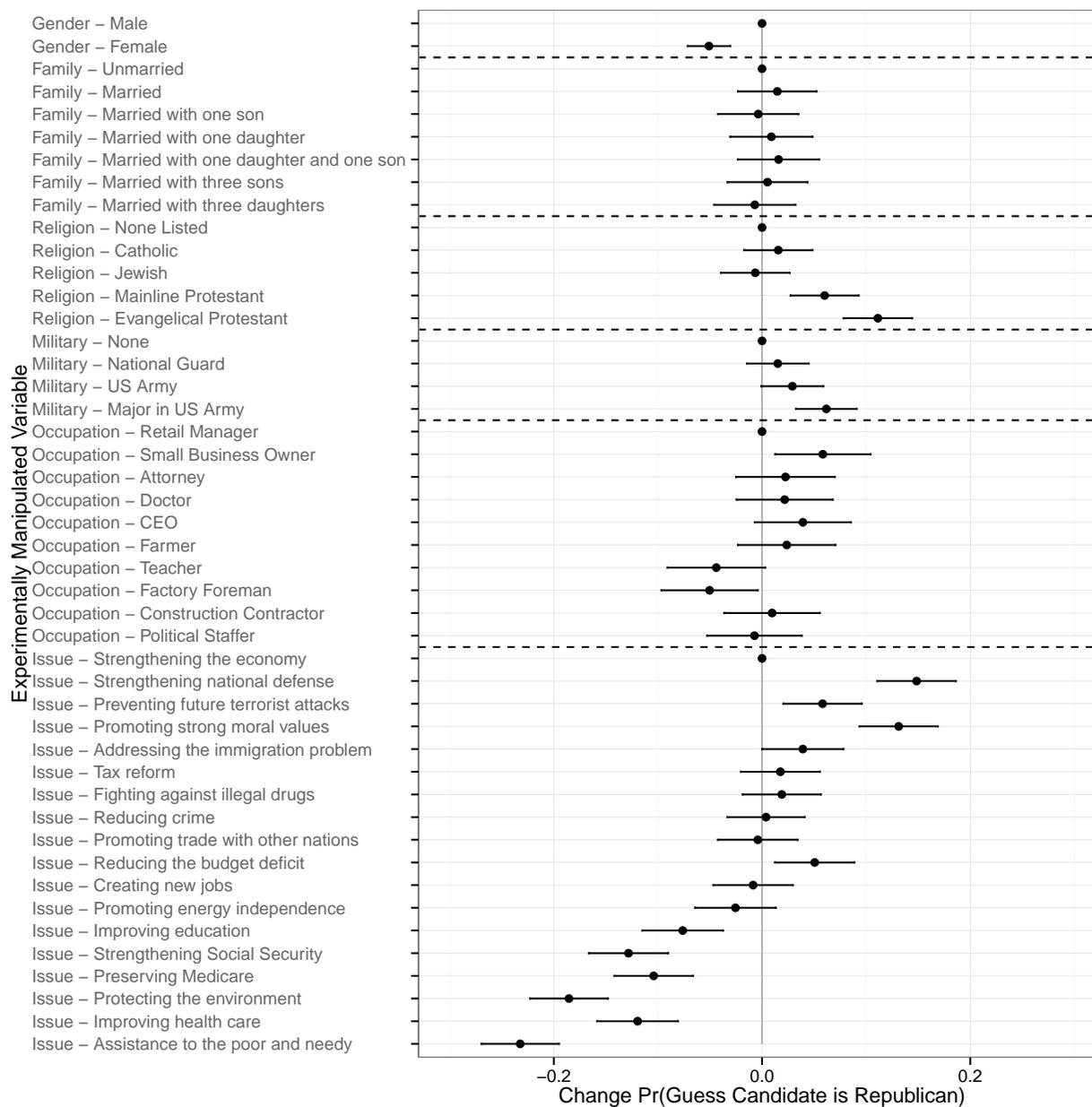


Figure 2: **Guessing Candidate's Party**: Estimates are OLS regressing party guesses on all factor levels. Standard errors are clustered on the respondent, with error bars displaying 95% confidence intervals. Estimates with no error bars are the excluded levels of each experimental factor. Issues are coded as present if they were in either the first, second, or third issue priority for the candidate. All variables are coded 0-1, with the dependent variable coded as 1=Republican, 0=Democrat.

on the inferred partisanship, even as the gender and number of children varies. Both Mainline and Evangelical Protestants were guessed to be more likely Republican, with Evangelical even significantly more Republican than Mainline. In fact, ‘Evangelical Protestant’ produces an effect larger than any other trait level. Military service trends toward guessing Republican in all conditions, and the effect is strongest when paired with an indicator of rank. Finally, several important patterns regarding the occupational background of the candidate emerge. Relatively high-status backgrounds (attorney, CEO, doctor) have little effect on the candidate’s guessed party. However, ‘small business owner’ leads to more Republican guesses, while ‘teacher’ and ‘factory foreman’ lead to more Democratic guesses. Several other occupations (farmer, construction contractor, and political staffer) all have negligible effects.

Figure 2 also provides important evidence about the associative link between issue priorities and parties. For our analysis here we collapse the three issues, and present the effect of having an issue appear at all as a priority.¹² As broadly expected by ownership theories, certain priorities like national defense, preventing terrorist attacks, promoting moral values, and reducing the budget deficit, lead respondents to infer candidates are Republicans. Similarly, prioritizing education, Social Security, Medicare, the environment, health care, and assistance to the poor and needy, yielded more Democratic inferences.

To examine whether cognitive party associations are inflated or masked by respondents’ party identities, we break the effects apart by respondent PID in Figure 3(a).¹³ As shown in Figure 3(a), Republicans and Democrats infer similar partisan signals coming from many of the candidate trait dimensions. Perhaps the most notable of these is candidate gender, where

¹²Separating out issues by their priority produces virtually identical results. Issues were stronger signals (more significant results and smaller confidence intervals) when they were higher priority, but the direction and relative magnitude of the effects were identical across the three positions. For clarity of presentation, we collapse across positions here.

¹³We exclude pure independents for clarity. Inferences by independents fall between that for Democrats and Republicans, but with wider confidence intervals. If one wishes to model these interactions with respondents’ partisanship formally, Table IV displays this model with issues.

female politicians are much more likely to be inferred as Democrats by both Democratic and Republican identifiers. We find similar agreement for military service and occupation attributes. In contrast, we find that partisans strongly disagree about how family status is associated with party. This is likely because each family category is viewed positively in voters' minds relative to being unmarried, so that partisans are attributing these positive valence characteristics more to in- rather than out-party candidates. Interestingly, the reverse is true for religious cues, including Catholic, Jewish, and Evangelical Protestant. For these, respondents of one party are more likely to guess the cue belongs to a partisan of the other party. However, these effects do not always overwhelm the main party signal – both Republicans and Democrats rate Protestants as more likely to be Republican, though only Democrats appear to update (substantially in the Republican direction) if the target is Evangelical as opposed to Mainline.

With respect to issues, there is generally strong agreement about which issue priorities Democratic and Republican identifiers associate with each party. Moreover, similar to the findings in Figure 2, these associations largely resemble core predictions emerging from issue ownership accounts. Assistance to the poor, improving health care or education, and strengthening or preserving Medicare and Social Security are all expected to be prioritized by Democrats, while strengthening national defense, promoting moral values and preventing terrorist attacks are (mostly) expected to be promoted by Republican politicians. Interestingly, partisan identifiers also largely agree about which issues are 'contested', that is roughly equally likely (off the 'economy' baseline) to be promoted by Republican and Democratic office-seekers, such as tax reform, reducing crime, and promoting trade, for example. However, there are a few issues where partisans, though agreeing on party direction, disagree on the magnitude of the associations. Relative to Democratic identifiers, Republicans believe that Social Security and Medicare are more likely to be prioritized by some Republicans,

though both are firmly on the Democratic side of the spectrum. Finally, with respect to the environment, we see a negatively valence issue priority, with Republicans taking it as a very strong cue of the candidate being Democratic, while Democratic respondents viewing it as a much weaker cue of a candidate being Democratic.

These results highlight several important findings – while there is substantial agreement in many domains on the association of certain personal attributes and issue priorities with party, there is also significant heterogeneity by the partisanship of respondents on some attributes. Even when tasked with a relatively objective guessing task, respondent partisanship leads them to be more likely to assign positively valenced (from their perspective) attributes as copartisan, while negatively valenced attributes are more likely to be exhibited by the other party. Despite the presence of such partisan boosting, very few of these disagreements among partisans impact the direction of their overall party inferences.

Finally, we examine party inferences broken down by the political knowledge of respondents, shown in Figure 3(b).¹⁴ For many of the biographical attributes and issues, there is very little disagreement between those with high political knowledge and low political knowledge.¹⁵ Where there is statistically significant disagreement, there is a larger effect for those with high political knowledge. That is, those with more political knowledge are likely to see the association, especially over issue priorities. It is notable, however, that most associations are pervasive even among the least informed respondents.¹⁶

¹⁴An alternative way of assessing knowledge would be to measure the “correctness” of the guess itself, particular if a respondent is sure of the answer. Following the procedure to predict the party of a given profile described in a previous footnote, Figures XII and XIV in the Appendix display these differences for partisanship and ideology, respectively. As expected, respondents who are “correct” and more sure of their answers generally exhibit larger effect sizes, similar to the results for this measure of political knowledge. Across all candidate profiles, respondents with high knowledge (median split) correctly guessed 68.1% of the profiles, while low knowledge respondents correctly guessed 60.2%.

¹⁵If one wishes to model the interaction with political knowledge formally, Table V displays these results for issues.

¹⁶In line with the analyses of “correctness” described previously, we also see that even low knowledge respondents generally correctly predict the partisanship of the candidate profile. For candidates in the 0.4-0.6 range on the 0-1 partisanship scale, respondents with higher-than-median political knowledge correctly guess the party 75.8% of the time, while respondents with low knowledge still correctly guess the party 65.6% of the

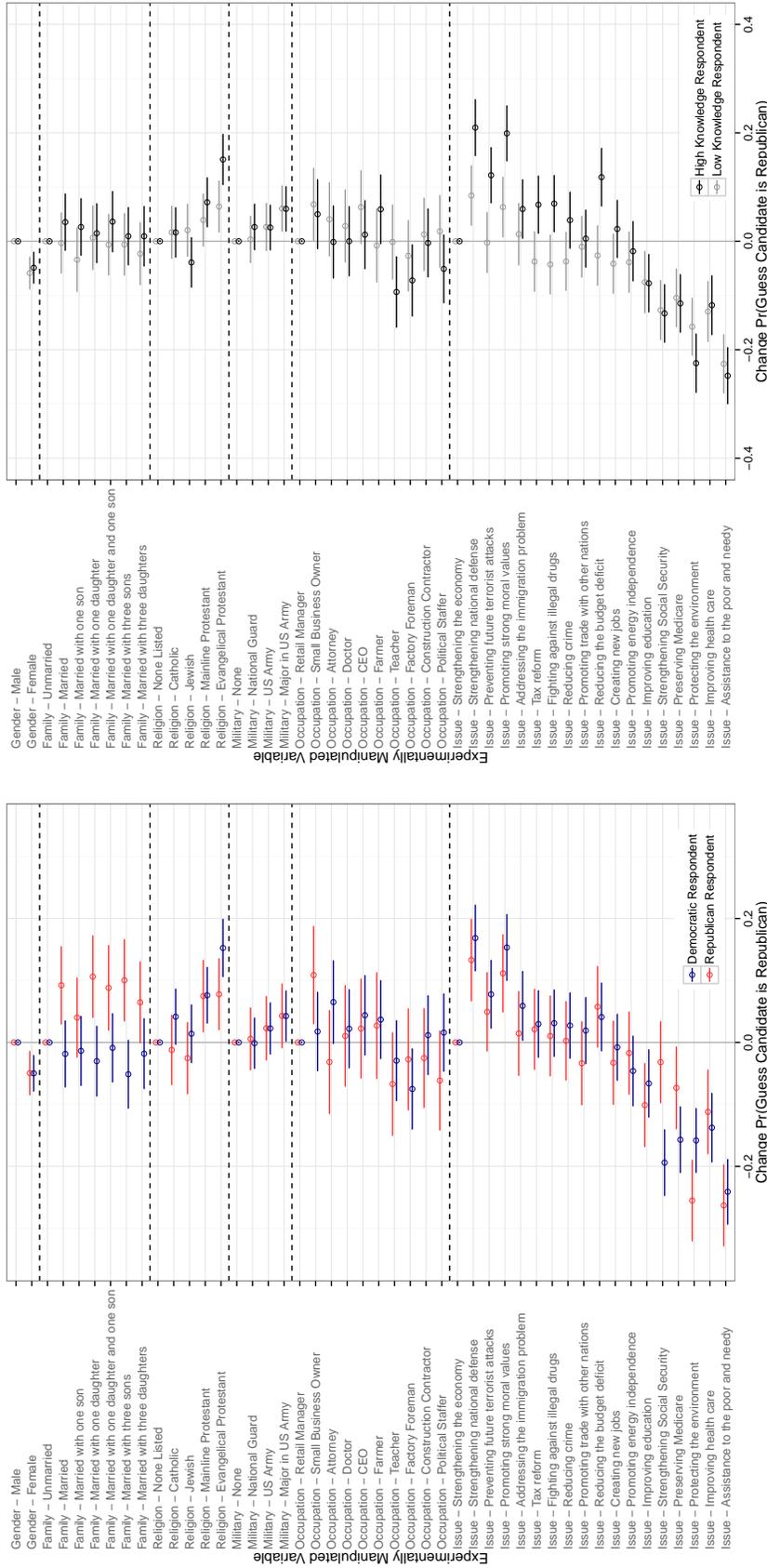


Figure 3: Guessing Candidate's Party by Respondent Party ID or Political Knowledge: Estimates are OLS regressing party guesses on all factor levels. Standard errors are clustered on the respondent, with error bars displaying 95% confidence intervals. Estimates with no error bars are the excluded levels of each experimental factor. Issues are coded as present if they were in either the first, second, or third issue priority for the candidate. All variables coded 0-1, with the dependent variable coded as 1=Republican, 0=Democrat. Partisans include independent leaners. Pure independents are excluded. Political Knowledge was measured with a 6-item measure on the CCES Common Content, then median split.

What *Should* Go with Red and Blue?

In the above analyses, we demonstrate the existence and relative magnitude of many personal and policy associations with party labels. Now we compare these linkages to a benchmark – actual associations exhibited by real candidates.¹⁷

With regard to issue priorities, as we note above, a useful benchmark can be found in the expectations laid out in relevant literatures (especially the work described above on party issue ownership). This work tends to associate Republicans with defense, crime fighting, taxes and family values, while Democrats are linked to social welfare, social group relations, education and the environment (Goggin and Theodoridis 2017; Hayes 2005, 2010; Petrocik 1996). The associations measured in our analyses are remarkably consistent with these expectations.

To establish benchmarks for candidate attributes, we compiled data on Congressional candidates from Project VoteSmart. These data include 1081 Republican and 1186 Democratic candidates.¹⁸ Respondents made some associations the data suggest exist in reality. For instance, Democratic candidates for Congress are indeed more likely to be female than are Republicans. Of the 2267 total unique Democratic and Republican general election Congres-

time.

¹⁷As a general point, it is not clear that respondent guesses should necessarily correspond in *magnitude* to the actual distributions of attributes observed among candidates. There could be critical densities at which virtually all voters are capable of seeing an association, so that respondents overestimate the accordance between parties and attributes relative to reality (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018). If real candidates from one party possessed a given trait 75% of the time, for instance, it could be reasonable for voters to always guess that party when presented with that trait. Consequently, we look for the concordance between direction (and not magnitude) of party guesses and candidate features. If we wish to examine magnitude more closely, we can examine the raw proportion of guesses for each party, given a particular factor level. Table III in the Appendix displays the proportion of guesses that a candidate was Republican. From this, we can more easily assess how much respondents pick up on these differences. While the bulk of the proportions are near 0.5, some attributes, particularly issues, are particularly powerful signals of the party of a candidate. Future work could incorporate other sources of data (such as VoteSmart’s National Political Awareness Test) and accordingly constrained conjoint design to better make magnitude comparisons. Such analyses will, however, remain limited by gaps in available data and the presence of empty cells in the true distributions of candidate characteristics.

¹⁸Candidates with missing information are included in all reported percentages since such omission could be strategic and thus informative.

sional candidates from 2008 - 2014, 24.7% of Democratic candidates were female, while only 12.7% of Republican candidates were women. Respondents clearly picked up on this association, with both Republican and Democratic respondents more likely to guess the candidate was Democratic when the candidate was female. This association between party and gender amongst sitting members of Congress has been noted in numerous other places (e.g., Thomsen 2015). We show that this holds for candidates as well as sitting members, and voters recognize it.

Respondents picked up on real associations between candidate religion and party: Republicans are indeed more likely to be Evangelical, with 10.7% of Republican candidates versus 6.7% of Democrats. Republicans are also more likely to be Protestant, with 33.8% of Republicans versus 26.7% of Democrats. And for military service, 42.4% of Democratic candidates reported no military background, while only 38.3% of Republican candidates reported no service.

Occupation is a more difficult personal attribute to measure and categorize. Yet, there is strong evidence respondents largely picked up on real associations by occupational categories.¹⁹ Among the candidates in these data, 27.8% of Republicans described themselves as business owners, while only 14.9% of Democrats did so. Also, 19.6% of Democratic candidates reported being attorneys, while only 13.0% of Republican candidates did so, and 17.0% of Democratic candidates listed a service-based occupation (e.g. teacher), with only 7.6% of Republican candidates doing so. While not all occupations exactly matched their associations in the real world, survey respondents mainly failed to detect actual associations when there were some, rather than falsely attributing differences when, in fact, the candidates were equally likely to possess a personal attribute.

¹⁹Candidates reported 3.7 occupations on average to Project VoteSmart, and these analyses report the percentage of candidates listing an occupation in that category, even if it was not their most recent occupation.

Impact on Candidate Evaluations

After guessing the partisanship of the presented candidate, respondents were asked to evaluate how they felt about the candidate – from “very unfavorable” to “very favorable”. This item helps us to evaluate the positive or negative valence of each piece of information within each factor, particularly how it may be differential among partisan subgroups of respondents. Figure II in the Appendix presents the marginal effect of each information item on the evaluation of the candidate, scaled from 0 to 1, and Figure 4 presents the same results broken out by respondents’ partisanship. Therefore, an effect of -0.05 means a 5% decrease in the evaluation of the candidate, relative to the omitted level of each factor.

The results in Figure 4 reveal several striking patterns. With a few prominent exceptions, many attributes have relatively little effect on the overall evaluation of the candidate. Notably, gender appears to have no impact on overall evaluations, and with the exception of the generally negative ‘Evangelical Protestant’, few religious categories do either. While not significant, we find that married candidates are weakly preferred to unmarried ones. With respect to military service, little overall effect on evaluations emerges, although it appears those with military background are viewed in a more positive light than those with none. Occupation is relatively mixed, with many of these evaluated as similar to the omitted category, retail manager. Small business owner and factory foreman, however, are both evaluated more positively than other occupations. Finally, most issue priorities make little difference in how voters evaluate candidates.²⁰ Candidates prioritizing Social Security and Medicare are evaluated more highly compared to other issue priorities.

There is considerable heterogeneity in the evaluations of partisan respondents. Noted above, respondents of both parties have distinctive views about what attributes are positive

²⁰The seemingly overall negative trend in evaluations among many of the issues is simply a result of the omitted issue priority being the near universal “strengthening the economy”, as that is viewed as more positive than the bulk of issue priorities.

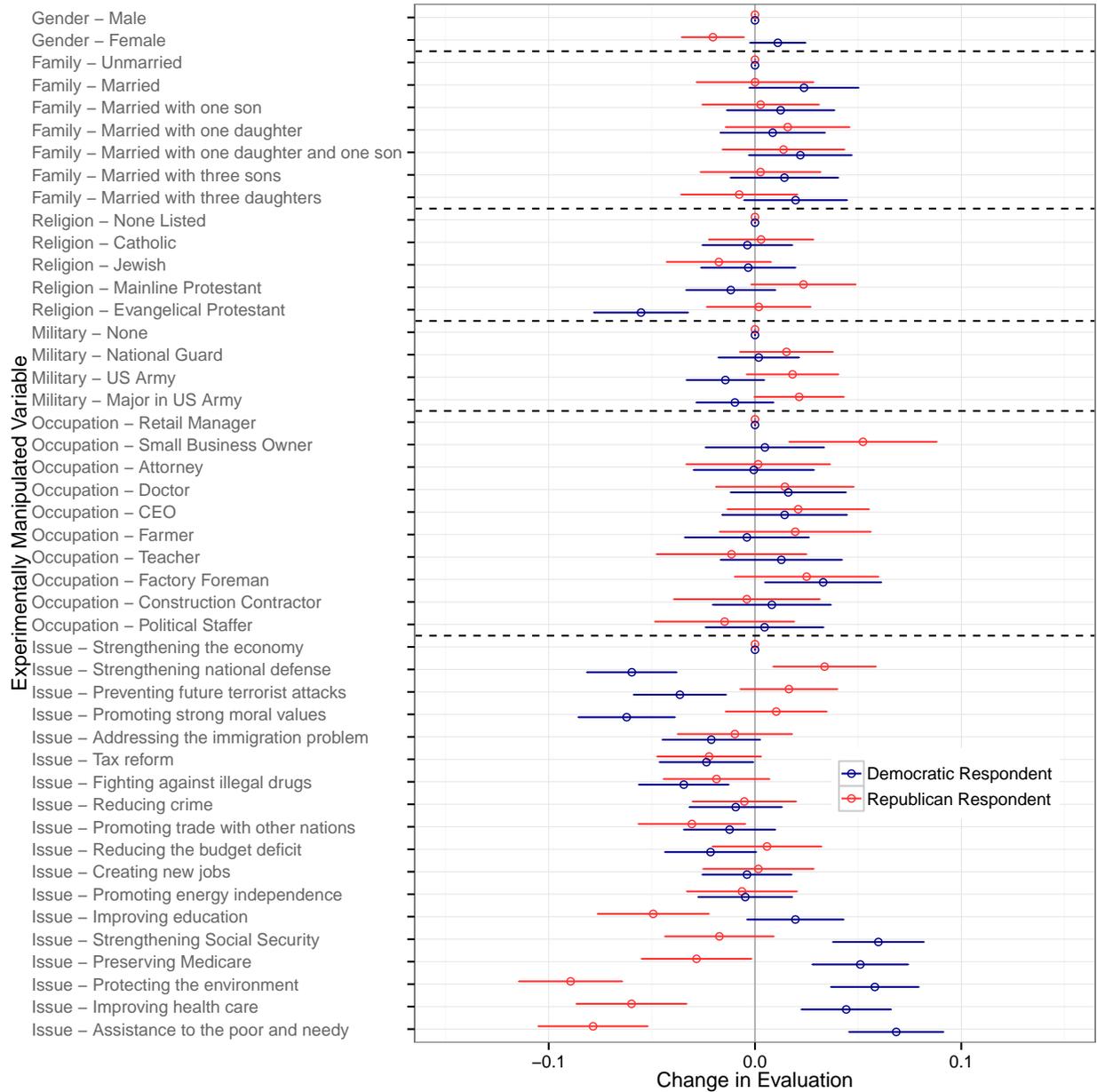


Figure 4: **Candidate Evaluations by Respondent Party ID:** Estimates are OLS regressing candidate evaluations on all factor levels. Standard errors are clustered on the respondent, with error bars displaying 95% confidence intervals. Estimates with no error bars are the excluded levels of each experimental factor. Issues are coded as present if they were in either the first, second, or third issue priority for the candidate. All variables coded 0-1, with the dependent variable originally presented to respondents as a 0-10 slider, with 0 indicating “very unfavorable” and 10 indicating “very favorable”. Partisans include independent leaners. Pure independents are excluded.

or negative in candidates. For this reason, we present attribute effects stratified by respondent party identification in Figure 4. The most interesting findings are when the evaluations by Democratic and Republican respondents diverge. Female candidates are positively evaluated by Democrats, but are viewed negatively by Republican respondents. Conversely, Evangelicals elicit negative evaluations among Democratic respondents, but make only neutral (and not positive) impressions on Republicans. Among Democratic respondents, military service results in a significantly less positive evaluation than among Republicans. Although many of these estimates are not significantly different from the ‘no military background’ condition, they are significantly different from each other, with Democratic respondents viewing it as a weakly negative cue, and Republicans viewing it as weakly positive. There is little divergence among occupations, with the exception of small business owners who get significantly higher evaluations by Republicans.

Perhaps most striking are the large gaps that emerge in the candidate evaluations by partisan respondents across different issue priorities. Candidates that prioritize typically Republican-owned issues (e.g., national defense, terrorism, strong moral values), are evaluated very negatively by Democratic respondents, but very positively by Republicans. And the mirror-image of this emerges for candidates emphasizing Democratic-owned issues (e.g. environment, health care, assistance to the poor and needy), with Democratic respondents boosting their evaluations of the candidate and Republicans diminishing theirs. This pattern is consistent with people reading issue priorities as strong signals of a candidate’s partisanship, leading them to adjust their evaluations in line with the assumed party.²¹

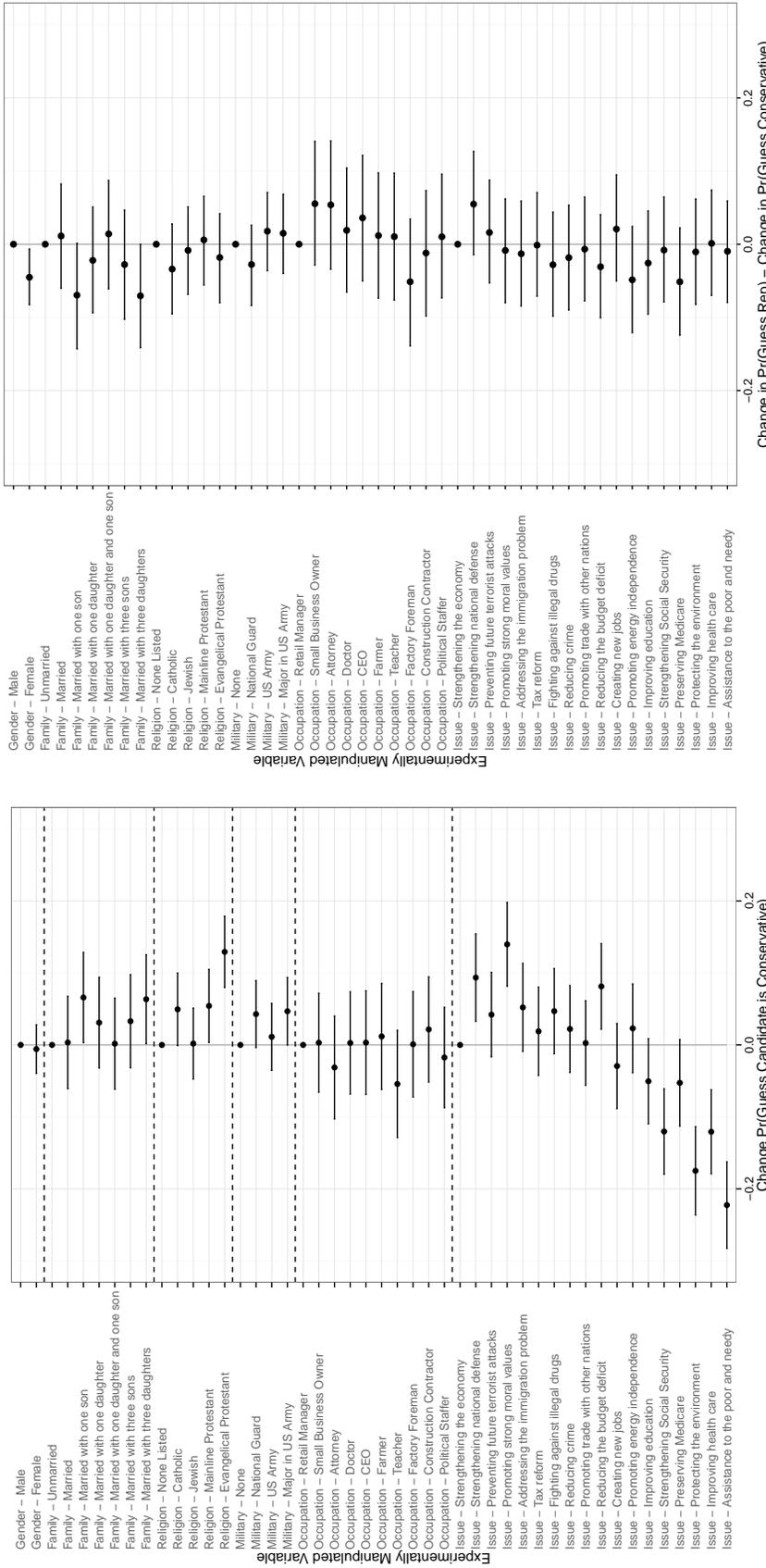


Figure 5: Guessing Candidate's Ideology: Estimates in (a) are OLS regressing ideology guesses on all factor levels, with standard errors clustered on the respondent, and error bars displaying 95% confidence intervals. Estimates in (b) are the difference in coefficients from an OLS regressing party guesses on all factor levels minus OLS regressing ideology guesses on all factor levels, with standard errors generated by bootstrapping this difference 10000 times, and error bars displaying 95% confidence intervals. Estimates with no error bars are the excluded levels of each experimental factor. Issues are coded as present if they were in either the first, second, or third issue priority for the candidate. All variables coded 0-1, with the dependent variable coded as 1=Conservative, 0=Liberal.

Ideological Associative Networks

In a separate conjoint experiment we asked respondents to guess the ideology of the candidate, using a binary choice of “liberal” or “conservative”. From this, we can compare the relative strength of association between the personal attributes and issue priorities with *both* party and ideology. The main results of respondents’ guessing (paralleling the results shown in Figure 2), are shown in Figure 5(a).²² The potentially multidimensional nature of ideology among modern voters might predict that respondents would be less consistent in this associative task. Yet, we find striking similarity between the results of Figure 2 and Figure 5(a), indicating that respondents see many of the cues that signal partisanship as similar cues of ideology. This lack of difference is more clearly shown in Figure 5(b). This is a powerful indication that ideology and party are closely linked in respondents’ minds. For only one factor – that of candidate gender, do respondents infer a partisan affiliation (Democratic) with the female gender – but do not associate this ideologically. For all other effect estimates, we see no difference in impact on partisan or ideological information for the given attribute or issue priority.

Additionally, there is virtually no deviation in our results when respondents are asked to guess ideology instead of party given candidates’ issue priorities. In other words, the ideological and partisan information being signaled to voters *simply by prioritizing particular issues* is strongly correlated. Thus, the issue priorities that Republicans ‘own’ are also significantly associated with being conservative, while the issues owned by Democrats are significantly linked with being liberal. This result significantly diverges from prior findings on constraint in mass opinion, suggesting that contemporary voters may grasp more of the ideological conflict

²¹We cannot entirely separate partisanship from the effect of the issue priority itself, for example, when respondents view the issue positively or negatively independent of party.

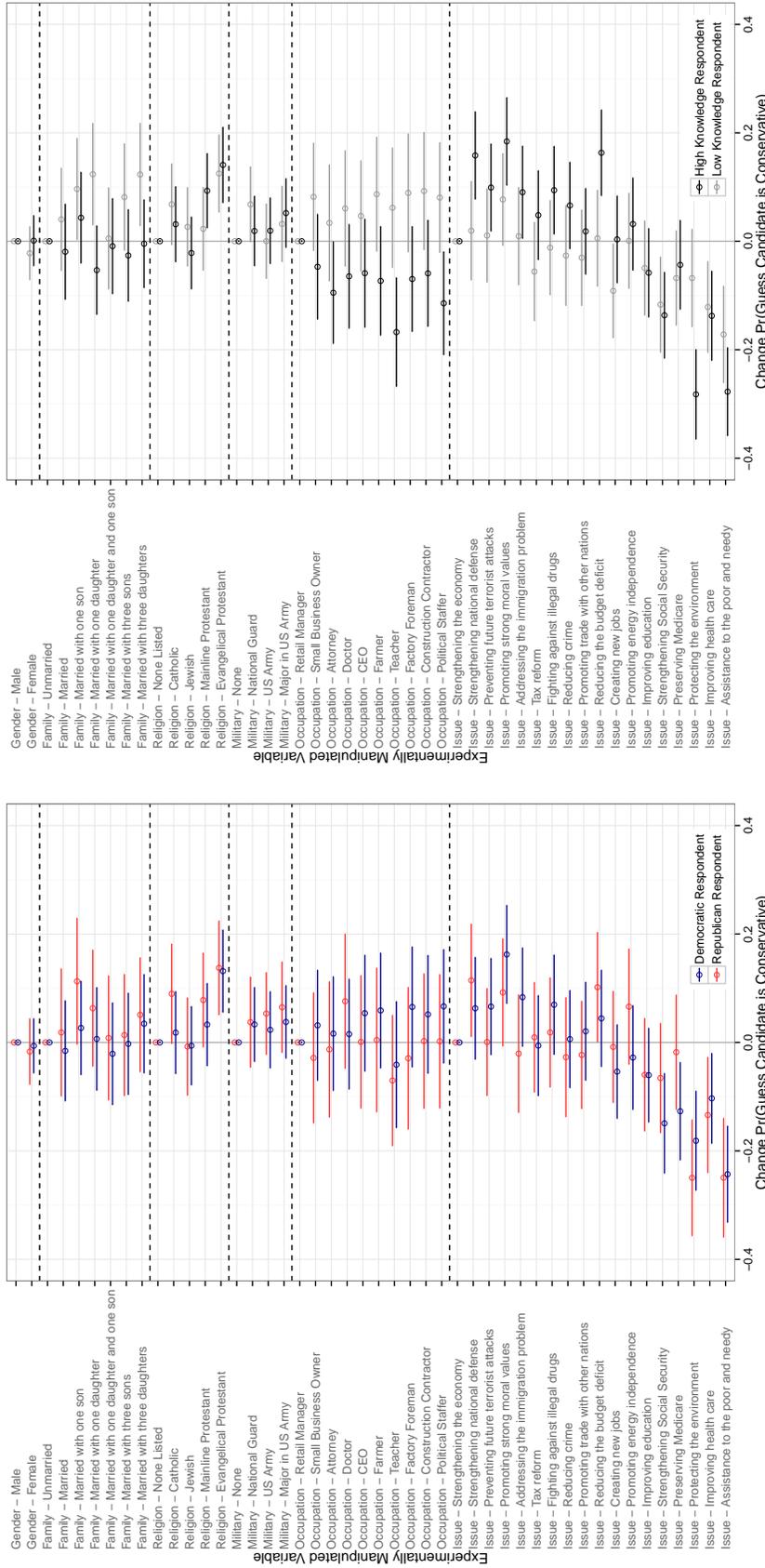
²²The confidence intervals in Figure 5(a) and Figure 6(a) are wider than those discussed previously, as the sample for this conjoint experiment is half that of the first.

in American politics than the voters analyzed by Converse (1964) in the middle of the last century. The finding also suggests that candidates may be able to influence the ideological or policy images voters form about them simply through valence-type appeals that prioritize party-owned issues.

In Figure 6(b), we present the ideology guessing results broken down by respondent political knowledge, analogous to Figure 3(b) for guessing candidates' party. Many of these associations become stronger for those with high compared to low political knowledge. Higher knowledge respondents see all occupations as more liberal than lower knowledge respondents, perhaps reflecting a socioeconomic bias in projection. We again see that in nearly every case, higher knowledge respondents are more likely to register an association between issue priorities and ideological labels than those with low knowledge.

As with associations with the party label, partisan identifiers likely infer different ideological signals from the traits and issue priorities of candidates. To assess this, we present ideological inferences stratified by respondent PID in Figure 6(a). Compared to our previous findings about partisanship in party guessing, we find that PID is a much weaker mediator of inferences about candidate ideology, yielding few differences across partisans.²³ With the exception of 'Evangelical Protestant' and Democratic-owned issues, we see virtually no trends in how either partisan group associates attributes with the ideological labels. While ideology and party are clearly intertwined in voters' minds, this lack of partisan bias in ideological guessing may reflect a broader finding that ideological labels do not generate the same amount of motivated boosting as do partisan ones.

²³The figure looks nearly identical stratifying by self-reported ideology rather than partisanship. However, due to the larger number of respondents that choose "moderate" versus the number that view themselves as "pure independents", the confidence intervals are substantially wider for the "liberal" and "conservative" respondent categories. We omit independents merely for the clarity of the figure, as previously noted.



(a) Guessing Ideology by Party ID

(b) Guessing Ideology by Political Knowledge

Figure 6: Guessing Candidate's Ideology by Respondent Party ID or Political Knowledge: Estimates are OLS regressing ideology guesses on all factor levels. Standard errors are clustered on the respondent, with error bars displaying 95% confidence intervals. Estimates with no error bars are the excluded levels of each experimental factor. Issues are coded as present if they were in either the first, second, or third issue priority for the candidate. All variables coded 0-1, with the dependent variable coded as 1=Conservative, 0=Liberal. Partisans include independent leaners. Pure independents are excluded. Political Knowledge was measured with a 6-item measure on the CCES Common Content, then split at the median.

Discussion

We develop a novel experimental design to map what we call *associative networks* – the issues, positions, traits and other qualities that voters associate with party and ideological labels – the key to associative competence. An important feature of these associative networks is that many different elements within them can be brought to mind simply by priming the label. This can be thought of as an implicit-level conceptualization of the partisan and ideological dimensions of elite political competition.

In our design, we ask respondents to *guess* the party (and ideological) label of candidates after learning about their issue priorities and traits. This approach can substantially reduce partisan bias in measuring associations, since it leads respondents to seek out “correct,” rather than party-consistent or boosting answers, under conditions of uncertainty. Respondents, including party identifiers, are fundamentally unsure of whether they are being asked to evaluate and assess Democrats or Republicans. Thus, respondents may be more likely to mute their partisanship in our task, lest it be misdirected at in-party politicians. Further, by using a quiz-like item that taps voter inferences, we generate indirect (rather than direct) measures of party associations. This may further dampen partisanship by adding cognitive ‘distance’ between evaluating unlabeled candidates, and making factual judgments about them. Finally, our use of a wide variety of attributes shown about the candidates, may also minimize the possibility that the valence of any single dimension will activate partisan bias. While our experimental design cannot completely eliminate partisan boosting by construction, we present evidence that it successfully minimizes it in many cases (e.g., issue associations). While we find that many voters do possess the associations we might deem “accurate,” the very presence of these associative networks leaves open the possibility that some voters could have their electoral decisions shaped, even in systematic, partisan ways, by erroneous associations that may exist in their minds.

Our experimental findings raise methodological concerns about the use of candidate vignettes or priming survey experiments to study behavioral or attitudinal questions in the social sciences. We find that voters associate a great many things with party and ideological labels. Priming those dimensions is likely to simultaneously bring any number of attributes to voters' minds, potentially altering how they respond to survey items (Dafoe et al. 2015; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). Future researchers should evaluate whether any unobserved associations stemming from included vignette information could be influencing findings, and should use care when studying attributes that, being closely associated with parties, are likely to elicit partisan associative bias.

Substantively, we find that many issue associations confirm those theorized in other literatures. We find considerable consistency in issue-based inferences across PID, indicating our design successfully minimized much of the effects of partisan boosting. However, we also observe a few important areas of disagreement across the aisle (preserving Social Security or Medicare), that may reflect the relative popularity of those two programs among partisans, partly reversing the arrow from evaluation to association. This highlights that some attributes may elicit positive or negative evaluations independent of their associations with the parties, and suggests a future extension of our design to assess the direct impact of attributes on evaluations, by priming party of candidates.

In two other areas, religion and gender, we recover associations that reflect meaningful differences in the candidates running under each party's label. Our respondents think of men and Protestant candidates (especially Evangelicals) as more likely to be Republican, than they do women, Catholic or Jewish politicians. In combination with our findings about voter evaluations, these results highlight potential difficulties some candidates may face running in primary and general elections with a particular party. Women in particular have faced significant challenges in securing nomination in primaries, especially in the Republican Party

(e.g., Lawless and Pearson 2008; Preece and Stoddard 2015). A party-gender asymmetry is similarly reflected in the negative evaluations (and Democratic associations) that Republican identifiers make of female candidates presented to them in our experiment.²⁴ We find a similar asymmetry for Democratic respondents negatively evaluating Evangelicals, whom they also infer to be Republicans, potentially hinting at an unfriendliness to such candidates among Democrats. These partisan differences in gender and religious stereotypes are suggestive that at least some party-trait associations could emerge through candidate screening in primaries or elections (e.g., Hayes 2005; Snyder and Ting 2002), though our broader findings suggest these are more likely to stem from stable competition in Congress (e.g., Egan 2013).

We find remarkable similarity between party and ideology inferences, particularly in issue priorities, indicating that these two dimensions are strongly intertwined in the current polarized environment. This suggests that voters associate issues not only with the parties, but also with particular ideological orientations toward policy more generally. These ideological associations could stem from what voters know about polarized parties: Democrats are liberal, Republicans are conservative, and they prioritize or own different issues. Yet, issue priorities may also signal ideological differences both across *and* within parties, by tapping voters' stereotypes about party associations. This raises an interesting implication that 'trespassing' candidates, in highlighting the owned issues of their partisan opponents (e.g., Sides 2006), could (un)intentionally be cultivating more centrist or bipartisan impressions among voters. Thus, rather than trying to 'steal' issues (e.g., Holian 2004), candidates may actually be trying to differentiate themselves from their more ideologically extreme parties.

As we noted earlier, our study is an extension rather than a replication of Converse's (1964) study of conceptualization by recall and recognition. We examine an implicit-level

²⁴Following other work on candidate recruitment, this finding could indicate that Republican voters are less willing to support female candidates (Lawless and Pearson 2008; Preece and Stoddard 2015). Yet, we cannot preclude that Republican identifiers negatively evaluate women in our experiment because they assume they are probably Democrats.

analogue of his explicit-level, semantic measures. As such, our findings are not directly comparable to Converse's or to the replications of his work conducted more recently. However, it is noteworthy and unexpected that even low-knowledge respondents (a group likely not heavily populated by voters Converse would describe as high-conceptualization "Ideologues" or "Near Ideologues"), associate the expected issues with Democrats, Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives. This is apparent both in our aggregate analysis and in our examination of individual-level 'correctness.'

Our study has broad implications for theories of heuristic voting and democratic competence. We find greater consistency in the issues rather than traits associated with the parties. This could indicate that issue priorities are more influential (or at least more coherent) in how party labels are used by voters. Many theories of democratic responsibility are concerned with whether citizens are capable of choosing candidates based on policy disagreements, rather than non-policy considerations (e.g., Fiorina 1980). Our results here suggest that minimal information about differences in policy priorities *is* available to many voters through the party labels. With few exceptions, we do not find that biographical traits are likely to override policy associations in ways that might obviously diminish issue-based heuristic voting. Consequently, voters possess a meaningful amount of useful policy information that could help them constrain incumbent behavior in office. In short, many voters, including some of the least informed, do grasp "what goes with what" where issues are concerned.

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