

Sobering up after “Partisan Intoxication or Policy Voting?”

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ABSTRACT

“Partisan Intoxication or Policy Voting?” raises questions central to understanding the extent to which individuals vote their partisanship and brings important attention to the potential observational equivalence between partisan and policy voting. In this response, I affirm some of Fowler’s arguments but also build upon existing studies to highlight that tests of the policy voting hypothesis need to seriously consider both the direct and indirect effects of partisanship to understand the relative role of policy versus partisanship. Such consideration is particularly significant as partisanship’s indirect effects can have troubling implications for democracy. I also reexamine the southern realignment and voters’ responses to hypothetical candidate policy positions, and when accounting for elite decision-making and complex information environments, I find voters respond less to candidate ideology and policy positions than suggested by Fowler’s original analyses. Together, my findings underscore the point that “policy voting and partisan intoxication are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive explanations” of voter behavior (Fowler, 2020, p. 144).

Keywords: Partisanship; policy; public opinion; electoral behavior; voting

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“Partisan Intoxication or Policy Voting?” raises questions central to understanding the extent to which individuals vote their partisanship and casts doubt that “partisanship is a hell of a drug.” I encourage readers to seriously consider Fowler’s challenges and critiques, which shed important light on what we know about partisanship’s and policy’s role in voter decision-making. In this response, I affirm some of Fowler’s assertions but also provide nuance to Fowler’s arguments to bring greater attention to an underemphasized point: “policy voting and partisan intoxication are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive explanations” of voter behavior (Fowler, 2020, p. 144) — a point that can be at times lost in this intoxicating debate.

I respond to many of Fowler’s points in the order originally made. I first broaden Fowler’s challenge to voter behavior scholars and argue that we not only need to find measures of partisanship independent of policy preferences but also continue to understand partisanship’s *indirect* effects on voting via policy opinions. Second, I build on Fowler’s study of the southern realignment to show that even though older and younger voters experienced the same realignment, those who came of political age prior to the civil rights movement exhibit more intoxicated voting behavior, which would be puzzling if we were in a purely policy-driven world. I further highlight that the southern realignment is a story of both voter and elite electoral behavior, and once we account for elite behavior, voters respond less to candidate ideology than suggested by Fowler’s original analyses. Third, I reexamine the survey experiment considered by Fowler and provide new evidence to support the policy voting hypothesis. I also discover that survey respondents are less likely to exhibit policy motivated voting behavior in more complex information environments and respond to non-policy characteristics, such as candidates’ age, race, and religion, consistent with explanations of voting behavior rooted in social groups. I conclude by encouraging political scientists from each side of this debate to avoid becoming tribal ourselves, as we may miss important contributions from members of the other “tribe” in the partisanship and policy debate.

The New Coke Challenge

Fowler poses a challenge to voter behavior scholars, analogous to Krehbiel’s (1993) challenge to those who study Congress. Members of Congress likely join political parties based on their policy preferences, leading to observed correlations between party membership and roll-call behavior. Voters similarly may adopt a party identification due to their policy positions, leading to correlations between party identification and vote choice. In the case of the voter, the correlation between partisanship and voting may then be rooted in policy rather than a social group membership or an emotional attachment.

To show partisanship matters, Fowler challenges scholars to demonstrate that partisanship affects vote choice independent of policy preferences.

Fowler’s concern about the study of partisanship echoes that made by Fiorina almost 40 years ago: “Controversies about issue voting versus party identification miss the point: the “issues” are *in* party identification” (Fiorina, 1981, p. 200). I encourage behavior scholars to take Fowler’s and Fiorina’s points seriously. Congressional research benefited from Krehbiel’s challenge, which forced congressional scholars to provide stronger evidence that “parties matter.” When providing evidence for the “partisan intoxication” hypothesis, behavior scholars can similarly provide evidence that partisanship matters with greater rigor, as indicated by Fowler’s critiques of prior work.

When considering Fowler’s challenge, it is useful to reflect on a key development in the Congressional “do parties matter” debate following Krehbiel’s challenge. Congressional scholars not only identified measures of preferences more independent of party effects (e.g. Ansolabehere *et al.*, 2001) but also increased attention given to the indirect effects parties have on Members of Congress. It, for instance, would be difficult to understand whether “parties matter” without considering agenda setting or other powers granted to party leaders (Cox and McCubbins, 2005; Rhode, 1991), and within explanations of voter behavior, it would be similarly difficult to understand how voters’ policy views matter without understanding partisanship’s influence on those views.

Fowler addresses some of partisanship’s indirect effects in his discussion of learning and opinion change but unfortunately gives less attention to how an individual’s social identity or perceptual screen can influence policy attitudes themselves. Fowler is clear that his “use of the term partisan intoxication refers specifically to the claim that psychological attachments to a party influence the way a person votes” and “restrict[s] my attention in this paper to the determinants of vote choices” (Fowler, 2020, p. 143). Voting is a very important action, but if we find a relationship between policy preferences and vote choice, and partisanship shapes policy preferences, partisanship has an important indirect effect on voting.¹ Otherwise stated, “policy voting” can be the hangover of “party intoxication.”

To illustrate this point, political scientists can learn more from “New Coke.” Recall in Fowler’s excellent “Cola analogy,” soda consumers replace voters; taste preferences replace policy preferences; and beverage selection replaces candidate selection. In a taste (policy) driven world, soda consumers (voters) would select the beverage (candidate) that aligned most with their preferences. In the soda wars, New Coke was judged to be the superior beverage (candidate), as “the new formula beat old Coke 55-45 in 190,000 blind

¹Nyhan’s first twitter usage of the “partisanship is a hell of a drug” meme, for example, did not apply to voting but instead to Democrats and Republicans differing views about Vladimir Putin in 2016.

taste tests” (Pendergrast, 2000, p. 352).² If consumers (voters) were objective followers of taste (policy), the results of the blind taste test strongly suggest New Coke (candidate) should be successful. This at least is what Coca-Cola executives believed. New Coke, however, was a failure, raising questions as to why consumers (voters) chose a beverage (candidate) that did not match their taste (policy) preferences.

According to Cola-Cola executives and marketing researchers, the reasons behind New Coke’s failure strike remarkable parallels to “partisan intoxication.” As the authors of *The American Voter* stated, “Few factors are of greater importance for our national elections than the lasting attachments of tens of millions of Americans to one of the political parties” (Campbell *et al.*, 1960, p. 121), the President of Coca-Cola during the launch of New Coke stated, “The simple fact is that all the time and money and skill poured into consumer research on the new Coca-Cola could not measure or reveal the deep and abiding emotional attachment to original Coca-Cola felt by so many people” (Oliver, 1987, p. 180).³ When examining consumers’ letters to Coca-Cola during the launch of New Coke, “[a] bewildered consulting psychologist told Company officials that the emotions he heard were similar to those of grief-stricken parents mourning the death of a favorite child” (Pendergrast, 2000, p. 355).⁴ The backlash led to the reintroduction of the original formula, even rebranding the beverage “Coca-Cola Classic” to invoke those lasting attachments.

Marketing scholars point to “New Coke” as an exemplary underappreciation of consumers’ emotional attachment to a brand, and political scientists need to avoid the same mistake when studying policy voting. Focusing on the *direct* link of policy and voting — as Coca-Cola executives focused on the taste test results — risks ignoring factors that may *indirectly* affect voting decisions. If we take the extreme position that policy preferences solely determine a broader partisan identification — to be clear, a position Fowler does not take — we must understand how this policy-rooted partisan identification can affect how voters develop their existing and new policy preferences.

²Consumers also preferred New Coke to Pepsi by six to eight points in blind taste tests (Oliver, 1987, p. 105).

³More directly tying soda and politics at the announcement of New Coke, a reporter asked “You say that thirty-nine percent of the people in identified tests preferred the old Coke and forty-five percent in the blind tastes. What does your research tell you of what they intend to do when they are deprived of the Coke they prefer?” The President of Coca-Cola responded: “Well, thirty-nine percent of people voted for McGovern” (Oliver, 1987, p. 135).

⁴Similar to conclusions that partisan identification can subconsciously impact voters’ opinions about politics (e.g. Theodoridis, 2017), individuals who have damaged ventromedial prefrontal cortexes, which regulate emotion, less often change indicated preferences between Pepsi and Coca-Cola when moving from blind to semi-blind taste tests. Such findings led Koenigs and Tranel to conclude that “normal brand preference is the product of factors unrelated to the taste of the soft drink” (Koenigs and Tranel, 2008, p. 4; see also McClure *et al.*, 2004).

Partisanship’s Indirect Influences in 2016

My challenge resembles the concern that “voters select their preferred party and candidates for arbitrary reasons and then adopt their policy positions, creating an illusion that issues matter” (Fowler, 2020, p. 151). Fowler’s discussion of learning and opinion change makes the very important point that voters do not equally care about all issues in each election (Fowler, 2020, p. 152). To reinforce this point, Fowler highlights Sides’, Vavreck’s, and Tesler’s finding that voters’ immigration views in 2011 “were *more* correlated with voting behavior in 2016 than they had been in 2012” (Sides *et al.*, 2017, p. 42), which suggests both that certain issues may matter in some elections more than others and the correlation between policy views and voting for Trump is not only an artifact of voters learning and changing their opinions to “follow their leader” (Fowler, 2020, Footnote 10).

Trump unlikely shaped many voters’ views on immigration in 2011, but recent work by Andrew Englehardt, Michael Barber, and Jeremy Pope suggests partisanship and elite position taking impacted voters’ 2016 policy positions.⁵ Englehardt (2019), for example, uses a research design similar to Carsey and Layman (2006) to study how partisanship can shape racial attitudes. Using multiple panel surveys from the 1990s and 2000s, Englehardt examines the extent to which racial attitudes and partisanship in time period one predict racial attitudes and partisanship in time period two and finds whites’ partisanship impacts their racial attitudes more so than racial attitudes impact their partisanship over time.

$$PID_{i,t} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 PID_{i,t-1} + \alpha_2 Immigration\ Attitude_{i,t-1} + \omega_i \quad (1)$$

$$Immigration\ Attitude_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 PID_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 Immigration\ Attitude_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

To illustrate the extent to which partisanship similarly impacts immigration views, Englehardt generously shared replication materials to help me study the 2012–2016 Voter Study Guide panel used by Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck. To dig deeper into Fowler’s point concerning immigration, I specifically investigate how a voter’s partisanship and attitudes towards immigration, as reported in 2011, associate with a voter’s attitudes towards immigration and a voter’s partisanship, as reported in 2016. Equations (1) and (2) formally express the examined relationships, and to facilitate comparisons, I set each variable from

⁵I maintain focus on how partisan identity shapes issue attitudes, but there is considerable evidence that group membership and identity also shapes issue attitudes. Brader *et al.* (2008); Citrin *et al.* (1990); and Sides and Citrin (2007) in particular provide more in-depth discussions in regard to the importance of identity for understanding immigration attitudes. For a fuller review, see Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014).

Table 1: Relationship between white voters’ partisanship and immigration attitudes.

	Partisanship _t	Immigration	
		Attitude _t	$\hat{\beta}_1 - \hat{\alpha}_2$
Partisanship _{t-1}	0.795* (0.020)	0.190* (0.020)	0.068* (0.031)
Immigration attitude _{t-1}	0.122* (0.023)	0.682* (0.021)	
Constant	0.055* (0.016)	0.055* (0.012)	
R-Squared	0.682	0.548	
N	6,134	6,134	

*Standard errors in parentheses
*p < 0.05

Results from cross-lagged, seemingly unrelated regressions that estimate the impact voters’ immigration views and partisanship in 2011 have on voters’ immigration views and partisanship in 2016. Third column reports the difference between the estimated impact partisanship has on immigration views and estimated the impact immigration views have on partisanship.

0 to 1 (see Englehardt, 2019, 6 for more detail).⁶ If α_2 is greater than zero, statistical analyses suggest that voters’ immigration opinions influence their partisanship and underscore Fowler’s and Fiorina’s point that measures of partisanship encompass policy positions. If β_1 is greater than zero, it serves as evidence that partisanship influences voters’ opinions on immigration and underscores the need to be concerned that partisanship shapes policy opinions when testing the policy voting hypothesis.

Table 1 presents results from cross-lagged, seemingly unrelated regressions that estimate Equations (1) and (2). Similar to Englehardt’s and Carsey and Layman’s findings, statistical analyses suggest policy positions and partisanship impact one another. A standard deviation increase in a white voter’s positions on immigration in 2011 relate to that voter being more likely to identify with the Republican party in 2016 by approximately .04, even when controlling

⁶To assess immigration views, I create an index measure using responses to three Voter Study Guide questions: “Overall, do you think illegal immigrants make a contribution to American society or are a drain?”; “Do you favor or oppose providing a legal way for illegal immigrants already in the United States to become U.S. Citizens?”; and “Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the US legally than it is currently?” By using an index measure, I aim to reduce the influence of measurement error in voters’ views on immigration (Fowler, 2020, p. 147). Results are similar when standardizing the immigration and partisanship measures. When more extensively accounting for measurement error in policy views, Ansolabehere *et al.* (2008, p. 216) find “issue scales can approach the coherence and stability of party identification, and can be almost as powerful in predicting voting behavior,” which is consistent with the argument that policy and party voting are not mutually exclusive explanations of voting behavior.

for a voter’s party identification in 2011 (Table 1: Column 1), which is a notable impact when one considers the potential bias measurement error introduces into measures of policy views (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 2008). Analyses in the second column, however, provide evidence that those who identified as Republicans in 2011 were more likely to express conservative views on immigration in 2016, even when controlling for their views on immigration in 2011. Together, these sets of estimates imply that both policy views influence partisanship and partisanship influences policy views. The difference between the estimated coefficients for partisanship $_{t-1}$ and immigration attitudes $_{t-1}$ (Table 1: Column 3), however, suggests that partisanship impacts immigration views more than immigration views affected partisanship over the course of the 2012 to 2016 election.

The above analyses indicate that there is a relationship between existing partisanship and future policy views, but they shed little light on the mechanisms that induce an individual’s policy views to change. One way that partisanship can influence policy views is if partisan voters take policy cues from elites. As put by Fowler when discussing the issue of social security within the 2000 election, such behavior may be “completely sensible . . . If the voter knows she agrees with Gore on the issues important to her, she can probably trust his position on this new issue,” particularly on issues less important to voters. (Fowler, 2020, p. 152).

Cues can be informative and sensible to follow, but when focusing on the 2016 election, Michael Barber and Jeremy Pope show cues perhaps changed voters’ policy views in a less sensible manner. Cognizant of the concerns Fowler raises in his challenge and critiques of prior work on cues, Barber and Pope state: “Even if parties are ideological coalitions, the cue is virtually always such that cue-givers are reinforcing both the ideological positions and partisan positions at the same time” (Barber and Pope, 2019, p. 40). Recognizing this difficulty, Barber and Pope utilize Trump’s position statements — both liberal and conservative on the *same* issue — to investigate how partisan voters’ issue positions change in response to one party leader’s statements. Specifically, Barber and Pope randomly assigned whether a respondent would see an actual liberal or conservative position statement from Trump on the same issue and found that Republican voters exposed to a conservative (liberal) Trump position shifted to more a conservative (liberal) issue position, even on the issues of abortion and guns and not just less salient issues, such as privatizing social security.⁷

Barber and Pope’s study partly addresses the difficulty in separating issue positions from partisanship and provides evidence consistent with the “large body of research suggesting that the issue positions of partisans blindly follow

⁷Barber and Pope provide evidence a liberal stance on immigration made Republicans’ position on this issue more liberal. Due to a technical error in administering the survey, no respondents received the conservative issue treatment for immigration.

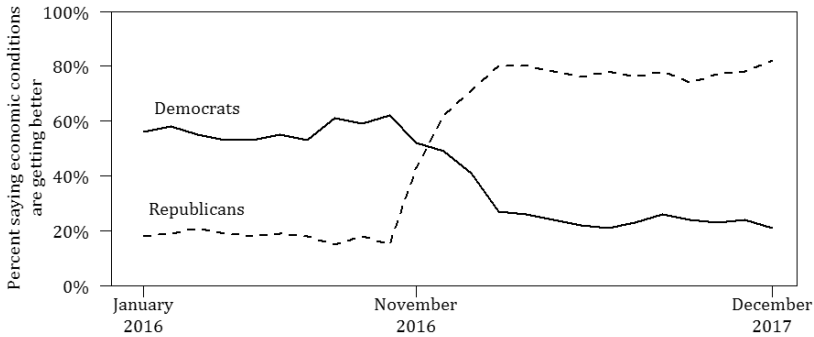


Figure 1: Democrats' and republicans' perceptions of the economy.

Percentages of Democratic and Republican respondents to Gallup surveys who thought “economic conditions are getting better,” aggregated by month from 2016 to 2017.

the policy positions of partisan elites” (Fowler, 2020, p. 151). Another way to characterize this body of work is that many voters identify elites based on some criterion and then follow without much discretion. There is something to be said that voters follow partisan elites. If voters were truly blind, everyone should be equally likely to follow the same elites. A consistent finding, however, is such selection is not “arbitrary” (Fowler, 2020, p. 151). Even with social security in 2000, Democrats followed Gore, and Republicans followed Bush. Voters then are not blind to politics. Instead, they “try” to make reasonable decisions (Fowler, 2020, p. 154). However, once some voters find a partisan leader to follow, Barber and Pope’s study suggests they may do so without much scrutiny.

Partisanship not only shaped voters’ policy views in 2016 but also how they perceived the world around them. Fowler makes important points concerning voters’ views of candidates (Fowler, 2020, p. 153).⁸ Fowler, however, gives less attention to how partisan attachments shape voters’ views of political events. The economy, for example, plays a “fundamental” role in elections (Gelman and King, 1993), and Sides *et al.*’s (2018) Figure 9.2 (replicated in Figure 1) offers a stark example of how voters’ partisanship shapes whether voters thought economic conditions were getting better. It is difficult to miss the sharp rise

⁸Focusing on elite cues outside of the 2016 presidential election, Fowler notes “[p]olicy voters might even use the party affiliations of candidates to draw inferences about the candidates’ positions and priorities” (Fowler, 2020, p. 143; see also Conover and Feldman, 1989), but such cues can lead voters to make inaccurate inferences. Fowler partly addresses this consideration by focusing voters’ ability to place elected officials on an ideological scale (Fowler, 2020, pp. 153–154). Voters, however, more often make incorrect judgements of Members’ of Congress individual issue positions when these positions differ from the party line (Ansolabehere and Jones, 2010; Dancy and Sheagley, 2013; see also Berelson *et al.*, 1954, 219–223). If policy voters follow these incorrect inferences, it can lead to less desirable policy voting.

in the numbers of Republicans who thought that economic conditions were getting better after Trump’s election and parallel reduction of Democrats who thought the same. Fowler brings important attention to research that shows that assessments of politics will affect party identification (Montagnes *et al.*, 2018; see also Donovan *et al.*, 2019) — similar to MacKuen *et al.*’s (1989) support of Fiorina’s point in the 1980s — but it is unlikely that such changes in partisan identification explain most of the 50 percent change in Republicans who thought economic conditions were getting better, even before Trump took office.

The above examples of voters’ changing policy views or perceptions of politics during the 2016 election do not refute that voters’ policy positions matter for elections. They instead add to the considerable amount of evidence that suggests — but does not prove — that partisanship influences voters’ policy views and help reaffirm that partisan intoxication and policy explanations of voting are not mutually exclusive. Political scientists, however, should be cautious to infer too much from a single election. “[T]he relative influence of policy versus identity is a question of first-order importance” (Fowler, 2020, p. 144), but policy or partisanship’s relative influence is not fixed over time. Elites can temporarily influence how important issues are to voters (Fowler, 2020, p. 152); issue salience increases the likelihood of issue voting (Carmines and Stimson, 1980); Highton and Kam (2011) show that partisanship had a stronger influence on voters’ issue positions in the 1980s than in the 1990s; and the partisan gap in views of the economy at times differed more in the 1950s and 2000s than in the 1970s (Jones, 2019).

If voters were consistently intoxicated partisans, we should see little variation in the extent to which partisan voting behavior in previous elections predicts variation in a later election, similar to how we should fail to see retirement slumps in Congressional elections (Fowler, 2020, p. 157). To illustrate how the influence of partisanship varies over time, I follow Bartels (1998; see also Azari and Hetherington, 2016) and examine state-level presidential voting over the last 130 years. Specifically, I regress state-level presidential electoral margins as a function of the state-level margins in the previous three elections separately for each presidential election using Equation (3). To capture the persistence of partisanship’s impact on election outcomes, I sum δ_1 , δ_2 , and δ_3 .⁹

$$R_{s,t} = \delta_0 + \delta_1 R_{s,t-1} + \delta_2 R_{s,t-2} + \delta_3 R_{s,t-3} + \epsilon_{s,t} \quad (3)$$

The black line in the left panel of Figure 2 is the loess curve of my estimates of the persistence of partisanship and suggests partisanship’s influence varies over time. Partisan loyalties were higher around the turn of the twentieth century but lower during the civil rights movement, especially in the south

⁹ δ_0 can be interpreted as the vote margin attributable national conditions specific to an election. See Bartels (1998, p. 283) for more thorough discussion.

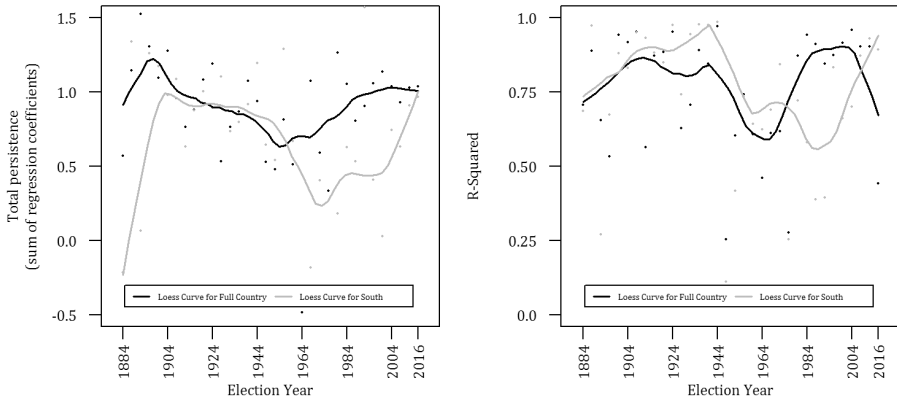


Figure 2: Party loyalties in presidential elections.

The left panel plots the sum of δ_1 , δ_2 , and δ_3 from year level regression of Equation (3) to capture the persistence of party voting across elections. The right panel plots the *R*-Squared measures for each of these regressions.

(grey line). Partisan persistence notably differs in the 1964 election, which exemplifies how policy and partisanship’s relative influence can vary over a short period of time. As documented by Carmines and Stimson (1989, p. 39), “John Kennedy and Richard Nixon followed their parties’ leads, adopting progressive and almost identical civil rights positions” in the 1960 election.¹⁰ Goldwater in 1964, however, “had a powerful appeal to anti-civil rights forces that abandoned the Democratic party” (Carmines and Stimson, 1989, p. 45), and positions on race received greater prominence in party platforms (Carmines and Stimson, 1989, fig. 2.3). As addressed by Fowler and below, this massive and salient change in policy positions led to changes in the levels of partisan voting among some voters. For example, 40 percent of African Americans — a group for which racial issues were particularly important — supported Eisenhower in 1956 but only 10 percent supported Goldwater in 1964 (Carmines and Stimson, 1989, p. 46). Since the 1970s, the overall relationship between partisan voting in previous and current elections strengthened until the 1990s — both in the full country and south — ultimately becoming more stable in the 2000s.

Past party voting also does not fully nor consistently explain current voting behavior. To illustrate this, the right panel of Figure 2 plots the *R*-Squared measures from each estimation of Equation (3). The average *R*-Squared

¹⁰Providing evidence that voters’ religious identities related to vote choice in the 1960 presidential election, 83 percent of Catholic voters supported Kennedy as compared to 39 percent of non-Catholics, a margin well over twice as large as that in any Presidential election from 1952 to 2016 (Achen and Bartels, 2016, fig. 9.1).

measure or the proportion of variation in electoral margins explained by a state’s previous three electoral margins is 0.755, suggesting that previous partisan voting does a lot — but not all — to explain current partisan voting.¹¹ Again underscoring the importance of the southern realignment, the proportion of variation in current electoral margins explained by past electoral margins reaches some of its lowest points immediately following the civil rights movement (Figure 2, right panel, black line). Interestingly, the proportion of variation electoral margins explained by previous margins was its lowest in 2016 since 1976 when considering the full country, but in the more solid Republican south, past party voting appears to explain contemporary party voting more than at any point since the 1940s (Figure 2, right panel, grey line).

Findings in Figure 2 imply that partisanship does not explain all voting behavior, but even in the 2016 election — where previous electoral margins only explained 44.3 percent of the variation in 2016 margins — partisanship likely impacted voters’ views of policy and the economy (Table 1, Barber and Pope, 2019, Figure 1), indirectly influencing tests of the policy voting hypothesis. While it is impossible to fully disentangle policy and partisanship’s influence on one another and even if “one concedes that policy preferences influence partisan attachments” (Fowler, 2020, p. 144), the indirect effects of partisanship can remain troublesome for democracy and accountability. If a voter joins the Democratic party for their stance on abortion and this acquired party identification influences how this voter sees economic policy (Gould and Klor, 2019; see also Achen and Bartels, 2016), partisanship then has a less desirable impact on policy views and then voting, at least in my judgment.¹²

The Southern Realignment

In addition to careful examinations of existing work, Fowler offers new analyses to make that the case voters are not intoxicated partisans. Fowler first identifies the southern realignment as an example where “southerners shifted their presidential voting dramatically over a short period of time, despite the fact that their party identifications were much slower to change” (Fowler, 2020, p. 157). The grey line in the left panel of Figure 2 reinforces Fowler’s point as the persistence of party voting in presidential elections is at its lowest in the south from the 1960s to 1990s before rising to more intoxicated levels in the 2000s. While major and highly salient changes in parties’ positions, such

¹¹When pooling election years, the *R*-Squared measure is 0.481.

¹²Sides *et al.* (2018, fig. 2.9) provide a similarly concerning finding that individuals’ 2007 racial attitudes had little relationship with voters’ economic perceptions in 2007 but were strongly correlated with 2012 economic perceptions, after an African American president was in office.

as those on civil rights, are rare in American history, the southern realignment is a good challenge for the partisan intoxication hypothesis under which “we might expect partisan voting patterns to continue unchanged” (Fowler, 2020, p. 156). Similar to Fowler, I will not provide an exhaustive review of the work on the southern realignment but will build from previous work to provide a fuller understanding of who changed their behavior and highlight the importance of elites’ decision-making for understanding policy’s role in southern elections.

Party Identification “is not learned on Mommy’s knee...”

Fowler nicely documents the increasing Republican successes in southern elections (Fowler, 2020, fig. 1). Few political scientists would dispute that some individuals changed their partisanship during this time. It, however, is difficult to identify change within an individual voter using aggregated election results or cross-sectional surveys, which may be influenced by cohort replacement (Green *et al.*, 2004) or migration (Polsby, 2005). To partly overcome this methodological limitation, I utilize the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study where high school students and their parents reported how they voted or would have voted in the 1964, 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980 presidential elections, how they voted in the 1970, 1972, and 1980 congressional elections, and their current partisanship in each the 1965, 1973, and 1982 waves of the survey.¹³

During the height of the civil rights movement, over 90 percent of self-identified Democrats supported the Democratic presidential candidate in the 1964 presidential election, but only 61 percent of individuals who identified as Democrats in 1973 supported the Democratic presidential candidate in 1972. Meanwhile, 68 percent of self-identified Republicans supported the Republican candidate in 1964 as compared to 97 percent in 1972. 46 and 57 percent of self-identified Democratic and Republican voters (using the 1965 identification) supported their party’s nominee in both elections. Taken together, partisanship alone clearly did not dictate all Republicans’ votes in 1964 nor Democrats’ votes in 1972, but some voters exhibited what could be called intoxicated voting behavior.¹⁴

To put the partisan intoxication hypothesis to a more difficult test, I examine the voting behavior of respondents who participated in each wave of the 17-year panel. The first two columns of Table 2 present the percentages

¹³Unfortunately, I am unaware of a relevant panel survey that starts before the 1964 election, where “southerners were solidly supporting Republicans in presidential elections” (Fowler, 2020, p. 157). In each of the 1960 and 1964 elections, Democrats won most of the southern vote, suggesting that there were many converts still to be had.

¹⁴In the 1982 survey, 77 and 95 percent of self-identified Democrats or Republicans supported their party’s presidential candidate.

Table 2: Percentages of intoxicated voters and partisans in youth-parent panel.

		Unchanged pres. voting 1964–1980	Unchanged cong. voting 1970, 1972, 1980	Unchanged partisanship 1968–1982
<i>All Panelists</i>	Full Country	32.4%	81.5%	41.3%
	South	34.6%	82.6%	41.3%
	Non-South	31.8%	81.2%	41.3%
<i>Parents</i>	Full Country	40.3%	86.6%	56.8%
	South	44.8%	87.3%	54.9%
	Non-South	38.9%	86.4%	57.4%
<i>Students</i>	Full Country	23.8%	67.9%	26.3%
	South	20.3%	66.7%	24.1%
	Non-South	24.5%	68.1%	26.8%

Percentages of respondents to the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study who always reported voting for the same party’s presidential, voting for the same party’s congressional candidate, or identified with the same political party across each the three panel waves.

of voters who consistently supported one party in each of the considered five presidential elections and three Congressional elections. Across 5 presidential elections, 32 percent of panel participants were unchanged voters, but over 80 percent consistently voted for either Democratic and Republican congressional candidates in the 1970, 1972, and 1980 elections (Table 2: First Row). Patterns are relatively similar in the South (Table 2: Second Row), which supports Fowler’s claim that “Southern voters took longer to swing toward Republican candidates in non-presidential elections” (Fowler, 2020, p. 157) but also interestingly suggest that intoxicated partisans are not considerably more likely to be found in a particular region (Table 2: Third Row), even with notable changes within the political parties.¹⁵

Eighty percent of voters may consistently cast intoxicated ballots in Congressional elections, but the remaining 20 percent of voters can still sway an election. To better understand who these changing voters are, I follow Seth McKee’s (2010; see also Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2008) examination of southern partisanship and divide panel respondents into parents and students. McKee found that the southern students more often switched to the Republican party than their parents (McKee, 2010, fig. 2.6 and 2.7), and I similarly find that only 20.3 percent of southern students were unchanged voters in presidential elections as compared to 44.8 percent of parents, approximately

¹⁵Focusing on more recent southern elections from 2010 to 2018, Kuriwaki (2019, fig. 1, personal correspondence) studies South Carolina ballot image logs and finds 90.8 percent of voters voted for the same party at the presidential and U.S. House level. Levels of partisan voting, however, were approximately 20 percentage points lower in county council elections.

a 24 percentage point difference. At the congressional level, the difference in unchanged voters slightly narrows to 21 points. When relating partisanship to vote choice, the Pearson's r correlation between 1965 partisan identification and 1980 presidential vote choice was 0.159 for southern students and 0.562 for southern parents. Probit analyses also suggest a southern parent who identified as a Republican rather than a Democrat in 1965 was 0.61 more likely to vote for Reagan in the 1980 presidential election (t -statistic of difference is 9.56). The comparable change in probability for southern students meanwhile is only 0.11 (t -statistic of difference 0.90).¹⁶

Partisanship adopted as a child then does not then appear to necessarily have persisting impacts on voting behavior, consistent with another point made by Fiorina that partisan identification "is not something learned on mommy's knee and never questioned thereafter" (Fiorina, 1981, p. 102). But differences between students and parents raise questions as to why mommies' and daddies' voting behavior do not change like their children. "The national platforms of the major parties flipped and diverged" (Fowler, 2020, p. 164) for both parents and children, but those who came of political age before the civil rights movement appear to exhibit more stable voting behavior.¹⁷

This finding concerning parents is consistent with Key's observation that "Although the great issues of national politics are potent instruments for the formation of divisions among the voters, they meet their match in the inertia of traditional partisan attachments formed generations ago" (Key, 1949, 285, qtd in Fowler, 2020), but it is again important not to lose sight that voters' policy views, issue importance, and identities are interrelated and at times change over time. The civil rights movement was an exceptional period in American politics, and the changing positions of the Democratic and Republican parties had different implications for white and African American voters. The above analyses suggest older, white voters maintained their partisanship following the southern realignment, but when studying cross-sectional surveys, Abramson finds that percentage of African Americans who identified with the Republican party before and after 1964 drops more among African Americans who were born before 1914 as compared to African Americans who were born after 1914, suggesting "even mature adults may discard established loyalties" in exceptional circumstances (Abramson, 1975, p. 67).

¹⁶Changes in probabilities calculated from probit estimations where the dependent variable is 1980 presidential vote choice, and the independent variables are a respondent's 1965 party identification along with the respondent's age, income, education, and gender in 1982.

¹⁷A possible alternative explanation for changing voting behavior is that students from high school to early adulthood experience greater life changes, leading to different political preferences. However, when only considering the later 1972 and 1982 surveys, the younger southerners were still 24 percent less likely to vote for the same party in the 1972–1980 presidential elections.

Retirement Slump

Fowler also uses the southern realignment to bring attention to another puzzle for the partisan intoxication hypothesis: the retirement slump. In an intoxicated world, we should not see any retirement slump in any region of the country, as voters would always vote for a particular party’s candidates, new or old. Fowler, however, highlights that the retirement slump is seemingly larger for southern Democrats but shows that the change in Democratic vote share from one election to the next is smaller when the candidate in the previous election (the incumbent) is more conservative, and this impact is largely the same across the country. Fowler’s analyses provide evidence that candidates’ policy positions matter, which is consistent with the policy voting hypothesis, but before concluding that “most if not all of the differential retirement slump of southerners is attributable to their policy conservatism” (Fowler, 2020, p. 160), it is useful to dig deeper into who is running in these elections.¹⁸

Challengers and incumbents strategically decide when to seek election (e.g. Cox and Katz, 2002), and there is suggestive evidence that such strategic behavior occurs within the elections Fowler considers. Forty-six percent of considered southern races went uncontested in an incumbent’s last term as compared to 8 percent of nonsouthern races, and only 7 percent of southern incumbents faced a quality challenger in their last election as compared to 23 percent of nonsouthern incumbents. If calculated as $\text{DemocraticVoteShare}_{t+1} - \text{DemocraticVoteShare}_t$, the retirement slump may not be the best way to assess partisan intoxication, particularly when a Democratic incumbent faces no Republican challenger and $\text{DemocraticVoteShare}_t$ is 100 percent. In such cases where there is no opposition candidate, at least one set of intoxicated partisans will have no choice but to vote against their partisanship if they vote at all.

To remove some of these biases and better understand policy’s relationship with voting, I replicate Fowler’s analysis but account for who — if anyone — challenges the Democrat seeking the open seat. To present comparisons, statistical analyses in the first column of Table 3 reproduce Fowler’s main analyses (Fowler, 2020, Table 2: Column 3), which include races where the retiring incumbent did not face an opponent in her last election and where a Republican candidate did not contest the newly opened seat. Statistical analyses in the second column of Table 3 exclude non-contested races. In this

¹⁸An assumption in the interpretation of Fowler’s and my analyses is that retiring southern Democrats were more conservative and their seats were sought by more liberal candidates (Fowler, 2020, p. 158). Measuring candidates’ ideology is difficult, but in the 134 (of 178) southern cases where a Democrat ultimately replaced a Democrat, the replacement was more conservative 49 times, and 3 southern Democrats were replaced by more liberal Republicans. Additionally, neither sets of analyses account for measures of constituent preferences. When including a control for district-level presidential vote in any analyses here or in Fowler’s study, the coefficient on the CVP measure is statistically indistinguishable from zero (Table A-1).

Table 3: Retirement slump for democrats in the U.S. House, 1948–1994.

	1	2	3	4
South	0.018 (0.051)	-0.062 (0.050)	-0.057 (0.049)	-0.040 (0.052)
CVP	-0.194* (0.075)	-0.130* (0.063)	-0.098 (0.055)	-0.079 (0.054)
South × CVP	-0.052 (0.118)	0.117 (0.112)	0.076 (0.108)	0.046 (0.111)
Quality challenger in previous election			0.032* (0.012)	0.034* (0.012)
Quality challenger in current election			-0.093* (0.012)	-0.094* (0.012)
Midterm election				0.039* (0.016)
Current democrat President				0.020 (0.015)
Midterm × Democrat President				-0.077* (0.023)
Constant	-0.033 (0.020)	-0.029 (0.017)	-0.008 (0.015)	-0.024 (0.018)
<i>R</i> -squared	0.061	0.029	0.158	0.189
<i>N</i>	488	365	365	365

Standard errors in parentheses
**p* < 0.05

Column 1 replicates Fowler’s analyses of the retirement slump for U.S. House Democrats (Fowler, 2020, Table 2: Column 3). Columns 2–4 narrow focus to contested elections and include controls for challenger quality and midterm elections.

subset, the strength of the relationship between the CVP measure and the retirement slump weakens.

When considering the relative influence of policy on voting behavior, Fowler usefully provides substantive effects. As reported by Fowler when using estimates that consider non-contested races, “the retirement slump increases by 22.5 percentage points, on average, as we go from the most liberal to the most conservative retiring Democrats” (Fowler, 2020, p. 160). When excluding non-contested races, I find the increase to be 10.2 percentage points. Within the context of the 103rd Congress — the last Fowler considers — this ideological difference is approximately equivalent to that between majority and minority leaders Dick Gephardt and Newt Gingrich, which would be a rather atypical within district replacement. The largest liberal to conservative replacement within the considered elections was when Democrat John Dowdy retired in 1966 amidst bribery allegations and was replaced by George H.W. Bush.

The predicted difference in retirement slump attributable to such a change in the CVP measure (a 0.486 change) was approximately 5 percentage points. The difference in the retirement slump attributable to a standard deviation change in the CVP measure (a 0.195 change) was approximately 2 percentage points.

Characteristics beyond ideological policy positions, such as a candidate’s experience or other valence factors, can also matter for the retirement slump. Some of these factors are encompassed in Fowler’s definition of policy voting, which includes candidates’ “policy positions, abilities, or likely performance” in office (Fowler, 2020, p. 143), but experience itself has little ideological content. Experienced candidates, for example, do not necessarily bring about good policy, as one could be a great campaigner but a poor policymaker. When accounting for whether challengers previously held elected office (Jacobson, 1989), the proportion of the variation in the retirement slump explained by the considered independent variables at least quadruples (Table 3: Column 3). Statistical analyses substantively suggest that the retirement slump is approximately 3 percent smaller when the retiring Democrat faces a quality Republican candidate in their last election, and the retirement slump grows by approximately 9 percent when a quality Republican candidate contests the newly open seat. This estimated impact of a quality Republican opponent exceeds the estimated impact of the previous incumbent’s ideology even when going from the most liberal to the most conservative retiring Democrats.

Congressional elections additionally occur in a larger political context. For example, one of the most established regularities in American elections is that the president’s party regularly loses seats in midterm congressional elections (Campbell, 1960). Statistical analyses in the final column of Table 3 provide evidence that when there is a Democrat in The White House, the retirement slump for Democrats in midterm elections increases by over 5 percentage points, which is approximately equivalent to that of increasing the CVP measure by over four standard deviations.

The above findings again do not rule out that policy matters for the outcomes of elections, but within the context of the intoxicated partisan versus policy voting, they highlight that a candidate’s ideological positions may not be the most important factor to consider. Policy itself can be very relevant for these other factors or indirect effects: Challengers’ decisions to run may be influenced by policy considerations (Rogers, 2015); challengers can bring policy to the attention of voters (Arnold, 1992); and some theories of midterm loss are rooted in policy considerations (Alesina and Rosenthal, 1989). A voter, however, has little control over who runs, and an individual Member of Congress has little control over who is in The White House. It is concerning — at least in my judgement — that factors largely outside of the candidate’s control appear to have just as much, if not more, influence than the policy positions a particular candidate takes in elections.

Randomizing Candidate Characteristics in Hypothetical Elections

Fowler also tests the partisan intoxication and policy voting hypotheses using a survey experiment conducted by Hainmueller *et al.* (2015). Survey respondents chose between two hypothetical presidential candidates who were randomly assigned different traits. Every candidate was randomly assigned a party affiliation (Democrat or Republican) and level of education (graduated from high school or graduated from college). Some candidates were also randomly assigned issue positions on abortion, health care, and gay marriage along with other traits (see Fowler, 2020, pp. 165–166 for more details).

When voting in these hypothetical presidential elections, 18.7 percent of survey experiment respondents cast a partisan vote in every contest, and 29.1 percent of respondents cast a partisan vote more than 90 percent of the time. 18.7 percent is less than the 30 percent of intoxicated partisans among the Youth-Parent Panel that captured behavior in real electoral settings, but 18.7 percent of respondents always casting a partisan ballot — even when candidates took surprising policy positions on salient issues such as abortion, health care, and gay marriage — is a non-trivial amount of “intoxication.” Reflecting such behavior when providing feedback on the survey, one Democratic respondent wrote that the survey was “Monotonous/easy since I only cared about two variables: education and political party.” When deciding between a Republican and Democratic candidate, this respondent voted for the Democratic candidate 22 of 22 times.

Not all survey experiment respondents exhibited intoxicated partisan behavior. Another respondent’s feedback to the survey captured the partisan-policy conflict voters can face, stating: “I am very pro-life, as you can see from my selections in the survey. I lean very much (but not completely) to Republican, but pro-life is very near and dear to my heart.” When deciding between Republican and Democratic candidates, this respondent supported six of the six Republicans who were more pro-life than their Democratic opponent and eight of the eight Democrats who were more pro-life than their Republican opponent. Consistent with this individual’s behavior and the policy voting hypothesis, Fowler finds respondents less often support candidates who share their party affiliation when that candidate takes a surprising policy position (e.g. a Democrat taking a pro-life policy position when the Republican is pro-choice).

To further evaluate the importance and relative influence of policy voting, I re-examine the HHY survey experiment with four different foci. First, I add to Fowler’s evidence supporting the policy voting hypothesis and show that policy voting is also evident in races that feature same party candidates, such as primary elections. Second, I provide evidence that the impact of policy voting is reduced in more complex information environments. Third, I show that voters respond to non-policy characteristics, such as candidates’ age, race,

and religion, consistent with more sociological explanations of voter behavior. Finally, I conduct a sensitivity analysis for Fowler’s estimates of the number of intoxicated partisans and policy voters in the sample.

Policy Voting in Single-Party Elections

With the random assignment of party labels to candidates, the HHY survey at times featured elections between two candidates of the same party. These elections were not considered by Fowler but present an opportunity to test the policy voting hypothesis in a context where the party cue is less informative, such as primary elections where a Democratic candidate faces another Democrat. To study same party elections, the second (third) column presents analyses that focus on elections where Democratic (Republican) respondents had to decide between two Democrat (Republican) candidates. For these analyses, I define a surprising policy item as one where the first Democratic (Republican) candidate presented in a hypothetical election took a more conservative (liberal) position than her opponent. Further supporting the argument that policy positions matter in elections, I find that Democratic voters are less likely to vote for Democratic candidates who take more conservative positions than their opponents, and Republican voters are less likely to vote for Republican candidates who take liberal positions, similar to findings from observational studies of Congressional elections (e.g. Thomsen, 2018).

Complex Information Environments

A motivation for Fowler’s analyses of the HHY survey experiment was to investigate if Peterson’s finding that “[a]dditional, randomly-assigned information about the candidates reduces the extent of partisan voting” replicated with independent data (Fowler, 2020, p. 165). To illustrate the limited influence of partisanship in more informationally rich informational environments, Fowler regresses “partisan voting on indicators for the number of additional pieces of information shared with respondents” and finds that “respondents receiving all 18 items were, on average, 11.9 percentage points less likely to vote with their party than those who only received 2 items” (Fowler, 2020, p. 166), which is inconsistent with studies that discover voters are increasingly partisan in more complex information environments (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk, 2001).

To understand how complex information environments also affect policy voting, I replicate the main analyses on two subsets of the data: those respondents who received fewer than nine items (Table 4: Column 4) and those who received more than nine items (Table 4: Column 5). On average, respondents who received more than nine items voted with their party 10 percent less

Table 4: Effect of additional information on partisan and primary voting.

	Original analyses	Democrat vs. Democrat	Republican vs. Republican	Fewer than nine items	More than nine items
<i>Surprising policy items</i>					
1	-0.147* (0.013)	-0.197* (0.026)	-0.160* (0.032)	-0.183* (0.018)	-0.087* (0.018)
2	-0.260* (0.023)	-0.223* (0.051)	-0.153* (0.064)	-0.291* (0.046)	-0.224* (0.028)
3	-0.306* (0.059)	-0.351* (0.121)	-0.018 (0.225)	-0.825* (0.042)	-0.254* (0.061)
<i>Policy items</i>					
1	-0.024 (0.016)	0.023 (0.027)	0.033 (0.032)	-0.011 (0.016)	
2	-0.009 (0.022)	0.090* (0.036)	0.056 (0.048)	0.002 (0.024)	0.045 (0.051)
3	0.032 (0.033)	0.091 (0.049)	0.081 (0.074)	0.050 (0.046)	0.072 (0.054)
<i>Total items</i>					
3	-0.019 (0.024)	-0.001 (0.037)	0.036 (0.044)	-0.019 (0.024)	
4	-0.008 (0.025)	-0.020 (0.039)	0.041 (0.051)	-0.008 (0.025)	
5	-0.013 (0.024)	-0.004 (0.043)	0.060 (0.044)	-0.014 (0.024)	
6	-0.024 (0.026)	-0.011 (0.039)	0.129* (0.049)	-0.024 (0.026)	
8	-0.043 (0.026)	0.045 (0.040)	0.081 (0.051)	-0.042 (0.026)	
13	-0.033 (0.030)	0.037 (0.047)	0.067 (0.059)		
18	-0.058 (0.039)	0.010 (0.057)	0.076 (0.081)		-0.028 (0.034)
Constant	0.812* (0.019)	0.523* (0.026)	0.461* (0.036)	0.811* (0.019)	0.708* (0.046)
R-Squared	0.035	0.028	0.021	0.035	0.026
N	22065	3471	2087	16368	5697

Ordinary Least Squares estimates predicting if an HYY survey experiment respondent voted for a hypothetical candidate of that shared the respondent's partisanship. First column replicates Fowler's main analysis focusing on two-party elections. Second and third columns examine hypothetical contests from the HYY survey experiment that featured two Democrat or two Republican candidates. Fourth and fifth columns study two-party elections but divide respondents who saw fewer than or more than nine candidate characteristics.

often than those who received fewer than nine items, again suggesting that more complex policy environments lead to less partisan voting. Surprising policy items’ impact on voting, however, also considerably lessens when voters are faced with more information about candidates, as would be the case in a real presidential election. The magnitude of the relationship between the presentation of surprising policy items and partisan voting drops by at least 23 percent ($\frac{(-0.291)-(-0.224)}{(-0.291)}$) when encumbering respondents with more than nine different candidate traits as compared to fewer than nine traits. Policy’s influence — more so than partisanship — appears to be affected by other information respondents are forced to evaluate within the survey experiment.

Non-Policy Candidate Characteristics

When interpreting results from the survey experiment, Fowler claims that “non-policy information, including the ages, genders, professions, and religions of the candidates, is less important” (Fowler, 2020, p. 168). This conclusion is largely based on interpretations of indicator variables that reflect the number of candidate traits a respondent saw. These counts treat a candidate’s age or religious activity the same as their favorite music genre or the car they drive. Building on Fowler’s observation that voters care about some issues more than others (e.g. abortion over health care), voters could care about other candidate traits more than others (e.g. income over military service). Campbell *et al.* (2011), for example, provide evidence that a candidate’s religion or religiosity can alter the strength of partisanship’s impact on vote choice, particularly when a candidate’s religious affiliation conflicts with that typically associated with the candidate’s political party (Campbell *et al.*, 2011, Table 1; see also Conover and Feldman, 1981), which is consistent with more sociological explanations of voting behavior that emphasize group memberships and cross pressures (Berelson *et al.*, 1954). Unfortunately, the above analyses do not consider if voters have different responses to different candidate traits or group memberships.

To fill this gap, I conduct a new analysis that examines the extent to which Democratic (Republican) voters support Democratic (Republican) candidates with different policy positions or traits. To provide refined tests of the policy voting hypothesis, I estimate the separate relationships between a candidate taking a more liberal position than his opponent’s position on abortion, health care, and gay marriage (measured 0 or 1). I also assess the influence of less policy-centric candidate traits. For characteristics measured as ordinal variables, I estimate the impact of a candidate’s trait relative to the other candidate, such as being richer, older, more educated, having more military service, or being more religiously active. For characteristics that

are categorical variables (e.g. race or candidate profession), I use individual indicator variables.¹⁹

To further test the intoxicated partisan hypothesis, my analyses also account for two respondent-level variables: strength of partisanship and ideological self-placement. Respondents who identified as a Democrat or Republican were asked “Would you say you are a strong Democrat/Republican or not a strong Democrat/Republican?” My analyses then include an indicator variable for if a respondent was a strong partisan. To account for the separate influence of ideology, analyses include a respondent’s self-reported liberalism or conservatism on a five-point scale.

I conduct separate analyses for self-identified Democrat and Republican respondents, as a Democratic respondent likely responds differently to a candidate who takes a more liberal position on abortion than a Republican respondent would. My dependent variable is whether a voter supported a candidate of his/her own party. I use weighted probit regressions, where survey weights account for respondents’ education. For clarity in presentation, I convert probit estimates to differences in predicted probabilities for the below discussion. Probit estimates are available in the Appendix.

My analyses again support the policy voting hypothesis that voters consider policy in their voting decisions. The first row of Table 5 indicates that if a

Table 5: Impact of policy, partisanship, and candidate traits on vote choice.

<i>Differences in predicted probability of partisan vote associated with:</i>	Respondent partisanship	
	Democrat	Republican
Relative candidate policy positions		
More liberal on abortion	+0.082* (0.012)	-0.081* (0.017)
More liberal on health care	+0.053* (0.014)	-0.136* (0.019)
More liberal on gay marriage	+0.095* (0.013)	-0.175* (0.019)
Respondent characteristics		
Strong partisan	+0.105* (0.008)	+0.040* (0.011)
Ideology (increase 1 unit more liberal on five-point scale)	+0.031* (0.004)	-0.024* (0.006)

(Continued)

¹⁹Fowler finds “[r]eceiving at least one other piece of policy information reduces partisan voting by more than 6 percentage points” (Fowler, 2020, p. 168). For Democratic voters, simply being exposed to candidates’ positions on abortion, health care, and gay marriage positions decreased the probability of party voting by 0.07, 0.06, and 0.06. Republican voters, however, did not appear to be impacted by simply receiving pieces of policy information. Differences in predicted probabilities in Table 5 reflect the difference between being exposed to a surprising policy position versus an unsurprising policy position when exposed to a policy position.

Table 5: (Continued)

<i>Differences in predicted probability of partisan vote associated with:</i>	Respondent partisanship	
	Democrat	Republican
Candidate Traits		
More educated	+0.066* (0.008)	+0.080* (0.011)
Older	-0.060* (0.011)	-0.071* (0.016)
Richer	-0.023 (0.012)	+0.000 (0.016)
More military service	+0.043* (0.013)	+0.030 (0.017)
More religious activity	+0.021 (0.012)	+0.100* (0.016)
Male	-0.012 (0.014)	+0.015* (0.018)
Race (baseline White)		
Asian American	-0.001 (0.017)	-0.026 (0.021)
Black	+0.001 (0.017)	-0.072* (0.022)
Hispanic	-0.024 (0.017)	-0.045* (0.021)
Religion (baseline none)		
Catholic	+0.004 (0.018)	+0.008 (0.023)
Evangelical Protestant	-0.005 (0.018)	+0.056* (0.022)
Mainline Protestant	+0.007 (0.018)	+0.020 (0.022)
Marital Status (baseline single)		
Married	+0.012 (0.014)	+0.044* (0.018)
Divorced	+0.014 (0.014)	-0.018 (0.019)
Prior elected office (baseline none)		
Governor	+0.040* (0.016)	-0.019 (0.022)
U.S. Senator	+0.042* (0.016)	-0.010 (0.022)
State Attorney General	+0.022 (0.016)	+0.001 (0.021)
Major contributor (baseline teachers unions)		
Auto Unions	-0.040* (0.017)	-0.021 (0.021)
Oil companies	-0.078* (0.017)	-0.020 (0.021)
Wall Street	-0.077* (0.017)	-0.015 (0.021)
Home State (baseline Ohio)		
Colorado	-0.024 (0.016)	-0.020 (0.021)
Massachusetts	-0.033 (0.016)	+0.000 (0.021)
Alabama	-0.027 (0.016)	-0.007 (0.021)
Profession (baseline farmer)		
Business owner	-0.004 (0.016)	+0.025 (0.021)
Firefighter	+0.014 (0.016)	+0.010 (0.022)
Lawyer	-0.010 (0.016)	+0.015 (0.022)

Differences in predicted probabilities associated with whether a candidate is relatively more liberal on abortion, health care, or gay marriage than opposing candidate or held different traits. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$

Democratic candidate took a more liberal position on abortion, the probability a Democratic respondent supports this candidate increases by 0.082, and if a Republican candidate takes a more liberal position on abortion, the probability a Republican respondent supports this candidate decreases by 0.081. Findings are similar for both health care and gay marriage, but Republican respondents appear to be more responsive to surprising policy positions. If a Republican candidate took a more liberal position on health care or gay marriage, statistical analyses predict the likelihood a Republican respondent would support this candidate falls by at least 0.136. The magnitude of these relationships found in the HHY survey experiment is larger than that found in observational studies of policy voting for similar issues, such as health care or abortion, in Congressional elections (Ansolabehere and Jones, 2010; Jacobson, 2013, 213; Nyhan *et al.*, 2012).

I additionally find evidence consistent with psychological or sociological explanations of voting behavior. A self-identified strong Democrat is 0.105 more likely to support a Democratic candidate than a self-identified weak Democrat. The comparable difference for Republicans is 0.040. These impacts are larger than those found for ideology. A Democratic respondent who identified as “very liberal” instead of “liberal” is approximately 0.031 more likely to support a Democratic candidate, and a Republican respondent who identified as “very conservative” instead of “conservative” was 0.024 more likely to support a Republican candidate.

Identity politics also shape voters’ decision-making. While the survey did not acquire information about voters’ own group memberships or policy views, voters of both parties prefer candidates who are relatively younger and more educated. Wealthy Democratic candidates are 0.023 less likely to receive Democratic respondents’ support (*t*-statistic of difference 1.92), and Republican respondents repeatedly provide evidence that candidates’ identities matter for their voting decisions. Republican respondents are 0.100 more likely to support Republican candidates who are more religiously active; 0.056 more likely to support candidates who identify as Evangelical Protestants (baseline category: no religious affiliation); 0.044 more likely to support married candidates (baseline category: single); and less likely to support African American or Hispanic candidates (baseline category: white). Democratic respondents meanwhile were more likely to support Democratic candidates who were previously governors or US senators but less likely to support candidates whose major campaign contributors were “Wall Street,” “Oil Companies,” and perhaps surprisingly auto unions (baseline category: Farmers).

I find less evidence that voters respond to a candidate’s profession, but this may be an artifact of unrealistic candidates in the survey experiment. Similar to the rarity of an election where a Democrat who was pro-life, anti-gay marriage, and believed the government should do less for health care competed against a pro-choice, pro-gay marriage Republican who thought the

government should do more for health care, two-thirds of hypothetical lawyers who had a high school degree faced an opponent who had a college degree within the hypothetical elections. All lawyers have high school degrees, but respondents noticed this lack of realism. When providing feedback on the survey, two different respondents wrote: “I was a little thrown off by some questions. Like it said, the candidate had only gone to high school but they their [sic] occupation is a lawyer” and “Very redundant, How could a candidate have a HS education, and be a Lawyer? Who came up with that one?”

Together the above findings provide evidence that candidates’ policy positions, voters’ partisanship, and candidate characteristics relate to vote choice. While informative, this survey experiment still potentially suffers from the “observational equivalence” that Fowler highlights (Fowler, 2020, Abstract). The found relationships between a voter’s strength of partisanship and vote choice could support the partisan intoxication hypothesis, but here it is important to keep in mind Fiorina’s assertion that “the “issues” are *in* party identification” (Fiorina, 1981, p. 200). Similarly, the relationships found between surprising policy positions and vote choice support the policy voting hypothesis, but it is again important to consider that policy views on abortion, health care, or gay marriage may be shaped by one’s partisanship or social identity. So what is the answer? What drives vote choice? Policy or partisan intoxication? The answer is likely neither but instead voting decisions take some from Column A and some from Column B.

Bounds on Intoxicated and Policy Voting

Fowler nicely summarizes the likely proportion of voters in Columns A and B by reporting the average number of elections where respondents supported their party by how many policy items respondents received in the survey experiment. “Voters receiving no policy information support their party 79.9 percent of the time . . . if they receive 3 pieces of policy information that diverge from expectation, partisan voting drops to 48.8 percent” (Fowler, 2020, p. 170; see also Fowler, Table 4). From these estimates, Fowler classifies voters as policy voters, partisan voters, and random voters using a set of system of equations and states “if we crudely assume that all survey respondents are 1 of these 3 types, we can conclude that 29 percent are intoxicated partisans and 31 percent are policy voters” (Fowler, 2020, p. 171) and later suggests that these percentages reflect the respective upper and lower bound on the shares of intoxicated partisans and policy voters in the sample (Fowler, 2020, p. 171).

Returning to Fowler’s and Peterson’s initial motivation to “measure partisan voting and test whether it decreases as we increase the number of additional characteristics revealed” (Fowler, 2020, p. 165), I investigate how sensitive the above bound estimates are to the amount of information voters face. Since Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto randomly assigned respondents

to receive 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13, or 18 additional pieces of information, there should theoretically be the same number of intoxicated partisans and policy voters within each subset of respondents who received different amounts of information. The estimated bounds then should not change if a particular subset is omitted from the analyses.

To investigate whether the data support this prediction, I recalculate the rates of partisan voting across the number of policy items revealed and the number of surprising policy items but exclude respondents who saw 18 different items, leaving only respondents who saw 13 items or fewer. Similar to the analysis that considers all respondents, I find that voters who received no policy information vote with their party 79.9 percent of the time, and voters who received three pieces of policy information that conform to expectations voted with their party 76.6 percent of the time. Respondents who saw 13 or fewer total items that included 3 pieces of surprising policy information, however, vote with their party 53.8 percent of the time, as compared to 48.8 percent of the time when considering all respondents. Applying these new figures to Fowler's systems of equations suggests that 34 percent of voters are intoxicated partisans and 26 percent are policy voters. Such findings arguably provide stronger evidence for the partisan intoxication hypothesis, but if one focuses on respondents who saw four items or fewer (the largest subset who never saw more than two policy items), Fowler's system of equations would predict that 40 percent of voters are policy voters and 21 percent are intoxicated partisans, which would be stronger evidence for the policy voting hypothesis.

If the amount of information presented to a respondent greatly changes estimates, it raises questions regarding whether analyses of HHY survey experiment can accurately place an upper bound on the number of intoxicated partisans or lower bound on the number of policy voters. Fowler acknowledges that the survey experiment is artificial and the model analyzed above is "highly unrealistic" (Fowler, 2020, p. 171).²⁰ In more realistic elections, campaigns can bring varying levels of information to voters, which can reinforce partisan identification, particularly when filtered through the perceptual screen. Campaigns can also highlight surprising policy positions to voters, resulting in more policy voting (Gelman and King, 1993; Sides and Vavreck, 2013, chap. 7). My survey experiment findings concerning reduced policy voting in complex information environments along with Peterson's and Fowler's survey experiment findings concerning reduced partisan voting in complex information environments indicate that it is not enough for political scientists to account

²⁰Fowler suggests a more realistic model would replace Equation (2) with $i + pX + \frac{r}{2} = 0.488$ "where X is some number between 0 and 1 reflecting the share of policy voters that nonetheless vote with their party even in light of 3 pieces of surprising policy information" (Fowler, 2020, p. 171). It, however, is unclear how successfully estimates from the HHY survey experiment can be applied to this model. For example, when X is 0.5, the predicted upper bound on the percentage of intoxicated voters is -2.4 .

for partisanship and policy positions to explain vote choice, but it is also important to consider the amount of information voters are asked to process when making voting decisions.

Let’s Avoid “Blind” “Intoxication”

“Partisan Intoxication or Policy Voting?” adds evidence that voters’ policy views matter for election outcomes, provides impressive scrutiny of prior work, and offers an important challenge to voter behavior scholars to identify measures of partisanship independent of preferences. Fowler makes these arguments quite forcefully, but I fear some individuals will walk away from Fowler’s manuscript thinking there is “no compelling evidence” that partisanship matters (Fowler, 2020, Abstract), when the point I believe Fowler is trying to make is that the influence of partisan attachment is overstated.

Forceful arguments are more likely to garner attention but can paint with too broad of a brush or even be off putting. Fowler, for instance, is right that “nobody can seriously defend the starkest version of the partisan intoxication hypothesis” (Fowler, 2020, p. 172), but I am unaware of many — if any — political scientists who would provide a defense for the starkest version. For instance when comparing urban workers’ and farmers’ voting behavior, the authors of *The American Voter* stated “Where such loyalties to a party are lacking, as they tend to be among farmers . . . The farmer is psychologically free to march to the polls and ‘vote the rascals out’” (Campbell *et al.*, 1960, p. 430). Over 40 years later, the authors of *The American Voter Revisited* similarly stated: “Yet no matter how strong the attachments, few Americans are utterly blinded by their partisanship” (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2008, p. 150). More recently, many of the political scientists whose research Fowler critiques provide evidence that policy relevant variables, such as the economy and incumbents’ issue positions, matter for election outcomes (Bartels, 2016b; Healy and Lenz, 2014; Nyhan *et al.*, 2012). Some political scientists may emphasize the limitations of the voter and democracy more than others, but my impression is that none would say partisanship dictates all voting, as I would be hard pressed to find someone who thought all voters were perfectly informed “robotic policy voters.”

Stark language, such as “arbitrary” and “no compelling evidence,” helps convey a point but can also risk repelling readers. Many readers will judge a book by its cover, which can lead many to not read or absorb the valuable points a book makes. With respect to the current manuscript, I question why the title is “Partisan Intoxication or Policy Voting?” instead of “Partisan Voting or Policy Voting?” And why do phrases, such as “blindly support,” “don’t care,” and “largely unrelated” describe “partisan intoxication” as compared to more careful wording such as “likely support,” “sometimes take,” or “correlated” to describe “policy voting” (Fowler, 2020, Table 1). The former set of phrases

carry punch, but I hope such phrasings do not deter a broader readership to be receptive to the manuscript's valuable contributions.

I want to strongly emphasize that Fowler is not the first to use punchy language to make a point nor the first to introduce "blinding" verbiage. *Both* sides of the "partisan intoxication or policy voting" debate at times sacrifice nuance for colorful language. Over 50 years ago Converse stated the "mass public contains significant portions of people who . . . offer meaningless opinions" (Converse, 2006, p. 49), and as noted by (Fowler, 2020, p. 162), Achen and Bartels (2016) "cleverly" title book chapters with phrases such as "It Feels like We're Thinking" or "Blind Retrospection." Blind retrospection is a phrase I have long disliked. To explain, Bartels was one of my dissertation advisors, and we often debated the term "blind retrospection," as I thought that this blunt portrayal of Achen and Bartels' argument would lead individuals to pass over more nuanced points, similar to the fear I have with Fowler's phrase: "partisan intoxication." Recognizing this critique in good humor, Bartels gave me a copy of *Democracy for Realists* with a handwritten note in the front cover: "Yes, 'blind retrospection' appears 76 times in the index, but not on the cover, so your good advice had some effect" (Bartels, 2016a, personal correspondence, emphasis in the original).

I hope that my response here has some effect to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relative influence of partisan and policy voting and to discourage political scientists from becoming tribal ourselves. We can learn from different tribes. Drawing upon another advisor–student pair, neither Key (1966) nor his student David Mayhew (1974) thought that all "voters are not fools" or all Members of Congress are "single-minded seekers of reelection." Mayhew recognized Members of Congress had other goals, but we would know a lot less about Congress if the multiple goals' tribe was blind to Mayhew's arguments (e.g. Fenno, 1973). Individuals' competing goals and the interrelatedness of our independent variables is one reason social science is particularly challenging. Policy and partisanship are a prime example of this. As put by Fowler, "policy voting and partisan intoxication are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive explanations" of voter behavior (Fowler, 2020, p. 144), which is an important point to not be blind to nor forget.

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