



The Scope of the Partisan ‘Perceptual Screen’

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Abstract

While a wealth of literature documents the existence of a partisan ‘perceptual screen’ and discusses individual-level moderators, less attention is devoted to identifying broader political conditions that accentuate or attenuate partisan differences. This article forwards the understanding of partisan motivated reasoning by systematically varying political contexts in a nationally representative survey experiment focused on an increasingly salient issue: vote miscounting. In particular, the authors examine how partisan differences are moderated by situations in which a person’s preferred party has won or lost an election. Additionally, they find that nonpartisan cues play as significant a role as partisan cues in shaping assessments of election counting. Finally, the study explores whether Independents have a ‘screen’ of their own, and if partisan differences extend to explanations of vote miscounting.

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Identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his [sic] partisan orientation. – Campbell et al. (1960, 133)

Partisanship has long been known to play a central role in shaping how people respond to information and form political decisions. Since Campbell et al. (1960), scholars have accumulated a wealth of evidence documenting differences across partisan groups. Democrats and Republicans consistently diverge in their policy preferences (Cohen 2003; Lodge and Taber 2005), reports of objective economic indicators (Bartels 2002), evaluations of political officials (Bartels 2002; Goren 2002; Lebo and Cassino 2007), and interpretations of politically-relevant factual information (Gaines et al. 2007).

Our theoretical understanding of partisan differences has been enriched by analyses of partisan motivated reasoning (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Gaines et al. 2007; Petersen et al. 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Taber and Lodge 2006). These studies suggest that partisans are motivated to confirm positive information about their party and disconfirm information that casts their party in an unfavorable light (Taber and Lodge 2006). While research on motivated reasoning has enhanced our understanding of how partisanship shapes information processing, public opinion, and political behavior, it has largely overlooked the conditions that moderate these partisan differences. Without question, studies incorporate individual-level moderators, such as political sophistication (Taber and Lodge 2006), strength of prior attitudes (Taber, Cann, and Kucsova 2009), and partisan ambivalence (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). However, this literature gives little attention to the way in which political contexts condition partisan differences.

This article asks how political environments accentuate or attenuate partisan differences by examining a context shown to impact a number of political attitudes: winning or losing an election (Anderson et al. 2005; Craig et al. 2006). Drawing on prospect theory, we first hypothesize that partisan motivated reasoning may be stronger for winners (who have something to lose) than losers (who have something to gain). Second, we explore conditions in which a neutral, nonpartisan group weighs in on an election controversy. Finally, in an attempt to grasp the scope of the ‘perceptual screen,’ we examine whether Independents reveal a bias of their own, and whether partisan differences extend to explanations of election misconduct.

Using a carefully designed experiment with a nationally representative sample, we find that partisans are significantly more likely to believe that votes were miscounted if their party lost the election and stands to benefit from a recount than if the identity of the winner is unknown or if their party was victorious. Yet, loss aversion appears to differ among partisans: while Democrats more often exhibit “winners’ biases” than Republicans do not. We also find that the opinions of neutral, third-party groups significantly influence appraisals of miscounting, but by no means eliminate partisan differences. Although we do not find that Independents exhibit an “anti-party” bias, they do report high levels of skepticism. Beyond this, we find systematic partisan differences in explanations of election misconduct; Republicans think problems stem from voter fraud, while Democrats more often fault vote suppression, and use of these rationales is influenced by political context.

After reviewing research on partisan motivated reasoning, we clarify definitional and measurement issues surrounding partisan differences and bias. We then present hypotheses about the conditions under which partisan cues should be most pronounced. Next, we discuss research focused on the effects of winning and losing elections, and why this scenario presents an

appropriate and important context to fill gaps in the literature on partisan differences. After describing our research design we test the predictions using a survey experiment. Finally, we present our results and discuss implications.

The Perceptual Screen

Building on Campbell et al. (1960), an extensive body of research has identified numerous occasions in which partisans respond to political information in distinct, and potentially “biased,” ways (see, e.g. Bartels 2002).¹ Most research on partisan differences views partisans as motivated reasoners (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Gaines et al. 2007; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006). They develop attachments toward political objects and actors, prompting *directional*, partisan motivations that color information processing (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Gaines et al. 2007; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012; Lebo and Cassino 2007; Taber and Lodge 2006).² Partisans seek out explanations that confirm their prior beliefs, while arguing against incongruent information. These “confirmation” and “disconfirmation biases” can lead partisan groups to interpret the same information in predictably distinct – and often, divergent – ways (Druckman,

¹ The term “partisan bias” is widely employed (Bartels 2002; Goren 2002; Goren et al. 2009; Jerit and Barabas 2012), but we recognize the difficulties of attributing partisan differences to bias (Bullock 2009; Gerber and Green 1999; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). For the sake of clarity, we simply refer to “partisan differences.”

² A directional motivation is one in which an individual’s goal is to reach a desired conclusion, such as an opinion consistent with prior beliefs (Kunda 1990; Taber and Lodge 2006). Individuals are also motivated to make *accurate* assessments (Kunda 1990), yet less attention is devoted to identifying the conditions that stimulate these motivations (Druckman 2012).

Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010; Taber, Cann, and Kucsova 2009; Taber and Lodge 2006). As noted above, previous research has found that partisan differences are heightened among individuals who are politically sophisticated (Taber and Lodge 2006), hold strong prior attitudes (Taber, Cann, and Kucsova 2009), or have little partisan ambivalence (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

Motivated reasoning has been employed in studies examining how partisan attachments and prior attitudes shape information processing in diverse settings, including: assessments of presidents and political candidates (Goren 2002; Lebo and Cassino 2007; Meffert et al. 2006; Redlawsk 2002); partisan issue framing (Slothuus and de Vreese 2010); evaluations of public policies (Taber, Cann, and Kucsova 2009; Taber and Lodge 2006); and ballot counting (Kopko et al. 2011). Using panel data, Gaines et al. (2007) demonstrate that although most respondents hold similar, fairly accurate beliefs about facts concerning the Iraq war, respondents' interpretations of these facts – and thus political opinions – diverge along partisan lines. An analysis of a wide-range of political topics over two decades confirms a selective pattern of learning: partisans retain information that confirms their prior beliefs and forget that which challenges their partisan positions (Jerit and Barabas 2012).

While partisan motivated reasoning has profoundly impacted our understanding of information processing, the literature has its limitations. First, much research has concentrated on documenting the existence of differences between partisan responses to political information, but less attention is given to identifying the political conditions that strengthen or moderate these differences.³ In particular, few studies examine how broader political contexts moderate partisan

³ There are exceptions. Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson (2010) demonstrate a “tipping point” at which motivated reasoners exposed to information inconsistent with priors begin to accurately

differences. Second, the extant literature often implicitly assumes that partisans from both parties engage equally in the practice of buttressing their partisan leanings. In reality, a partisan's likelihood of confirming or disconfirming evidence may depend on their party's incumbency status, electoral competitiveness, the issue at hand, or a number of other factors.

Third, much of the research that looks for partisan differences only examines the effects of *partisan* cues and information (Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Rahn 1993). This practice misses a crucial element of political debate that has the potential to mitigate differences: neutral, third-party cues. Nonpartisan groups often weigh in on political debates with objective information that could potentially provide credible challenges to party cues, stimulate accuracy motivations, and mitigate partisan differences. Fourth, previous research often limits evidence of partisan differences to a simple evaluation or assessment. By including an analysis that examines how partisans elaborate on opinions, this study assesses the scope of partisan cues. Finally, there has been scant attention paid to understanding how Independents respond to partisan cues. Yet, these individuals – who make up a considerable segment of the eligible voter population – are crucial for understanding how parties shape opinion formation.

A Note on Partisan Differences

Despite the ever-increasing documentation of partisan differences, the source of such divergence is not as straightforward as it may initially appear. The term “bias” is inherently ambiguous and is widely employed using different conceptualizations. Bartels (2002) cites the lack of convergence *between* partisan groups as evidence that partisans are not employing a Bayesian learning model to form political evaluations (as suggested by Gerber and Green [1998, update evaluations. Druckman (2012) discusses the role of accuracy motivations, and Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus (2013) analyze the moderating effects of polarization.

1999]). Others highlight the difficulty of disentangling whether partisan differences are attributable to biases in information processing, or rational updating consistent with prior beliefs (Bullock 2009; Gerber and Green 1998, 1999; Gerber and Huber 2010). In particular, if Democrats and Republicans differ in the weights they assign prior beliefs and new information, partisan differences may not necessitate bias (Bullock 2009).⁴

In addition, implicit in the extant literature is the notion that partisan groups will reinforce their leanings equally. Because partisan “biases” are typically measured as differences in Democratic and Republican evaluations (or changes in evaluations), it can be impossible to untangle which party’s identifiers are most affected by partisan cues. This is especially important when one is trying to identify the conditions that prompt or inhibit partisan responses. In what follows, we focus on how attitudes differ when a respondent’s party won or lost an election. Because we do not expect the effect of partisan cues to be equal in magnitude among winners and losers, we employ a baseline measure of partisans’ beliefs when the outcome of the election is unknown, and focus primarily on *within-party differences*, rather than *between-party differences*, in responses to partisan and nonpartisan stimuli.⁵

⁴ Like Bartels (2002), Gaines et al. (2007) present a challenge to Gerber and Green’s (1999) discussion of limited evidence of perceptual biases. Kim, Taber, and Lodge (2010) directly compare computational models built on motivated reasoning and Bayesian learning, and find that the former provides a more consistent rationale for persistence and polarization of attitudes.

⁵ We highlight this choice of measurement because its advantages are often overlooked, but this is by no means the first study to compare differences within parties (see, e.g., Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). By measuring intraparty differences, we can identify the contexts in which partisans differ from one another, and explain how these differences evolve.

Partisan Differences in the Context of Winning, Losing, and Election Miscounting

The context of winning and losing elections provides an excellent setting to examine partisan differences with respect to perceptions of election miscounting for several reasons. First, observational research has clearly demonstrated that winners and losers differ significantly from one another in their opinions on a wide range of issues (Anderson et al. 2005; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson and LoTempio 2002; Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Blais and Gelineau 2007; Craig et al. 2006; Nadeau and Blais 1993). Not surprisingly, partisans of the winning party give higher post-election evaluations of political leaders, policies, and economic conditions (Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Ginsberg and Weissberge 1978). But winning also appears to increase feelings of internal and external efficacy (Anderson et al. 2005; Clarke and Acock 1989), satisfaction with democracy and regime type (Anderson et al. 2005; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Blais and Gelineau 2007; Ginsberg and Weissberg 1978), and political trust (Anderson et al. 2005; Anderson and LoTempio 2002), as well as perceptions of electoral fairness and protest potential (Anderson et al. 2005). Although much of this research is comparative, similar patterns exist in the U.S. as well (Craig et al. 2006, Joslyn and Cigler 2001).

However, one thing that we cannot determine by focusing on observational data is *who* is driving these differences. Are winners overconfident in election validity? Or do discrepancies reflect the fact that partisans are sore losers? While the literature finds a clear association between losing elections and dissatisfaction with democracy, research to date has relied almost exclusively on observational studies that highlight between-party variation and focus on voting behavior rather than partisanship. This study seeks to strengthen our understanding of the perceptual screen while isolating causality through a comparison of partisans' reactions to winning and losing in an experimental context.

Second, perceptions of election misconduct are widespread, and the issue is becoming increasingly salient (and partisan) as state legislatures debate the need for, and legitimacy of, voter identification requirements (Bronner 2012).⁶ Figure 1 displays the percent of Democrats and Republicans, surveyed between 1996 and 2012, who thought that the presidential election was unfair. In every survey, we see drastic differences between partisans of the losing party (who are more likely to think the election was unfair) and partisans of the winning party (who are generally fairly confident in the results).⁷ Not surprisingly, these differences were greatest in 2000, when Democrats were in some cases four times as likely to perceive electoral unfairness.⁸

{Insert Figure 1 about here}

A third reason we examine this issue is that manipulating election outcomes – at least at the congressional level – provides a feasible way to cue partisan identities without introducing too many confounding issues (e.g., changes in unemployment) which could be interpreted

⁶ According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, nine states passed laws requiring voter photo identification since 2005. For research on election misconduct, see the symposium on voter identification requirements in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 42(1) (2009).

⁷ In every survey, partisan winners are significantly more likely than losers to think the election was fair ($p < 0.01$ one-tailed test). The same pattern emerges when we compare voter behavior.

⁸ We found no relevant surveys from 2008. Unfortunately, only the 2012 ANES asked respondents specifically about vote counting. For the remaining elections, we rely on perceptions of a closely related issue: election fairness. Attitudes towards fairness may reflect opinions about a range of issues other than ballot counting, including campaign finance, media attention, and the candidates' conduct during campaigns. See Appendix A for question wording.

differently among Democrats and Republicans. Our study asks if the differences observed in Figure 1 extend to the congressional context.⁹

Partisan Differences: Winners' and Losers' Biases

Under what conditions are people more likely to give “partisan” responses when evaluating ballot counting? Research on partisan motivated reasoning provides a framework for understanding perceptions of electoral fairness. People are motivated to view their preferred party in a favorable light. As individuals cling to and confirm positive information about their party and counter-argue that which contradicts this positive assessment, we might expect partisans to validate their party’s victories and discount information that could jeopardize its success. We expect the discrepancies between Democrats and Republicans (shown in Figure 1) reflect this motivated reasoning: partisan winners are likely to view elections they won as fair and legitimate (confirmation bias) and resist or counter-argue accusations of election misconduct (disconfirmation bias). Losers may not reject actual victories, but they could be more likely than winners to interpret the election as unfair and perceive vote miscounting. In contrast, partisans who are unaware of the election results do not possess the information necessary to exercise confirmation or disconfirmation biases. Their attitudes in response to an *unpartisan* cue (where the election winner is unknown) reflect a general sense of election conduct.¹⁰ Thus, to test the

⁹ This is not the first experiment to assess partisan differences in response to election outcomes. Notably, Kopko et al. (2011) find that when partisans have a stake in election outcomes, they are more likely to reject a ballot as “invalid” if it favors their opponent’s party instead of their own.

¹⁰ Although unpartisan cues are less likely to stimulate partisan motivations, past experiences and future expectations may influence perceptions of miscounting, and this could differ by party.

This is another reason we focus on within-party comparisons.

effects of election outcomes, we compare within-party reactions to partisan and unpartisan cues. As described below, we expect to observe what we call winners' and losers' biases.

H1a: Partisans exhibit a winners' bias. That is, partisans are less likely to think there is vote miscounting if their party won the election than if they do not know which party won or lost.

H1b: Partisans exhibit a losers' bias. That is, partisans are more likely to think there is vote miscounting if their party lost the election than if they do not know which party won or lost.

Gains versus Losses: Asymmetric Responses?

While we expect election outcomes to shape partisans' opinions about vote miscounting both when their preferred party won and lost, the magnitude of such winners' and losers' biases may differ. Partisans from the winning party face a loss if they believe votes were miscounted, whereas partisans from the losing party stand to gain. Experimental research stemming from prospect theory has found that most individuals tend to be loss averse. Often, the disutility associated with losing something outweighs the utility from gaining that same thing (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Kahneman 2011). Our experimental context may reveal an "endowment effect" (Kahneman 2011, Thaler 2008) if giving up an electoral victory is more painful than gaining a win is enjoyable. Partisans of the winning party may place greater weight and emotional attachment on the prospect of losing the election if votes were miscounted than partisans of the party that lost and is filing the lawsuit.

H1c: Winners' biases are greater in magnitude than losers' biases.

Previous research examines the role of prospect theory in a variety of political contexts, including American foreign policy (McDermott 1998), economic reforms (Weyland 1996), and the framing effects of political, social, and economic issues (Druckman 2004). To our knowledge, this is the first study to apply it to perceptions of election outcomes. Finding that

individuals respond in ways that are consistent with prospect theory would have important implications for understanding the effect of partisanship more broadly. For example, individuals may be more likely to mobilize in opposition, than in support, of a recount. And, partisans of the incumbent party may be more outraged when they lose than partisans of victorious challengers. Moreover, we may find that winners feel a greater sense of entitlement that extends beyond current election results – for example, to policy decisions and future electoral contests.

Presence of Nonpartisan Cues

Political events are rarely reported from an exclusively partisan source. One party's arguments are often disputed by the opposition or assessed by neutral, third-party groups. While previous research has focused on the scope of partisan and elite cues (Arceneaux 2008; Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Nicholson 2011; Rahn 1993), as well as the effects of counterframing by opposing parties (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013), we consider the degree to which arguments presented by a *nonpartisan* source influence opinions.¹¹ If information from partisan sources stimulates divergence, might nonpartisan messages promote convergence? This is an important question that is seldom examined in current research.¹²

We suspect that objective information presented by a nonpartisan source will stimulate accuracy motivations. When information from a nonpartisan source conflicts with partisan cues, the latter may be perceived as less reliable or credible, and individuals may look beyond the party to more even-handedly evaluate the issue and form an accurate opinion. Specifically, we hypothesize that partisans should react in ways that are less consistent with their partisanship if

¹¹ See Chong and Druckman (2010, 2013) for a discussion of counter-framing.

¹² In one of the few studies on the subject, Berinsky (2012) finds that statements by nonpartisan groups can help reduce uncertainty and correct inaccurate rumors.

they are exposed to nonpartisan counterarguments. In many ways, this parallels research on different mechanisms through which misinformation can be “corrected” (Kuklinski et al. 2003; Lewandowsky et al. 2012). Because the source of information is nonpartisan, it is less likely to be resisted due to a disconfirmation bias, and we expect nonpartisan counterarguments to be more powerful than counterarguments from the opposition (although we do not test this here). Similarly, people should react in ways that are more consistent with their partisanship if they are exposed to nonpartisan confirming arguments.

In our study, a subset of respondents is told that a nonpartisan advisory commission investigated the election and found no evidence of misconduct. We expect identifiers in this condition to be triggered by accuracy motivations and report lower levels of election miscounting, regardless of whether their party won or lost. Yet, we also expect partisan differences to persist. For losers this new, nonpartisan information will be contradictory, but for winners it will be confirmatory; thus, moving both groups in the same direction. Moreover, partisan interpretations, not beliefs about facts, often drive opinions (Gaines et al. 2007).

H2: Partisans from both parties will be less likely to think votes were miscounted if a nonpartisan cue reports no misconduct, but partisan differences will not be eliminated.

The Effects of Partisan Cues on Independents

Somewhat surprisingly, there is a critical segment of the American public that is often ignored in studies of partisan motivated reasoning and bias: Independents.¹³ Many studies argue that Independents lack partisan motivations, and intentionally exclude this group from empirical analyses altogether (Bullock 2011; Cohen 2003; Druckman et al. 2012; Levendusky 2010;

¹³ Certainly, Independents have been included in analyses of motivated reasoning more broadly, but there are few studies of *partisan* motivated reasoning that address this population.

Nicholson 2011). Without partisan motivation, Independents should neither respond positively or negatively to, nor confirm or disconfirm, partisan cues. In one of the few studies that directly examines Independents, Lebo and Cassino (2007) echo this sentiment, stating: “in the absence of partisan bias, we would expect to see Independents engage in little motivated reasoning and respond to economic news as rational Bayesian updaters regardless of who is president” (738).¹⁴

While this reasoning is intuitive, an alternative argument can be made. Nonpartisans may hold an attachment or allegiance to their identities as Independents (Klar 2013). If an Independent label acts like a partisan identity, these individuals may be motivated to confirm opinions held by fellow Independents and disconfirm arguments from political parties, revealing an “anti-party” motivation and skepticism of partisan cues. That is, Independents may have their own perceptual screen. These two arguments prompt distinct predictions.

H3a: Independents are equally likely to think there is vote miscounting when partisan cues are present as when they are absent – that is, party cues have no effect.

*H3b: Independents are less likely to think there is vote miscounting when a partisan cue is present than when there is no partisan cue.*¹⁵

Of course, many self-identified Independents actually hold partisan attachments. As Magleby, Nelson, and Westlye (2011) argue, the “myth” that a plurality of voters are undecided,

¹⁴ The authors only find partial support “for the hypothesis that Independents update their approval more rationally than do Democrats or Republicans” (2007, 738). This conclusion is based on their finding that Independents reward administrations from both parties for decreases in unemployment, but not inflation—where Independents are more in line with Democrats.

¹⁵ Independents may also be more likely to think ballots are miscounted if they learn that an *Independent* candidate alleged vote miscounting. We do not test this in the current analysis.

free of partisan attachments, and can be swayed during campaigns overlooks the fact that “pure” Independents make up a small segment of the population. Drawing on ANES data, these authors find that self-identifying Independents, not reporting a “leaning” toward either the Democrats or Republicans, have constituted no more than 15 percent of the electorate at any point from 1952 through 2008.¹⁶ Leaners tend to act like partisans: they are as interested in politics, loyal at the voting booth, and display similar education rates. In contrast, pure Independents are typically less educated than leaners or self-identified partisans, and they are less likely to turn out at the polls. They also display few, if any, partisan attachments – giving neither favorable nor unfavorable ratings to parties, and switching their votes from one election to another.¹⁷

Thus, to test hypotheses 3a and 3b, our analysis focuses exclusively on individuals who self-identify as Independents and do not lean toward one party or another. We oversample this group so that they constitute one-third of the respondent population (307 individuals). To our knowledge this is one of the only survey experiments to rely on such a large, nationally representative, sample of individuals who report no partisan inclinations.

Explaining Election Misconduct

We also explore whether partisan differences extend to explanations of election conduct. A number of studies demonstrate that perceptions of misconduct and voter identification requirements are increasingly divided along partisan lines (Ansolabehere 2009; Ansolabehere and Persily 2008; Fund 2004; Kimball, Kropf and Battles 2006; Sobel 2009). One of the most notable divisions concerns whether people perceive misconduct in terms of voter “fraud” or

¹⁶ Pure Independents constituted 11 percent of eligible, and eight percent of actual, 2008 voters.

¹⁷ Leaners typically display less confidence in political parties, and turn out at slightly lower rates, than “weak” or “strong” partisans (Magleby, Nelson, and Westlye 2011).

“suppression.” Fraud typically pertains to individual-level actions, such as noncitizens voting or legal voters casting more than one ballot. Suppression is more often at the system-level, and it includes barriers to legal voting, such as decreasing access to early voting, and discouraging or turning away legal voters at the polls.

We expect partisans to generally employ the rationale used by their party’s elite. As Sobel (2009) states, “Republicans tend to fear widespread voter fraud, while Democrats fear voter suppression” (449).¹⁸ However, we are also curious as to whether different experimental conditions – specifically, being a partisan winner or loser – shape attitudes. In particular, might partisan cues about one issue may trigger partisan responses about related, but separate, issues? To examine this issue, we define “fraud” and “suppression” in our survey experiment, and ask respondents which possibility is most likely.

Experimental Design

To test these research questions and hypotheses, we executed an experiment with a nationally representative sample of the U.S. adult population between April 24 and May 6 of 2009. In total, 928 participants from the Knowledge Networks database completed the study.¹⁹ Participants are asked a standard set of questions every year, including several related to party identification.²⁰ The standard two-part partisanship question generates a seven-point scale that

¹⁸ See also Ansolabehere and Persily (2008).

¹⁹GfK Knowledge Networks samples over 50,000 individuals using internet-based surveys. Information on recruitment and sampling can be found at www.knowledgenetworks.com. Data was acquired using Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (NSF Grant 0094964).

²⁰ Because these questions are asked at a different time from the survey experiment, partisanship should only be primed by the news stories described below.

ranges from “strong Democrat” to “strong Republican.” We only examine respondents who identified as Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, and we initially exclude leaners from the analysis. In total, there are 184 Democrats, 203 Republicans, and 307 Independents.²¹

Within each of these groups, participants were randomly assigned to one of five experimental conditions. In each condition, subjects were shown a fictitious excerpt (presented as real) from an article by the Associated Press. The excerpt discussed a lawsuit filed in response to the November 2008 congressional election in Ohio’s 20th district.²² Because the hypothetical election concerns an Ohio congressional district, we only sampled individuals who do not live in Ohio.²³ Details about the lawsuit – including the filer’s identity and whether or not a nonpartisan

²¹ We sampled equally across Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Because we exclude partisan leaners, our population for either party is smaller than that for nonpartisans. See Appendix B for replications of all of the analyses with leaners treated as partisans.

²² Individuals from other states are unlikely to know the results of Ohio congressional elections, and opinions on party success should be rather uncertain since the state is fairly evenly divided. (Still, we separate the analysis by party in case Democrats and Republicans have varying prior beliefs.) Following the 2008 election, Ohio sent 11 Republicans and seven Democrats to the U.S. House of Representatives. In 2008, Ohio had 18 seats; the 20th district we reference is fictitious.

²³ Aside from excluding Ohioans and sampling equally from both parties and Independents, individuals were drawn randomly from the Knowledge Networks nationally representative sample. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 94. Fifty two percent were female. Seventy-five percent self identified as white, ten percent as Hispanic, eight percent as African American, and six percent as mixed race or other. Ten percent have less than a high school education, 37 percent completed high school and did not attend college, 27 percent attended –but had not

advisory commission investigated the charges – varied across the five (randomly assigned) treatment groups listed in Table 1. Conditions 1 and 2 inform the respondent that a lawsuit was filed by Democrats or Republicans, respectively. Conditions 3 and 4 replicate conditions 1 and 2, and add sentence stating that a nonpartisan advisory commission found no evidence of misconduct. Condition 5 is similar to conditions 1 and 2 (i.e. no advisory commission is mentioned), except instead of identifying which party lost the election and filed the lawsuit, the condition simply states that “A group filed a lawsuit.”

{Insert Table 1 about here}

Immediately following the excerpt, respondents were asked:

How likely do you think it was that thousands of votes were not counted due to technical problems with the voting machines used in Ohio’s 20th district?

Respondents were given five possible answers to choose from:²⁴

Very likely that thousands of votes were not counted
Likely that thousands of votes were not counted
Somewhat likely that thousands of votes were not counted
Unlikely that thousands of votes were not counted
Very unlikely that thousands of votes were not counted

To gauge reactions to suppression and fraud, participants were then presented with this prompt:

There are various types of election misconduct. Vote suppression occurs when people who are legally allowed to vote are turned away at the polls. Voter fraud occurs when people who are not legally allowed to vote are able to vote at the polls. What type of election misconduct do you think was most likely to have occurred?

completed – college, and 27 percent completed college. The median income was between \$50,000 and \$59,000 a year, and it ranged from less than \$5,000 to over \$175,000. Respondents come from every state, except Ohio, as well as the District of Columbia.

²⁴ The answers were randomized between this ordering and the reverse ordering.

The three possible answers included “vote suppression,” “voter fraud,” and “another type of election misconduct that is neither vote suppression nor voter fraud.” A full description of the survey is available at <web address to be inserted in final version>.²⁵

Results

Of the 913 respondents who answered the question, “How likely do you think it was that thousands of votes were not counted due to technical problems with the voting machines used in Ohio’s 20th district,” 564 – or 61 percent – reported that a miscount was “very likely,” “likely,” or “somewhat likely.” For ease of presentation, and because all of these responses indicate a similar position, we combine these three responses into a single group indicating that votes were miscounted, and the “unlikely” and “very unlikely” responses into a group indicating that votes were counted correctly. (Similar results to those shown below are obtained when we measure miscounting as a five-point continuous variable. See Appendix C for a full replication.)

Winners’ and Losers’ Biases: Asymmetric Responses?

To test *H1a* and *H1b*, Table 2 displays responses for partisans presented with Conditions 1, 2, and 5. The percent of respondents who thought miscounting was likely is reported for electoral losers (i.e. those respondents whose party lost the election and filed the lawsuit), individuals who are not informed as to which party won or lost, and electoral winners.

{Insert Table 2 about here}

Consistent with expectations, partisans are much more likely to believe that thousands of votes were miscounted when their party lost the election and filed a lawsuit than when either the opposing party lost and filed the suit (a difference of 32 percentage points) or no party was mentioned (a difference of 14 points). The results provide strong support for both a winners’ and

²⁵ The order of voter fraud and vote suppression was randomized in the question and answer.

losers' bias; each is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The findings align with previous studies of motivated reasoning: partisans tend to confirm information that benefits their party and resist that which challenges their preferences.²⁶

To investigate whether these effects are equal for partisans from each party, Figure 2 separates the analysis by Democrats and Republicans. As the results reveal, Democrats and Republicans may not see eye to eye for reasons beyond perceptual bias. In each condition, Democrats are more likely to think votes were miscounted than Republicans. And while winners' biases exist for partisans from both parties, losers' biases are only significant for Republicans. Knowing their own party lost increases the share of Democrats who think the election was miscounted from 71 to 81 percent, but this difference is not significant.

{Insert Figure 2 about here}

Building on prospect theory, we hypothesized that winners' biases may be stronger than losers' biases. While we find evidence that both biases exist, the experimental results do not confirm this hypothesis in our experiment. Winners' biases are more common for Democrats, but the opposite is true for Republicans. In neither case (nor overall) are these differences (in

²⁶ Appendix D presents the same analysis broken down by four individual level moderators shown to consistently affect motivated reasoning: political interest, media exposure, education, and party identification strength. Respondent behavior is consistent with previous research.

differences) significant.²⁷ It appears as though partisans are equally motivated to align with their party's position if they stand to gain as in the case where they stand to lose.²⁸

We suspect that prospect theory may not operate in this setting for three reasons. First, a subject's response in the experiment does not affect real political outcomes. Perhaps partisan responses would align more with prospect theory if individuals were asked to directly vote for a recount or if they knew their attitudes were sure to affect the outcome. In elections, individuals' actions rarely have a unique direct effect; instead, they act as a collective, democratic body. Second, because individuals in the experiment are not members of Ohio's 20th district, they may be less likely to think about personal gains and losses, and therefore less likely to act in ways that align with prospect theory. Previous research argues that endowment effects are heightened when individuals feel a strong emotional attachment to the object they could potentially gain or

²⁷ When leaners are treated as partisans, we do find significant differences between the winners' and losers' biases for Democrats. See Appendix B for these analyses.

²⁸ In 2008, Democrats made significant gains in the House and Senate, and took over control of the presidency. Thus, it is possible that Democrats already identified as winners, and Republicans as losers, going into the experiment. We investigated whether individuals were more likely to exhibit winners' (or losers') biases when they were winners (or losers) in their own congressional district, and did not find this to be the case. However, since previous research has found that effects of winning and losing depend more on national, rather than congressional, elections (Anderson and LoTempio 2002), we suspect a measure of congressional incumbency status may not be sufficient to overcome the long-run effects of identifying with the national level winner or loser. In future research, it would be fruitful to assess winners' and losers' biases over time and in relation to national party control.

lose – in this case, the election outcome (Ariely, Huber, and Wertenbroch 2005). In future research it would be useful to expand our understanding about if and when prospect theory shapes political attitudes toward winning and losing elections by including a scenario where respondents' past behaviors or attitudinal responses shape election outcomes. Third, the experiment does not allow respondents to have a sense of gain or loss that lasts for a meaningful period of time. As soon as they learn which party was victorious, respondents are told about the lawsuit, and immediately thereafter they are asked to give their own opinion about vote miscounting. Previous research has shown that the time a consumer owns an object can contribute to how much they value it (Strahilevitz and Loewenstein 1998). A similar phenomenon may occur in politics, which could explain why Democrats are more likely to exhibit a winners', but not a losers', bias.

Testing the Attenuation Hypothesis: The Effect of a Nonpartisan Advisory Commission

Our second set of hypotheses suggests that information from nonpartisan groups may prompt individuals from both parties to adjust their beliefs about election miscounting. It is not uncommon for individuals to acquire information from nonpartisan sources, and it is critical to examine whether these informants have the ability to diminish partisan differences.

Figure 3 displays the percent of respondents who thought that miscounting was likely, by experimental condition. Respondents on the far left read that their party lost the election and filed the lawsuit ("Loser"), but they were not told about a nonpartisan advisory commission ("No AC"). As reported in Table 2, 78 percent of these respondents believed votes were miscounted. The next three categories represent losers with an advisory commission, winners without an advisory commission, and winners with an advisory commission. As we can see, respondents of the filing (losing) party are 17 percentage points less likely to think that election miscounting

occurred when they are told about a nonpartisan advisory commission. Similarly, there is an 11 percentage point decrease when an advisory commission is mentioned and the filer is from the opposite party. Nonpartisan cues have a significant effect on interpretations of vote miscounting among both partisan winners and losers.

{Insert Figure 3 about here}

On average, the presence of a nonpartisan advisory commission decreases the gap between respondents exposed to the same or opposite party cues by about seven percentage points. While this difference is nontrivial, it is not statistically significant, and a sizeable gap (26 percentage points) continues to separate partisan losers and winners. Moreover, the share of partisans who believe that thousands of votes were miscounted when their own party filed and a nonpartisan group found no evidence of misconduct is 15 percentage points higher than when than when the opposing party filed and a nonpartisan group was not mentioned. Clearly, partisans are partial toward thinking that their party should have rightfully won or performed better in the election – regardless of the presence of a neutral third-party cue.²⁹

In addition, we find that partisans of the losing party who were given the advisory commission prompt are no more likely to think there was miscounting than are those who saw the neutral prompt (64 percent). The nonpartisan cue effectively cancelled out any effect of a partisan cue on losers. This suggests that nonpartisan stimuli, which may trigger accuracy motivations, matched the influence of directional partisan goals in this context. Not surprisingly, partisans are significantly less likely to think votes were miscounted if the opposing party filed

²⁹ In this case we do not see significant differences between the two parties. The percent of Democrats thinking a miscount was likely across the four groups is 81, 66, 53, and 36; for Republicans, it is 77, 58, 41, and 35.

suit – both with and without a nonpartisan advisory commission – than if they read the neutral news story. This is expected since the commission’s finding of no misconduct reinforces a winners’ bias (there was no misconduct), but presents a challenge to losers’ beliefs.

While the presence of a nonpartisan commission does not appear to have a statistically significant, convergent effect overall, we might expect it to do so if there were more, or more convincing, cues from nonpartisan groups. Ultimately, the probability of a miscount is bounded at zero and one, so a wealth of information negating a miscount may lead to convergence.³⁰

Independents

We compared responses among pure Independents presented with a partisan cue (Conditions 1 or 2) with those who received the neutral stimulus (Condition 5) to determine whether Independents behave like an unbiased baseline or if there is any evidence of an anti-party bias. The results are shown in Table 3.

{Insert Table 3 about here}

It appears as though Independents do not exhibit any strong anti-party bias; they are only three percent more likely to think there is vote miscounting when a political party filed the suit as when no party was mentioned, and this difference is not significant. There is also no variation by party: Independents are equally likely to think vote miscounting occurred when Democrats or Republicans lost and filed the lawsuit.

However, we do find that Independents on the whole are more skeptical about election counting than partisans. When no party is mentioned, Independents are 11 percent more likely to

³⁰ Although we do not test it here, we expect partisan losers and winners to also be influenced if the commission found evidence of misconduct. If the nonpartisan group corroborated the plaintiff’s case, partisans would likely increase their perceptions of misconduct.

think ballots were miscounted than partisans (this difference is significant at $p < 0.10$). And, in the presence of a partisan cue, Independents are almost as likely to think there is vote miscounting as are partisans of the party filing suit.

Thus, instead of an anti-party bias, it appears as though Independents hold more of an *anti-system* attitude. They have little trust that ballots were counted correctly, regardless of the partisan cue. In this respect, Independents look similar to electoral losers. As Anderson and coauthors argue, “individuals with party attachments should have higher levels of support for the idea that the process matters...than non-identifiers” (2005, 77). We find that Independents not only have less support, but also that they are less responsive to electoral outcomes.³¹

Perceptions of Misconduct: Partisan Beliefs about Fraud and Suppression

All respondents were asked if they thought election misconduct was most likely to be caused by vote suppression, voter fraud, or something else. Consistent with our expectations, responses differ along partisan lines. For Republicans, 40 percent reported fraud, while only 18 percent said vote suppression was an issue. Democrats, on the other hand, were relatively evenly split: 24 percent referencing fraud and 23 percent suppression. (A plurality in both groups – 42 percent of Republicans and 53 percent of Democrats – thought that another type of misconduct may have occurred. Many of these respondents were likely referring to technical errors with the voting machines, as described in the news excerpt.) Overall, the results indicate significant

³¹ The percent of Independents reporting that thousands ballots were likely miscounted drops from 72 to 64 percent in the presence of a nonpartisan advisory commission – a smaller decrease than that for partisan winners or losers. Independents appear to be less easily dissuaded and more skeptical of government actors – whether it is a party filing a lawsuit or a nonpartisan group investigating such allegations.

differences across partisan groups with respect to attitudes toward fraud. But there are more subtle differences on the issue of vote suppression, with only five percent more Democrats seeing this as a source of misconduct in comparison with both Republicans and Independents.

Next, we examine whether rationales for election misconduct vary by condition. Does winning or losing, or the presence of nonpartisan cues, affect explanations of misconduct? Figure 4 graphs the percent of partisans who cite traditional rationales for misconduct given by their own, and their opposing, party, across each of the four partisan conditions listed in Table 1. As in Figure 3, the conditions are ordered left to right from the case in which partisans are most likely to think there was miscounting (i.e., when the respondent's own party lost the election and filed the lawsuit and there was no nonpartisan advisory commission) to the condition where they are least likely to think miscounting occurred (i.e., when the other party filed and a nonpartisan advisory commission found no evidence to support the claim).

{Insert Figure 4 about here}

Figure 4 reveals that the group of respondents most likely to react in a “partisan” way – that is, citing their own party's rationale more regularly and agreeing with the opponent's justification less often – fall in the condition where they would be least likely to think misconduct occurred: winners who learned a nonpartisan commission found no evidence of miscounting. These individuals are 90 percent more likely to employ their own party's rationale, and over seven times less likely to use their opponent's rationale, than losers who are not informed about the advisory commission's investigation. (The difference in means between the fourth condition and all others is significant for both one's own, and one's opponent's, rationale at $p < 0.05$). This suggests that information undermining one's opponent may prompt stronger disconfirmation biases than information confirming one's own party's beliefs – even in areas

beyond vote counting. The finding is consistent with research demonstrating that out-party cues are more influential and polarizing than in-party cues (Goren, Federico, and Kittilson 2009; Nicholson 2012). Consequently, we may expect stronger opposition responses to allegations of fraud or suppression than demonstrations of public support for such claims.

Discussion

Previous research establishes partisan divergence on a number of issues, yet less headway has been made in identifying the political conditions that aggravate or moderate these differences. As Lodge and Taber (2005) argue, “one clear expectation—given that affect permeates all thinking and reasoning—is that most citizens most of the time will be biased reasoners” (456). Yet, others have suggested that “we do not believe this can go without end” (Redlawsk, Civettini, and Emmerson 2010, 564) and “the process of motivated reasoning is not unbounded” (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012, 13). The chief purpose of this study is to broaden our understanding of the scope of the partisan perceptual screen. To do so, we analyze a number of contextual factors and situations that have previously been overlooked in studies of partisan motivated reasoning and bias. Each of these investigations suggests future research in the field, and has broad implications that reach beyond the current study.

We find that partisans of the victorious party are over 70 percent more likely to express confidence in electoral procedures than partisan losers. Yet, when an explicitly nonpartisan report finds that votes were not miscounted, partisan winners and losers alike significantly moderate their beliefs about miscounting. In fact, the presence of a nonpartisan cue has the same weight as a partisan cue, suggesting that individuals in this context are as likely to be motivated by accuracy as partisanship. The findings have valuable implications for our understanding of voter behavior and the assessments of partisan bias more generally. In particular, is important to

note that partisan divergence does not signify a lack of accuracy motivations; in our study, individuals presented with partisan and nonpartisan cues diverge almost as much as those presented with only a partisan stimulus. Future research may investigate the degree to which information from nonpartisan sources can shape beliefs in the other settings, and ask if a preponderance of information from nonpartisan sources has the ability to reduce the partisan gap. More research on repetition, the order of cues, and over-time effects of counter frames remains to be conducted (Chong and Druckman 2010, 2013).

We also find clear evidence that pure Independents do not exhibit an “anti-party” bias, lending credibility to past research that assumed this population would remain unaffected by partisan cues. However, Independents are not exactly an “unbiased” baseline for comparison. This group, which represents five to ten percent of presidential election voters, is on the whole more skeptical of election conduct than party identifiers – so much so that they adopt similar beliefs to partisan losers. And they are less likely to moderate their skepticism when presented with a nonpartisan cue. To this end, partisanship may not be the only obstacle to unbiased and rational information processing – lacking party attachments may also prompt individuals to deflect information. In some respects, the findings suggest a more positive role of partisanship, and highlight the importance of clarifying our expectations about what it means to be neutral, unbiased, or unaffected by partisan cues. In future work, it may prove rewarding to ask if Independent voters are motivated to respond in ways that support Independent candidates (rather than simply unidentified, but probably partisan, candidates). And it is important to ask how partisan cues shape other attitudes and behaviors – such as democratic trust, electoral efficacy, and the likelihood of voting – among these unaffiliated members of the population.

We extend our analyses further by addressing explanations of election misconduct. Consistent with predictions from existing literature, we find that Republicans tend to explain vote miscounting in terms of fraud whereas Democrats more often cite suppression. But we also find that “partisan” responses are most common when the opposing party “cries wolf” – that is, the opposing party loses the election, files suit, and a nonpartisan commission finds no evidence of misconduct. This suggests that negative information about the opposing party may at times be more influential in solidifying partisan beliefs than positive information about one’s own party. What we have not studied here, however, is a context in which an individual’s preferred party’s claim is found to be justified. Next steps could compare the effects of nonpartisan confirming information about one’s own party with nonpartisan disconfirming information about the opponent, to examine whether in-group and out-group cues have asymmetric effects.

There is limited support for the argument that winners should be more overconfident in election results than losers are skeptical. Yet, we do find differences between the two parties in this respect: Democrats exhibit stronger winners’ biases than losers’ biases, while Republicans appear equally likely to evoke either. (This is especially apparent when leaners are treated as partisans, as shown in Appendix B.) Does this represent a fundamental difference between the two parties’ supporters? Or, might the discrepancy reflect political conditions at the time the experiment took place – a time when Democrats were still celebrating a political sweep, and a divided Republican party did not pose an immediate threat. Either way, it is important to further investigate the potential asymmetries among winners and losers, and Democrats and Republicans, in their attitudes toward ballot counting, electoral fairness, and democratic trust.

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Condition 1: Democrats file lawsuit; No advisory commission mentioned

Columbus, Ohio (AP) -- On Monday the Ohio Democratic Party filed a lawsuit in state court requesting that all ballots from the 2008 congressional race in Ohio's 20th district be recounted. The Democratic candidate in this district lost in a close election in November. The Ohio Democratic party alleges that thousands of votes were incorrectly counted as invalid due to technical problems with new voting machines used in the district.

Condition 2: Republicans file lawsuit; No advisory commission mentioned

Condition 2 is identical to condition 1 except "Democratic" is replaced with "Republican."

Condition 3: Democrats file lawsuit; Nonpartisan advisory commission finds no election misconduct

The excerpt is identical to condition 1, except an additional line is added that mentions a nonpartisan advisory commission. The entire excerpt is printed below.

Columbus, Ohio (AP) -- On Monday the Ohio Democratic Party filed a lawsuit in state court requesting that all ballots from the 2008 congressional race in Ohio's 20th district be recounted. The Democratic candidate in this district lost in a close election in November. The Ohio Democratic party alleges that thousands of votes were incorrectly counted as invalid due to technical problems with new voting machines used in the district. Last month a nonpartisan advisory commission, which was formed to investigate the matter, found no evidence of misconduct.

Condition 4: Republicans file lawsuit; Nonpartisan advisory commission finds no election misconduct

Condition 4 is identical to condition 3 except "Democratic" is replaced with "Republican."

Condition 5: Lawsuit is filed; No advisory commission mentioned

Columbus, Ohio (AP) -- On Monday, a lawsuit was filed in state court asking for a recount of the 2008 congressional race in Ohio's 20th district. The group filing suit alleges that thousands of votes were incorrectly counted as invalid due to technical problems with new voting machines used in the district.

Table 1. Five Experimental Conditions

	Same party filed (Losers)	No party mentioned (Neutral)	Opposing party filed (Winners)
Both Parties	78% (SE=5; N=79)	64% (SE=5; N=78)	46% (SE=6; N=78)

Table 2. The percent of partisans reporting that a miscount was likely. (Standard errors and the number of observations are in parentheses.)

	Democrats lost and filed suit	No party mentioned	Republicans lost and filed suit
Pure Independents	72% (SE=6; N=57)	75% (SE=6; N=56)	72% (SE=6; N=57)

Table 3. Perceptions of miscounting among Independents by party cue.

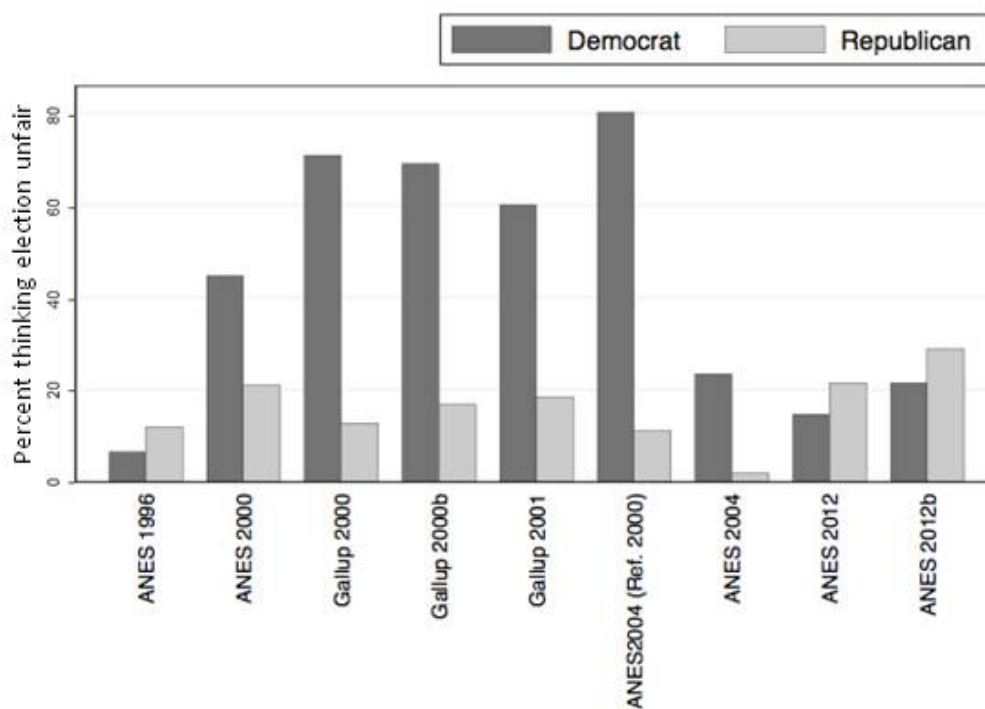


Figure 1. The percent of Democrats and Republicans perceiving unfair election conduct.

Note: This figure excludes partisan “leaners,” although the differences between winners and losers remain, and remain significant, if we include them. The ANES2004 (Ref. 2000) survey was conducted in 2004 but asked about fairness in the 2000 election. We recognize that the bulk of this data is centered on the 2000 election and is restricted to a short time period.

Unfortunately, these are the only elections for which we found surveys gauging perceptions of electoral fairness in the U.S.

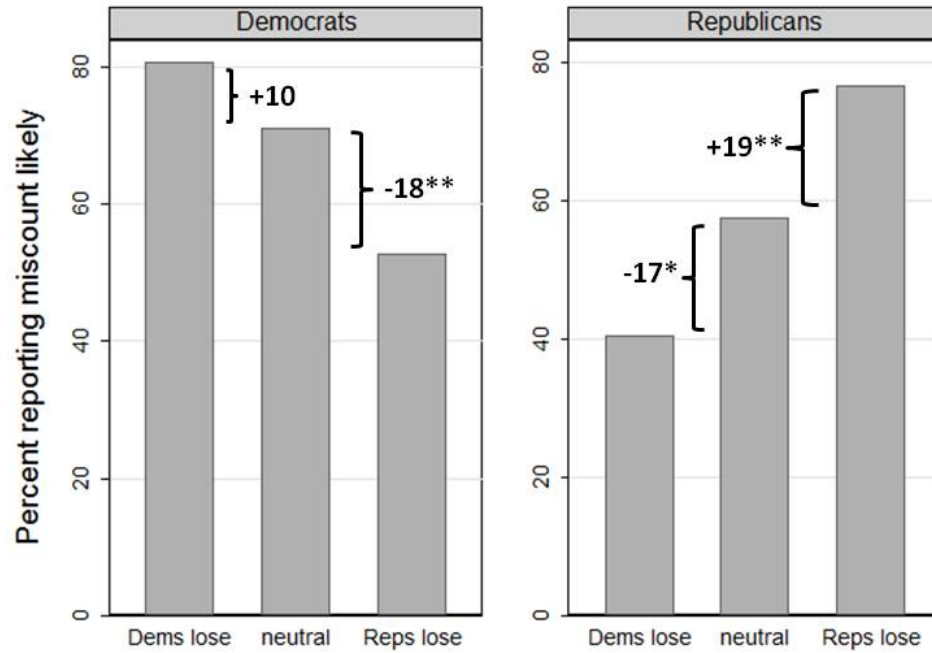


Figure 2. The percent of respondents, by party, reporting that a miscount was likely
 (* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, one-tailed test).

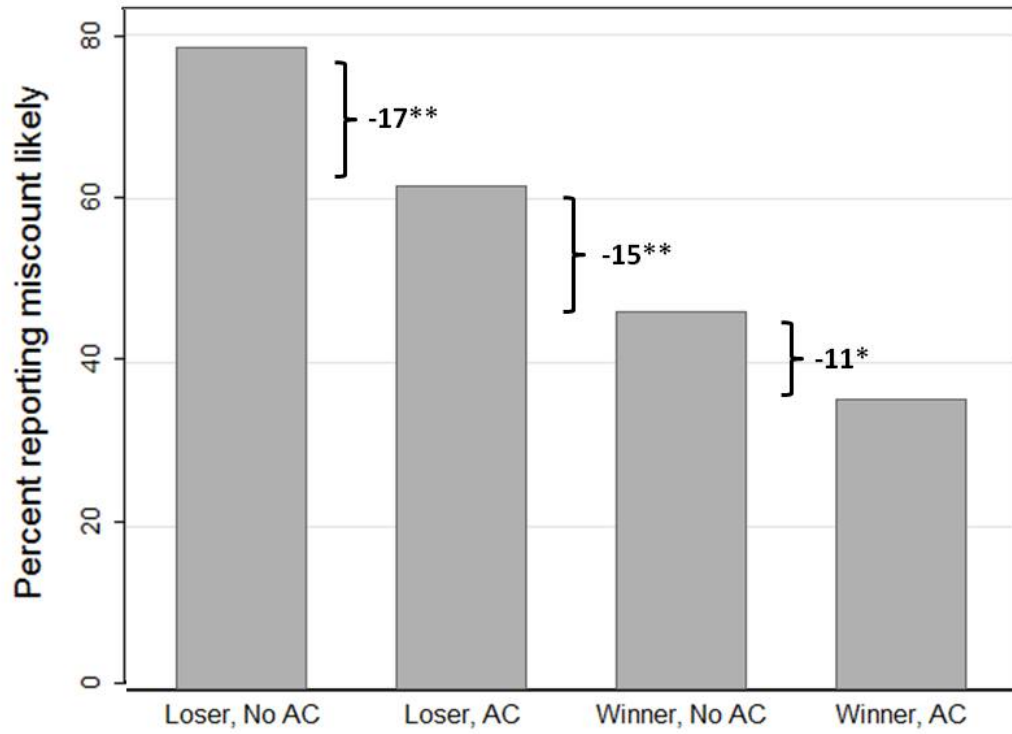


Figure 3. Attitudes toward miscounting with and without the presence of a nonpartisan advisory commission (* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$, one-tailed test).**

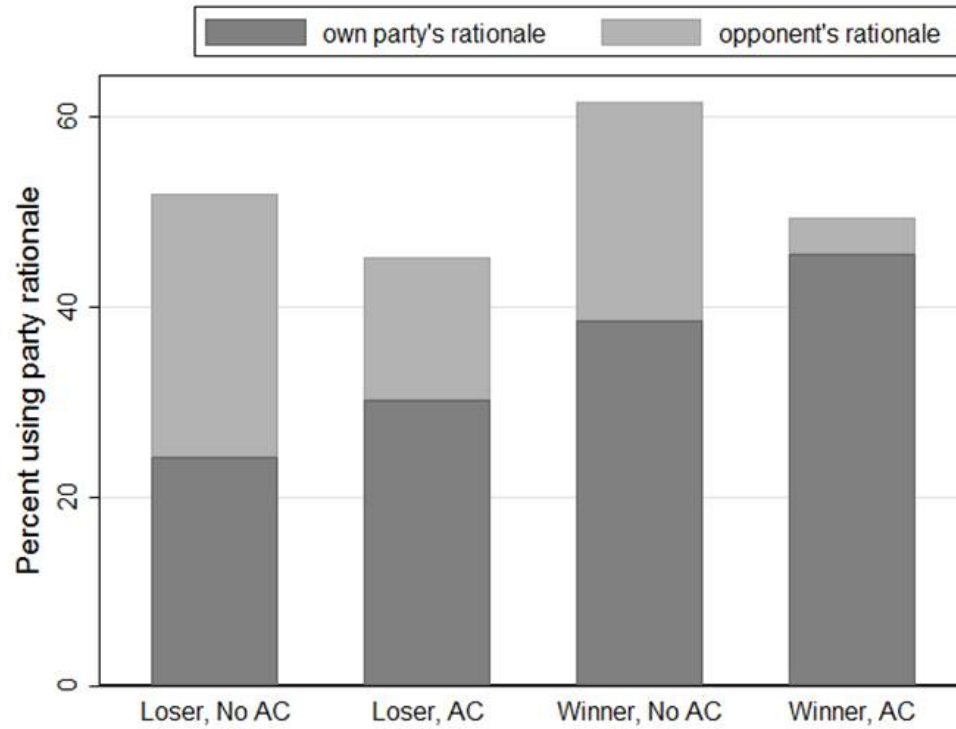


Figure 4. The percent of respondents who use the same rationale as their party or opponent, by experimental condition.

Appendix A. Survey questions used in Figure 1.

1996 ANES

V961460: In some countries, people believe their elections are conducted fairly. In other countries, people believe that their elections are conducted unfairly. Thinking of the last election in the United States, where would you place it on this scale of one to five where 1 means that the last election was conducted fairly and 5 means that the last election was conducted unfairly?

Results:

Inap, no response = 180

1 (Last election conducted fairly) = 746

2 = 394

3 = 227

4 = 92

5 (last election conducted unfairly) = 54

Don't know = 11

NA = 10

After No response, NA, and don't know removed, sample = 1513

Categories 1 and 2 added together for "fair" = 1140

Categories 4 and 5 added together for "unfair" = 146

V960417: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Democrat: 663

Republican: 471

Independent: 446

Other party: 5

No preference: 125

NA: 3

-- *V960420* has broken down 7pt. For Figure 1, we exclude leaners.

We have previously broken the data down by whether someone voted for the winner or loser (instead of party):

V961082: Following *V961081* (How about the election for President? Did you vote for a candidate for PRESIDENT?), Who did you vote for?

1 (Vote for Bill Clinton--Winner) = 600

0 (Vote for Bob Dole--Major party loser) = 434

Excluded, votes for other candidates = 680

1999, Millennium Survey (Sept.) {Not in graphic}

Do you feel that elections in this country are free and fair?

60% Yes

38% No

2% Don't know

Methodology: Conducted by Taylor Nelson Sofres Intersearch, September 20 - September 28, 1999 and based on 1,005 telephone interviews. Sample: National adult. [USTNS.99MILA.R02]

Millennium Survey, Sep, 1999. Retrieved Jul-24-2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut.

http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html

2000 ANES

V001291: Please continue thinking about the November election. In some countries, people believe their elections are conducted fairly. In other countries, people believe that their elections are conducted unfairly. Thinking of the presidential election we've just had, do you believe it was very fair, somewhat fair, neither fair nor unfair, somewhat unfair, or very unfair?

NA = 357

1 (Very Fair) = 322

2 (Somewhat fair) = 415

3 (Neither fair nor unfair) = 155

4 (Somewhat unfair) = 309

5 (Very unfair) = 217

Don't know = 28

Refused = 4

Sample after NA's, don't know, and refused removed = 1418

Very and somewhat fair categories combined for fair = 737

Very and somewhat unfair categories combined for unfair = 526

V000519: Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

Democrat: 620

Republican: 451

Independent: 496

Other party: 27

No preference: 204

NA: 0

-- *V000523* has broken down 7pt. For Figure 1, we only look at partisans not including leaners.

V001249: If R voted for president: Who did you vote for?

1 (George W. Bush—Winner) = 530

0 (Al Gore—Major party loser) = 590

Excluded, votes for other candidate = 687

Gallup 2000

(Referenced in Figure 1 as Gallup2000) *Q.14*: As you may know, more people across the country voted for Al Gore than George W. Bush, but Bush has been declared the next president because

he won more votes in the Electoral College. Do you think this was a fair or unfair outcome of the presidential election?

1 (Fair) = 545

0 (Unfair) = 439

Don't know (removed) = 27

(Referenced in Figure 1 as Gallup2000b) *Q. 24*: In general, do you think the system in which votes are cast and counted in THIS COUNTRY

1 Discriminates against some people, (or) = 422

2 Is fair to all Americans, (or) = 547

3 Don't know/refused = 42

D7. In politics, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or an Independent?

Republican: 290

Democrat: 317

Independent: 376

Other party: 7

Don't Know/Refused: 21

D8 Breaks Independents down by leaners, but Figure 1 does not include leaners. Just the numbers for the partisans.

Q.22 Now, suppose that the presidential election of 2004 were being held today, and it included Al Gore as the Democratic candidate and George W. Bush as the Republican candidate. Would you vote for

1 (George W. Bush—Winner) = 423

0 (Al Gore—Major party loser) = 487

None, Other, Don't know, Refused (excluded) = 101

Gallup 2001

Q.32: In general, do you think the system in which votes are cast and counted in THIS COUNTRY

1 Discriminates against some people, (or) = 392

2 Is fair to all Americans, (or) = 598

3 Don't know/refused = 22

[Not included in our paper] *Q.34*: Which comes closest to your view of the way George W. Bush won the 2000 presidential election

1 He won fair and square = 505

2 He won, but only on a technicality, (or) = 335

3 He stole the election = 143

4 Don't know/refused = 29

D7. In politics, as of today, do you consider yourself a Republican, a Democrat or an Independent?

Republican: 362

Democrat: 304

Independent: 309

Other party: 11

Don't know/refused: 26

D8 Breaks Independents by leaners, but we do not include leaners in Figure 1.

D.12A Did you happen to vote for Al Gore, George W. Bush, or Ralph Nader?

1 (George W. Bush) = 401

0 (Al Gore) = 316

Other, excluded = 63

2004 ANES

V045042: Please continue thinking about the November election. In some countries, people believe their elections are conducted fairly. In other countries, people believe that their elections are conducted unfairly. Thinking of the presidential election we've just had, do you believe it was very fair, somewhat fair, neither fair nor unfair, somewhat unfair, or very unfair?

1 (Very Fair) = 498

2 (Somewhat fair) = 336

3 (Neither fair nor unfair) = 76

4 (Somewhat unfair) = 96

5 (Very unfair) = 49

Don't know/refused (excluded) = 11

V043114 Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, or an Independent, or what?

Republican: 347

Democrat: 382

Independent: 399

Other party: 14

No preference: 60

Don't know: 8

Refused: 2

V0403116: Makes party 7pt. For Figure 1 we only look at partisans not including leaners.

V045026: Who did you vote for?

1 (George W. Bush) = 412

0 (John Kerry) = 399

Other (excluded) = 24

(Referenced in Figure 1 as 2004**) *V043004: All things considered, would you say that the 2000 presidential election was decided in a way that was FAIR or UNFAIR?*

1 (fair) = 590

0 (unfair) = 566

Don't know/refused (excluded) = 56

V043005: Breaks down previous variable by strength

V043003: If R says they voted for president in 2000: Which one did you vote for:

1 (George W. Bush) = 400

0 (Al Gore) = 398

Other (Excluded) = 46

Gallup International Voice of the People Survey, June 2005 {Not shown in graphic}

Do you feel that elections in the United States are free and fair?

Yes = 57%

No = 42%

Don't Know = 1%

Methodology: Conducted by Gallup International, June 29 - July 3, 2005 and based on 504 telephone interviews. Sample: National adult. Fieldwork was conducted in the US by TNS Intersearch. Parallel surveys were done in 67 other countries. [USMISC.05VOICE.R10]

2012 ANES

{electintpo_countfair} In your view, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections? [Very often, fairly often, not often, or not at all often? / Not at all often, not often, fairly often, or very often]? Votes are counted fairly.

Very often and fairly often recoded to fair: 4461

Not often and not at all often to unfair: 991

For ANES2012b

{electintpo_eleccofair} (In your view, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections?) ([Very often, fairly often, not often, or not at all often? / Not at all often, not often, fairly often, or very often]?) Election officials are fair

Very often and fairly often recoded to fair: 3999

Not often and not at all often to unfair:413

{pid_self} Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a [DEMOCRAT, a REPUBLICAN / a REPUBLICAN, a DEMOCRAT], an INDEPENDENT, or what?

Democrat=2363

Republican=1389

Independent=1845

Other party=161

No preference=66

Don't know=44

Refused=48

For Figure 1 we only look at partisans not including leaners.

Appendix B. Replication analyses where leaners are partisans.

Table B1, and Figures B1-3 replicate Table 2 and Figures 2-4 in the main text, but include leaners as partisans. With one exception, all results are identical to the case where leaners are excluded from the analysis. The exception is that Democrats exhibit a winners, but not a losers, bias when we include leaners, and this difference in difference is significant at $p < 0.05$. (See Figure B1.)

	Same party filed (Losers)	No party mentioned (Neutral)	Opposing party filed (Winners)
Both Parties	0.75 (SE=0.04; N=122)	0.66 (SE=0.04; N=116)	0.50 (SE=0.04; N=122)

Table B1. The proportion of respondents reporting that a miscount was likely. (Standard errors and the number of observations are in parentheses.)

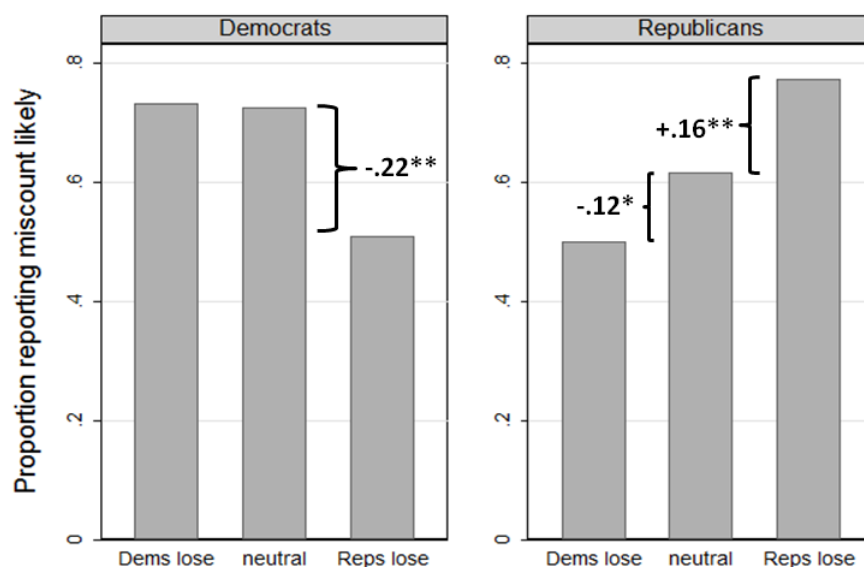


Figure B1. The proportion of respondents, by party, reporting that a miscount was likely (* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$, one-tailed test).**

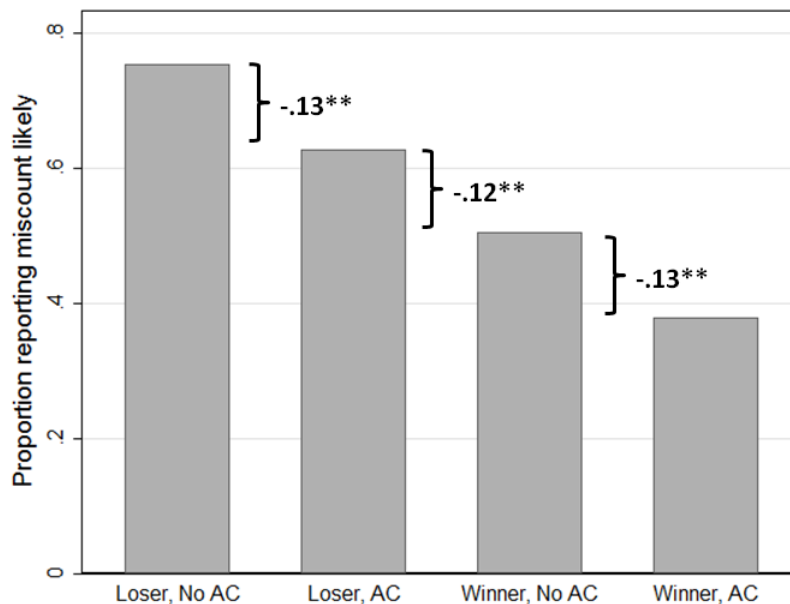


Figure B2. Attitudes toward miscounting with and without the presence of a nonpartisan advisory commission (* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, one-tailed test).

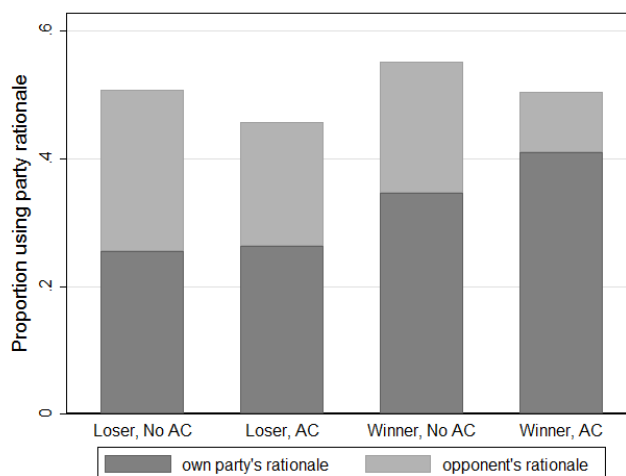


Figure B3. The share of respondents who use the same rationale as their party or opponent, by experimental condition.

Democrats are significantly less likely to cite fraud, and significantly more likely to cite suppression when their party won the election and a nonpartisan advisory commission found no evidence of miscounting than any of the other conditions. The opposite is true for Republicans: they are significantly more likely to cite fraud, and less likely to cite suppression in this condition.

Overall, Democrats are more likely to cite suppression than Republicans, and Republicans are more likely to cite fraud.

Appendix C. Replication analyses with a continuous dependent variable

The paper only displays results for a binary dependent variable that categorizes responses as saying that vote miscounting was “likely” or “unlikely.” Here we run tests similar to those in the paper with an ordinary least squares regression model that employs a five-point continuous dependent variable, such that higher numbers indicate a stronger belief that votes were miscounted:

- 5 = Very likely** that thousands of votes were not counted
- 4 = Likely** that thousands of votes were not counted
- 3 = Somewhat likely** that thousands of votes were not counted
- 2 = Unlikely** that thousands of votes were not counted
- 1 = Very unlikely** that thousands of votes were not counted.

	Model C1a	Model C1b	Model C1c
loser	0.47*** (0.18)	0.89*** (0.13)	
winner	-0.50*** (0.18)		
advisory		-0.20* (0.13)	
neutral cue			0.10 (0.20)
Democrat			
constant	2.87 (0.13)	2.41 (0.11)	3.05 (0.12)
<i>N</i>	235	309	166

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, one-tailed tests for slope coefficients

Table C1. Robustness checks with a continuous dependent variable.

In Models C1a and C1b, the regression is run only on partisans. Model C1a reveals evidence of a winners and losers bias. (The reference category includes partisans from the neutral condition.) Model C1b shows that an advisory commission is associated with a lower chance of thinking votes were miscounted. Model C1c is run only for Independents, and confirms that they are no more likely to think there was misconduct when presented with a neutral cue than when they read a partisan cue.

Appendix D. The effects of four moderators: political interest, news consumption, education, and partisan strength.

We also investigated whether political interest, newspaper readership, education, and partisan strength moderated the effect of winning and losing. Taber and Lodge (2006) suggest that because motivational biases require effort, they are contingent on political sophistication and the strength of prior attitudes. Politically sophisticated individuals are better able to effectively filter information and counter-argue information that challenges their prior beliefs. People with stronger priors are more often motivated to engage confirming or disconfirming biases. Because we do not have the political knowledge questions that are typically used to assess political sophistication, we include other known correlates: political interest, news consumption, and education (Luskin 1987, 1990; Hamill and Lodge 1986). To assess the moderating effect of prior beliefs, we examine partisanship strength.

Figure D1 reveals that the data in this analysis perform similarly to previous studies (Taber and Lodge 2006). Consistent with expectations, the figures demonstrate that winners and losers with heightened interest, news consumption, education, and partisanship are more likely to diverge than winners and losers who are less politically involved or aware, are less educated, and have weaker partisan attachments.

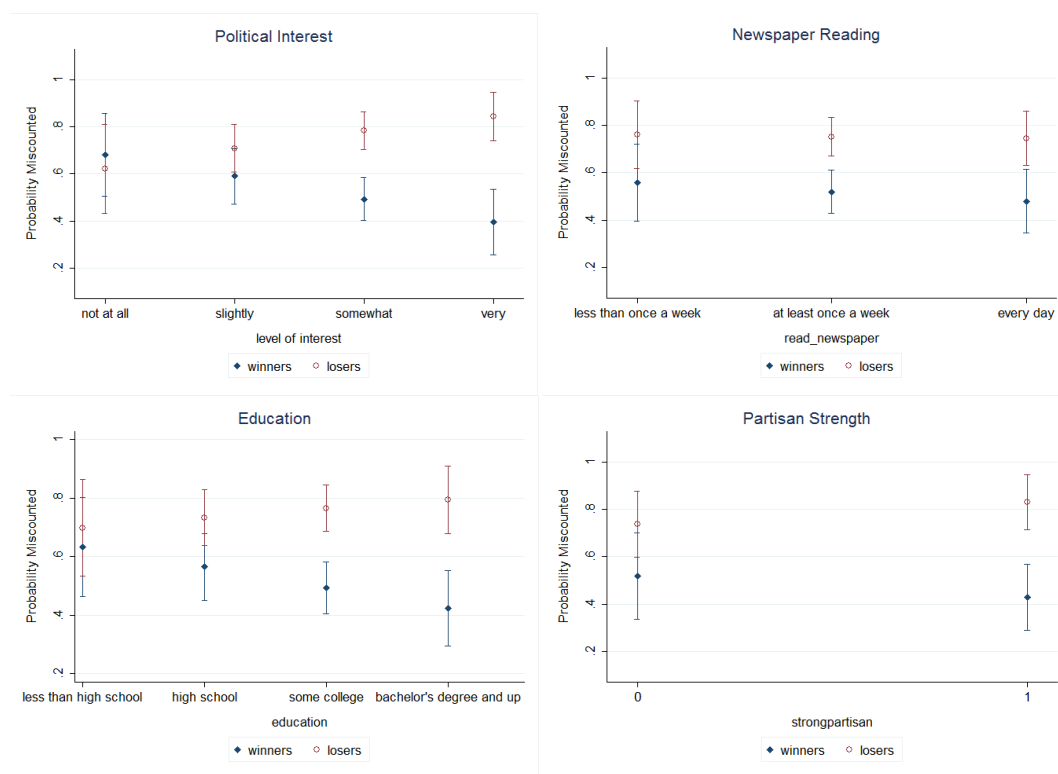


Figure D1. Moderating variables.