Partisanship and Voting Rule Trade-offs

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Abstract

To what extent are partisan differences about voting rules rooted in sincere disagreements about the relative importance of maximizing turnout versus preventing ineligible voters from casting ballots? We document partisan differences in preferences regarding this trade-off over time, demonstrating that these differences are particularly pronounced among the most politically interested respondents. We then report findings from two pre-registered survey experiments that shed light on whether these gaps are a product of partisan sorting or responses to elite cues. The experiments asked participants to make trade-offs between a pair of voting systems: one that would entirely prevent ineligible votes, randomly varying turnout rates among eligible voters, and one that would have 100 percent turnout among eligible voters, but result in some randomly varied number of ineligible voters casting ballots. Some participants were also provided with cues signaling which party endorsed which system. Our results suggest that the effects of divergent partisan cues, rather than differing priorities regarding maximizing eligible turnout and minimizing ineligible turnout explain the partisan gaps we find in our observational data. Taken together, the findings suggest that strategic elites can stoke partisan disagreements about how the democratic process should work.

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Debates about rules regarding the voting process have become a focal point of American politics over the past several decades, which have seen a flood of changes to state and local voting laws. Many of these changes, such as restrictions on mail voting, voter identification laws, or restrictive list maintenance, are defended on the grounds that they improve election security. Supporters of restrictions argue that they ensure election integrity by preventing ineligible voters from casting ballots. Opponents often point to the dearth of evidence that many ineligible individuals cast ballots to begin with, and further argue that restrictive voting practices are likely to reduce turnout by imposing new barriers to participation for eligible voters. Those on this side of the debate often argue that, rather than imposing new restrictions, existing barriers to participation should be reduced in an effort to broaden participation.

The extent to which changes in voting laws affect voter participation or election outcomes continues to be a matter of scholarly debate (Atkeson et al., 2010; Fraga and Miller, 2022; Grumbach, 2023; Grimmer et al., 2018; Grimmer and Hersh, 2024; Miller et al., 2024; Morris and Miller, 2024). There is little doubt, however that support for these policies is closely connected to partisanship (Atkeson et al., 2014; Biggers and Bowler, 2022; Gronke et al., 2019; Kane, 2017; McCarthy, 2019; Stewart III, Ansolabehere and Persily, 2016). For example, Republicans at both the elite and mass levels are notably more supportive of restrictive voting policies than Democrats (e.g. Atkeson, McKown-Dawson and Stein, 2025; Barber, Hassell and Miller, 2024; Coll, J. Tolbert and Ritter, 2022; Gronke et al., 2019; Hicks et al., 2015; Huber et al., 2025; Wilson and Brewer, 2013). This partisan rift on a foundational aspect of the democratic process presents a puzzle given how broadly shared the goals of promoting turnout and preventing ineligible voting appear to be. Although Democrats and Republicans disagree on many issues, both groups broadly view voting as a civic duty—something that is an important part of being a "good" member of society (Silver, N.d.). Democrats and Republicans are also likely to overwhelmingly agree that those who are ineligible should not be allowed to vote.[1]

One possibility is that the partisan gap in support for particular voting procedures is rooted in divergent perceptions about, say, how common voter fraud is or how common it is for eligible voters to be dissuaded from casting a ballot as a direct consequence of certain voting rules. These partisan

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[1]For example, although Democrats are less supportive of laws requiring people to prove their identity before voting *than Republicans*, clear majorities support these policies (Gallup, 2024), casting doubt on the notion that Democrats are indifferent to—or even welcome—ineligible individuals casting ballots.

differences may also stem from deeper-seated, values-based disagreements about the objectives that voting rules should prioritize. Perhaps Republicans simply view reducing ineligible voting as more valuable than increasing turnout among eligible voters, while Democrats are more willing to tolerate some ineligible voting in the name of increasing turnout. If so, partisan differences may be traceable to "sorting" where some citizens who deeply value maximizing turnout are drawn to the Democratic Party and those who view ineligible voting as particularly problematic are drawn to the Republican Party and its elites who promise to take aggressive steps to prevent ineligible voting.

An alternative explanation is tied to signals from party elites. To the extent that people view both preventing fraud and ensuring that eligible voters have access to the ballot as hallmarks of fair election procedures, they may rely on their existing party allegiances and cues from their party's elites to help them resolve these tradeoffs (Doherty and Wolak, 2012; Bullock, 2020). If so, partisan gaps in voting rule preferences may be largely disconnected from the potential costs and benefits of particular policy proposals. Rather than engaging in effortful processing of these tradeoffs, partisans may simply report preferences that mirror those espoused by party elites (Lenz, 2012; Nicholson, 2012).

We examine the connection between partisanship and deeper-seated attitudes about the ends that voting rules should achieve. We first use survey data to document how partisan differences in preferences regarding the trade-offs between preventing ineligible voting and maximizing turnout have evolved over the past 16 years. We find that partisan gaps were already evident in 2008 (when our data series begins) and have grown modestly in the years since. Notably, the gap is particularly pronounced among politically interested Americans.

We then report the results of a novel research strategy in which, rather than measuring attitudes about specific voting policies (e.g., voter ID laws), we compare how partisans choose when presented with an abstracted pair of hypothetical voting procedures that would either maximize turnout or minimize ineligible voting. In two pre-registered experiments, we experimentally manipulate the nature of this trade-off, dramatically varying how much ineligible voting would accompany a proposal that would yield universal turnout among eligible voters, as well as eligible turnout rates under a proposal that would entirely eliminate ineligible voting. Our designs position

us to assess how sensitive individuals are to variation in how different policy regimes would affect rates of ineligible and eligible voting, to explore differences in these sensitivities between Republicans and Democrats, and to examine how party cues shape these judgments.
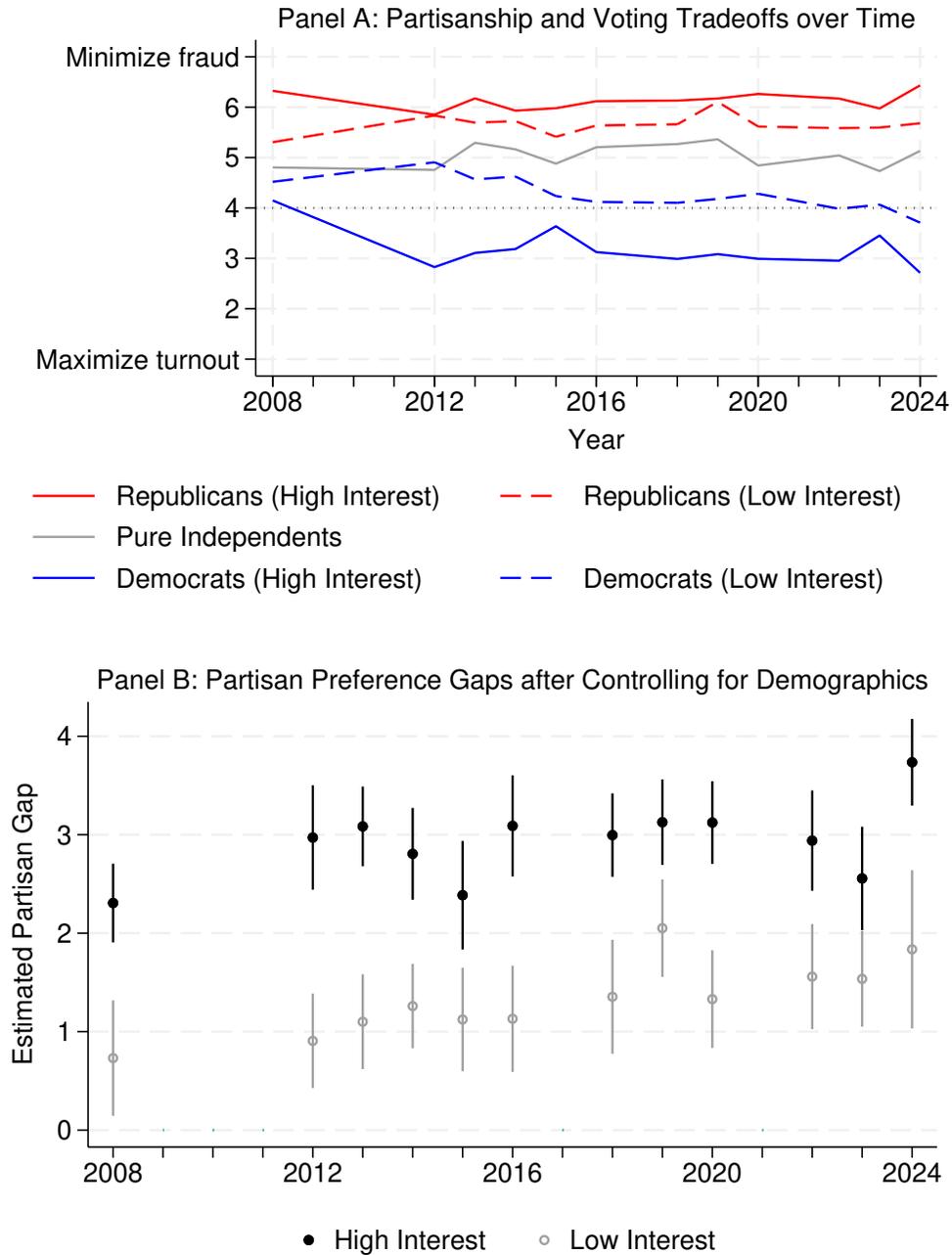
We find that people do respond to variation in how well proposals achieve the goals of maximizing eligible turnout and minimizing ineligible turnout. However, our analysis offers little support for the expectation that Republicans are more sensitive to rates of ineligible voting than Democrats. This said, we find clear evidence that Republicans are significantly more likely than Democrats to choose proposals that eliminate voting by ineligible residents over those that yield universal turnout among the eligible. This difference—which emerges independent of our experimental treatments—is larger than the effect of a proposal that would yield universal turnout among eligible voters being accompanied by extremely high (50 percent), rather than very low (0.1 percent) rates of ineligible voting. Moreover, when we experimentally vary which proposal was endorsed by which party, the effects of party cues are dramatically larger than either the experimentally varied trade-offs or baseline partisan differences. The substantively large effects of party cues in the experiments—coupled with the wider partisan gaps among politically interested respondents in the survey data—suggest that partisan gaps in voting rule preferences are driven by cues from strategic elites, rather than "principled" partisan disagreements about the relative importance of maximizing turnout versus minimizing ineligible voting.

Descriptive, Over Time Analysis

We begin by analyzing data from 12 Cooperative Election Study (CES) team modules from 2008-2024 that each asked respondents: "What should be the more important priority for your state government in conducting elections, maximizing voter turnout even if some illegal voting occurs, or minimizing illegal voting even if that reduces turnout?" Responses were recorded on a 7 point scale ranging from "Maximize turnout" (1) to "Minimize illegal voting" (7).[2]

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[2]Survey years: 2008, 2012-2016, 2018-2020, 2022-2024. Post-election wave in 2008, 2018, 2020, 2022, 2024. Phrasing for the 2008 question was slightly different: "In your opinion, what is a more important priority for your state government in conducting elections, maximizing voter turnout even if some voter fraud occurs, or minimizing voter fraud even if it reduces turnout? Please place yourself on the following scale." The endpoints were labeled "Maximizing turnout" (1) and "Minimizing fraud" (7).

Figure 1: Partisan Gaps in Voting Priorities Over Time (by Political Interest)

Panel A: Partisanship and Voting Tradeoffs over Time

Legend:
— Republicans (High Interest)   – – Republicans (Low Interest)
— Pure Independents
— Democrats (High Interest)   – – Democrats (Low Interest)

Panel B: Partisan Preference Gaps after Controlling for Demographics

● High Interest   ○ Low Interest

Note: Data from Cooperative Election Study (CES) team modules. Panel A shows mean responses across years to question asking "What should be the more important priority for your state government in conducting elections, maximizing voter turnout even if some illegal voting occurs, or minimizing illegal voting even if that reduces turnout?" Red lines are for Republicans (including leaners); blue lines are for Democrats. Solid lines are for partisans who reported following events in government and public affairs "most of the time" ("high interest"); dashed lines are for respondents who reported lower levels of political interest. Gray line is for (all) pure Independents. Panel B reports estimated gaps between Democrats and Republicans among high (black markers) and low (gray markers) interest respondents after controlling for demographic characteristics (see footnote 5).

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We present two sets of analyses from this time-series data in Figure 1.[3] In Panel A we report mean responses to the item across years, broken down by respondent partisanship and reported interest in politics. The red and blue lines correspond to Republican and Democratic respondents (including partisan leaners), respectively. Solid lines are for partisan respondents who reported following events in government and public affairs "most of the time;" dashed lines are for respondents who reported lower levels of political interest. The gray line is for all pure independents (including respondents who reported being "not sure" about their party identification).[4] In Panel B we report estimates from two OLS regression models—one restricted to high-interest respondents (i.e., those who reported following events in government and public affairs "most of the time;" black markers), the other to lower-interest respondents (gray markers). In each model we regress our outcome measure on indicators for Republican and Independent respondents and a vector of demographic controls, interacting all covariates with year indicators.[5] The markers indicate the estimated "controlled" gap between Republican and Democratic preferences separately for each year in the data.

Several notable patterns emerge. First, throughout the time series, there is a clear gap in preferences between Democrats and Republicans, with Republicans consistently more likely than Democrats to choose an option closer to the "Minimize Fraud" end of the scale throughout the time series (Panel A). In Panel B, we see that this partisan gap persists after controlling for respondent demographics.[6] Second, the gap is particularly pronounced among high-interest respondents— those most likely to be exposed to elite (partisan) cues. This is apparent when we compare the dashed and solid lines in Panel A. It is also clear when we compare the black and gray markers in Panel B, which show the partisan gap among high and low interest respondents, respectively, after controlling for demographics. Third, there is limited evidence that the partisan gap has

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[3]Our analysis throughout uses weights provided by the survey firms we worked with.

[4]Pooling across years, approximately 49 percent of the full, weighted sample reported following politics "most of the time." This response was far more common among partisans (54 percent; including leaners) than among pure Independents (29 percent). We do not disaggregate Independents by political interest because, on average, in a given year we have only 56 high interest, pure Independents.

[5]Demographic controls include age, gender (indicators for: female, other; ref. group = male), race (indicators for Black, Hispanic, other; ref group = white), education (indicators for: high school diploma, some college, 4-year degree, graduate; ref group = no HS diploma), income (family income in 2020 dollars), indicator for income refusals.

[6]In 2024, 85 percent of Republicans placed themselves on the "minimize fraud" side of the scale, whereas 55 percent of Democrats chose an option on the "maximize turnout" side of the scale.

grown dramatically over the last 16 years. The clearest difference is between the estimated gap in 2008 (when the phrasing of the question was slightly different) and the gap in other years. In sum, the public opinion data are indicative of a partisan divide, particularly among the most politically interested, on this trade-off between minimizing voter fraud and maximizing turnout. However, our observational data do not speak to the origins of the gap: is it rooted in deep-seated disagreements about the relative importance of maximizing turnout and minimizing illegal voting or in responses to divergent cues from partisan elites? Our experimental evidence better-positions us to speak to this question.

Voting Rule Trade-offs: Experiments

We conducted two pre-registered experiments with similar designs.[7] In each, we asked respondents to imagine they get to make the rules for voting in a town's elections. The town was described as having 10,000 voting age adults who are eligible to vote and 1,000 who are ineligible.[8] Respondents were presented with two hypothetical proposals for rules that were expected to lead to different patterns of participation. One proposal would yield universal turnout among eligible voters, but experimentally varied the number of ineligible voters who would also vote. The other proposal would prevent all *ineligible* voting, but would be accompanied by an experimentally varied lower rate of turnout among the eligible voting population. We asked participants to choose which proposal they preferred.

Experiment 1

The first experiment was fielded from August 22-27, 2024. Respondents (N = 1,500) were recruited by Verasight to complete the survey.[9] The experimental design, with treatments in brackets, is shown below (bolding and other formatting reflects what respondents saw). The order of the proposals was randomized. Two-thirds of respondents were assigned to the condition where

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[7]See Section SM .1 for pre-registrations.

[8]Just over 7 percent of voting age adults in the United States are not eligible to vote (McDonald, 2022).

[9]See column [1] of Table SM.1 for summary statistics. Per our pre-analysis plan, we exclude 12 respondents who lacked usable values on our outcome or the demographic covariates we preregistered for use in our regression models. We also drop two respondents who indicated that they were less than 18 years old.

no party cue was present ("Proposal 1" vs. "Proposal 2"). For the remaining third, the proposals were randomly labeled as either the "Democratic" or "Republican" proposal. The numbers in brackets were assigned independently and with equal probability.

> Imagine **you get to make the rules** for voting in elections in a town. Like most towns in the United States, some voting age adults are **eligible** to vote while others are **not eligible** to vote for various reasons. In this town **10,000** voting age adults are eligible to vote and **1,000** are ineligible.
>
> [Two experts/A Republican and a Democratic expert] each propose a set of voting rules. Each approach is expected to lead to different patterns of participation. *Assume that the expectations about who would vote under each proposal are accurate*.
>
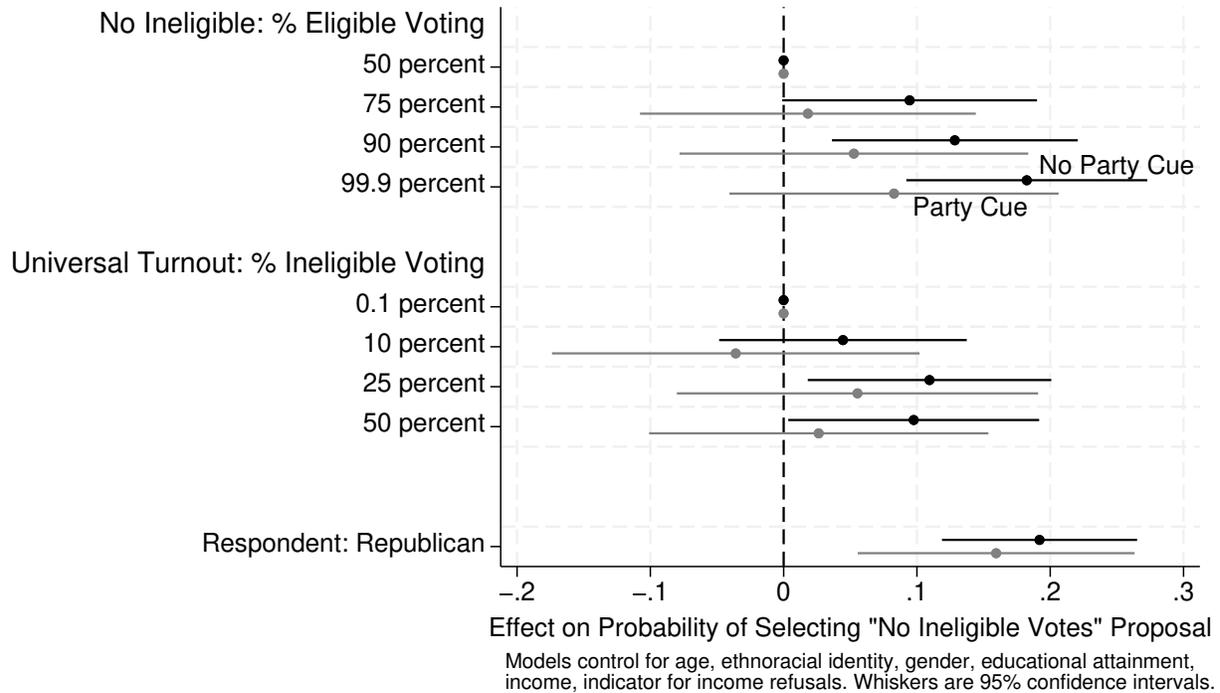> Which of these two approaches would you use?
>
> - [Proposal 1 / [Democratic/Republican] proposal]: All 10,000 eligible voters would vote, but [1 / 100 / 250 / 500] of the 1,000 residents who are ineligible would also vote.
> - [Proposal 2 / [Republican/Democratic] proposal]: [5,000 / 7,500 / 9,000 / 9,990] of the 10,000 eligible voters would vote, but none of the residents who are ineligible would vote.

Voting rule trade-offs in the absence of party cues

Per our pre-analysis plan, we begin our analysis focusing on those assigned to the no party cue condition. We report the results of our OLS regression model in Table SM.2. In the first column, we report a model specifying an indicator for the choice respondents made as our outcome (1 = "no ineligible voting" proposal; 0 = for "universal turnout"). We regress this measure on two sets of indicators: 1) indicators for the rate of eligible voting in the "no ineligible voting" proposal; 2) indicators for the rate of ineligible voting in the "universal turnout" proposal. In each case we treat the lowest rate as our reference group. Our model also includes indicators for respondents who identified as Independent and Republican, and a vector of preregistered demographic controls. We report estimates of interest from this model in Figure 2 (black markers).

Three notable patterns emerge as we move down Figure 2, focusing for now on the black markers. First, consistent with expectations, respondents were more likely to support the proposal that would eliminate ineligible voting when turnout would be higher. For example, they were

Figure 2: Treatment Effects by Presence of Party Cue: Experiment 1. Black markers are estimated coefficients from model restricted to respondents assigned to the condition where no party cue was present; gray markers from model restricted to respondents assigned to a condition with a party cue. Whiskers are 95% confidence intervals See columns (1) and (4) of Table SM.2 for models.

Effect on Probability of Selecting "No Ineligible Votes" Proposal

Models control for age, ethnoracial identity, gender, educational attainment, income, indicator for income refusals. Whiskers are 95% confidence intervals.

approximately 18 percentage points ($b = .182, p < .001$) more likely to choose the proposal that would entirely eliminate ineligible voting when it would yield a near-perfect 99.9 percent turnout rate among eligible voters than when turnout would only be 50 percent (the reference category).

Second, there is some evidence that people are more inclined to support the "no ineligible voting" proposal when the universal turnout proposal would be accompanied by higher rates of ineligible voting. For example, respondents were about 10 percentage points more likely to support the "no ineligible voting" proposal when the universal turnout proposal would be accompanied by very high (25 or 50%) rates of ineligible voting than when it entailed only 0.1% (the reference category) of ineligible persons also casting ballots. However, this sensitivity is somewhat limited. The differences between the 10, 25, and 50 percent ineligible voting in the universal turnout conditions are substantively small and not statistically distinguishable from one another.

Per our pre-analysis plan, we estimated a model to formally test whether Democrats and

Republicans differed in their sensitivity to the percent eligible and ineligible treatments. We interacted each treatment indicator in Table SM.2 with indicators for Independent and Republican respondents. We report this model in Table SM.3. All of the Republican interaction terms fall short of conventional thresholds of statistical significance (with *p*-values ranging from .099 to .8386) and these Republican interactions do not significantly improve the fit of the model (*p* = .494 for test of joint significance). We note that the direct effects of our numeric treatments are notably weaker than we anticipated. Given these weak direct effects, our design does not have sufficient statistical power to identify anything short of dramatic inversions of treatment effects. Thus, for purposes of illustration, in columns (2) and (3) of Table SM.2 we replicate the column (1) model separately for Democrats and Republicans. Even putting aside formal statistical comparisons, the patterns of point estimates that emerge among Democrats and Republicans are broadly similar, offering little beyond a hint of support for the notion that Democrats were more broadly sensitive to the treatments. We explore these partisan differences more directly in Experiment 2.

Third, on average across conditions, Republicans (the bottom-most coefficient in Figure 2) were 19 percentage points more likely to choose the "no ineligible voting" proposal than Democrats. This partisan difference is as large as—in many cases, larger than—any of the experimental treatment effects reported in Figure 2. In other words, even though on average both Democrats and Republicans were responsive to the numeric treatments (and not substantially different from one another), in the absence of party cues attached to the proposals the "baked in" partisan difference was still as large as—in most cases larger than—any single numeric treatment.

Voting rule trade-offs in the presence of party cues

In column (4) of Table SM.2 we re-estimate the column (1) specification, instead restricting the sample to respondents assigned to a condition where the proposals were accompanied by party cues. Estimates from this model are reported as the gray markers in Figure 2. Our pre-registered expectation was that the presence of party cues would attenuate party differences, but in a model pooling across conditions and interacting our numeric treatment indicators and indicators for Republicans and pure Independents with an indicator for the presence of party cues (see Table

SM.4), we find that the gap between Democrats and Republicans in the party cue condition is indistinguishable from what we find in the no party cue condition ($p = 0.656$). Similarly, our pre-analysis plan specified exploratory analysis comparing the estimated treatment effects between the column (1) and (4) specifications. Although a comparison of the estimates indicated by the gray and black markers in Figure 2 offer a modicum of suggestive evidence that they are attenuated in the presence of party cues, formal tests from the interaction model fall well short of allowing us to reject the null hypothesis that the coefficients on these treatment indicators are the same across conditions (p-values on interaction terms range from 0.251 to 0.510).

In a final piece of exploratory analysis that was not pre-registered, in column (5) of Table SM.2 we restrict our analysis to partisans assigned to the party cue condition. We add an indicator set to 1 for respondents whose preferred party was associated with the "no ineligible voters" proposal and 0 for respondents whose party was associated with the "universal turnout" proposal. We find a *dramatic* shift toward the "no ineligible voters" proposal among partisans when it was attributed to their own party. The estimated 37 percentage point effect of this treatment is approximately twice the size of any of the estimated effects reported in Figure 2, a result we revisit in Experiment 2.
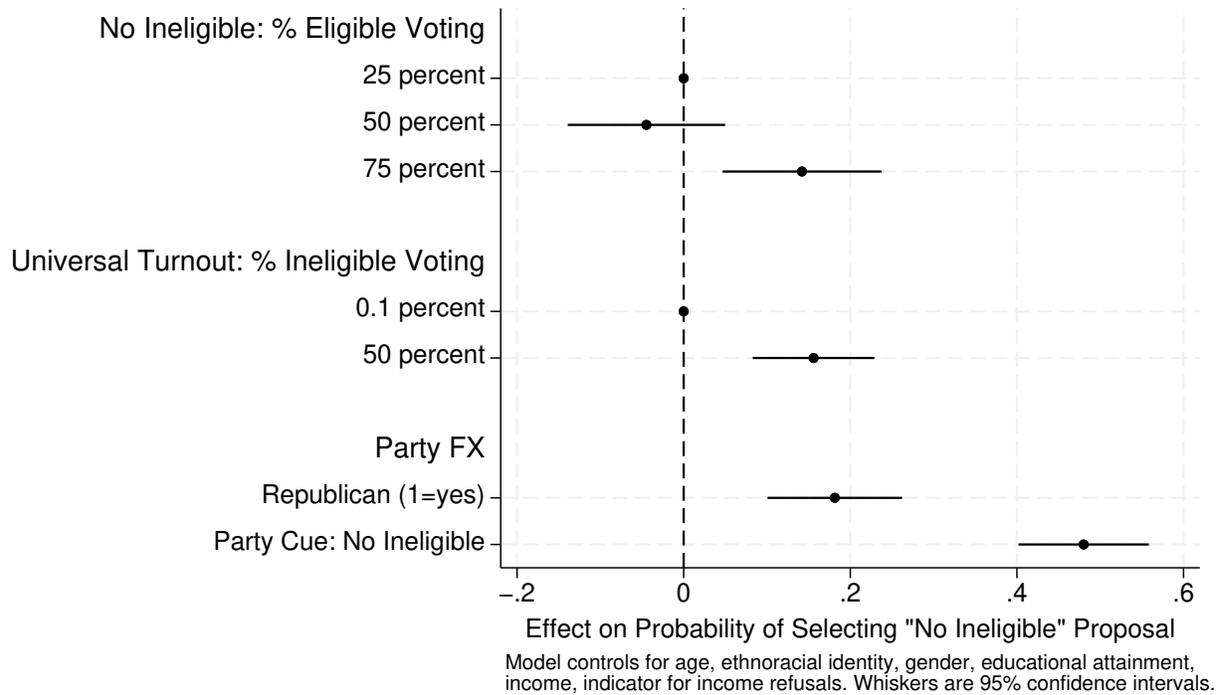
Experiment 2

The second pre-registered experiment was fielded by YouGov as part of a pre-election team module on the 2024 CES (see column [2] of Table SM.1 for summary statistics). The primary purpose was to compare the effects of directional party cues to those associated with variation in ineligible and eligible voting in the proposals, as well as to "baseline" partisan differences in support for eliminating ineligible voting. A secondary purpose was to test whether Democrats and Republicans responded to the party cue and numeric treatments differently.

The design differed from the first experiment in two ways. First, party cues were presented to all participants. This allows us to more precisely estimate the effects of our numeric treatments when party cues are present, as they often are in the political arena. Second, given the modest differences in effects between the numeric treatments in the first experiment, we only used 0.1% (1 ineligible voter) and 50% (500 out of 1,000) as rates of ineligible voting tied to the universal

turnout proposal. The proposal that would eliminate ineligible voting was also accompanied by more extreme variation in eligible turnout rates: 25%, 50%, and 75%. We report estimates from our primary model in Figure 3 (see column [1] of Table SM.5 for regression model).

Figure 3: Pooled Treatment Effects (Experiment 2). Markers are estimated coefficients from a model pooling across respondent partisanship. Whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. See column (1) of Table SM.5 for model.

Model controls for age, ethnoracial identity, gender, educational attainment, income, indicator for income refusals. Whiskers are 95% confidence intervals.

Consistent with the results from the first experiment, we find evidence that the randomly assigned turnout rate (for eligible voters) associated with the "no ineligible voting" proposal affected participants' choices in the expected manner: respondents were approximately 14 percentage points more likely to select that proposal when turnout among eligible voters would be 75 percent, rather than a mere 25 percent. However, the difference between the 25 percent and 50 percent turnout conditions was not statistically significant. Also consistent with the first experiment, respondents were again sensitive to the number of ineligible votes that would be cast under the "universal turnout" proposal. When that proposal was associated with a very high rate of voting among ineligible voters (50 percent), rather than very low rate (0.1 percent), respondents were
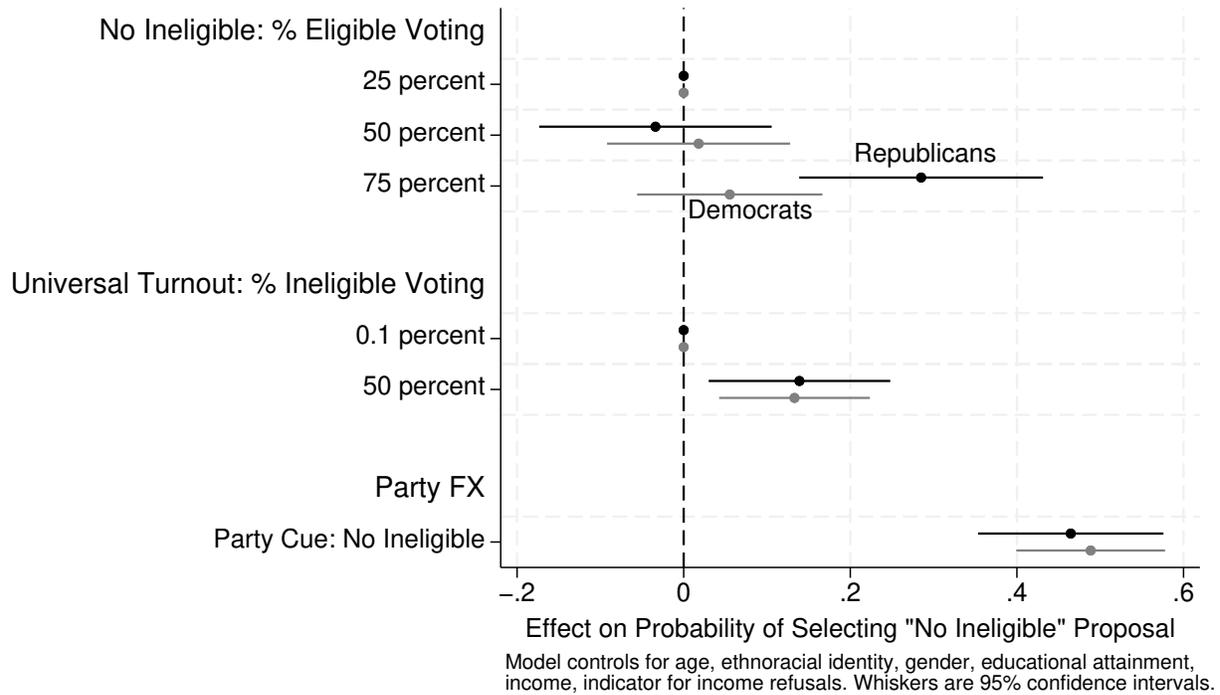
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approximately 16 percentage points more likely to opt for the "no ineligible voting" proposal.

Additionally, after controlling for other variables in the model, Republicans were about 18 percentage points more likely to select the "no ineligible voting" proposal than Democrats. This estimate is almost identical to the one obtained in Experiment 1. Per our pre-analysis plan, we conducted formal, pairwise tests of the equality of the coefficients on the indicators for: A) Republicans, B) 50 percent ineligible voting in the universal turnout proposal, and C) 75 percent eligible turnout in the no ineligible votes proposal. No test allowed us to reject the null hypothesis of "no difference" between any pairing across these three estimates, suggesting that "baseline" partisan differences in preferences are comparable to the effects tied to dramatic variation in rates of eligible and ineligible turnout.

Also following our pre-analysis plan, in Figure 4 we report the treatment effects separately for Democrats and Republicans (see columns [2] and [3] of Table SM.5). We tested these differences formally in a model interacting our indicator for Republican respondents with all treatments and demographic covariates. The patterns of effects are similar for each group, with only one exception: Republicans were more sensitive to the treatment specifying high turnout in the "no ineligible voting" proposal. This difference in effect sizes between Democrats and Republicans is statistically significant ($p = 0.014$). Overall, however, the lack of partisan differences in Figure 4 suggests that the party differences we observe are not primarily driven by differing sensitivity to turnout and ineligible voting rates.

Finally, consistent with the findings from our exploratory analysis in Experiment 1, the effect of the (pre-registered) party cue treatment was simply massive in comparison to the other treatment effects. In Experiment 2, respondents were, on average, 48 percentage points more likely to select the "no ineligible voting" proposal when it was attributed to their preferred party than when it was attributed to the opposing party (see the bottom most coefficient in Figure 3). This estimated effect is easily statistically distinguishable from all other estimates reported in Figure 3 ($p < .001$ for all comparisons) and is similar for both parties (see the two bottom most coefficients in Figure 4).

Figure 4: Treatment Effects by Party (Experiment 2). Markers are estimated coefficients from models pooling across respondent partisanship. Whiskers are 95% confidence intervals. See columns (2) and (3) of Table SM.5 for models. Model interacting respondent party identification with treatments to formally test differences in treatment effects by party (excluding pure Independents) reported in Table SM.6.

Model controls for age, ethnoracial identity, gender, educational attainment, income, indicator for income refusals. Whiskers are 95% confidence intervals.

Discussion

Voting plays a critical role in democracies and low or unequal patterns of turnout are often viewed as a threat to the government's legitimacy. At the same time, high rates of turnout are supposed to be confined to those who are eligible to cast ballots. Although there is reason to expect all Americans to value maximizing eligible turnout and minimizing ineligible voting, our observational evidence demonstrates a substantial partisan gap in priorities regarding whether it is more important to maximize turnout or minimize illegal voting. This gap is long-standing and particularly pronounced among politically interested Americans.

Similar to other recent work in this area (Huber et al., 2025), our measures intentionally divorced these judgments from debates regarding specific policies that may affect patterns of

electoral participation, positioning us to shed light on the extent to which partisan differences in support for voting process reforms are rooted in fundamental rifts in how partisans weight these priorities. Our findings suggest that they are not. Instead, these partisan disagreements appear to be primarily traceable to elite cues.

Although we find some degree of sensitivity to the experimentally varied rates of eligible and ineligible voting associated with the proposals, these effects are arguably modest given how dramatically we varied patterns of turnout. Consider the effect of the rate of ineligible voting in the proposals that would achieve universal turnout. The effect of this proposal being accompanied by an (arguably implausible) 500 out of 1,000 ineligible residents casting ballots, rather than only 1 out of 1,000, was only 10-15 percentage points. In our second experiment, the average effect of *tripling* turnout among eligible voters—from 25 to 75 percent—was less than 20 percentage points.

The limited nature of the effects of these treatments is more stark when we compare them to the role of partisanship. The "effect" of a respondent being a Republican rather than a Democrat was comparable to those associated with the largest effects tied to the substance of the proposals. Although it is tempting to attribute this pattern to a dynamic where, for example, Republicans are simply more averse to ineligible votes — which prior work suggests they might be (Huber et al., 2025) — we do not find any support for the expectation that Republicans were *more sensitive* to the ineligible voting treatments.[10] Moreover, the effects of directional party cues dwarfed the effects associated with the substantive consequences of the proposals.

Taken together, our findings suggest that the particularly stark gaps between politically interested Democrats and Republicans we see in our observational data likely are the product of responses to elite party cues, rather than partisan sorting. Partisan sorting would imply that the public has deeply held views about these tradeoffs that they use to choose which party to identify with. For example, individuals who view ineligible voting as particularly unacceptable would come to identify as Republicans because the learn that Republicans share their position on the issue. However, if this dynamic was at play, we should expect Republicans to respond particularly strongly to the varying rates of ineligible voting in our designs. Again, they do not. Participants

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[10]This result is consistent with the experimental result reported in Huber et al. (2025), as they also do not observe a partisan difference in response to their fraudulent votes treatment.

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from both parties responded similarly, and only modestly, to those treatments. In contrast, the effects of partisan cues were substantial.

The fact that the partisan gap in voting priorities we find in our observational data stretches back to at least 2008 makes these patterns all the more striking. Republican participants in our experiments were no more sensitive to variation in rates of ineligible voting in spite of having decades of "practicing" internalizing elite signals about the threat of ineligible voting. Similarly, although Democrats appear to have been broadly nudged by elites to say they care more about maximizing eligible turnout than preventing ineligible voting, they were no more responsive to rates of eligible voting than Republicans.

This pattern of facts offers reason for both dismay and optimism. From one perspective, it may be normatively disappointing that partisans fail to weigh costs and benefits tied to fundamental features of the democratic process. On the other hand, our findings suggest that there is room to help partisans reach compromises by drawing on the fact that many Democrats and Republicans appear to both value eligible turnout and seek to minimize voting by ineligible persons.

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Supplementary Materials

SM .1 Pre-Analysis Plans

Partisanship and Voting Rules Preferences (#185871)

Author(s)
This pre-registration is currently anonymous to enable blind peer-review.
It has 3 authors.

1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
1) Do Democrats and Republican differ in how they view tradeoffs between increasing turnout and preventing ineligible voters from voting? 2) Are differences attenuated in the presence of party cues?

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
Whether respondent chooses proposal that would entirely prevent ineligible voters from voting.

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
Respondents will be randomly assigned to a party cue (1/3) or no party cue (2/3) condition. Number of eligible and ineligible voters noted in brackets below will be randomly assigned independently and with equal probability (4 possible values of each = 16 conditions). Among those in the party cue condition, which party is tied to which proposal will be randomized with equal probability.

Imagine you get to make the rules for voting in elections in a town. Like most towns in the United States, some voting age adults are eligible to vote while others are not eligible to vote for various reasons. In this town 10,000 of the voting age adults are eligible to vote and 1,000 are ineligible.
[Two experts/A Republican and a Democratic expert] each propose a set of voting rules. Each approach is expected to lead to different patterns of participation. Assume that the expectations about who would vote under each proposal are accurate.
•⬜[Proposal 1 / [Democratic/Republican] proposal]: All 10,000 eligible voters would vote, but [1 / 10 / 100 / 500] of the 1,000 residents who are ineligible would also vote.
•⬜[Proposal 2 / [Republican/Democratic] proposal]: None of the residents who are ineligible would vote, but only [5,000 / 7,500 / 9,000 / 9,990] of the 10,000 eligible voters would vote.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
We will report results from three OLS regression specifications
Restricting sample to no party cue condition
TOP-LEVEL PARTY DIFF IN SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL W/ZERO INELIGIBLE?
DV = Party ID (indicators for pure Independents and Republicans [including leaners] + indicators for eligible/ineligible voter treatment dimensions (3 for each) + demographics
PARTY DIFF IN SENSITIVITY TO TURNOUT AND INELIGIBLE VOTING LEVELS?
DV = Party ID (indicators for pure Independents and Republicans [including leaners] + indicators for eligible/ineligible voter treatment indicators (3 for each) + PID x eligible/ineligible voter treatment indicators + demographics
Full sample
PARTY CUES ATTENUATE PARTY DIFFS?
DV = Party ID (indicators for pure Independents and Republicans [including leaners] + indicators for eligible/ineligible voter treatment dimensions (3 for each) + Party Cue indicator + PID x Party Cue indicator + demographics
**Demographics: age, ethnoracial identity, sex, educational attainment, income (+ indicators for income refusals)

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
Respondents who do not answer the question and/or fail to report demographics or party ID will be excluded

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
1,500

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
We will present descriptive analysis by party of sensitivity to the eligible/ineligible voter treatment dimensions under the no party cue and party cue conditions.

Partisanship and Voting Rule Preferences (#191044)

Author(s)
This pre-registration is currently anonymous to enable blind peer-review.
It has 3 authors.

Pre-registered on: 2024/09/20 - 12:04 PM (PT)

1) Have any data been collected for this study already?
No, no data have been collected for this study yet.

2) What's the main question being asked or hypothesis being tested in this study?
1) Do party cues affect preferences regarding tradeoffs between voting rules that maximize turnout and those that minimize fraud?; 2) If so, how do these "party cue" effects compare to those associated with how much turnout would be enhanced or how much ineligible voting would be prevented by a given rule proposal?; 3) How do effects of party cue treatment compare to observational party differences in voting rule preferences? 4) Are the effects of party cues and expected levels of turnout and ineligible voting different for Democrats and Republicans?

3) Describe the key dependent variable(s) specifying how they will be measured.
Whether respondent chooses proposal that would entirely prevent ineligible voters from voting.

4) How many and which conditions will participants be assigned to?
Number of eligible and ineligible voters noted in brackets below will be randomly assigned independently and with equal probability (6 total conditions). Which party is tied to which proposal will be randomized with equal probability.

Imagine you get to make the rules for voting in elections in a town. Like most towns in the United States, some voting age adults are eligible to vote while others are not eligible to vote for various reasons. In this town 10,000 of the voting age adults are eligible to vote and 1,000 are ineligible.
[Two experts/A Republican and a Democratic expert] each propose a set of voting rules. Each approach is expected to lead to different patterns of participation. Assume that the expectations about who would vote under each proposal are accurate.
•⬚[Democratic/Republican] proposal: All 10,000 eligible voters would vote, but [1 / 500] of the 1,000 residents who are ineligible would also vote.
•⬚Republican/Democratic] proposal: None of the residents who are ineligible would vote, but only [2,500 / 5,000 / 7,500] of the 10,000 eligible voters would vote.

5) Specify exactly which analyses you will conduct to examine the main question/hypothesis.
DV = Party ID (indicators for pure Independents and Republicans [including leaners]) + Indicators for numeric treatments in brackets + Indicator for "preferred party" proposal would entirely prevent ineligible voting + demographics (age, ethnoracial identity, gender, educational attainment, income, indicator for income refusals)

We will formally test pairwise equalities of coefficients on 1) "500 ineligible voters" (ref cat = "1 ineligible"); 2) "7,500 eligible voters" (ref cat = 2,500); 3) indicator for "preferred party" proposal would entirely prevent ineligible voting (set to .5 for pure independents); 4) Indicator for Democratic respondents (ref cat = Republican).

We will also estimate a model, excluding "pure independents," interacting each treatment indicator, as well as demographics noted above with an indicator for Republican respondents. Formal tests tied to interactions between PID indicator and the treatment indicators noted in 1)-3) above.

6) Describe exactly how outliers will be defined and handled, and your precise rule(s) for excluding observations.
Respondents who do not answer the question and/or fail to report demographics or party ID will be excluded.

7) How many observations will be collected or what will determine sample size? No need to justify decision, but be precise about exactly how the number will be determined.
N = 1,000

8) Anything else you would like to pre-register? (e.g., secondary analyses, variables collected for exploratory purposes, unusual analyses planned?)
Exploratory analysis of other political covariates associated with preference for "no ineligible voters" proposal.

SM .2   Question Wording

Cooperative Election Study (Descriptive Analysis; Experiment 2)

Party Identification. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a ... ?

- Democrat

- Republican

- Independent

- Other

Strength of ID Branch (if Democrat or Republican) Would you call yourself a strong [Democrat/Republican] or not so strong [Democrat/Republican]?

- Strong [Democrat/Republican]

- Not so strong [Democrat/Republican]

Party ID Leaning Branch (if Independent or Other) Do you think of yourself as closer to the Democratic or the Republican party?

- The Democratic Party

- The Republican Party

- Neither

- Not sure

Gender. What is your gender?

- Man

- Woman

- Non-binary

- Other

Race. What racial or ethnic group best describes you?

- White

- Black or African-American

- Hispanic or Latino

- Asian or Asian-American

- Native American

- Middle Eastern

- Two or more races

- Other

Age. In what year were you born? (numeric entry; subtract from survey year to get age in years)

Education What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Did not graduate from high school

- High school graduate

- Some college, but no degree (yet)

- 2-year college degree

- 4-year college degree

- Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, PhD, etc.)

Family Income Thinking back over the last year, what was your family's annual income?

- Less than $10,000 (1)

- $10,000 - $19,999 (2)

- $20,000 - $29,999 (3)

- $30,000 - $39,999 (4)

- $40,000 - $49,999 (5)

- $50,000 - $59,999 (6)

- $60,000 - $69,999 (7)

- $70,000 - $79,999 (8)

- $80,000 - $99,999 (9)

- $100,000 - $119,999 (10)

- $120,000 - $149,999 (11)

- $150,000 - $199,999 (12)

- $200,000 - $249,999 (13)

- $250,000 - $349,999 (14)

- $350,000 - $499,999 (15)

- $500,000 or more (16)

- Prefer not to say (set to mean among non-refusals)

SM .3 Additional Analysis

- Table SM.1 reports demographic characteristics of respondents analyzed in Experiments 1 and 2.

- Tables SM.2, SM.3, and SM.4 report regression models tied to Experiment 1.

- Tables SM.5 and SM.6 report regression models tied to Experiment 2.

Table SM.1: Summary Statistics

	Experiment 1 (Verasight)	Experiment 2 (Cooperative Election Study)
Prefer Proposal with Zero Ineligible	0.57	0.40
Pure Independent (1=yes)	0.20	0.16
Republican (1=yes)	0.40	0.43
Age (in years)	47.5	50.4
White	0.61	0.66
Black	0.12	0.14
Hispanic	0.18	0.095
Other Race	0.092	0.018
Asian		0.042
Native American		0.013
Two or more races		0.031
Middle Eastern		0.0041
Male	0.48	0.46
Female	0.51	0.54
Non-binary		0.0016
Other Gender	0.0056	0.0012
Some College/2Y Degree	0.26	
4Y Degree+	0.36	
Education (1-6)		3.53
Income over 50k	0.70	
Income (1-16; refusals = median among non-refusals)		6.83
Income Refusal (1 = yes)		0.075
Observations	1486	976

Table SM.2: Direct Effects Regressions: Experiment 1

	No Party Cue Present			Party Cue Present	
	(1) Pooled	(2) Democrats	(3) Republicans	(4) Pooled	(5) Ds/Rs Only
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible	0.095	0.093	0.027	0.018	0.043
Proposal: 75 percent	(0.049)	(0.070)	(0.075)	(0.064)	(0.061)
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible	0.128**	0.159*	0.042	0.053	0.039
Proposal: 90 percent	(0.047)	(0.068)	(0.074)	(0.067)	(0.065)
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible	0.182**	0.186**	0.159*	0.083	0.091
Proposal: 99.9 percent	(0.046)	(0.068)	(0.069)	(0.063)	(0.061)
Inelig. Voting in Universal Turnout	0.045	0.167*	0.011	-0.036	0.051
Proposal: 10 percent	(0.047)	(0.067)	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.072)
Inelig. Voting in Universal Turnout	0.109*	0.150*	0.043	0.055	0.043
Proposal: 25 percent	(0.047)	(0.066)	(0.070)	(0.069)	(0.066)
Inelig. Voting in Universal Turnout	0.098*	0.148*	0.081	0.026	0.041
Proposal: 50 percent	(0.048)	(0.066)	(0.074)	(0.065)	(0.066)
Respondent: Pure Independent	0.125*			0.082	
	(0.052)			(0.067)	
Respondent: Republican	0.192**			0.159**	0.157**
	(0.037)			(0.053)	(0.049)
Age (in years)	0.006**	0.006**	0.007**	0.003*	0.003
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Black	-0.069	-0.037	-0.154	-0.026	-0.089
	(0.063)	(0.068)	(0.164)	(0.082)	(0.085)
Hispanic	-0.091	-0.005	-0.171	-0.194**	-0.181**
	(0.051)	(0.072)	(0.090)	(0.070)	(0.067)
Other Race	-0.078	-0.022	-0.145	-0.397**	-0.274**
	(0.061)	(0.105)	(0.089)	(0.068)	(0.073)
Female	0.029	0.018	-0.003	0.113*	0.054
	(0.033)	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.048)	(0.048)
Other Gender	-0.082	-0.035		-0.241*	-0.060
	(0.240)	(0.194)		(0.102)	(0.098)
Income over 50k	-0.016	-0.048	0.010	0.027	-0.000
	(0.041)	(0.065)	(0.062)	(0.059)	(0.057)
Some College/2Y Degree	-0.006	0.090	-0.015	0.092	0.106
	(0.045)	(0.070)	(0.063)	(0.063)	(0.066)
4Y Degree+	0.046	0.110	0.015	-0.025	0.013
	(0.042)	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Party Cue: No Ineligible					0.373**
					(0.047)
Constant	0.051	-0.081	0.296	0.264*	0.097
	(0.087)	(0.112)	(0.155)	(0.119)	(0.118)
Observations	997	459	398	489	417

Cell entries are OLS coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table SM.3: Conditionality by Respondent Party: Experiment 1

	(1)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 75 percent=1	0.090
	(0.070)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 90 percent=1	0.152*
	(0.067)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 99.9 percent=1	0.183**
	(0.068)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 10 percent=1	0.171*
	(0.068)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 25 percent=1	0.158*
	(0.068)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 50 percent=1	0.156*
	(0.066)
Pure Independent=1	0.124
	(0.142)
Republican=1	0.332**
	(0.094)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 75 percent=1 × Pure Independent=1	0.171
	(0.142)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 75 percent=1 × Republican=1	-0.058
	(0.103)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 90 percent=1 × Pure Independent=1	0.141
	(0.133)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 90 percent=1 × Republican=1	-0.107
	(0.100)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 99.9 percent=1 × Pure Independent=1	0.061
	(0.140)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 99.9 percent=1 × Republican=1	-0.020
	(0.098)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 10 percent=1 × Pure Independent=1	-0.357*
	(0.148)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 10 percent=1 × Republican=1	-0.160
	(0.097)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 25 percent=1 × Pure Independent=1	0.002
	(0.135)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 25 percent=1 × Republican=1	-0.123
	(0.097)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 50 percent=1 × Pure Independent=1	-0.105
	(0.149)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 50 percent=1 × Republican=1	-0.087
	(0.098)
Constant	-0.019
	(0.090)
Demographic Controls?	Yes
Observations	997

Cell entries are OLS coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table SM.4: Party Cues Attenuate Treatment FX?: Experiment 1

	(1)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 75 percent=1	0.090
	(0.049)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 90 percent=1	0.131**
	(0.047)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 99.9 percent=1	0.184**
	(0.047)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 10 percent=1	0.047
	(0.048)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 25 percent=1	0.114*
	(0.047)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 50 percent=1	0.096*
	(0.048)
Pure Independent=1	0.130*
	(0.052)
Republican=1	0.200**
	(0.037)
Party Cue Condition=1	0.111
	(0.081)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 75 percent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.063
	(0.082)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 90 percent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.054
	(0.082)
Elig. in No Inelig. Prop.: 99.9 percent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.090
	(0.079)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 10 percent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.075
	(0.085)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 25 percent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.067
	(0.084)
Inelig. in Univ. Turnout Prop.: 50 percent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.062
	(0.082)
Pure Independent=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.038
	(0.086)
Republican=1 × Party Cue Condition=1	-0.028
	(0.062)
Constant	0.081
	(0.078)
Demographic Controls?	Yes
Observations	1486

Cell entries are OLS coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table SM.5: Direct Effects Regressions: Experiment 2

	(1) Pooled	(2) Democrats	(3) Republicans
Party Cue: No Ineligible	0.480**	0.489**	0.465**
	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.057)
Republican (1=yes)	0.181**		
	(0.041)		
Pure Independent (1=yes)	0.305**		
	(0.059)		
Inelig. Voting in Universal Turnout Proposal: 50 percent	0.156**	0.133**	0.139*
	(0.037)	(0.046)	(0.055)
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible Proposal: 50 percent	-0.045	0.018	-0.034
	(0.048)	(0.056)	(0.071)
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible Proposal: 75 percent	0.142**	0.055	0.285**
	(0.049)	(0.057)	(0.074)
Age (in years)	0.002*	0.006**	-0.004*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Black	0.045	0.129*	-0.054
	(0.061)	(0.056)	(0.141)
Hispanic	0.001	0.129	-0.104
	(0.070)	(0.089)	(0.133)
Asian	-0.083	0.159	-0.292
	(0.132)	(0.108)	(0.163)
Native American	-0.214	0.028	-0.235
	(0.153)	(0.132)	(0.199)
Two or more races	-0.155	-0.054	-0.340
	(0.142)	(0.088)	(0.246)
Other	0.033	0.229	-0.173
	(0.081)	(0.138)	(0.090)
Middle Eastern	-0.442	0.591**	-1.152**
	(0.449)	(0.159)	(0.080)
Woman	0.041	0.057	-0.036
	(0.038)	(0.043)	(0.060)
Non-binary	-0.003	0.256**	
	(0.093)	(0.087)	
Other	-0.319		-0.059
	(0.183)		(0.137)
Education (1-6)	-0.000	-0.002	0.015
	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.024)
Income (1-16; refusals = median among non-refusals)	-0.009	-0.007	-0.003
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.010)
Income Refusal (1 = yes)	0.004	-0.161**	0.159
	(0.066)	(0.062)	(0.082)
Constant	-0.094	-0.310**	0.355*
	(0.105)	(0.102)	(0.169)
Observations	976	475	351

Cell entries are OLS coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table SM.6: Conditionality by Respondent Party: Experiment 2

	(1)
Republican (1=yes)=1	0.665**
	(0.197)
Own Party Cue: No Ineligible=1	0.489**
	(0.046)
Inelig. Voting in Universal Turnout Proposal: 50 percent=1	0.133**
	(0.046)
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible Proposal: 50 percent=1	0.018
	(0.056)
Elig. Voting in No Ineligible Proposal: 75 percent=1	0.055
	(0.057)
Republican (1=yes)=1 × Own Party Cue: No Ineligible=1	-0.024
	(0.072)
Republican (1=yes)=1 × Inelig. Voting in Universal Turnout Proposal: 50 percent=1	0.006
	(0.072)
Republican (1=yes)=1 × Elig. Voting in No Ineligible Proposal: 50 percent=1	-0.052
	(0.090)
Republican (1=yes)=1 × Elig. Voting in No Ineligible Proposal: 75 percent=1	0.230*
	(0.093)
Constant	-0.310**
	(0.102)
Observations	826

Cell entries are OLS coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$. Coefficients on demographic controls and interactions between demographics and the Own Party Cue treatment suppressed for presentation purposes.