

The Party Faithful: Partisan Images, Candidate Religion, and the Electoral Impact of Party Identification

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We argue that the factors shaping the impact of partisanship on vote choice—"partisan voting"—depend on the nature of party identification. Because party identification is partly based on images of the social group characteristics of the parties, the social profiles of political candidates should affect levels of partisan voting. A candidate's religious affiliation enables a test of this hypothesis. Using survey experiments which vary a hypothetical candidate's religious affiliation, we find strong evidence that candidates' religions can affect partisan voting. Identifying a candidate as an evangelical (a group viewed as Republican) increases Republican support for, and Democratic opposition to, the candidate, while identifying the candidate as a Catholic (a group lacking a clear partisan profile) has no bearing on partisan voting. Importantly, the conditional effect of candidate religion on partisan voting requires the group to have a salient partisan image and holds with controls for respondents' own religious affiliations and ideologies.

Of all the factors affecting voting behavior in American elections, party identification is among the most consistently important (Campbell et al. 1960). That impact, however, is not constant. "Partisan voting"—party identification's relationship to electoral choice—varies by political context (Miller 1978; Miller et al. 1976), across types of elections (Bartels 2000), and over time (Bartels 2000; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008; Miller and Shanks 1996). Citizens' images of the social group character of the parties also may affect partisan voting (Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991; Green, Palmquist, and Shickler 2002), and given the candidate-centered nature of American politics, this impact may operate through candidates' social characteristics.

To assess this possibility, we focus on one candidate characteristic: religious orientation. The role of religion

in American elections has received ever-increasing attention, but the overwhelming focus has been on how voters' own religions affect their voting decisions (Campbell 2007; Green 2007; Layman 2001). A growing literature has begun to examine how voters respond to a candidate's religious affiliation (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2009; Kalkan, Layman, and Green 2008; Kane, Craig, and Wald 2004; McDermott 2007, 2009b), but it has not systematically examined if, and how, a candidate's religion conditions partisan voting. Here we focus on candidate religion, not because it is more important than other social characteristics to partisan voting, but because it is especially illustrative.

We employ experiments, embedded within national sample surveys, which provide respondents with descriptions of a hypothetical congressional candidate and

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randomly vary the description of the candidate's religious orientation. This allows us to isolate the conditional effect of the candidate's religion on the relationship between party identification and support for him. We find that a candidate's religious traits have a conditional effect on partisan voting, but only a particular religious group (evangelicals) is clearly and strongly associated with a given party.

Party Identification, Partisan Voting, and the Conditional Effect of Candidate Traits

While there has been a great deal of debate about the nature of party identification and the factors that structure it (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960; Fiorina 1981; Franklin and Jackson 1983; Green, Palmquist, and Shickler 2002; Miller 1991), there is implicit agreement that party identification serves as a summary of individuals' orientations toward the parties, providing citizens with a shortcut for making voting decisions. Thus, the degree to which the elements of an election, including candidate characteristics, reflect that summary judgment about the parties should condition the strength and character of partisan voting.

For example, party identification originally was defined as a psychological attachment to a party (Campbell et al. 1960). If true, then partisan voting should fluctuate with party involvement in campaigns, either through candidates emphasizing their party affiliations or party organizations mobilizing support for candidates. In fact, partisan voting is greater under such circumstances (Highton 2009; Miller 1978). A different view of party identification sees it as a summary evaluation of the parties' issue and ideological orientations (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981). In this case, partisan voting should vary with the issue agendas of campaigns and the degree of issue difference between parties and candidates. In fact, partisan voting is greater when candidates emphasize traditional partisan issues (Miller 1978; Miller et al. 1976) and when the ideological differences between parties and candidates are larger (Bartels 2000; Highton 2009; Jackson and Carsey 1999).

Yet another view of party identification draws on both the original definition and earlier work on the close connection between social groups and parties (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). This view sees party identification as rooted in citizens' social group identities and their perceptions of the social groups that strongly support each party (Green, Palmquist, and Shickler 2002;

Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991). Based on this perspective, we argue that the social profile of candidates should play a fundamental role in shaping partisan voting.

The candidate-centered nature of American elections means that candidate social characteristics such as race (Carsey 1995; Citrin, Green, and Sears 1990; Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993), gender (Dolan 1998; McDermott 1997; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Streb et al. 2008), and religion (Campbell, Green, and Monson 2009; McDermott 2009a) have a direct impact on vote choice. But candidates' social characteristics also may condition the electoral impact of other factors if they enable citizens to infer electorally relevant information (Conover and Feldman 1989; Fiske and Taylor 1991). Past research finds that voters draw inferences about candidates' issue positions, ideologies, qualifications, and experience from their social characteristics (Berinsky and Mendelberg 2005; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; McDermott 2007, 2009b; Mendelberg 2001; Sigelman et al. 1995). Voters also may draw inferences about candidates' party ties from their social characteristics. Because citizens have clear images of the groups associated with the parties (Bastedo and Lodge 1980; Miller, Wlezien, and Hildreth 1991) and these images shape party identification (Green, Palmquist, and Shickler 2002), differences in candidates' group identities should be related to differences in partisan voting.

Of course, groups vary in the strength of their association with the parties. Some groups may be strongly linked to the Democrats or Republicans. Candidate affiliations with such groups should have a greater impact on partisan voting. Candidates identified with groups that have a weak partisan association should have little influence on partisan voting. The salience of group-party associations to voters may be critical as well. Candidates' social group ties may influence partisan voting only if the party-group linkages are readily accessible to voters when they evaluate candidates (e.g., Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock 1991; Zaller 1992).

Religion, Party Images, and Partisan Voting

A candidate's religion might have a direct effect on vote choice, with voters preferring a candidate of their own faith. Or it might have an indirect effect—voters might infer traits or beliefs from a candidate's religion, and those inferences could influence voter decisions. For example, McDermott (2009b) finds that voters infer that evangelical Protestant candidates are conservative, competent, and trustworthy. Voters also may infer candidates'

partisanship from their religious orientations when religious groups are strongly associated with a party.

Religion has long been associated with partisanship in the United States, although the association of particular religions with the major parties has changed in recent times (Green 2007). For example, Catholics were once closely aligned with the Democrats, but are no longer. Citizens have taken note of this shift by not seeing a distinctive partisan profile for Catholic candidates (McDermott 2007). In contrast, Green, Palmquist, and Shickler note that the “mobilization of Christian fundamentalist leaders on behalf of a conservative social agenda altered . . . how Republicans as a social group were perceived” (2002, 11–12). Bolce and De Maio (1999a, 1999b, 2007, 2008) show that evangelical and fundamentalist Christians are linked by voters not only to staunch conservatism, but also to the Republican Party, with negative views of fundamentalists growing more connected to negative evaluations of the GOP and its candidates.

There should thus be wide variation in the public’s partisan images of religious groups, with different candidate religions conditioning partisan voting in diverse ways. When candidates have religious affiliations that are consistent with party stereotypes (e.g., Catholic Democrats in earlier eras or evangelical Republicans today), the result should be increased partisan voting; in contrast, partisan voting should decrease when candidate religion contradicts party images.

Religious orientations also may tap into the public’s perceptions of particular policy and ideological viewpoints. Some religious groups are closely linked to particular attitudes, such as the connections between evangelical Protestants and traditional morality, black Protestants and civil rights, and Jews and liberalism. In some instances, the issue inferences that citizens are likely to draw from candidates’ religious orientations—for example, surmising that an evangelical candidate is opposed to abortion—may closely parallel their perceptions of party beliefs (e.g., the GOP as more pro-life and conservative) and thus increase levels of partisan voting. In other cases, the issue images that candidate religions trigger in voters’ minds—for example, seeing a Catholic candidate as opposed to both abortion and the death penalty—may not conform to their images of either party’s issue positions, and thus reduce partisan voting.

Data and Party Images

This investigation employs data collected as part of the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) conducted in the fall of 2006 (round 1), and then in a follow-

up study conducted in the summer of 2007 (round 2) using the same methodology.¹ Both surveys were administered online by Polimetrix, and a comparison of these samples to other data reveals that they are a reasonably accurate reflection of the American electorate, though somewhat more politically knowledgeable than the population as a whole (see Ansolabehere 2006, 2008; Rivers 2006; and Vavreck and Rivers 2008 for more details).

To gauge the extent to which citizens associate particular groups with one of the two major parties, we asked the respondents to the round 2 survey to indicate whether they viewed the members of a variety of religious and nonreligious groups as being “mainly Democrats, mainly Republicans, or a pretty even mix of both.” Table 1 shows their placements of six religious groups (columns 1–3). Clearly, citizens see large differences across these religious groups. In keeping with their increasingly strong ties to the GOP (Layman and Hussey 2007) and the prevailing stereotype of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians as highly conservative (Bolce and De Maio 1999a, 1999b, 2008), evangelical Christians are perceived as overwhelmingly Republican, with nearly three-fourths of respondents identifying them as “mainly Republicans,” and only 4% of our sample placing them in the Democratic camp. In fact, of all of the groups included in this battery, only “conservatives” (80% Republican) are viewed as being more Republican than evangelicals, while “people in business,” the traditional backbone of the Republican coalition, were associated much less clearly with the GOP (59% Republican). Both Mormons and the generic group “religious people” have relatively strong Republican profiles, with pluralities identifying them as “mainly Republicans,” and very few respondents viewing them as Democrats. However, the aggregate party images of Mormons and religious people are far more opaque than those for evangelicals, as over 40% of respondents perceive each group as a mixture of Republicans and Democrats.

Catholics, in contrast, do not have a clear partisan profile at all. In keeping with the movement of Catholics away from having strong ties to the Democratic Party in the 1960s to currently being evenly divided between the two parties (McDermott 2007; Mockabee 2007), about as many respondents view them as “mainly Democrats” as “mainly Republicans,” and a majority of respondents see them as “a pretty even mix of both parties.” The partisan image for Jews is much clearer, with a plurality of respondents (41%) placing them in the Democratic camp. However, given the long history of strong Jewish ties to

¹There were 3,000 cases in the first-round survey and 2,000 cases in the second round. Since this article does not employ all of the experimental manipulations in either survey, the number of cases in each model is smaller.

TABLE 1 Party Images of Religious Groups and Their 2006 Congressional Voting Behavior

	Party Image of Group ("Members of This Group Are . . .") ^a			Reported 2006 Congressional Vote	
	Mainly Republicans	Pretty Even Mix of Both	Mainly Democrats	Republican	Democratic
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Evangelical Christians	73.7	18.9	4.2	70.2	29.8
Mormons	51.3	41.1	5.1	72.2	27.8
Religious people	45.8	45.2	5.3	62.8	37.2
Catholics	24.7	52.4	20.1	52.7	47.3
Jews	17.7	37.5	41.2	30.7	69.3
Nonreligious people	2.9	45.4	47.7	34.8	65.2

Note: Entries are row percentages.

^aThe percentages in columns 1–3 do not equal 100 because those who skipped the question are not included.

the Democrats, it is somewhat surprising that 18% of respondents view Jews as “mainly Republicans” and a near plurality sees them as a mixture of Democrats and Republicans. “Nonreligious people” have the strongest Democratic profile of any of our religious groups, with a slight plurality of respondents viewing them as Democrats and a near plurality viewing them as a partisan mixture—almost the mirror image of their generically “religious” counterparts. However, the perceived association of nonreligious people with the Democrats is not as strong as that of nonreligious groups such as Hispanics (56% Democratic), union members (71%), blacks (76%), and liberals (79%).

These party-group images have a strong basis in the reality of group voting behavior. The last two columns of the table show the reported congressional votes of 2006 CCES respondents from these religious groups,² and the patterns are quite similar to those for the groups’ party images. Evangelicals, Mormons, and religious people voted strongly Republican, while nonreligious people and Jews gave the large majority of their votes to Democratic candidates. Catholics supported the two parties evenly.

As we have noted, the effect on partisan voting of candidate affiliation with a group may depend not just on the public’s partisan images, but also on how salient the group is to such images. To assess the salience of partisan group associations, we asked respondents open-ended questions about “the groups that come to mind for you when you think about the Republican and Democratic Parties.” Respondents were asked to name up to

three groups for each party, and we coded the thousands of individual responses into 42 categories of Democratic groups and 46 categories for the GOP. Table 2 displays the ten groups mentioned most frequently for each party, as well as relevant religious groups not in the top ten (see Table 2).³

Religious groups figure prominently in the public’s perception of the Republican Party. Only “conservatives” were mentioned more frequently than groups associated with evangelical Protestantism: “evangelicals,” “fundamentalists,” “Christian conservatives,” and religious/Christian right groups. The GOP also is closely associated with religion in general: “religious people,” “Christians,” and general church groups. Closely linked to traditionalist religion are groups advocating conservative positions on cultural issues such as abortion and gay rights, and they also are prominent in Republican images, receiving a higher percentage of mentions than all but three other categories of groups. Thus, when a candidate is an evangelical or simply highly religious, partisan voting clearly should be amplified: Republican support should increase and support from Democratic identifiers should decrease.

On the Democratic side, *none* of the ten groups mentioned most often are religious groups. Some of the prominent groups in the electorate’s image of the Democratic coalition—cultural liberals, environmentalists, and people associated with Hollywood—are associated with religious progressivism or antipathy toward traditionalist religion, but none are explicitly religious. Seculars,

²Catholics, Jews, and Mormons were defined by self-identification, evangelical Christians were defined as white, born-again Protestants, and religious and nonreligious people were defined by an index of religiosity.

³We did not count references to the party itself (e.g., Democratic National Committee) in determining the top ten groups for each party. More details on the question wording and the full range of responses are provided in the online supporting information document.

TABLE 2 Group Images of the Parties: The Top Ten Groups Mentioned in Open-Ended Questions about the Republican and Democratic Coalitions, Along with Selected Religious Groups

Republican Party		Democratic Party	
Group	Percentage of Responses	Group	Percentage of Responses
1. Ideological conservatives, right wing, conservative media	16.99	1. Ideological liberals, progressives, left	17.55
2. Evangelicals, fundamentalists, Christian conservatives, religious/Christian right	13.16	2. Working class, blue collar, unions	10.87
3. Big business, big money, corporations	10.30	3. Environmentalists	5.01
4. Gun owners, NRA	5.67	4. Blacks/NAACP/civil rights groups	4.35
5. Rich people, upper income	5.07	5. ACLU, civil liberties groups	4.09
6. Anti-abortion, pro-life groups	4.75	6. Abortion rights/pro-choice groups	4.01
7. Religious people, Christians, church groups	4.29	7. Socialists, communists	2.84
8. Military, pro-war, hawks	3.00	8. Feminists/women's rights groups	2.43
9. Middle class, white collar, middle America	1.88	9. Gays, homosexuals, gay rights groups	1.92
10. Racist, prejudiced, anti-immigrant, nativist	1.63	10. Poor people, welfare recipients	1.87
<i>Other religious groups</i>		<i>Other religious groups</i>	
Catholics	.13	Seculars, atheists, agnostics, antireligious	.44
Mormons	.11	Catholics	.04
Jews	.04	Jews	.04

Note: Entries are the percentage of all of the open-ended responses referring to the particular group. Respondents were allowed to provide up to three responses.

atheists, and agnostics are the most frequently cited groups related to religion, but they were mentioned in only 0.44% of responses. In keeping with the changing partisan image of Catholics (McDermott 2007), Catholics were mentioned less frequently for the Democrats than for the GOP, but were mentioned very rarely for either party.

Mormons and Jews each present an interesting case. Within the electorate, voters in each group overwhelmingly support one party or the other; the closed-ended prompt also revealed that each is associated with either the Republicans (Mormons) or Democrats (Jews) in voters' minds. But neither group has a salient connection to either party. Possibly reflecting the relatively small size of the Mormon and Jewish populations (less than 2% in most surveys), only 0.11% of all responses mentioned Mormons as a Republican group, while 0.04% mentioned Jews in connection with the Democrats. Because neither group has a salient partisan association, we would not expect a Mormon or Jewish candidate to condition partisan voting.

The Experiments

The questionnaires administered to these samples contained embedded experiments designed to isolate the effects of religious traits on the respondents' likelihood of voting for hypothetical candidates. To account for the fact that the two parties tend to be associated with different policy agendas (Petrocik 1996) and the possibility that candidates' issue agendas also may structure levels of partisan voting, we provided our respondents with two different issue profiles for our hypothetical candidate. The candidate stressed issues typically emphasized by the Republican Party ("Republican issue profile") in one and issues typically associated with the Democratic Party ("Democratic issue profile") in the other. The baseline description of the candidate with the Republican issue profile is as follows (issues in bold-face):

Now we would like to get your opinion about a candidate running for Congress outside of your

state. Please read his description, and then tell us what you think about him.

John Robinson owns a local pharmacy. He is forty-one years old, married, and has three children. As one of the most prominent citizens in his community, he has long been active in local politics. In a recent newspaper article, this is what he said when he was asked why he has entered the congressional race: “I am running for Congress because I want to see our values protected, our borders secure, our people safe, our economy strong, and our troops supported.”

If you lived in this candidate’s congressional district, how likely would you be to vote for him? [Very Likely, Somewhat Likely, Not Very Likely, Not At All Likely]

The candidate with the Democratic issue profile had an identical biography, but different issues:

“I am running for Congress because I want to see good wages, a clean environment, effective healthcare, quality schools, and honest government.”

Judging from the relationship between party identification and candidate support in the baseline conditions, respondents saw clear partisan overtones in these issue profiles. When our candidate emphasized issues typically stressed by the GOP, the percentage of respondents indicating that they would be “very likely” to vote for him was 53 among self-identified Republicans, but only 18 among Democrats. When the candidate emphasized issues typically stressed by the Democrats, the pattern was reversed. Over 46% of Democrats, but only 21% of Republicans, said that they would be very likely to vote for him.

The treatments provided the respondents with a religious cue by modifying the baseline description to include religious traits associated to one degree or another with party stereotypes. Here is an example (with the religious trait in boldface):

*John Robinson . . . , and has three children. As one of the most prominent **evangelical Christians** in his community, he has long been active in both **his church** and local politics. In a recent newspaper article, this is what he said . . . : “**As a man of faith**, I am running for Congress because . . .*

The other religious traits were “Catholic,” “Mormon,” “Jew,” and an indicator of generic religiosity, where the

candidate was described with the words “one of the most prominent members of the local church in his community, he has long been active in both his church and local politics.” Other treatments added partisan cues to the religious traits, describing the candidate as a Republican or Democrat.⁴

The results from the partisan group associations suggest that certain types of religious cues should elicit an explicitly partisan response from voters, thus conditioning partisan voting. Because citizens clearly think of evangelicals and religious people as Republicans, we expect that evangelical and generically religious candidates should attract more support from Republican identifiers and less support from Democrats. In contrast, a Catholic candidate should not affect levels of partisan voting since Catholics are not strongly associated with either the Republicans or the Democrats. Our expectations are similar for the Mormon and Jewish cues. Both of those groups were clearly more identified with one party over the other when respondents were asked to identify their partisan tendencies—implying that Mormon and Jewish identities for candidates should condition partisan voting. However, neither group was even remotely salient to respondents’ group images of the parties. When citizens apply their partisan heuristics to their voting decisions, neither Mormons nor Jews are likely to be at the top of their heads, thus limiting the impact of these candidate religions on partisan voting.

Religious Traits and Partisan Voting

To examine the degree to which candidates’ religious traits condition the impact of party identification on vote choice, we estimate a series of simple models with the following form:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Likelihood of Support}_i = & b_0 + b_1 \text{Party Identification}_i \\ & + b_2 \text{Treatment}_i + b_3 (\text{Party ID}_i \\ & \times \text{Treatment}_i) \end{aligned}$$

Party identification is the standard 7-point scale, recoded to range from 0 for strong Democrats to 1 for strong Republicans. The treatment variable is a dummy variable

⁴The evangelical and general religion cues were applied to both profiles. The Catholic and Mormon cues were applied only to the Republican profile. The Jewish and partisan cues were applied only to the Democratic profile. While these experiments may not accurately simulate actual congressional campaigns, they do allow us to isolate the unique effects of candidate religious traits on partisan voting, something that is more difficult with observational data. They also give us a much larger number of observations than in a typical laboratory experiment.

on which a score of 1 indicates the respondents who received a religious cue and 0 indicates respondents who received the baseline condition. The multiplicative interaction between party identification and the treatment variable captures the degree to which the religious trait affects the impact of party identification on vote choice. Because the respondents were assigned to treatments randomly, there is generally no need for demographic controls.⁵

We estimate all of our models with logistic regression because our dependent variable in these models is a dichotomous variable coded 1 for respondents who said that they were “very likely” to vote for the candidate and 0 for all other respondents. We condensed the four-category scale on which respondents placed themselves into a binary variable for two reasons. First, we are interested in the impact of party identification on the likelihood of actually voting for candidates with particular religious characteristics, and respondents who said they were “very likely” to support our candidate are more likely than those in the other three categories to vote for him in an actual election. Second, we estimated our models with a variety of estimation techniques and with different numbers of categories in the dependent variable, and the results were all very similar. Thus we focus on the simplest set of results.⁶

We report the logit coefficients, which do not provide a direct indication of the substantive effects of independent variables, but do shed light on the direction and statistical significance of those effects. Because our models include an interaction between party identification and the treatment variable, the coefficient on party identification indicates its effect on the likelihood of being “very likely” to vote for our candidate among respondents in the baseline condition (0 on the treatment variable), while the coefficient on the treatment variable represents the effect of the candidate religion cue among strong Democrats (0 on party identification). The coefficient on the interaction term represents the difference in the effect of party identification for the treatment

group respondents and for respondents in the baseline condition, or whether the impact of partisanship on vote choice is enhanced or dampened when a candidate has a particular religious affiliation. We also display figures that show the probabilities of being very likely to vote for the candidate across all categories of party identification for the baseline condition and the various treatment conditions.⁷

Table 3 and Figure 1 show the effects of various candidate religious characteristics on partisan voting when the candidate has either a Republican or Democratic issue profile. The effect of partisanship on candidate support in the baseline condition (represented by the coefficient on party identification in each model and by the solid lines in the figure) is highly significant in both issue profiles. However, the nature of that effect is dramatically different across the two profiles. The impact of party identification is strongly positive when the candidate focuses on “Republican issues,” with the probability of being very likely to vote for him increasing from .10 among strong Democrats to .58 among strong Republicans. It is strongly negative when the candidate has a Democratic issue profile, with the probability of very likely support decreasing from .51 for strong Democrats to .09 for strong Republicans.

The first two columns of the table and the first two segments of the figure show how identifying the candidate as an evangelical Christian modifies the electoral impact of partisanship. When the candidate has a Republican issue profile, the positive and significant coefficient on the interaction term indicates that identifying him as an evangelical enhances the positive effect of party identification on support for him. The figure illustrates the magnitude of that enhancement, showing the probability of very likely support increasing from .07 among strong Democrats to .72 among strong Republicans.

The effect of identifying the candidate as evangelical on partisan voting is more dramatic when he has a Democratic issue profile. The positive and significant coefficient on the interaction term indicates that the effect of party identification on the probability of support for the candidate is less negative when he is an evangelical. However, part B of the figure shows that the effect actually becomes positive for an evangelical candidate, with support increasing significantly with increasing Republican party identification. That is due partly to Republican identifiers becoming more favorably disposed toward the candidate: the probability of very likely support among

⁵We compared all of the experimental treatment groups used in this analysis to the baseline group on a wide variety of sociodemographic variables (education, income, gender, age, region, race, religiosity, identification as a born-again Christian, and religious affiliation) as well as party and ideological identification. For the majority of the experimental treatments employed in the analysis, there were no statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the baseline group. For the treatment groups for which there were significant differences, the differences were only on a small number of variables. We reestimated the models for those groups with controls for the relevant variables, and in no case did the results we present here change in any noticeable way.

⁶The results using alternative estimators are presented in the online supporting information.

⁷The online supporting information provides more detail about the predicted probabilities from our analyses and confidence intervals around them. We estimated the confidence intervals using code provided in Hanmer and Kalkan (2009).

TABLE 3 Candidate Religion and Partisan Voting: Logit Estimates of the Effect of Party Identification, Candidate Religion Cues, and Their Interactions on Candidate Support

Independent Variables	Evangelical Cue (Republican Profile)	Evangelical Cue (Democratic Profile)	Generic Religion Cue (Republican Profile)	Generic Religion Cue (Democratic Profile)	Catholic Cue (Republican Profile)	Jewish Cue (Democratic Profile)	Mormon Cue (Republican Profile)
Candidate Religion Cue ^a	-.43 (.43)	-1.96* (.43)	-.77* (.37)	-1.64* (.42)	-.20 (.41)	.13 (.37)	-.43 (.46)
Party Identification ^b	2.53* (.29)	-2.51* (.57)	2.53* (.29)	-2.51* (.57)	2.53* (.29)	-2.51* (.57)	2.53* (.29)
Party Identification X C and Religion Cue	1.09 (.62)	3.57* (.77)	1.26* (.53)	3.06* (.77)	.40 (.60)	-.12 (.77)	.26 (.63)
Constant	-2.22* (.20)	.06 (.28)	-2.22* (.20)	.06 (.28)	-2.22* (.20)	.06 (.28)	-2.22* (.20)
Pseudo R ²	.15	.07	.16	.07	.13	.11	.12
χ^2 (df = 3)	148.48	28.43	191.62	24.78	129.11	90.09	121.78
% Correctly Predicted (N)	74.94 (822)	78.46 (390)	74.67 (995)	78.13 (375)	74.10 (834)	74.35 (386)	74.39 (824)

Note: Entries are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable is coded 1 for respondents who are “very likely” to support the candidate and 0 for all other respondents.

^aComparison category includes respondents in the baseline condition.

^bRanges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

*p < .05.

strong Republicans increases from .09 for the baseline candidate to .30 for the evangelical candidate. However, it is due even more to Democrats becoming much less likely to vote for the candidate (as the negative coefficient on the treatment variable indicates). The probabilities of very likely support among strong, weak, and leaning Democrats are all substantially lower for the evangelical candidate than for the baseline candidate.⁸

The fact that strong Republicans are more supportive than strong Democrats of this evangelical candidate even though his issue agenda is more closely associated with Democratic priorities illustrates the powerful influence that a candidate’s social group traits exert on partisan voting, particularly when the group is closely tied to prevailing stereotypes about a particular party. It does not lead us to conclude that partisan group images are more important than party issue profiles as a basis for party identification and partisan voting. However, it clearly does suggest that group images have im-

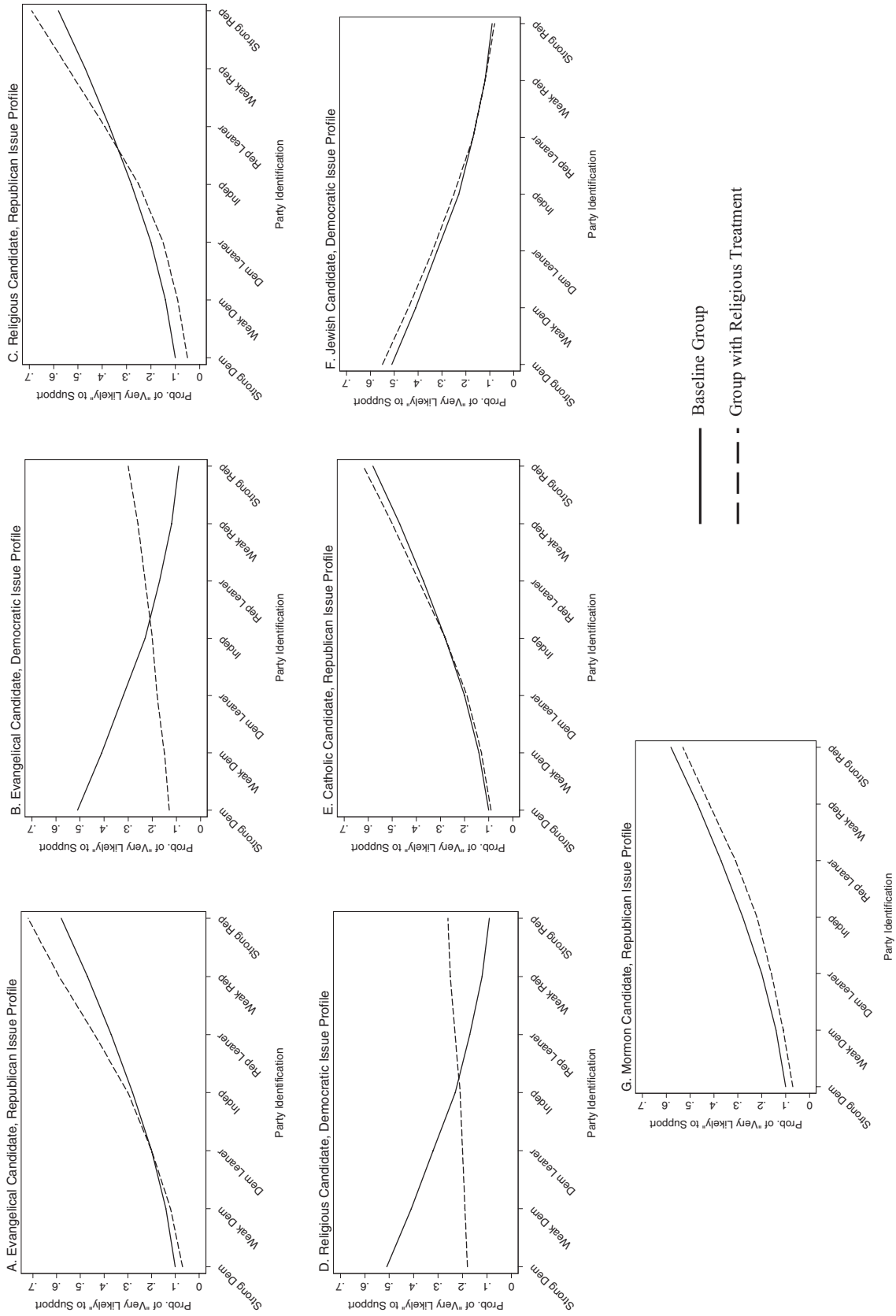
portant effects on partisan voting even when the conditional effect of candidate issue agendas is taken into account.

Next, we see analogous results for a generically religious candidate. This religious cue’s effect on partisan voting is similar to that for the evangelical candidate. When the candidate has a Republican issue profile, describing him as “religious” produces a significantly more positive impact of party identification on the probability of respondents being very likely to vote for him. When the candidate emphasizes issues typically espoused by Democrats, identifying the candidate as religious makes the relationship between partisanship and support for him significantly less negative, and, in fact, slightly (but not significantly) positive. Democratic identifiers abandon the generically religious candidate just as they deserted the evangelical candidate, while strong Republican identifiers become significantly more likely to vote for him.

Although “religious people” are much more closely linked to the GOP than to the Democratic Party in the minds of voters, their partisan image is less clearly Republican than that of evangelicals. From that standpoint, it is somewhat puzzling that the effect of a generically religious candidate on partisan voting is nearly as

⁸As the supporting information shows, the difference in the probability of very likely support under the baseline and evangelical conditions is statistically significant for strong Republicans and for all groups of Democrats.

FIGURE 1 The Impact of Party Identification on Support for the Baseline Candidates and Candidates with Religious Identifiers



Note: Lines represent predicted probabilities from the logit models in Table 2.

substantial as that of an evangelical candidate.⁹ We suspect that the solution to the puzzle is that citizens view candidates who provide generic affirmations of religious faith as most likely being evangelicals, given the high profile of evangelicals in American politics (Bolce and De Maio 1999a, 2008). Our respondents clearly viewed “religious people” differently from evangelical Christians when they were asked separately about the two groups in our party image battery, but when they are presented with a candidate describing himself simply as “a man of faith,” they may infer that he is an evangelical.

As noted, Catholics are not primarily identified with one party over another. Thus, a Catholic candidate cue should neither increase nor decrease the impact of party identification on vote choice—precisely what we find. Describing a candidate with a Republican issue profile as Catholic produces change neither in the probability of candidate support among any partisan group nor in the overall relationship between partisanship and candidate support.

The results for the Jewish and Mormon candidate cues are similar to those for the Catholic cue. When we depict a candidate with a Democratic issue profile as Jewish and when we identify a candidate with a Republican issue profile as Mormon, the relationship between partisanship and the probability of being very likely to support the candidate remains unaltered from the baseline conditions. This result is consistent with our expectations: while both groups had partisan associations when respondents were prompted, neither had a salient partisan association, thus eliminating the effect of candidate affiliation with the groups on partisan voting.

The Effect of Combined Religion and Party Cues

Some respondents also were given information about the candidate’s party affiliation, as well as his religion, in order to see how religious and partisan cues interact. The relationship between religious groups and citizens’ social group images of the parties should make religious and partisan cues interact in important ways to shape the degree of partisan voting. If a religious trait is closely connected to a particular party in voters’ minds, then the religious trait and party label may convey the same information about the candidate’s partisanship, and the combination of the two cues may not have an impact on partisan voting beyond that exerted by just the religious

cue. However, if a religious trait is moderately associated with a party stereotype, then each cue may provide additional information about the candidate’s partisanship, thereby increasing the degree of partisan voting beyond the impact of the religious cue alone. Finally, if a religious trait runs counter to a party stereotype, then the two cues may provide mixed signals to voters, simply maintaining or even weakening the effect of party identification.

In Table 4 and Figure 2, we show the conditional effects of identifying the partisanship of evangelical and generically religious candidates on partisan voting. The first two columns in the table focus on the evangelical Republican and evangelical Democratic candidates. The first part of the figure shows the relationship between party identification and the predicted probabilities of being very likely to vote for the baseline candidate, an evangelical candidate with no party cue, an evangelical Republican candidate, and an evangelical Democratic candidate.¹⁰

Turning first to the evangelical Republican treatment, the degree of partisan voting is no different than when the candidate is described simply as an evangelical. The candidate’s evangelical and Republican affiliations clearly seem to be conveying the same information—both cues indicate that the candidate is a Republican.¹¹

A candidate who is both an evangelical and a Democrat produces a very different effect on partisan voting. We might expect that identifying a candidate as a Democrat would amplify the impact of party identification, increasing support from Democratic identifiers and reducing support from Republicans. However, that is not the case when the Democratic candidate also is described as an evangelical. The overall impact of party identification on the probability of being very likely to support the evangelical Democratic candidate is statistically indistinguishable from that for the candidate with no religious or party identifiers. Meanwhile, weak, strong, and leaning Republicans are no less likely to support a Democrat who is an evangelical than they are to support the baseline candidate, for whom no information about partisanship (or religion) is provided. Among Republicans, “evangelical” seems to neutralize the impact of “Democrat”—a striking finding given the powerful effect of party labels on the vote.

⁹Further analysis shows that the effects of the religious and evangelical candidate cues on partisan voting are not statistically different. See the online supporting information for more explanation.

¹⁰All of these probabilities are for the Democratic issue profile only. The probabilities for the evangelical Republican, evangelical Democratic, and baseline candidates were computed from the models in Table 4. The probabilities for the evangelical candidate with no party identifier are from the model in Table 3.

¹¹As the supporting information shows, none of the differences within partisan groups between respondents who received the evangelical and evangelical Republican treatments are statistically significant.

TABLE 4 Candidate Religion, Candidate Party, and Partisan Voting: Logit Estimates of the Effect of Party Identification, Candidate Religion and Party Cues, and Their Interactions on Candidate Support

Independent Variables	Evangelical Republican Cue	Evangelical Democratic Cue	Religious Republican Cue	Religious Democratic Cue
Religious/Party Cue ^a	-2.62* (.51)	-.57 (.37)	-3.48* (.65)	.40 (.38)
Party Identification ^b	-2.51* (.57)	-2.51* (.57)	-2.51* (.57)	-2.51* (.57)
Party Identification × Religious/Party Cue	4.06* (.83)	.73 (.77)	5.19* (.95)	-1.45 (.91)
Constant	.06 (.28)	.06 (.28)	.05 (.28)	.06 (.28)
Pseudo R ²	.09	.09	.13	.17
χ^2 (df = 3)	35.81	36.09	45.41	70.31
% Correctly Predicted (N)	80.90 (377)	77.25 (400)	81.16 (361)	75.07 (369)

Note: Entries are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable is coded 1 for respondents who are “very likely” to support the candidate and 0 for all other respondents.

^aComparison category includes respondents in the baseline condition.

^bRanges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

*p < .05.

Even more remarkable is that Democratic respondents are no more likely to support an evangelical Democratic candidate than the baseline candidate (no party affiliation). Thus, a candidate who is both an evangelical and a Democrat appears to present voters with conflicting cues. It is almost as if respondents are being told that the candidate is *both* a Republican and a Democrat, surely a perplexing circumstance for a voter.

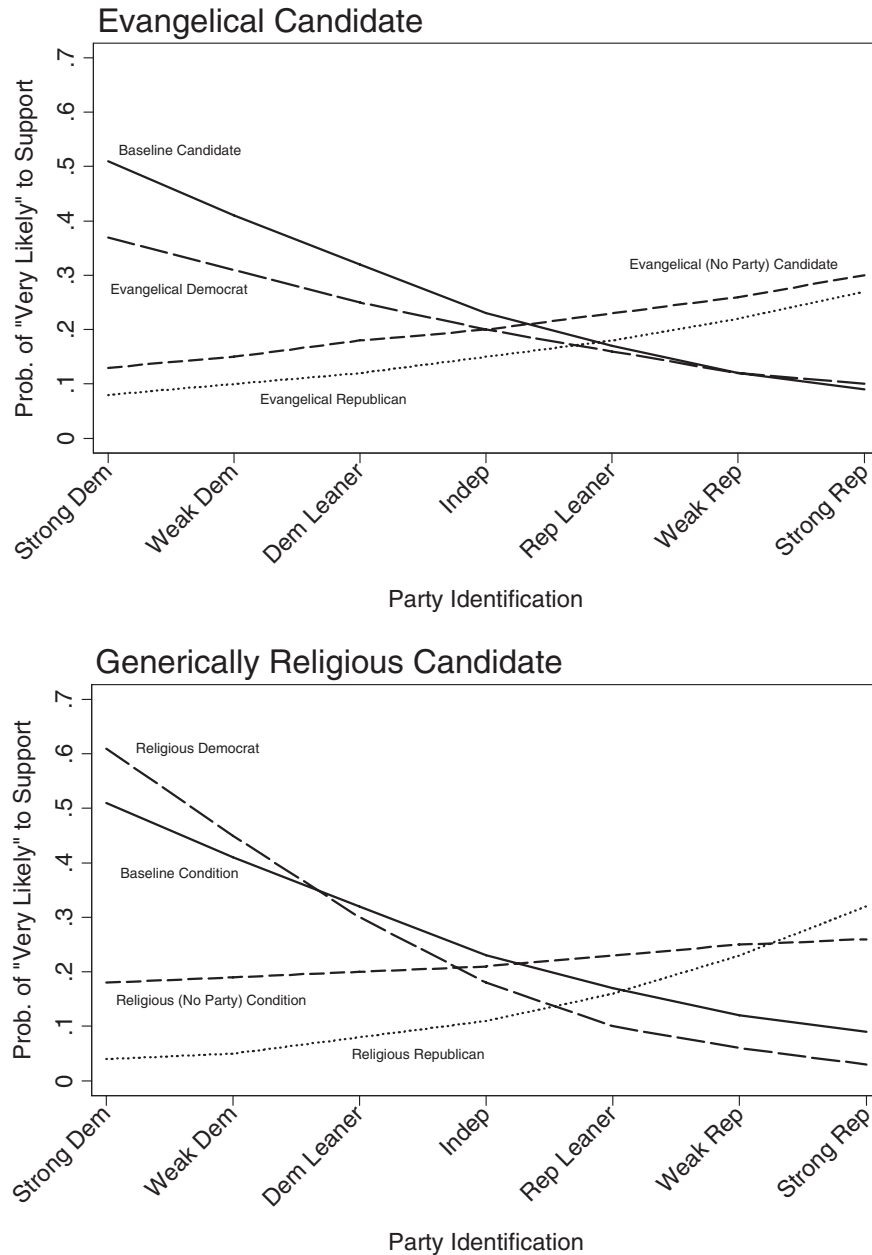
The last two columns of the table and the bottom half of the figure show the results when we combine the generic religion cue with party labels. While adding “Republican” to “evangelical” seemed to be redundant in the minds of respondents, respondents do not associate “religious people” as closely with the GOP as they do evangelicals. Thus, adding a Republican cue to a generic religious cue imparts more information than just describing a candidate as religious. Portraying the candidate simply as religious blunted the highly negative effect of party identification on support for the baseline candidate, but did not produce a significantly positive partisan impact. In contrast, the relationship between partisanship and support for a religious Republican is both positive and statistically significant (see the online supporting information), and all three groups of Democratic identifiers are less likely to support the religious Republican than the candidate who is simply religious. It is as if the “religious candidate,

no party” respondents are being told that the candidate might be a Republican, while the “religious Republican” respondents are having that possibility confirmed.

The evangelical label clearly counteracted the effect of the Democratic label in respondents’ reactions to our candidate; identifying him simply as religious does not negate the effect of Democratic affiliation to the same extent. Although the impact of partisanship on support for our candidate is statistically indistinguishable in the religious Democrat and baseline conditions, it is greater for the religious Democratic candidate than it is for the evangelical Democrat. The probability of very likely support among strong Democrats is significantly lower for the evangelical Democrat than for the religious Democrat (see the online supporting information), and the overall impact of party identification on candidate support is significantly less negative for the evangelical Democrat than for his generically religious copartisan.¹² Thus, while describing a Democratic candidate as evangelical apparently makes some respondents question his Democratic credentials, there seems to be less skepticism in citizens’ minds about whether a generically religious Democrat really is a Democrat.

¹²The analysis showing this is presented in the online supporting information.

FIGURE 2 The Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support by Candidate Religion and Party (Democratic Issue Profile Only)



Note: Lines represent predicted probabilities from the logit models in Table 3.

The Impact of Voters' Own Religion and Ideology

While we have focused our attention on party images in activating partisan voting, there are at least two alternative—or perhaps complementary—explanations for the observed effects. The first possibility is that voters

support candidates with whom they share a religious orientation. A second alternative explanation is that our results reflect ideology rather than partisanship. Of course, one common perspective on partisanship is that people identify with a party because their beliefs match the party's beliefs (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006; Fiorina 1981), and some religious groups are strongly associated

with particular issue positions and ideology. For example, we have noted that other research finds that evangelical candidates and evangelical Christians more generally are viewed as being highly conservative (Bolce and De Maio 1999a, 1999b; McDermott 2009b). If voters respond to religious cues by making inferences about candidates' beliefs and ideologies, and partisanship is based in ideology, then the connections we have shown between candidate religion and partisan voting actually may be connections between candidate religion and ideological voting. Democratic voters, for instance, may be less likely to support an evangelical candidate not because they infer that he is Republican, but because they surmise that he is conservative and they are themselves liberals.

It is worth noting that just as partisanship can be related to social groups, ideology can be as well. Conover and Feldman (1981) show that liberal-conservative self-identification is rooted in group affect and symbols of social differentiation and conflict. Thus, even if a candidate's social group memberships produce inferences about his or her ideology and thus trigger voting on the basis of individuals' ideological orientations, this vote may still be group-based or affective voting rather than issue-based or ideological voting.

We assess whether these alternative explanations account for our results by reestimating the models of partisan voting with two new variables: a measure of the respondents' own religious characteristics and respondents' self-identified ideology (on a 5-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative), each also interacted with the treatment variable. In the models assessing the impact of evangelical candidate cues, our measure of respondent religion is a dummy variable for evangelical Protestants. For the generic religion cue, we constructed a factor score of religiosity which includes frequency of worship attendance, importance of religion, and frequency of prayer.¹³ All of these variables range from 0 to 1.

Table 5 reports the estimates of these models for the evangelical and generically religious candidate cues with both issue profiles and for the four religion and party treatments included with the Democratic issue profile.¹⁴

Figure 3 shows the corresponding predicted probabilities.¹⁵ In general, these results indicate that our evidence for the impact of candidate religion on partisan voting is not due to the conditional effect of candidate religion on the impact of respondents' religious or ideological orientations. First of all, our logit estimates provide limited evidence that the effects of respondent religion and ideology on candidate support are conditioned by the candidate religion treatments. There is significant evidence of candidate religion (or religion and party) conditioning the electoral impact of ideology in only two of the eight models we estimated—the evangelical candidate and the evangelical Republican candidate with Democratic issue profiles. The interaction between respondent religious orientation and the treatment variable is statistically insignificant in seven of the eight models, reaching significance only for the evangelical candidate with a Republican issue profile.

In addition, there is still considerable evidence in these models of candidate religion significantly affecting partisan voting even when we account for the influence of ideology, respondent religion, and their interactions with our treatment variables. In the six models in which the interaction between party identification and the treatment variable was statistically significant in our models without controls—all of the models except for those with a Democratic candidate—the interaction term coefficients all remain statistically significant in the models with the controls. In fact, in the models for candidates with Republican issue profiles, the coefficients on the interaction terms actually grow larger with controls. The fact that partisan voting is more strongly positive for the evangelical candidate and the generically religious candidate than it is for the baseline candidate with a typically Republican issue agenda is now even more evident. In sum, the conditional effects of candidate religion on partisan voting do not seem to be due to the effects of respondents' religious orientations and ideology.¹⁶ Instead, candidates' religions trigger partisan images and those images affect partisan voting, especially when such religious characteristics are quite salient to citizens' partisan images.

¹³Principal components factor analyses with round 1 data and round 2 data both produced a single factor (eigenvalue of 2.21 in round 1 and 2.31 in round 2), with each of the three religious variables loading at .8 or higher.

¹⁴Because the Catholic, Mormon, and Jewish candidate cues did not condition the relationship between partisanship and voting decisions even without the controls, we did not reestimate the models for these cues with controls.

¹⁵To compute these probabilities, we held ideology and the respondent religion variable at their observed values for each respondent. The figure shows the mean predictions for all respondents. Hanmer and Kalkan (2009) demonstrate the advantages of this approach. See the online supporting information for more details.

¹⁶Further analysis shows that these results are also not due to respondents making inferences about candidates' positions on cultural issues such as abortion and gay rights. See the online supporting information for more details.

TABLE 5 Are the Results Due to Ideology and Religious Orientations? Logit Estimates of the Effects of Party Identification, Ideology, Respondent Religious Orientation, and Their Interactions with the Candidate Religion Treatment on Candidate Support

Independent Variables	Evangelical Cue (Republican Profile)	Evangelical Cue (Democratic Profile)	Evangelical Republican (Democratic Profile)	Evangelical Democrat (Democratic Profile)	Religious Cue (Republican Profile)	Religious Cue (Democratic Profile)	Religious Republican (Democratic Profile)	Religious Democrat (Democratic Profile)
Candidate Religion/ Religion and Party Treatment	.09 (.65)	-3.13* (.63)	-4.14* (.78)	-.86 (.52)	-.88 (.62)	-2.08* (.64)	-4.29* (.91)	.46 (.64)
Party Identification ^a	1.21* (.37)	-2.31* (.77)	-2.32* (.77)	-2.31* (.77)	.98* (.37)	-2.47* (.82)	-2.47* (.82)	-2.47* (.82)
Party ID × Treatment	1.69* (.80)	2.03* (1.03)	1.83 (1.16)	.85 (1.03)	1.66* (.65)	2.28* (1.10)	4.62* (1.27)	-1.15 (1.13)
Ideological Identification ^b	3.26* (.57)	-1.35 (1.02)	-1.35 (1.02)	-1.35 (1.03)	3.03* (.58)	-.57 (1.11)	-.57 (1.11)	-.57 (1.11)
Ideological ID × Treatment	-1.75 (1.20)	3.85* (1.41)	4.70* (1.64)	.65 (1.35)	-.37 (.97)	.94 (1.48)	.76 (1.68)	-.97 (1.46)
Respondent Religion ^c	.25 (.23)	.86 (.46)	.86 (.46)	.86 (.46)	.89* (.32)	-.30 (.60)	-.30 (.60)	-.30 (.60)
Respondent Religion × Treatment	.95* (.52)	-.58 (.62)	-.12 (.66)	-.64 (.67)	.35 (.55)	.91 (.85)	1.50 (.97)	.92 (.85)
Constant	-3.50* (.32)	.40 (.41)	.40 (.41)	.40 (.41)	-3.68* (.34)	.40 (.46)	.40 (.46)	.40 (.46)
Pseudo R ²	.21	.11	.15	.10	.23	.07	.14	.20
χ ² (df = 7)	205.44	44.24	54.25	42.91	251.87	25.57	44.39	75.52
% Correctly Predicted (N)	75.71 (778)	78.23 (372)	80.43 (368)	78.16 (380)	76.66 (904)	77.68 (327)	81.27 (315)	76.13 (331)

Note: Entries are logit coefficients. Standard errors are in parentheses. All independent variables are coded to range from 0 to 1. The dependent variable is coded 1 for respondents who are “very likely” to support the candidate and 0 for all other respondents.

^aRanges from strong Democrat to strong Republican.

^bRanges from very liberal to very conservative.

^cDummy variable for evangelical Protestants for models with an evangelical candidate treatment. Religiosity factor score for models with a religious candidate treatment.

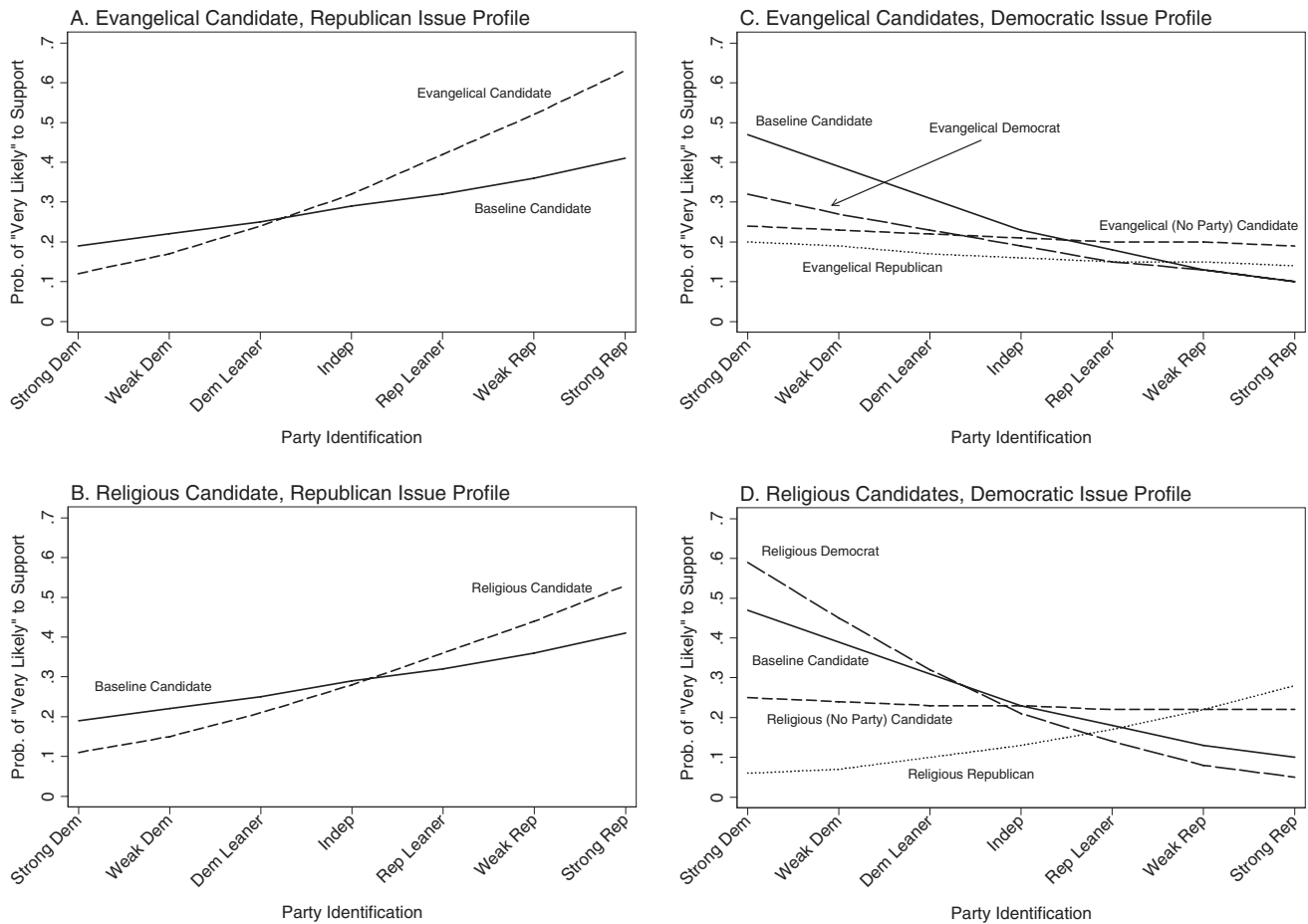
*p < .05.

Conclusion

From a theoretical perspective, our analysis supports the idea that variation in partisan voting is determined by the factors that structure party identification. The two leading perspectives on the nature of party identification are, on the one hand, that it is based in issues and ideology and, on the other hand, that it is based in group identity and images. If the factors that underlie partisanship structure its electoral impact, then partisan voting should vary with the social profiles and issue agendas of candidates. Our experiments demonstrate that the relationship between party identification and vote choice varies significantly with both of those factors. More specifically, we have provided a group-based explanation for variation in partisan voting: sometimes the characteristics of candidates activate citizens’ partisan predispositions, increasing their impact on vote choice, but at other times they either diminish or have little influence on the electoral impact of partisanship.

Our experimental results also substantiate that religion is a major cleavage in contemporary American politics. However, they do so in a way that the literature has not yet addressed. The bulk of previous research has revealed the impact of voters’ own religious orientations on their voting decisions, and some recent work has demonstrated the impact of candidate religion on such decisions. What we have shown is different: Candidate religious characteristics can exert powerful conditional effects on partisan voting. Certain religious groups, especially evangelical Christians but also religious people in general, are clearly and strongly associated with the GOP. Accordingly, candidate membership in those groups has a substantial influence on the level of partisan voting, increasing support from Republican identifiers and decreasing it from Democrats. Other religious groups, such as Catholics, Jews, and Mormons, do not have a clear partisan profile or are not salient in citizens’ partisan images. Thus, candidate affiliation with these groups has no effect on partisan voting.

FIGURE 3 The Impact of Party Identification on Candidate Support by Candidate Religion and Candidate Religion and Party—Controlling for Ideology, Respondent Religion, and Their Interactions with the Candidate Religion Treatments



Note: Lines represent predicted probabilities from the logit models in Table 4.

Our analysis also provides further evidence for the somewhat asymmetrical relationship between religion and the two major parties. While both parties have contributed to the growing traditionalist-modernist religious divide between them, the growth of evangelicalism and religious traditionalism among Republican activists and mass identifiers has been steadier and more pronounced than the emergence of religious modernism and irreligion in the Democratic ranks (Green 2007; Layman 2001, n.d.). Meanwhile, both citizens and political elites seem to see a stronger link between the GOP and traditionalist religion than the association between religious liberalism and/or secularism with the Democrats (Bolce and De Maio 2008; McDermott 2009a). As our results show, although citizens do perceive nonreligious people and Jews as primarily Democratic groups, these groups are not salient to the social images they associate with Democrats. Meanwhile,

evangelical Christians and religious people in general figure very prominently in group images of the GOP. Thus, candidate affiliations with generally Republican religious groups are more likely to condition the electoral impact of party identification.

In sum, for many people partisanship is a bundle of information stored in party images, including the groups associated with each party. How such information is perceived and used helps condition the impact of partisanship at the ballot box.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Table A1: The Social Group Image of the Democratic Party (percentage of all three open-ended responses in each category)

Table A2: The Social Group Image of the Republican Party (percentage of all three open-ended responses in each category)

Table A3: Candidate Religion, Party, and Partisan Voting: Predicted probabilities and confidence intervals for being “very likely” to support the candidate by party identification and candidate religion (or religion and party) treatment

Table A4: Are the Results Due to Ideology and Religious Orientations? Predicted probabilities and confidence intervals for being “very likely” to support the candidate by party identification and candidate religion (or religion and party) treatment—controlling for ideology, respondent religion, and their interactions with the candidate religion treatment

Table A5: Predicted Probabilities from Ordered Logit, Multinomial Logit, and Stereotype Logit Models without Control Variables

Table A6: Predicted Probabilities from Ordered Logit, Multinomial Logit, and Stereotype Logit Models with Controls for Ideology, Respondent Religion, and Their Interactions with the Candidate Religion Treatment

Table A7: Are the Results Due to Cultural Issue Attitudes, Ideology, and Religious Orientations? Logit estimates of the effects of party identification, cultural issue attitudes, ideology, respondent religious orientation, and their interactions with the candidate religion treatment on candidate support

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