Partisan influence in suspicious times

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Abstract

Parties can significantly influence their supporter's policy views via endorsement cues raising worries about manipulation of mass opinion. We bring attention to a novel constraint on party influence: information implying that the party adopted its position due to the lobbying efforts of interest groups and campaign donors. Party cue taking is significantly reduced across three survey experiment when this type of information is presented alongside a party endorsement cue. This attenuation in cue taking occurred both when the party adopted a stereotypical as well as a counter-stereotypical policy position and both when ideologically aligned and non-aligned groups were the source of lobbyist influence. Moreover, partisans were less likely to follow the party line even though they still believed the party's policy arguments to be superior to opposing arguments and that the policy would yield positive outcomes. Our results suggest a novel and common limit on partisan influence.

Word Count: 9846

Replication: Replication files are available in the JOP Data Archive on Dataverse (http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/jop).The empirical analysis has been successfully replicated by the JOP replication analyst.

Human Participants: The studies contained herein were conducted in compliance with relevant laws and conducted in line with ethical standards contained in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments.

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Political parties are "opinion-forming [agents] of great importance" (Campbell et al. 1960, 128).[1] Numerous studies demonstrate this by showing that parties across a wide variety of political systems can cue their followers to adopt policy positions and particular interpretations of politically relevant facts (Bisgaard and Slothuus 2018; Bolsen, Druckman, and Cook 2014; Brader et al. n.d.; Hobolt 2007; Samuels and Zucco Jr. 2013). Party influence is important because it threatens to upend traditional understandings of democratic power in which elites follow the preferences of the public (Disch 2011; Mansbridge 2003). It is perhaps not surprising that recent research has begun the search for factors that condition party influence and, perhaps, reorient the balance of power in favor of the public (Arceneaux and Vander Wielen 2017; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Bullock 2011; Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012).

We bring attention to a novel contextual feature of political debates that may serve to condition party influence. Party positions do not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, they reflect interactions between politicians and non-governmental actors including campaign donors and interest groups (Hall and Deardorff 2006; Karol 2009). Information about these interactions frequently trickles down to the mass public and often with the insinuation that party positions have in effect been 'purchased' by these actors. Consider an example from the *Washington Post* regarding the Affordable Care Act. The article's title "Industry Cash Flowed to Drafters of Reform; Key Senator Baucus is a Leading Recipient" insinuates a quid pro quo between interest groups and Democratic legislators (Eggen 2009). This insinuation becomes explicit via a quote from "Jerry Flanagan, a health-care analyst with Consumer Watchdog" saying that "the tide of

[1] The empirical data has been successfully replicated by the JOP replication analyst. Pre-registration materials can be found in the Online Appendices and via the following links: Study 2 (https://aspredicted.org/623q9.pdf), Study 3 (https://aspredicted.org/gh83z.pdf), and Study 4 (https://aspredicted.org/j34g8.pdf).

campaign contributions amounts to a ‘huge down payment’ by companies that expect favorable policies in return” and that this is “‘the cold reality of big-money politics’”. While existing work has made great strides to situate party influence in realistic information environments by considering, for instance, the roles of message competition and substantive information (Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Bullock 2011; Chong and Druckman 2007), it has not situated partisan influence within this more complex, and potentially nefarious, rendition of the policymaking process. Do partisans still follow the leader when they receive information insinuating their leader is doing the bidding of other actors?

In answering this question, we draw upon rival theoretical accounts that generate contrasting expectations. First, one perspective holds that party cues influence partisans because they activate identity-related motivations and associated biases in information processing (Bakker, Lelkes, and Malka 2020; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013). This perspective implies that partisans will reject insinuations and continue to follow the party line. Second, a rival perspective holds that party cues are shortcuts supported by feelings of trust that enable partisans to draw inferences regarding the consequences of policies (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2013; Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Petersen, Slothuus, and Togeby 2010). This perspective implies that insinuations should undermine cue taking unless additional ideological signals are available to reassure partisans about the value of the policy (e.g., Downs, 1957, p. 234). A third perspective is suggested by work on the public’s preferences over decision making procedures where a common finding is that self-interested decision makers undermine the legitimacy of decisions even when the decision is viewed positively by the individual (Bøggild 2016; Hibbing and Alford 2004). This implies an unconditional rejection of party cues. Which account better

captures the reactions of partisans has important implications as they suggest different visions of the public's malleability and its ability to hold co-partisan elites accountable.

We test these rival arguments across four survey experiments, three of which were pre-registered. Participants in all experiments were asked to evaluate a policy proposal. We randomly varied whether this information included a partisan cue in which the respondent's in-party supported the policy as well as the presence of additional information insinuating that this position resulted from efforts by special interests to influence the party. In Experiments 2-4, we also randomized the ideological direction of the in-party's position and information about the actors influencing the party. On average, the insinuation significantly reduced cue taking across the experiments, albeit with a notable deviation in Experiment 4. In Experiments 2 and 3, meanwhile, this occurred regardless of whether the party took a stereotypical position or when traditionally allied social groups influenced the party. Moreover, this occurred despite the cue still having a positive impact on the perceived policy outcomes of the policy and the belief that the in-party's policy arguments were superior to opposing arguments. In other words, the insinuation influenced cue taking not just for ideological reasons but also seemingly because it provided evidence of malfeasance.

Our study makes two important contributions to literatures on partisanship and public opinion formation. First, we situate partisan influence in a more complex information environment by incorporating a common, but unexplored, element of political discourse into accounts of partisan influence. In doing so, we highlight a previously unexplored constraint on party influence: information about the policymaking process (see also: Atkinson, 2017). Second, we contribute to the broader literature on media framing and particularly research on strategic framing. This literature has explored the influence of strategy-framed news content on political

trust, but has paid less attention to its influence on policy attitudes (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Lee, McLeod, and Shah 2008; Zoizner 2021). We show that media accounts focused on the motives of elites can significantly impact public policy attitudes as well.

Theory

Many people believe that politicians are self-serving and that the political system is dominated by 'special interests' (Clarke et al. 2018; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). One source for these beliefs is news coverage, which often frames politics through the 'strategy' frame wherein strategic elites put their own interests ahead of the public's (Aalberg, Strömbäck, and de Vreese 2011; Cappella and Jamieson 1997). However, while past research has repeatedly shown that such news content influences political trust (Zoizner 2021), much less work has explored how it interacts with partisan position taking to influence resulting public attitudes. We highlight three theoretical perspectives that promote different expectations regarding how partisans should react to information insinuating that co-partisan elites have adopted a position to satisfy a self-serving motivation such as catering to lobbyists and campaign donors.[2]

Parties as Identities

The first perspective we consider roots partisan influence in the psychology of social identity (Huddy, Bankert, and Davies 2018; Leeper and Slothuus 2014). Here, identification with a party motivates the partisan to adopt group norms to maintain status within the group and also to engage in a variety of behaviors to defend the value of the group against outside threats (Hogg and Reid 2006; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Suhay 2015). One politically salient example of

[2] We focus on co-partisans here because our priors hold that opposing partisans are likely to reject information from the other side regardless of whether these insinuations are present or not.

the latter type of behavior is the selective acquisition and interpretation of information found in the literature on partisan motivated reasoning. Partisans appear to readily accept party-friendly information while rigorously counter-arguing, and often rejecting, information that speaks unkindly on the in-group (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Jerit and Barabas 2012; Lodge and Taber 2013). Partisans may also rationalize party-incongruent information that they cannot reject as when partisans selectively attribute blame for governmental performance or when partisan "losers" deem losses the result of electoral malfeasance (Bisgaard 2019; Sances and Stewart 2015). This perspective suggests that partisans will continue to follow the party's lead because the insinuation will either be rejected outright or rationalized.

Parties as Information Shortcuts

The foregoing social identity-based perspective arguably dominates the literature on partisanship and public opinion. However, another influential theory holds that partisans follow party cues for instrumental purposes. Partisan elites face incentives to build informative party brands (Downs 1957; Snyder Jr. and Ting 2002). These partisan brands, meanwhile, influence mass partisan sorting (Goren and Chapp 2017; Highton and Kam 2011). Partisans thus trust the in-party because they believe they and it share political goals in common. Party cues thereafter influence resulting attitudes in one of two ways depending on the level of motivation experienced by the partisan when learning of the party endorsement (Leeper and Slothuus 2014). On the one hand, partisans may simply adopt the in-party's position out of this sense of trust if they are unmotivated or unable to cognitively elaborate about the proposal (Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Hobolt 2007; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). On the other hand, partisans may use their beliefs about the party brand to form inferences about the proposed policy if there exists a reason to formulate a justification for taking the party's position (Bullock 2011; Petersen et al.

2013; Petersen, Slothuus, and Togeby 2010). Either way, party cue taking is built upon the presumption of common interests.

Insinuations that co-partisan elites adopted a position due to the influence of other agents targets the beliefs that form the basis for cue-taking from this perspective. Insinuations may leave partisans uncertain about whether they and the party share common goals in the current instance and thus less willing to follow the party line as a shortcut. Insinuations may also upset the inferential process. To use a party brand to infer something about the consequences of a policy requires the assumption that the party was attempting to act based on the components of the brand. However, insinuations of outside influence suggest an alternative causal story wherein the party is acting based on the potentially conflicting interests of other agents. Thus, an observable implication of this perspective is reduced cue taking in the face of an insinuation.

An additional implication is that attenuations in cue taking should be conditional. Partisans may rationally continue to follow the party line if there exist additional signals regarding the value of the party's position to reassure the partisan. On the one hand, a reduction in cue taking should be more apparent on policies that deviate from stereotypes about the party brand as fears that the party's position has been bought should be most believable in this context. Likewise, cue taking should be particularly attenuated when the agent influencing the party is ideologically counter-stereotypical as an ideological ally influencing one's co-partisans may simply be treated as a further cue of the value of the proposed policy (Downs 1957, 234).

Procedural Beliefs & Policy Attitudes

There is one final perspective that may be relevant for thinking about partisan influence in the presence of insinuations albeit one that is less commonly invoked in this literature. Humans from this third perspective are "wary cooperators" who attempt to balance the goals of

cooperating with fellow group members while avoiding being taken advantage of by self-interested actors in the process (Hibbing and Alford 2004). Individuals are thus on the constant look out for signals that their leaders are self-interested to avoid falling into this trap (Bøggild 2018; Bøggild, Aarøe, and Petersen 2021). A variety of studies testify to the consequences of believing that a politician or decision maker has violated this norm of proper decision making. Research on campaign finance disclosures, for instance, shows that violations of transparency norms undermines candidate support even when the candidate is ideologically proximate (Rhodes et al. 2019; Wood 2020; Wood and Grose n.d.). Studies concerning candidate and party valence show that a reputation for being unethical can undermine vote intentions even among co-partisans (Basinger 2013; Butler and Powell 2014; Stone and Simas 2010). Finally, individuals are willing to reject financial decisions they personally agree with, and would benefit from, when the decision maker is portrayed as self-interested in nature (Bøggild 2016; Hibbing and Alford 2004). Individuals in these cases are willing to trade off, to some extent, their broader instrumental interests to uphold their standards for how decision makers *should* behave.

This perspective suggests a variation on the logic offered earlier. Partisans in the parties-as-shortcuts perspective are concerned about whether a policy is utility-maximizing or not with the party cue used as evidence on the matter. Partisans from this third perspective are also deeply motivated by the question of "have I been screwed?" (Hibbing and Alford 2004, 74). This perspective suggests that partisans may disregard party cues when they believe partisan elites are self-serving but *regardless* of additional information regarding the policy's value lest they inadvertently get taken advantage of, much like decision makers in prisoner dilemma games employing a tit-for-tat strategy (Axelrod 1984).

Hypotheses

We extrapolate the following hypotheses from this discussion. First, insinuations that co-partisan elites are motivated by the desire to cater to special interests should undermine cue taking (**Hypothesis 1**). Second, this rejection of the party line should be less likely either when the group influencing the party is an ideological ally or when the party's position is ideologically stereotypical (**Hypothesis 2**). Rejection of both hypotheses would support the first theoretical perspective, as it is associated with the null hypothesis in each case. Evidence supportive of Hypotheses 1 and 2 would provide evidence in favor of the second perspective while evidence supportive of Hypothesis 1 and in violation of Hypothesis 2 would support the final perspective.

Overview of Experiments

We fielded three survey experiments (two pre-registered) to investigate the foregoing arguments; pre-analysis plans can be found in the Online Appendices. The experiments share a common structure but vary in some particulars. Table 1 provides an overview of some of the key differences between the experiments. In this section we expand on the structure of the experiments and the logic behind our design choices. We later discuss a fourth experiment conducted during the review process that adds additional treatment conditions.

Table 1: Overview of Experiments

	Experiment 1	**Experiment 2**	**Experiment 3**
Sample	MTurk (n=1013)	MTurk (n=1582)	Lucid Fulcrum (n=2460)
Survey Timing	November 23-30, 2018	February 7, 2019	March 27-April 3, 2019
Issue	Privatization of Air Traffic Control	Tax Policy	Tax Policy
Conditions	3*	3x2*	5x2
Cue Treatments	(1) No Party Cue (2) Party Cue (3) Party Cue w/Insinuation	(1) No Party Cue (2) Party Cue (3) Party Cue w/Insinuation	(1) No Party Cue (2) Party Cue (3) Party Cue w/Insinuation (from 1 of 3 sources)
Variation of Direction of In-Party Position	No	Liberal or Conservative	Liberal or Conservative
Insinuation	"lobbying efforts from interest groups set to	"companies that will benefit from the change made large contributions	Same as Experiment 2, but with variation between "companies",

	benefit from privatizing air traffic control"	to [party] legislators while the policy was written."	"labor unions", and "interest groups"

Notes: Sample sizes refer to number of partisans in the experiment as they are the ones assigned to treatment. [Party] would be filled with the respondent's in-party. Full treatment wordings are presented in Online Appendix A. *In Experiments 1 and 2 subjects could also be assigned to a 'positive procedure' message; we discuss the results of this condition in Online Appendix D.

Choice of Sample

Experiments 1 and 2 were conducted using samples recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Experiment 3, meanwhile, used a sample recruited using Lucid Fulcrum Exchange. Neither data source uses a probability-based design, although recruitment in the Lucid study utilized quotas on education, race, and age to better approximate the underlying US adult population. The use of a non-probability sample suggests a potential limitation on our ability to infer to the broader US population even if such samples better approximate this population than do other types of convenience sample (Coppock and McClellan 2019; Levay, Freese, and Druckman 2016; see Table OA1 for sample characteristics).[3] However, validation studies show that treatment effects generated by either Turk or Lucid closely resemble those generated using probability-based sampling designs (Coppock and McClellan 2019; Mullinix et al. 2015).

Choice of Procedures

In all three experiments participants began by answering questions regarding their partisan identity, symbolic & operational ideology, and need for cognition before entering the experiment. One important difference is that Experiment 1 was conducted as a two-wave panel, with these measures placed on the first wave, while Experiments 2 and 3 were conducted as a single survey with these measures at the beginning of the survey. In both cases we possess pre-test measures of partisanship, which was necessary for the assignment of partisans to the correct

[3] We provide results from models controlling for education, where some of the biggest deviations occur in the Turk samples, in Online Appendix OE. The same results emerge.

in-party treatment condition. However, respondents do vary in whether they enter the experiment with their partisan identities salient or not which may influence resulting behavior (Klar, Leeper, and Robison 2020; Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres 2018).

In all three experiments we randomly assigned partisans, including leaning partisans, to read a news article (Experiment 1) or what they were informed was an excerpt from a news article (Experiments 2 & 3). Each article presented information regarding a policy proposal including arguments for and against the proposal. Partisans were randomly assigned to three treatment conditions in all experiments.[4] In the *No Party Cue* condition respondents were not told where the parties stood on the issue at hand. Policy arguments were thus sourced to "supporters" and "opponents". In the *Party Cue* condition, meanwhile, they learned that their in-party supported the policy change while their out-party was in opposition with policy arguments sourced accordingly. Finally, in the *Party Cue with Insinuation* condition, respondents received the party cue but also read an additional short paragraph insinuating that the in-party's position was caused by lobbying efforts. We discuss this information in further detail below.

Choice of Issue and Policy Positions

The policy information present in Experiment 1 concerned a proposal to move the governance of US air traffic control from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to a private non-profit agency. Using this issue has some advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand,

[4] A fourth condition was present in Experiments 1 and 2 wherein the party's position was described as following consultations with experts and the mass public. This 'positive procedural' treatment generally bolstered party cue taking; see Online Appendix D. This finding cuts against the possibility that reduced cue taking in the presence of the insinuation is simply a function of learning more about policy making procedures.

this was a low salience issue not on the national agenda when we conducted Experiment 1. Moreover, the specific proposal is a reasonably 'hard' one as it touches upon technical issues of governmental regulation (Carmines and Stimson 1980). These considerations should promote party cue taking (Lenz 2012). On the other hand, this issue was briefly on the national agenda during 2017 with the Trump administration proposing a similar change to the FAA. In addition, while the issue is not necessarily a partisan one, and indeed the Clinton administration advocated something similar during the 1990s (Adams 2017), a move to effectively privatize a part of the government may read as a 'conservative' policy. This stereotyping issue also served as motivation for the variation in policy direction in Experiments 2 and 3 described next.

The policy information in Experiments 2 and 3 focus on proposed changes to tax rates at the state level. Here, we adapt treatments from Mullinix (2016) and Chong and Mullinix (2019) wherein the in-party can either support a liberal policy change (lower sales taxes, higher income taxes) or a conservative policy change (higher sales taxes, lower income taxes). These authors show that partisans see a division in ideological direction between the two issues, something we also find.[5] This enables us to randomize whether partisans read about an in-party sponsoring a stereotypical or counter-stereotypical policy change.

[5] In Experiment 2 58% of respondents in the Conservative Change/No Party Cue condition said the Republican Party would be the most likely sponsor of the policy, while 57% of respondents in the Liberal change condition identified the Democrats as the most likely sponsor. In Experiment 3 we asked respondents to place the policies on a 1-7 ideology scale. Here, respondents in the No Party Cue/Conservative Policy condition rated the policy as significantly more conservative than those in the No Cue/Liberal Change condition ($t_{493} = 2.66$, $p < 0.01$).

What implications follow from changing the policy from regulatory to tax policy? On the one hand, we might expect to see *less* cue taking for two reasons. First, tax policy has long divided Republicans and Democrats and so respondents may have strong predispositions regarding tax levels. Second, the months prior to Experiments 2 and 3 featured multiple Democratic politicians advocating higher taxes on wealthy Americans, which may pre-treat respondents (Slothuus 2016). On the other hand, there are specific aspects of the treatments which may promote cue taking. First, the policy debate is complex as it requires a change to both sales and income taxes. Second, the party cue information indicates that "virtually all Democratic legislators" stand on one side of the issue while "virtually all Republican legislators" stand on the other, i.e. the parties are described as polarized which should promote reliance on the party line (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Mullinix 2016).

Choice of Insinuations & Group Manipulation

A final variation in the procedures across the experiments concerns the nature of the insinuations on offer. In Experiment 1, respondents assigned to *Party Cue w/Insinuation* condition read a paragraph indicating that the party's proposal followed lobbying efforts from "interest groups set to benefit from privatizing air traffic control". This information included a quote modeled on the one in the introduction: "Jerry Flanagan, a non-partisan analyst from the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, noted that key architects of the [Democrats'/Republicans] proposal also received campaign donations from these groups. "These donations are a huge down payment," Flanagan said. "That is the cold reality of big-money politics." The insinuation in Experiments 2 and 3, on the other hand, was sourced to "good government watchdog groups" who had "critical things to say about how [Democratic/Republican] legislators" in these states deliberated on the issue. In Experiment 2, these sources note that "companies that will benefit from the change made large contributions to" in-party legislators while the policy was being

written with the same quote as above also present. One potential issue with these initial treatments is that subjects may infer something from the groups involved that influence their policy reasoning. Thus, in Experiment 3 respondents assigned to the insinuation treatment could hear that companies, interest groups, or labor unions were the ones pressuring the parties. Democrats and Republicans express significantly different, and opposite, attitudes toward labor unions and big business groups.[6] "Interest groups", on the other hand, is a more abstract category that may enable respondents of all partisan stripes to consider a negatively tinged group (Grant and Rudolph 2003). Experiment 3 thus enables us to more fully test Hypothesis 2.

Measures

Our chief dependent variable is the respondent's attitude toward the proposed policy change. We measured this on a 1-7 scale in Experiment 1 and a 0-10 scale in Experiments 2 and 3 with higher values indicating greater policy support. In all analyses below we rescale this item to a 0-1 scale to facilitate comparisons across the experiments.

[6] For instance, Democrats on the 2016 ANES rated unions 18.78 [16.75, 20.81] points higher on a 0-100 point feeling thermometer than did Republicans, while they evaluated "big business" -11.07 [-12.85, -9.28] points lower. We asked respondents on the post-test of Experiment 3 to indicate how they much believe unions, business leaders, and companies "represent their interests and values in public debates". Republicans reported significantly higher trust in companies ($t_{2440} = 3.49$, $p < 0.001$) and business leaders ($t_{2445} = 4.72$, $p < 0.001$) than Democrats who, in turn, trusted unions significantly more ($t_{2443} = 9.55$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, Democrats' ratings of unions are not necessarily overly warm; the mean thermometer rating for unions among Democrats in 2012 was only 66.4. We return to this point below.

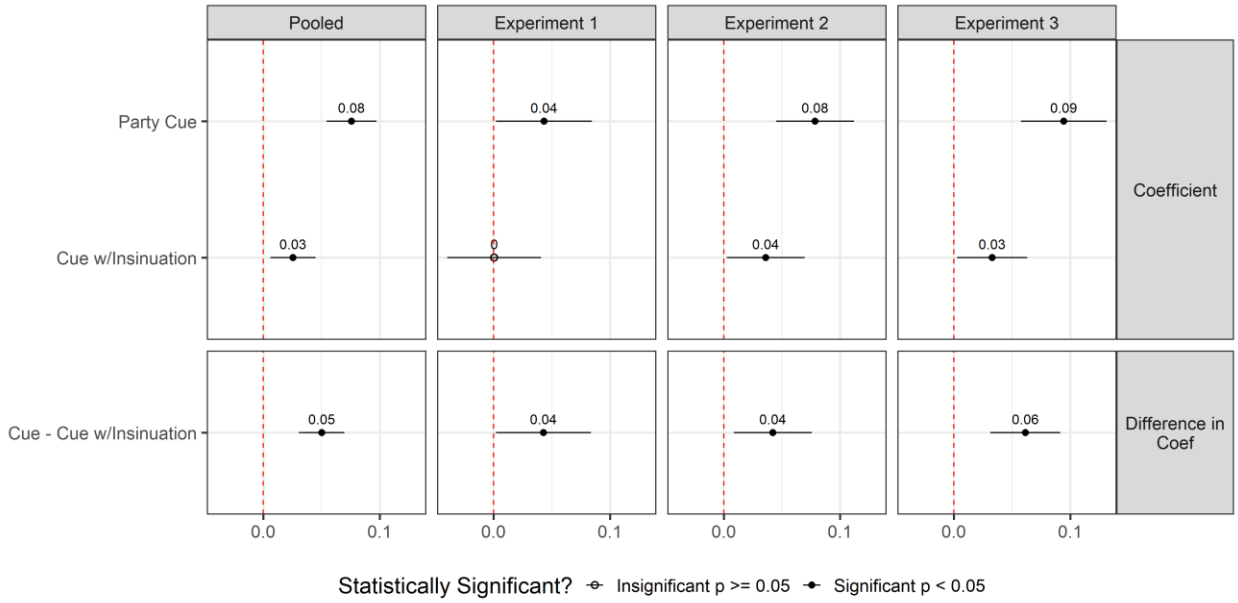
We will also analyze three additional items, each pre-registered for Experiments 2 and 3, to further probe the influence of party cues and insinuations on policy reasoning processes. First, we asked respondents on all three experiments to evaluate the strength of the arguments for and against the proposed policy. Our focus is on the relative rating of the arguments for and against the policy (i.e., Pro Argument – Con Argument, rescaled to range from 0-1). Second, we asked respondents in Experiment 3 to indicate whether they believed the policy change would worsen or improve a variety of outcomes if the policy were passed in their own state including many not referenced in the treatment text. These outcomes include economic growth in the state, their personal financial situation, the economic fortunes of the community in which they live, the unemployment rate, and (in separate items) the financial situation for poor people, middle class people, and the rich. We averaged responses to these items to form a scale where higher values indicate a belief that the policy will lead to more positive outcomes (alpha = 0.87; rescaled to range from 0-1 in analyses). Third, we asked respondents in Experiment 3 to place the policy on a 7-pt ideological scale. We use this measure to assess the perceived proximity of the policy by taking the absolute value of this placement and the respondent's pre-test ideological self-identification (scaled to range from 0-1 with higher values indicating greater proximity), although we caution that ideological placement items may capture non-ideological considerations as well (Bauer et al. 2017). These measures enable us to further ascertain whether any attenuation in party cue taking occurred due to a rethinking of the merits of the policy.

Results

Do Insinuations Reduce Partisan Cue Taking?

We begin by exploring whether the party cue influenced policy support and whether this cue taking was significantly reduced when an insinuation was present. Figure 1 provides the

Figure 1: Cue Effects on Policy Support



Notes: Markers in the top sub-graph provide OLS coefficients for the two treatment conditions (relative to the No Party Cue Baseline) with 95% confidence intervals. Markers in the bottom sub-graph provides an estimate of the difference in these coefficients. Models can be found in Table OB1. The number of observations per analysis is: 5053, 1013, 1582, and 2458.

results of four OLS regression models that speak to this point (see Table OB1 for full model results). In the "Pooled" model we combine all three experiments together to maximize statistical power and regress policy support on assignment to the Party Cue and Party Cue w/Insinuation treatment conditions as well as indicators for the experiment and policy change condition to which the respondent was assigned. The remainder of the graphs provide experiment-specific results with the Experiment 2 and 3 models also controlling for policy change condition. The top half of Figure 1 provides the OLS coefficients for the cue treatments while the bottom half provides the difference in these two coefficients with positive values indicating greater cue taking in the Party Cue condition than in the Party Cue w/Insinuation condition.

Figure 1 communicates two points. First, providing party cues significantly influences policy support. Partisans were approximately 8 percentage points (b=0.08 [0.05, 010]) more supportive of the described policy when they learned that their in-party supported it than when

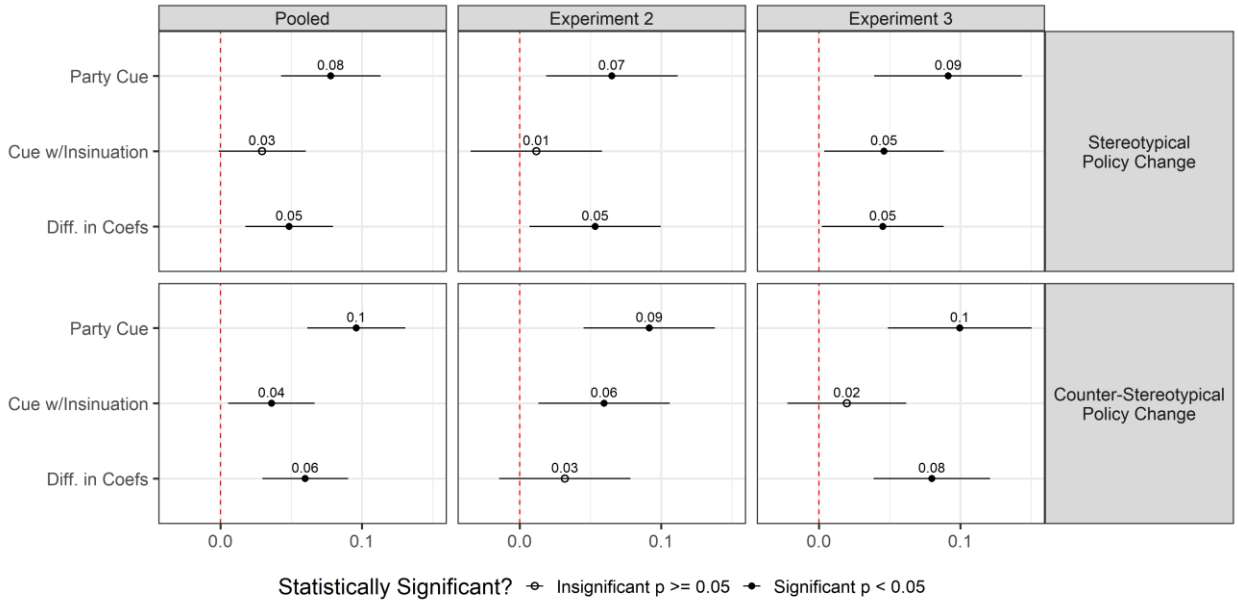
they lacked this information in the pooled analysis. However, this effect was conditional: the effect of the party cue was cut roughly in half when the party's position was alleged to have emanated from lobbying efforts and campaign donations. Figure 1 demonstrates that parties may have less influence over their follower's preferences than existing work suggests.

Does the Direction of the Proposed Change Matter?

Partisans were willing to deviate from the party line when given a reason to doubt the motivations of party elites. Are partisans willing to do so even in cases where the party is acting in a brand consistent manner? Figure 2 provides evidence on this front using data from Experiments 2 and 3. Here we regressed policy support on cue condition, whether the policy change was stereotypical or not, and their interaction. We again provide results pooling both experiments (while controlling for experiment) and then separately for each experiment. In the top half of Figure 2 we provide the marginal effect of treatment assignment as well as the difference in these coefficients for those who read about a party stereotypical change, while the bottom sub-graph does the same for those reading about a counter-stereotypical change. The full model results underlying this figure can be found in Table OB2.

The key lesson of Figure 2 is that the reduction of cue taking seen earlier is broadly unrelated to the type of proposed policy on offer. The provision of a party cue led to more support for the in-party's position regardless of whether the proposal was stereotypical or not. The insinuation, meanwhile, consistently undermined cue taking when the proposal was stereotypical. Cue taking was also reduced when the policy change was counter-stereotypical with the difference in marginal effects statistically significant in the Pooled Model (difference = 0.06 [0.03, 0.09]) and Experiment 3 (0.08 [0.04, 0.12]) but not Experiment 2 (0.03, [-0.01, 0.08]). The bulk of the evidence shows that partisans were willing to deviate from the party line

Figure 2: Insinuations Broadly Reduce Cue-Taking Regardless of Type of Policy Change



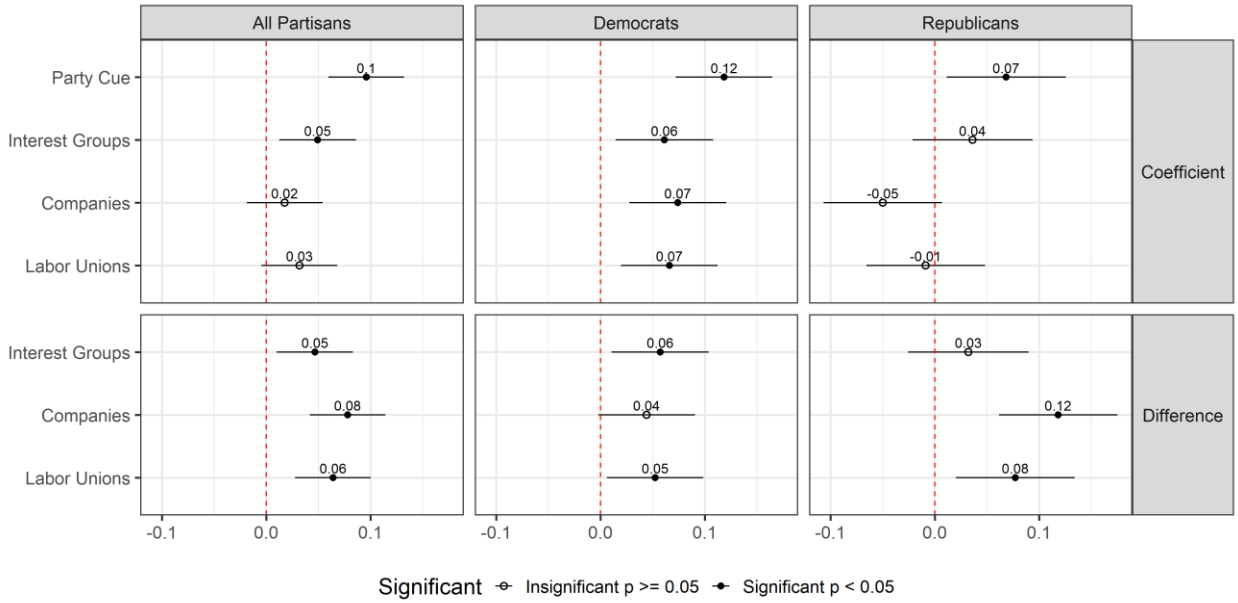
Notes: "Party Cue" and "Cue w/Insinuation" provide OLS coefficients while "Diff in Coefs" provides the difference in these two coefficients, all with 95% confidence intervals. See Table OB2 for model results. The number of observations per analysis are 4039, 1581, and 2458.

due to an insinuation even when the proposed policy was consistent with the broader policy reputation of their party and thus likely consistent with the partisan's underlying policy interests.

Does the Identity of the Lobbying Group Matter?

In Hypothesis 2 we argued that the parties as information shortcuts approach implies that partisans should be less concerned with lobbying efforts from ideological allies. In Experiment 3 we randomly varied the group lobbying the party to test this claim. As before we regress policy support on treatment assignment and policy direction, but we now separate the "Cue w/Insinuation" condition by the specific group involved. We do this in three models: one that combines partisans and then two where we disaggregate by respondent partisanship given that Republicans and Democrats should react differently to the groups involved. The logic of Hypothesis 2 implies that cue taking should continue broadly apace for Democrats when "labor unions" are involved but should be attenuated when either "companies" or "interest

Figure 3: Partisans Broadly React the Same to Different Types of Lobbying Groups



Notes: Markers in the top sub-graph are OLS coefficients (Comparison Group: No Party Cue) with 95% confidence intervals. Markers in the bottom half provide the difference between "Party Cue" and each of the three other conditions. See Table OB3 for full model results. The number of observations per graph are 2458 (All Partisans), 1376 (Democrats), and 1082 (Republicans).

groups" pressure the party. Republicans, on the other hand, should be more reassured by "companies" but put off by "interest groups" and "labor unions."

We plot the results from these regression models in Figure 3, again showing the OLS coefficient for treatment assignment as well as the difference between the coefficient for the Party Cue condition and each insinuation treatment condition; see Table OB3 for full results. Figure 3 shows that partisans, and perhaps especially Democrats, were less responsive to the party cue regardless of the nature of the group pressuring the party. Democrats were less likely to follow the party cue when either Interest Groups (difference = 0.06 [0.01, 0.10]) or Labor Unions (0.05 [0.01, 0.10]) influenced the in-party. Cue taking among Democrats was also reduced when Companies were involved, although this difference is not statistically significant (0.04 [-0.002, 0.09])). Republicans were likewise less likely to follow the party line across all three actors. Cue taking was lower when either Companies (0.12 [0.06, 0.17]) or Labor Unions (0.08 [0.02, 0.13])

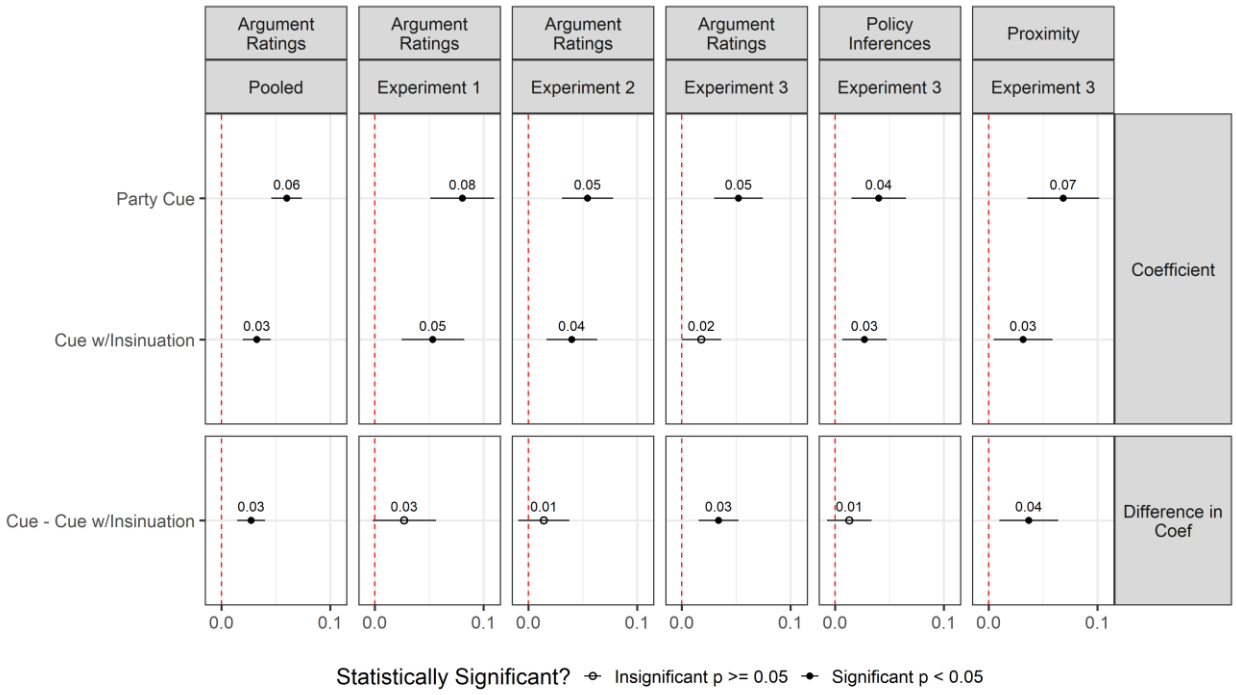
were involved with both differences statistically significant. Cue taking was also less evident when "Interest Groups" pressured the party, although this difference was not statistically significant (0.03 [-0.03, 0.09]). The key implication of Figure 3 is akin to that of Figure 2: partisans seem hesitant to follow their party when they have reason to believe it has acted based on self-interest rather than using other cues to rationalize following the party.

Additional Analyses

We have thus far seen that (1) party cues influence policy opinions, (2) cue taking is attenuated when insinuations are present, and (3) this attenuation broadly happens regardless of the type of policy, the stereotypicality of the change, or the group influencing the party. We have suggested that this lends support to a perspective that highlights partisans as 'wary cooperators' – not just using cues as trustworthy signals to "correct" attitudes but willing to deviate from party cues even when it would cost them ideologically. In this section we further probe how the insinuations affected respondents' reasoning about the merits of the proposed policy change.

We first examine the perceived strength of the arguments for and against the proposal. Prior work shows that associating arguments with partisan labels polarizes perceived argument effectiveness with in-party arguments rated more positively than out-party ones (Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Mullinix 2016). The first four plots in Figure 4 show that this happened in all experiments as seen in the significant positive coefficient for those assigned to the Party Cue condition. At the same time, partisans in the Cue w/Insinuation condition *also* tend to evaluate the Pro argument better than the Con argument when party labels are present, albeit to a lesser degree with the difference in coefficients statistically significant in the Pooled and Experiment 3 models. The insinuation thus did shake some of the cue's effect on partisans' reasoning about argument quality, although not completely so.

Figure 4: Cue Effects on Policy Argument Ratings, Policy Inferences, and Proximity



Notes: Markers provide the OLS coefficient for assignment to treatment condition (top half) and the difference between these coefficients (bottom half) with 95% confidence intervals. The dependent variable and sample used are provided in the topmost facets (Argument Ratings = polarization in pro and con argument ratings; Policy Inferences = beliefs about the economic consequences of the policy; Proximity = perceived policy proximity). The number of observations per graph are: 5039, 1013, 1581, 2445-2460 (for Experiment 3 figures).

A more direct way of considering the impact of the insinuation on policy reasoning is to focus on the specific policy inferences made by respondents. The fifth graph in Figure 4 shows that respondent beliefs about the specific outcomes of the policy were more positive when the cue was present than when it was absent (difference = 0.04 [0.02, 0.07]). However, inferences were *also* more positive when the insinuation was present (0.03 [0.01, 0.05]) with the difference between these two coefficients small and statistically insignificant (0.01 [-0.01, 0.03]). Partisans in Experiment 3 were thus willing to disregard the party line even though their impressions about the specific consequences of the policy were approximately as positive as those held by partisans who did not read the insinuation.

The final graph in Figure 4 focuses on the perceived ideological proximity of the policy. Subjective proximity was greater when the party cue was present than when it was absent regardless of the presence of the insinuation. However, subjective proximity was lower when the cue was paired with the insinuation than when presented sans insinuation with this difference being statistically significant. These three dependent variables thus provide some evidence that the insinuation did influence reasoning about policy merits, although the evidence on this front is weakest when it comes to the item most explicitly about policy (i.e. the inferences item) and existing work suggests some caution in inferring that responses to the ideological placement items reflect purely "ideological" reasoning (Bauer et al. 2017; Simas 2018). Figure 4 suggests a mixture of ideological and process-based reasoning as underlying the insinuation's influence. We return to this point in the Conclusion.

A Further Replication Attempt

Finally, we discuss the results of an additional experiment we fielded on an MTurk sample in September 2020 that uses the same procedures and materials as Experiment 2 (see Online Appendix OG for more details). We had two goals in fielding this experiment. First, we included a condition in which respondents received the insinuation absent the party cue to ascertain its independent impact. Second, we included additional variables on the post-test to further probe the 'wary cooperators' perspective. We asked respondents to indicate the importance of four motives (special interests, personal gain, the desire to make good policy, and the views/interests of people like you) in explaining why pro-reform legislators took their position. A factor analysis revealed that a single dimension underlies these four items; we thus combine them into a single index with higher values indicating a stronger belief that 'positive' motives guided the legislators. We analyze the items separately in Online Appendix OG. In

Table 1: Results from September 2020 MTurk Replication Experiment

	(1) Policy Support	(2) Argument Difference	(3) Inferences	(4) Proximity	(5) Motives	(6) In-Party Affect
Party Cue	0.12**	0.06**	0.06**	0.07**	0.06**	-0.06**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Cue w/Insinuation	0.10**	0.04*	0.06**	0.08**	0.02	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Insinuation	-0.03	-0.03	-0.00	-0.01	-0.07**	0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Counter-Stereotypical Change	-0.14**	-0.08**	-0.09**	-0.15**	-0.09**	-0.03+
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.51**	0.52**	0.54**	0.74**	0.49**	0.71**
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Observations	1027	1026	1027	1027	1025	1024

Notes: All DVs range from 0-1; Argument Difference = Difference in Argument Ratings; Inferences = beliefs about economic consequences of policy; Motives = perceived motives of pro-reform legislators; In-Party = in-party thermometer. Standard errors in parentheses; $^{+}$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

addition, we also measured respondents' evaluation of their in-party via a feeling thermometer. Broadly, we expect that the insinuation should lead individuals to more negative perceptions of the legislators' motivations and worse in-party affect.

Table 1 provides the results from OLS regressions for our dependent variables. As earlier, we find that the party cue led to more support, polarization in perceived argument effectiveness, more positive impressions of the policy's likely outcomes, and even more positive impressions of the pro-reform legislator's motivations. The insinuation, by itself, had little impact on the dependent variables; while it was associated with reduced support for the policy, and to a more cynical reading of the legislators' motivations, only the latter effect was statistically significant. More interestingly, unlike the previous experiments, including those using the same treatments and procedures, we fail to find a significant diminution of cue taking

Table 2: Results (Experiments 1-4 Merged)

	(1) Policy Support	(2) Policy Support	(3) Policy Support
Party Cue	0.08**	0.09**	0.10**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Cue w/Insinuation	0.04**	0.05**	0.04*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Stereotypical		0.06**	0.05**
		(0.01)	(0.02)
Party Cue # Stereotypical			-0.01
			(0.02)
Cue w/Insinuation # Stereotypical			0.02
			(0.02)
Observations	5820	4807	4807
Experiment Fixed Effects	Exp 1-4	Exp 2-4	Exp 2-4

Note: See Table OB9 for experiment fixed effects and Table OB10 for analyses that further control for pre-treatment demographics. Standard errors in parentheses; $^{+}$ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

when the cue is present alongside the insinuation. We discuss why this might have happened, and how it affects the broader influence of insinuations on party influence in the Conclusion.

How does the null effect in Experiment 4 influence our overall estimate of the effect of insinuations? We address this question in Table 2. In Model 1 we regress policy support on treatment assignment and experiment fixed effects for all four experiments. Model 2 adds an indicator for whether the proposed policy change was stereotypical or not and thus focuses on Experiments 2-4. Notably, the insinuation still has the effect of cutting cue taking in half with the difference between the coefficients for the two conditions being statistically significant (Model 1: $F = 24.84$, $p < 0.001$; Model 2: $F = 21.46$, $p < 0.001$). Model 3 focuses on the interaction of the cue and insinuation with type of policy change. The effect of the cue was again lower when the insinuation was present both for a stereotypical policy (average marginal effect for Party Cue condition: 0.09 [0.06, 0.12]; Insinuation Condition AME: 0.06 [0.03, 0.08]; Difference: 0.03

[0.005, 0.06]) and for a counter-stereotypical policy (Cue AME: 0.10 [0.07, 0.13]; Insinuation AME: 0.04 [0.01, 0.06]; Difference: 0.06 [0.03, 0.09]). In Table OB10, meanwhile, we repeat this exercise while controlling for pre-treatment demographic (age, gender, education, income, and race) and political (symbolic ideology, partisan identity strength) covariates. Turk samples tend to skew more liberal and well educated, so these analyses address the possibility that compositional differences are influencing our estimates. However, the same results emerge. Thus, our central conclusion remains that insinuations, on average, undermine cue taking.

Conclusion

A key finding of research on public opinion is that political parties influence the policy opinions of their supporters (Brader, Tucker, and Duell 2013; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Hobolt 2007). We consider a novel constraint on party influence: the presence of insinuations regarding the self-serving motivations of the party for taking the policy position in question. Across three survey experiments we found that these insinuations did indeed blunt the effect of party cues on policy opinions, although a fourth experiment failed to find this effect. When the insinuation worked it did so both when the party took a stereotypical policy position and when they took a counter-stereotypical one. It also happened when more or less trusted social groups pressured the party. Our results thus suggest that party influence is real, but potentially more limited than existing work suggests given the common invocation of self-serving motivations in the policy-making process (Aalberg, Strömbäck, and de Vreese 2011).

We began with three theoretical perspectives that we believe implied different reactions to insinuations. Our results appear to be least consistent with the parties-as-identities perspective at least in the strong form that we advanced. What about the final two perspectives: parties as informational shortcuts and humans as wary cooperators? These two perspectives share a focus

on perceptions of trust, but the latter, we argued, suggests that insinuations should promote an unconditional reticence to follow the party leader. We believe the evidence, overall, is consistent with this claim: partisans were less willing to follow the leader on stereotypical issues and when (potentially) friendly groups influenced the party. This does not mean that instrumental motivations were absent in explaining the effect of the insinuations in Experiments 1-3 as the party cue's effects on perceived argument strength and subjective proximity did vary based on the presence of the insinuation across conditions. However, we believe it suggests supplementing existing identity- and instrumental-understandings of party influence with a process-oriented view of followership to more fully capture the influence of parties on their followers (Bøggild 2018).

Our first three experiments showed that party cues significantly influenced policy support and that an insinuation could undercut this effect. However, in Experiment 4 we only saw evidence of the former effect even though the treatment materials were the same as in Experiments 2 and 3. Why might this have occurred and what does it say about the importance of insinuations? There are two extreme possibilities here. On the one hand, one could discount the final experiment given replication across three others. We do not think this conclusion justified – one should take the entirety of the evidence on hand. On the other hand, one could in effect discount the first three and conclude that the null in Experiment 4 is closer to the 'true' value of the insinuation treatment effect. This too strikes us as unpersuasive; we see no reason stemming from the sampling procedures or materials used to give the fourth study disproportionate weight in assessing the influence of insinuations such that it would outweigh three other experiments.

The cumulative results of all four experiments (Table 2) and the foregoing considerations lead us to a different conclusion: the average effect of an insinuation is likely one where party

influence is undercut, but there is almost certainly important heterogeneity in this effect due to context. Experiment 4, for instance, was conducted during the height of a Presidential campaign, which may have strengthened the motivation to defend one's side (Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). It is also plausible that participants in Experiment 4 were more strongly pre-treated on the issue of taxes giving the continued focus on this issue during the 2020 Democratic Presidential primaries and discussions regarding state debt and taxation stimulated by the Coronavirus. Indeed, the difference in the ideological placement of the policy based on whether it was liberal or conservative was two to three times larger for respondents Experiment 4 than in Experiment 3 despite both samples reading about the same policy (see Online Appendix G). These speculations suggest that the influence of insinuations might be most strongly felt outside of election season and for less salient issues where people are less well informed – characteristics that plausibly describe most, but certainly not all, cases. Ultimately, more work will be required to consider the potential sources of heterogeneity in reactions to insinuations such as timing and order of exposure, attitude strength, and source credibility.

A second area of potential future research concerns reactions by Independents and out-partisans. How should Republicans or Independents react to hearing that the Democratic Party has adopted a position to satiate the demands of an interest group (and vice versa)? Our prior is that the policy attitude of out-partisans should be little affected as they already possess a reason to oppose the policy in question. At the same time, it may be that the *strength* of this attitude may increase if the insinuation provides a subjectively sounder base for the attitude. Independents, meanwhile, are typically left out of party cueing experiments. It seems plausible that insinuations may drive resistance to policies proposed by either party among Independents by stoking dissatisfaction with policymaking procedures (Atkinson 2017; Hibbing and Theiss-

Morse 2002). We are limited in our ability to test this claim because we only assigned Independents to a party cue condition in Experiment 3, but there we found Independents were unaffected both by the party cues *and* the insinuations (see Online Appendix OF). This analysis involves a somewhat small sample of Independents, however, so future work is required to further delineate the reactions of non-partisans.

A final potential area for future work concerns potential partisan asymmetries in reactions to insinuations. In Figure 3, for instance, we found that Democrats were more consistently reactive to the insinuation than were Republicans. One possibility is that labor unions were an insufficiently reassuring signal and Democrats would have continued to follow the leader to the same extent had a group with stronger ideological or affective overtones been involved.[7] A stronger test of the conditionality hypothesis, and hence of the process-based explanation, will ultimately require the use of a more distinctive social group. However, another possibility is that Democrats may generally be more concerned with the influence of special interests in American policymaking processes. Some recent research on reactions to campaign finance law transgressions, for instance, suggests that Democrats react more negatively to such violations potentially due to more consistent elite messages on the pernicious role of big money in politics (Rhodes et al. 2019; Wood 2020). Recent work on partisanship and public opinion also suggests that Republicans are more ideological than Democrats who, in turn, are more attuned to group considerations (Grossmann and Hopkins 2015). There is some evidence for this latter point in our experiments. In exploratory analyses we investigated whether the insinuation had a similar impact on the policy inferences and subjective proximity judgments of Democrats and Republicans in Experiment 3 (see Online Appendix OH). Democrats and Republicans alike

[7] We thank an Anonymous Reviewer for bringing our attention to this possibility.

expressed more positive impressions of the policy on these two measures when the party cue was presented by itself. However, the insinuation undermined this belief among Republicans only. Democrats, in other words, were willing to deviate from the party line in Experiment 3 even though the insinuation did not alter their beliefs about the positive policy implications or proximity of the policy. There may exist important group-level differences in the applicability of the parties as information-shortcuts and wary cooperative theories, with Republicans falling more in the former and Democrats more in the latter category. However, this is something that future work is required to further delineate.

We conclude by discussing the normative implications of our findings. Party influence on mass opinion is often, if not always, treated with some degree of suspicion out of the worry that party influence reveals a public being 'manipulated' by its leaders (Disch 2011; Mansbridge 2003). These fears may be especially pronounced if partisans follow the party line uncritically, e.g. even in cases where the party adopts a counter-stereotypical position out of line with the underlying interests of its partisans (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012). On this front our results could be read as providing some room for optimism. Partisans did not follow the party line uncritically but were willing to disregard a counter-stereotypical party position when they had reason to doubt the motivations behind its provenance. However, our results also suggest that partisans could be too "wary" as they also rejected the party cue when it was consistent with the party's reputation. Partisans here may have 'over-corrected'; while avoiding a negative outcome they may also have avoided a positive one as well. Combined these results suggest some caution in suggesting the gullibility of mass partisans, but also highlight how partisan wariness can also be a tool that leads people away from the 'correct' decision.

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