

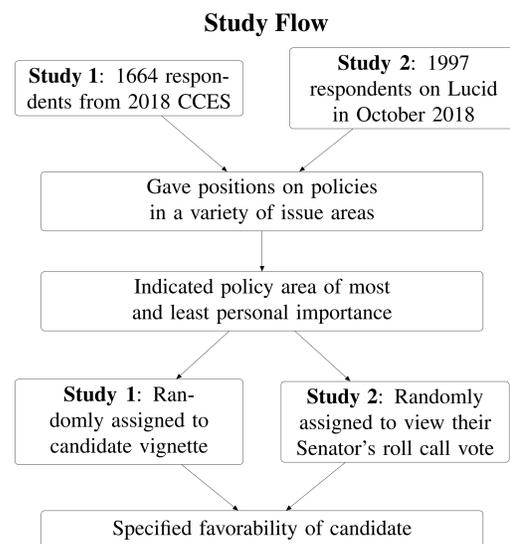
# Policy Versus Party: The Importance of Personal Issue Importance

Gabriel Madson | Duke University | gabriel.madson@duke.edu

## INTRODUCTION

- To what extent do voters rely on policy information versus partisan cues when making electoral decisions?
- Past work has assumed issue-driven public, while recent research argues voters are ‘blind partisans’ who ignore policy information in favor of expressing political identity.
- I propose voters rely on both issue information and party cues, with personal issue importance moderating how much one is relied on relative to the other.
- I argue this relationship has been missed for two reasons. First, researchers tend to focus on political salience of an issue rather than personal importance. Second, standard measurement of personal issue importance poorly discriminates between important and unimportant issues.
- Across two survey experiments, I test the effects of issue and party agreement on candidate evaluations for political issues of high and low personal importance.

## STUDY DESIGN



## EXPECTATIONS



### All else equal:

- Issue agreement leads to higher evaluations
- Party agreement lead to higher evaluations

### For issues of LOW personal importance:

- Issue agreement matters less
- Party agreement matters more

### For issues of HIGH personal importance:

- Issue agreement matters more
- Party agreement matters less

### Ignoring Issue Importance

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )
Constant	0.38	0.01	30.49	0.00
Party Match	0.08	0.02	4.59	0.00
Issue Match	0.10	0.02	5.91	0.00
Interaction	0.00	0.02	-0.20	0.84
n	1253			
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.08			

(A)

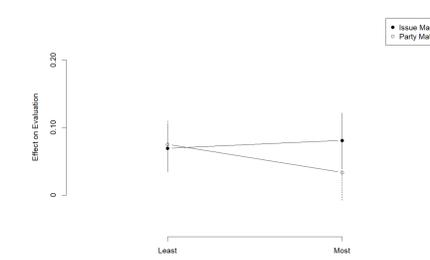
	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t )
Constant	0.23	0.02	12.74	0.00
Party Match	0.40	0.03	15.50	0.00
Issue Match	0.15	0.03	5.64	0.00
Interaction	-0.03	0.04	-0.85	0.40
n	1150			
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.33			

(B)

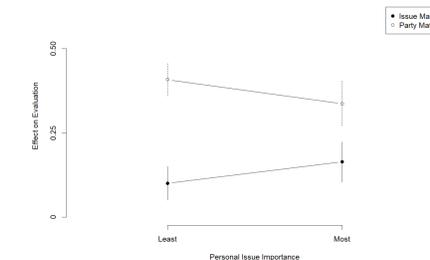
Tables above show the effect of party and issue agreement on candidate evaluations from the CCES (A) and Lucid (B) while ignoring issue importance. Both studies show that a match for issue positions and partisanship is preferred to a mismatch. All variables are re-coded 0-1.

## RESULTS

### Effect of Agreement



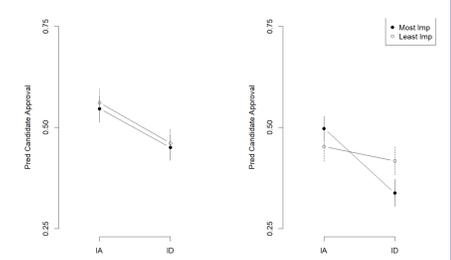
(A)



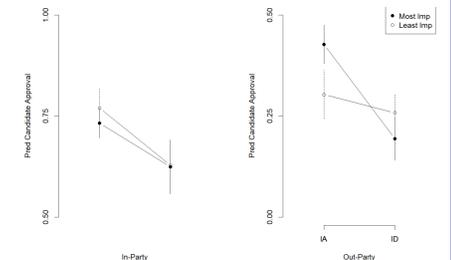
(B)

Figures above show the effect of party and issue agreement on candidate evaluations by issue importance for the CCES (A) and Lucid (B). Comparing evaluations of the most important issue to the least, the effect of issue match increases while party match decreases.

### Predicted Evaluation by Condition



(A)



(B)

When evaluations are split based on in versus out-party evaluations we see, for both the CCES (A) and Lucid (B), in-party evaluations are policy-driven regardless of issue importance. Out-party evaluations show the expected moderating effect of issue importance on policy-driven behavior.

## IMPLICATIONS

- Positive takeaways for democratic accountability.
  - Regardless of issue importance, in-party evaluations were policy-driven.
  - Out-party evaluations only policy-driven when the issues at stake are of high personal importance. Suggests ‘issue publics’ can still hold out-partisans accountable.
- Results are consistent with theory of Negative Partisanship. Animosity towards out-party members cannot be overridden by issue agreement on low importance issues.
- Past results arguing issue importance has no effect on moderating political behaviors may be due to measurement error rather than actual null effects.

## DRAWBACKS & FUTURE WORK

- Measuring issue importance through isolation of the most and least important issue demonstrates that issue importance matters but is limited in other ways (e.g. does not speak to how importance matters across the full range of issues).
- Future work should improve upon the standard measure of personal issue importance to better understand its impact on political behavior.
- Additional studies needed to determine how issue importance impacts the relationship between partisan preferences and issue positions.