

**How Do People React When They Can't Vote How They Want? The Relationship Between
the Public and Democratic Institutions**

by

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Dedication: To Cooper, who would probably sigh and roll his eyes at me dedicating my dissertation to him but I'm doing it anyway. Miss you every day.

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Abstract

In this three-paper dissertation, I examine how people react when democratic institutions function sub-optimally in two contexts: when political parties fail to field a candidate for office and thus allow another political party to win automatically, and when voters have a poor experience at the polling place in the process of casting their ballot. In the first paper, I use a regression discontinuity design, nationwide precinct-level election results, and survey data from 2016 to show that there is a down-ballot electoral penalty when parties don't have a candidate for Congress on the ballot. This pattern appears to be mostly due to increased voter roll-off as well as some evidence of voters casting a split-ticket down-ballot. In the second paper, I use a survey experiment and other survey data to show that some survey respondents do seem to believe that it is political parties' responsibility to find candidates for office, and also show that the potential mechanism for the down-ballot penalty in the first paper is protest voting. In the third paper, I use an original survey experiment and data from a nationwide survey in 2016 to show that under certain circumstances encountering a problem while voting slightly reduces voter roll-off, but respondents did not appear to distinguish between long lines due to malfeasance or those due to innocent errors by election officials. This dissertation makes contributions to political science's understanding of the relationship between democratic institutions and the public, to the theory of protest voting, and to the understanding of voter roll-off.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

American democracy is in crisis. Driven by nefarious actors intent on undermining elections, many have lost faith in democratic institutions. A judiciary, increasingly divorced from public opinion, sets policy without any direct democratic accountability. In this context, it is important to examine how people react to immediate examples of democratic institutions failing, and to consider how the public views its relationship to those democratic institutions. Do they believe, as scholars do, that political parties play a critical role in democracy, or do they instead think that political parties are impediments to democracy? Similarly, what are voters' expectations for the in-person voting experience, and the consequences for when they encounter problems voting? This dissertation attempts to answer these questions, and to examine the relationship between the public and democratic institutions in those two contexts.

Lippman (1922, p. 18) introduced the idea of the “pictures in our heads” as motivating how people interact with the public world, stating that: “*The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind.*” The political world has gotten no less complex 100 years later, and so many people may still use these simpler models of reality in order to make sense of politics. It is rational that many people collect a limited amount of information about the political world, as they have other, more immediate and important concerns that demand their attention (Downs 1957, p. 214-228). Achen and Bartels (2016) discussed these simpler models of reality in their discussion of the “folk theory of democracy,”

in which citizens have an idealized conception of how voters choose for whom to vote compared to how scholars believe voters actually make their choices.

Aside from the most politically engaged, most people will only encounter elections, or think about the candidates on their ballot, once every couple of years. It is natural, then, for many people to remain ignorant of the inner workings of democratic institutions, much as they might choose to not learn about certain political issues that they believe have no bearing on their life. For example, many voters cannot correctly identify the competitiveness of their congressional election (McDonald and Tolbert 2012). Given this limited information, citizens may form simpler models of democratic institutions and democracy to make sense of the realities of those institutions and expect those institutions to “just work” while maintaining at least a nominal commitment to democracy. As Norris (2011, p. 14) states: “But citizens need to demonstrate at least some minimal cognitive awareness about the basic procedural characteristics and core institutions of liberal democracy if they are to make rational and enlightened judgments about both the quality of democratic performance and the importance of democracy as the ideal regime for governing their country.”

There is no uniform “lay definition of democracy” (see among others Canache 2012; Osterberg-Kaufmann and Stadelmaier, 2020), and there is no uniform understanding of democratic institutions, how those institutions are supposed to function, or the appropriate recourse when democratic institutions do not function. This dissertation focuses on how voters react to democratic institutional dysfunction in two contexts: when parties fail to place a candidate on the ballot, and when voters encounter problems while casting their ballot. These two examples of democratic dysfunction, among the many others that exist in the American political system, are particularly important to understand in a time of decreasing faith in

democracy—in order to potentially fix America’s democratic crisis, we must first understand the problem’s many facets. While institutional reforms such as improving political parties’ candidate recruitment will not directly decrease the mass polarization that is part of the threats to democracy, voters always having an opportunity to vote for the party they support might increase their faith in democracy.

1.2 Summary of Chapter 2

In the first paper of this dissertation, I use nationwide precinct-level election results from 2016 and the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study to identify if there is an electoral penalty from uncontested congressional races on down-ballot state legislative races. In addition, I use regression discontinuity analysis on election data from California and Washington, the only states that use the top-two primary, to causally identify the effect of a political party just missing the general election ballot due to the top-two primary. I also examine if this penalty appears to be due to voter roll-off, split-ticket voting, or a combination of the two using all three datasets.

I find that there is an electoral penalty for state legislative candidates when their party does not field a candidate for the congressional race in that precinct. This penalty is evident in the regression discontinuity results from California and Washington, in the nationwide precinct data from 2016, and in survey data and appears to be mostly the result of voters abstaining in down-ballot races and some voting for other parties. In total, the results in the first paper suggest that this penalty is more due to voter roll-off rather than to vote switching, but the precise mechanism of what motivates voters to roll-off the ballot is not evident from that data. The size of this electoral penalty is modest, typically a few percentage points on average, but it is large enough to potentially be decisive in close elections—that is, when a political party does not have a candidate for Congress on the ballot, they may be inadvertently sabotaging their chances of

winning more competitive races down-ballot. These findings expand upon the existing literature showing that some voters abstain from voting in uncontested races (Fisk 2021; Patterson, Jr. 2020), and show that abstention continues down the ballot.

One implication of the findings from this paper is that it may always be beneficial for political parties to put a candidate on the ballot, even in hopeless elections, to prevent these consequences for down-ballot candidates who may be in more competitive elections. When directly asked to choose between the two options, some voters consider winning elections more important while others consider electoral competition more important (Brunell and Clarke 2012), but in uncontested races neither of those possibilities is met for some voters. Being able to cast a meaningful vote is fundamental to democracy, and my findings suggest that there are deleterious effects when voters cannot do so. In a sense, this is reassuring, as it would be alarming if voters did not react to elections in which their votes are meaningless.

1.3 Summary of Chapter 3

As both historic and recent scholars have noted, it is easy for the public to identify political parties in government (politicians) and in the electorate (fellow Republicans or fellow Democrats), but parties as organizations—the entities that nominate candidates for office, fundraise for those candidates, coordinate campaigns, provide professional campaign staff, and distribute resources such as polling and voter data—are difficult to observe (Key, Jr. 1961 p. 438; Roscoe and Jenkins 2016, p. 2). Similarly, it is easy to identify how the public thinks about parties in government and parties in the electorate—surveys ask respondents about their feelings about elected officials and about other members of the public all the time. In a sense, this is natural—people interact with members of the other party in normal, everyday interactions and encounter news stories about politicians frequently, while political party organizations may only

be in the news during campaigns, and are overshadowed by individual candidates. So how the public feels about or understands the RNC or the DCCC, or the Ohio GOP or Washtenaw County Democrats, is not known—and when surveys ask respondents how they feel about political parties, we don't know if respondents are thinking of parties in government, parties in the electorate, or party organizations when they reply, nor how they understand the political parties' role in democracy. Their responses may be a reflection of their party identity, rather than their feelings about the party organizations.

In the third chapter, I identify a potential mechanism for the electoral penalty I show in the second chapter. I analyze data from survey questions on an NORC AmeriSpeak survey in November-December 2019 intended to gauge respondents' beliefs about the role of parties in the nomination system. I also use a survey experiment, fielded on an NORC AmeriSpeak panel in November-December 2018, to assess how the public reacts to situations in which their party does not field a candidate in a particular election due to either the top-two primary or to the party choosing to conserve resources.

Similar to Albert and La Raja (2021), I find evidence that the public does believe that political parties have a role to play in the nomination process and puts more value on the party finding and supporting candidates than they do on parties influencing candidates' issue positions. The qualitative and quantitative analyses of open-ended responses to the survey experiment yielded several theoretical insights into these situations and empirical results, including the fact that some respondents have pre-existing beliefs about the reasons that uncontested races happen. Those who read about their party not competing more often have a negative response than those who read about another party not competing. However, I find no evidence that reading about

uncontested races has a demobilizing effect on survey respondents in terms of their likelihood of voting or making political donations in the future.

In concert with the evidence presented in the first paper, it appears that uncontested races have a limited effect on voters—but that effect, and the resulting down-ballot penalty for other candidates, can be decisive in close elections. The open-ended responses suggest that the electoral penalty shown in the first paper may be due to protest voting, as some respondents express sentiments that make casting a protest vote more likely (or explicitly say they don't vote in uncontested races) and that survey respondents appear to care less about uncontested elections per se than they do when their party is the party that loses automatically in an uncontested election. This is consistent with the “winner's effect,” wherein voters whose party wins the election have more satisfaction with democracy than do voters who supported the losing party (see among others Blais and Gélinau 2007; Norris 2018). Presumably, those whose party did not even field a candidate—and thus lost automatically—are particularly susceptible to feeling decreased faith in democracy, as they have real-world evidence that democracy is not working for them. Democracy did not provide a candidate for them to support, or even a meaningful choice in the election.

1.4 Summary of Chapter 4

In the fourth chapter, I analyze data from the CCES, focusing on 2016 but including data from 2012, 2014, and 2018 and use an original survey experiment on an NORC AmeriSpeak survey fielded in November-December 2019 to explore how people react to problems they encounter on Election Day. While there is much research on the administrative reasons that long lines or other problems occur and how experiences voting shape confidence in democracy, there is comparatively little research on if and how encountering a long line or other problem while

voting might change a voter's decisions in the moment (Hall and Moore 2014, p. 182; King 2017; King 2020). There has also been little research on if the source of an Election Day problem matters for voters' reactions, despite the fact that a long line to vote could be due to any number of factors such as too few voting machines, high turnout, broken voting machines, problems with the list of registered voters, too few volunteers, a long ballot, or many other reasons.

I find little evidence that the reason given for a poor voting experience matters for how voters react. In my survey experiment, both nefarious-framed and innocent-framed errors had a slight pro-participatory effect compared to the control condition of a well-run election. I also find that reporting feeling intimidated while voting is associated with casting a more complete ballot in that election, suggesting that when people feel their right to vote is threatened, they act in such a way to preserve that right. The findings in this paper indicate that not only do poor experiences while voting shape behavior in future elections (i.e., Pettigrew 2021), but those subpar experiences can also affect how people vote in the election in which the poor experiences occur.

These two central topics of my dissertation—parties not fielding a candidate for office, and poor experiences while voting—focus on the relationship between the public and democratic institutions, and how the public reacts when these democratic institutions do not function as intended or as the public wishes. In a time of declining faith in institutions such as government agencies and scientific advice, understanding how the public thinks about these democratic institutions, and how they respond when those institutions do not function properly, is essential.

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Chapter 2: How Do Voters React When Their Party Doesn't Compete?¹

Abstract

I apply the theory of withdrawn coattails, often discussed in the context of midterm elections when congressional candidates suffer from not having a co-partisan presidential candidate on the ballot, to uncontested congressional elections and simultaneous down-ballot races. I propose that when a political party does not field a candidate in a congressional election, down-ballot candidates from that party suffer electorally. I use a regression discontinuity design and precinct-level election results from California and Washington as well as nationwide precinct-level data from the MIT Election Data and Science Lab to show that there is an electoral penalty for state legislative candidates when they do not have a co-partisan congressional candidate on the ballot with them. I find similar results using the 2016 CCES and show that this electoral penalty seems to be primarily due to voter roll-off but there is also some evidence of down-ballot split-ticket voting. In Chapter 3, I show that these patterns may be due to protest voting due to voter dissatisfaction with not being able to support their party.

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2.1 Introduction

In the 2016 general election, Republican Congressman Hal Rogers of Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District ran unopposed by a Democratic candidate, despite the Democratic Party running a candidate against Rogers in the two prior elections. In the simultaneous election for the 92nd District in the Kentucky House of Representatives, which is geographically entirely within Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District, incumbent Democratic candidate John Short lost his re-election bid for a fourth term to his Republican challenger by fewer than 500 votes. But what if Rogers had a Democratic opponent in his congressional race—might Short have won more votes, and perhaps kept his seat in the Kentucky House of Representatives? This chapter shows the down-ballot consequences for a political party when they don't nominate a candidate for Congress.

Sixty-four races for the United States House of Representatives did not have a candidate from one or the other major party in the 2016 general election. Simultaneously, 291 state legislative races nationwide were decided by 1000 votes or fewer. As Table 2.1 shows, in any given year as many as 15 percent of congressional elections do not feature both a Republican and Democratic candidate, although the frequency and distribution between parties of these uncontested races varies greatly from year to year.² These uncontested races are strikingly common in federal, state, and local elections and so it is important to understand their consequences for parties, candidates, and voters.

² Data on party competition and election results is from the Clerk of the House of Representatives website <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>. These numbers of uncontested races are approximately the same as Larry Sabato's calculations for the number of uncontested Republicans and Democrats http://www.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/articles/gerrymandering-the-house-1972-2016/?upm_export=print.

Table 2.1: Uncontested U.S. House Races by Year

Year	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020
Races with no Republican	47	42	5	21	42	34	38	19
Races with no Democrat	13	14	25	27	35	29	4	8

I examine how uncontested U.S. House of Representatives elections are associated with vote penalties for down-ballot candidates. While there is evidence that some voters who face an uncontested or single-party race will choose to not vote in that race (Fisk 2021; Nagler 2015; Patterson Jr. 2020), whether or not those races have subsequent effects on down-ballot races has not been established. Withdrawn coattails are often discussed alongside the concepts of “party balancing” or “surge and decline” as explanations for why candidates that share the presidents’ partisanship do worse in midterm elections, and I extend that theory to apply to congressional and down-ballot elections (Erikson 2016).

Specifically, I apply the theories of withdrawn coattails and protest voting to uncontested congressional elections, and propose that there will be a down-ballot penalty for leaving a congressional election uncontested and subsequently losing that election automatically.³ I test my hypotheses using a regression discontinuity design on precinct-level election results from California’s 2012 and 2016 elections, a nationwide precinct-level election results file from 2016,

³ I use “conceding” and “not contesting” races/elections interchangeably, in addition to calling them “uncontested” races/elections. By those terms, I mean that no candidate for the party in question is on the general election ballot. In the case of the two major parties and elections in the United States, this effectively means that one candidate is running unopposed, or that two co-partisans are facing off in the general election and in effect one party wins effectively automatically while the other loses automatically. In these uncontested races, partisan voters may not have a co-partisan candidate for whom to vote. I am not using contested/uncontested in such a way to imply that there were challenges to the legitimacy of the election or that the results were inaccurate or invalid. There are also situations wherein a candidate for a particular party is on the ballot with no expectation of winning, and possibly very little effort to do so. I refer to these candidates as “nominal candidates” where appropriate, but these candidates and elections are not central to my theory.

and the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). I find evidence that down-ballot candidates suffer electorally when their party does not contest a race higher on the ballot, and this seems to mostly be due to increased voter roll-off after uncontested races, but there is some limited evidence of split-ticket voting down-ballot from uncontested races as well.⁴ The electoral consequences for state legislative candidates (potentially tens of votes or a few points change in the vote margin per precinct) appear to be large enough to potentially cost state legislative candidates victories in close races. As Fraga and Hersh (2018) note, Americans exist in a hierarchical state of politics which might differ in competitiveness in the same election cycle, so a competitive state legislative district could be nested in a landslide congressional district.

2.2 Theory

To compete in general elections, parties must first recruit candidates to run in the primary election or nominate candidates at a convention—but this is not entirely up to the party organizations.⁵ Individual potential candidates or incumbent candidates play a substantial role in deciding who runs for election. Incumbents may strategically retire, or quality candidates may choose to not run for election in unfavorable conditions such as poor economic or macro-political concerns like the popularity of the president (Jacobson and Kernell 1981; Rogers 2015). Other contextual factors, such as congressional apportionment can influence the quality of candidate that runs for office in that the more congressional seats apportioned to a state, the lower the quality of candidate on average (Geras 2018). Perceptions of what support candidates

⁴ I mostly do not focus on how uncontested congressional races affect voter turnout, outside of examining turnout using the CCES.

⁵ Throughout this chapter when I refer to political parties I am referring to political party organizations which exist with organizational structures and staff, rather than members of a political party in the electorate or party in government.

will receive from the party can discourage some candidates, particularly women, from seeking nominations in the first place (Butler and Preece 2016). This shows the importance of the party infrastructure in the nomination process. Even though modern congressional and lower-level campaigns can be relatively candidate-centered, party leaders and elites still exert influence on the nomination process (Hassell 2018), as does the electoral system in which candidates are running (Bullock and Clinton 2011; McGhee et al. 2013; McGhee and Shor 2017). Candidates from both major parties must navigate these recruitment and nomination processes for the general election to be contested.

In addition to individual candidates strategically deciding whether or not to run, parties themselves are also strategic about when and where to use their finite resources. If parties assess districts or races to be out of reach, they may choose to conserve their resources and not invest time or money in recruiting candidates in those districts. Indeed, the “flippability” of a state legislative chamber (the chance of a legislative chamber having a different majority party after the election) is a powerful predictor of the rate of uncontested races at the state legislative level. The more difficult it is to change the party control of a chamber, the higher the rate of uncontested elections for seats in that chamber (Burden and Snyder 2019).

If a party doesn’t nominate a candidate to run in the general election, they and the opposing party both may not campaign in that district vigorously. Subsequently, in uncontested districts there are fewer chances for campaigns to reduce the information costs that voters face. Television campaign advertisements are particularly important for voter persuasion in down-ballot races as voters have fewer pre-formed opinions about those candidates (Sides et al. 2022). The party without a candidate for office has explicitly chosen to not campaign in a district, and the other party does not need to campaign vigorously to win since they’ve done so automatically.

Faced with an election in which their party does not run a candidate, partisans who have decided to vote are faced with two unpleasant options: casting an incomplete ballot by not voting in the race where their party lost automatically, or by voting for a non-co-partisan candidate. After a voter decides which of these options they prefer for the uncontested race, they must subsequently decide if or how to complete the remainder of their ballot.

2.3 Voter Roll-Off, Split-Ticket Voting and Protest Voting

Voters cast incomplete ballots for many reasons.⁶ Some voter roll-off is likely unintentional and can be attributed to voter fatigue or to problems with technology (Bullock and Dunn 1996; Ansolabehere and Stewart III 2005). However, some roll-off is intentional, resistant to efforts to reduce the submission of incomplete ballots (Miller 2013; Miller, Tuma, and Woods 2015) and can be caused by multiple reasons such as voters not knowing what the “correct” vote is and not wanting to guess (Wattenberg et al. 2000), a lack of representative candidates on the ballot for whom to vote (Herron and Sekhon 2005), and wanting to send a message about dissatisfaction about candidates in the presidential race (Kropf and Knack 2002). The latter is particularly notable in the wake of the numerous media reports of voters in the 2016 election refusing to cast a vote in the presidential race due to dissatisfaction with the choice between Clinton and Trump. Indeed, when given the opportunity some voters will vote for a “none of these candidates” option to express their disapproval of all the candidates for a particular office while still voting in that race (Brown 2011).

Along with these factors that predict voter roll-off, a lack of co-partisan candidates on the ballot also makes voters more likely to roll-off in particular races. There is much evidence that

⁶ I use “roll-off,” “undervote,” and “cast an incomplete ballot” interchangeably. By all three, I mean that a voter does not cast a vote in all races on their ballot. For example, a voter may vote for the candidate for Senate near the top of the ballot, but not cast a vote in state legislative races or other down-ballot races.

same-party general elections resulting from the top-two primary in California leads to fewer votes cast in those races (Highton, Huckfeldt, and Hale 2016; Fisk 2021; Nagler 2015; Patterson Jr. 2020). The extent to which voters re-engage with their ballot after an uncontested race, and possibly withholding their vote in that race, is an open question. Some voters may encounter an election where their vote is definitionally meaningless and decide not to continue to fill out the rest of their ballot.

Alternatively, voters facing an uncontested race could choose to vote for the candidate in that race who they know will win automatically, and knowingly cast that meaningless vote. As Burden and Kimball (2002, p. 158) argue, “the absence of competition in congressional races is a major source of ticket splitting in the United States.” In addition, some split-ticket voting may be due to “party balancing” in that some Americans may prefer divided government or policy moderation, and subsequently vote a split-ticket ballot hoping to produce those outcomes (Fiorina 1996; Mebane, Jr. 2000; Lacy et al. 2019).⁷

Indeed, individual beliefs about who is likely to win the presidential election predicts split-ticket voting among high-information non-partisans—those who believe they know the outcome of the presidential race are more likely to cast a split-ticket ballot (Erikson 2016). Predicting who is likely to win a presidential election is a cognitive hurdle, particularly in an era when the country is polarized, relatively evenly divided, but where there can be wide divides between the popular vote result and the Electoral College result. In an uncontested race predicting the winner is a trivial task. Voters who prefer that both parties hold some levers of

⁷ See Petrocik and Doherty (1996) for a discussion of how balancing may be due instead to a race-by-race comparison of candidates, and Mulligan (2011) for a discussion how balancing may be due instead to ambivalence between the two parties.

power, then, might choose to vote down-ballot for the party that lost the uncontested race automatically in order to provide this partisan or policy balancing.⁸

In addition to a preference for divided government, dissatisfaction with the available choices, or feeling as though their vote does not make a difference, may also lead voters to cast a “protest vote” for a party that is not their own (Kang 2004; Southwell and Everest 1998). Voters might cast a protest vote in order to change the future actions of their party (Kselman and Niou 2011), or to “signal discontent stemming from perceived failures of their most preferred party” (Schimpf 2019), but in an uncontested race voters cannot cast a meaningful protest vote. If voters want to send a meaningful message to their political party, they must cast a protest vote in a contested down-ballot race. Thus, there are multiple ways that an uncontested race might disrupt a voter in the process of filling out their ballot and voting for their preferred party up and down the ballot.

2.4 Electoral Coattails and Coattail Voting

The electoral coattails effect is when the strength of a candidate high on the ballot helps co-partisan candidates down-ballot electorally—the down-ballot candidates can “ride the other candidates’ coattails into office,” although the precise definition and mechanisms of the coattail effect is still a matter of some debate (Jacobson 2019, p. 165). Calvert and Ferejohn (1983) find evidence that the effect of presidential coattails on congressional candidate vote shares declined between the New Deal era and the 1980s, although Campbell describes the strength of Eisenhower’s coattails in the 1956 election in boosting the fates of down-ballot candidates (1960).

⁸ In this case, an uncontested congressional election might actually lead to a higher vote share for co-partisan down-ballot candidates of the party that did not field a candidate. See Erikson (1989) for a discussion of how intentionally losing a presidential race might be in a political party’s interest for this reason.

The study of the coattails effect is not limited to the top-down relationship between presidential and other candidates. For example, Hogan (2005) finds that gubernatorial elections can exert some coattail-like influence on state legislative races, particularly if the gubernatorial race is competitive. There is conflicting evidence on whether a bottom-up coattails effect (that is, that stronger down-ballot candidates can have a beneficial electoral effect on candidates that appear higher on the ballot) exists (Broockman 2009; Madariaga and Ozen 2015). However, local party organizations and activities have beneficial effects on the electoral prospects of higher-level candidates (Frendreis et al. 1990; Doherty et al. 2021). Not having a presidential candidate to lift the electoral fortunes of down-ballot candidates (“withdrawn coattails”) is one possible explanation for the president’s party suffering during midterm elections (Erikson 2016), but the presence or effect of withdrawn coattails in simultaneous races that do appear on the ballot has yet to be explored.

2.5 Hypotheses

My theory predicts that when a party does not contest an election for Congress, co-partisan candidates down-ballot from that race will suffer electorally. These consequences may be due to voters casting a split-ticket vote in down-ballot races, rolling-off the ballot after an uncontested race, or possibly depressed turnout in the election and the subsequent changes in the composition of the electorate. Down-ballot candidates running for office from a congressional district not contested by their party cannot have joint campaign events with candidates for Congress, and they cannot expect any potential coattail effects from those candidates on Election Day.

Voters who face an uncontested race for Congress may be less likely to be mobilized by a campaign, as there are likely fewer campaign investments in uncontested races.⁹ These voters know that their vote in the uncontested race does not matter for the outcome of that race. If a voter’s party does not field a candidate, their party loses automatically—and finding out that their party lost automatically may come as a surprise on Election Day if the voter did not pay attention during the campaign period or research their down-ballot races prior to voting.¹⁰ Many voters do not correctly perceive the competitiveness of their congressional election, regardless of if that race is even contested (McDonald and Tolbert 2012; Moskowitz and Schneer 2019), and so voters may be surprised when they reach that part of their ballot and there is no co-partisan candidate for whom to vote.

I expect that the withdrawn congressional candidate coattails stemming from uncontested races will have noticeable effects in both the election results for down-ballot candidates in contested elections, and in individual-level survey data where respondents report their down-ballot participation and vote choice. My hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (Candidate Vote Shares): *State legislative candidates in contested races down-ballot from a U.S. House election their party did not contest will receive lower vote shares on average than state legislative candidates down-ballot from contested U.S. House elections.*

⁹ I adopt the terminology of Fisk (2021) and Nagler (2015) and refer to voters without a co-partisan candidate for Congress in the general election as “orphaned voters” in my analysis of survey respondents. I also refer to these individuals as having been “abandoned by their party.”

¹⁰ In Florida and Oklahoma, candidates running for office who do not face a general election opponent do not appear on the general election ballot. In those cases, voters are not put in the position of either voting for the out-party or not voting in a race at all, and so there may not be a down-ballot penalty in those states. That question requires a larger sample size of uncontested congressional races in those two states than fits the scope of this paper.

Hypothesis 2 (Voter Roll-Off): *Fewer people will vote in contested state legislative elections that follow uncontested U.S. House races compared to state legislative elections that are down-ballot from contested U.S. House races.*

Hypothesis 3 (Voter Turnout): *Survey respondents will report voting less often when they are in uncontested congressional districts, especially if they are members of the political party that did not contest the race.*

Support for the candidate vote shares hypothesis would be indicated by state legislative candidates down-ballot from a congressional race in which their party did not field a candidate receiving lower vote shares relative to candidates down-ballot from contested congressional elections, and individuals reporting that they supported that party less often in the survey data when those individuals are orphaned by their party at the congressional level.¹¹ Fewer votes cast (increased roll-off) in state legislative races held in precincts where there is an uncontested congressional race compared to precincts where the congressional race is contested would be evidence for my second hypothesis. Finally, survey respondents who live in uncontested congressional districts less often stating that they voted compared to those who live in contested districts would be evidence supporting my third hypothesis.

2.6 Data

California and Washington employ the top-two primary system to determine which candidates appear on the general election ballot. Relatively new election systems, in top-two elections all

¹¹ I acknowledge that states have different names for their upper and lower state legislative chambers, but for brevity and convenience I describe the upper chamber in all states as either the “upper chamber” or the “state senate,” and the lower chamber as either the “lower chamber” or “state house,” without intending to give the impression that my analyses are limited just to states that call their legislative chambers by those terms.

candidates appear in the “primary” election on the same ballot, regardless of their party, and the two candidates that receive the highest number of votes appear on the subsequent general election ballot—again, regardless of their party. In effect, this primary election system can result in general elections where two Republicans or two Democrats face each other, even if there were candidates from the other party on the primary ballot. In a district that heavily favors one party, if enough candidates from that party run in the primary election the party may even be shut out of the general election due to splitting the vote.¹² I use precinct-level data from California and Washington in 2012 and 2016 to test my hypotheses regarding down-ballot vote shares and voter roll-off using a regression discontinuity design.¹³

To determine if candidates down-ballot from an uncontested congressional race appear to suffer electorally in other states without the top-two primary, I created a nationwide precinct-level election results dataset for the 2016 general election. This file includes results from the presidential, U.S. House, and state legislative races, each of which were provided by the MIT Election Data and Science Lab (2018a; 2018b; 2018c). In each original file (presidential, congressional, and state legislative race data), I created a unique precinct identifier that combined the state postal code, the county FIPS number, and the precinct name since precinct names are not necessarily unique within or across states but are far more likely to be unique within counties. I collapsed each dataset so that each precinct was an observation, with variables that included the votes cast for each candidate (or party, in single-party top-two elections or

¹² For a discussion of these concerns, see the appendix of this chapter, as well as <https://www.vox.com/2018/5/29/17381244/California-elections-2018-top-two-primaries>

¹³ California precinct-level data is from the California Statewide Database. Washington precinct-level data is from the Washington Secretary of State website, as well as the county websites for King and Snohomish County. The congressional district-level vote margins in the primary election, (the running variable in the regression discontinuity models) was manually added to the data. As Washington has multi-member legislative districts, I present the results for California Assembly and Washington State House Position 1 in the main text but the results for California Assembly and Washington State House Position 2 are in the appendix.

multi-member districts), including third party or write-in candidates where available. In uncontested races, this value is zero.¹⁴ The files were then merged on the precinct identifiers. The presidential and U.S. House files—the two nationwide files—were merged at approximately a 97% success rate.¹⁵

After dropping the 4582 observations that had zero votes cast in either the presidential or U.S. House contests, the precinct-level dataset has 186,227 observations, which include all 50 states and for the presidential, congressional, and state legislative (where appropriate) races for each precinct.¹⁶ My data contains 58,147 precincts in contested state senate races (races that contained both a Republican and a Democrat), and 91,749 precincts in contested state house races.¹⁷ I focus on these races, but include results for all state legislative candidates, whether they faced a major party opponent or not, in the appendix.¹⁸ Descriptive statistics and the distributions of the size of precincts is available in the appendix.

I use the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) to assess voters' self-reported voting behavior in national and state-level races (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017).

The CCES is an online survey fielded by YouGov with a sample size of 64,600 respondents

¹⁴ In the case of California and Washington, same party vote totals in the general election which resulted from the top-two primary were combined in a similar way. So, for example, if the general election featured two Democratic candidates, their vote totals were combined for the Democratic vote. I used a similar method for states that use multi-member state legislative districts—the vote totals for each party were summed. More details about the data cleaning procedure are available in the appendix.

¹⁵ See the appendix for a discussion of these mismatched precincts.

¹⁶ I ran my models both with and without the 4582 precincts where the total votes cast in the House or presidential race was 0 and the results did not substantively change.

¹⁷ I exclude 2279 precincts that could not be matched to a congressional district—these precincts are primarily in Arkansas, Indiana, and South Carolina. In some states, notably Maryland and some states in New England the unit of aggregation for the reported data is higher than the precinct (in some cases the town, in others the county). This is also complicated by the fact that some state legislatures use multi-member districts, which also inflates the vote totals for state legislative races by precinct relative to the vote totals for other races such as for president.

¹⁸ Running my models on the full dataset (including both contested and uncontested state legislative races) typically led to larger “effects of uncontested races on vote counts and shares—which is unsurprising, given the likelihood that a landslide congressional district includes at least one landslide state legislative district in the same partisan direction.

including respondents in every state and the District of Columbia. This survey is fielded in pre-election and post-election waves in even-numbered years. Among demographic and other variables, the CCES asks respondents about their experiences voting and voting behavior up and down the ballot, and other measures of campaign engagement. The CCES also features voter validation from a third-party vendor, in which self-reported voter turnout is verified or not using public voter files. In the case of the 2016 CCES, voter validation is provided by Catalist, LLC, which matches survey respondents to voter file data using a proprietary method. Importantly, while voter turnout can be validated through voter files, down-ballot participation cannot be validated in any way. The CCES also provides sample weights for both pre-election and post-election waves, and I use the post-election weights in my regression analyses of this data.

2.7 Regression Discontinuity Results in California and Washington

Table 2.2 presents the results from regression discontinuity models in lower state house races in California and Washington in 2012 and 2016 using multiple model specifications: local linear regression, and regressions using second and third order local polynomials.¹⁹ The running variable in these models is the results of the congressional primary election—specifically, how close the party came to having or not having a candidate on the general election ballot (see Patterson, Jr. 2020 for a more in-depth discussion of how the top-two primaries can be used in a regression discontinuity design, and how general elections can be single-party or two-party contests as-if randomly assigned). More detail on the calculation of the running variable is available in the appendix.

¹⁹ This analysis is similar to that of Patterson, Jr. (2020) but differs in two crucial respects. First, Patterson’s unit of analysis is the district, while mine is the precinct. Second, Patterson focuses on results at the congressional level, while I focus on the state legislative level. Our findings, despite these differences, are similar in that we both find participatory penalties for same-party general elections. My analysis is limited to 2012 and 2016 for consistency with the rest of the paper which focuses on 2016, but my results remain if I include data from 2014 and 2018 California elections as well in my analyses.

The window is plus or minus ten percentage points—so a value of “-5” as the running variable indicates that the congressional primary results were five percentage points away from having both a Republican and a Democratic candidate.²⁰ The dependent variable of the vote share models are the vote shares for either the Republican or the Democratic state house candidate, as appropriate, when the Republican or Democratic Parties just made or missed the general election ballot for Congress. The voter roll-off dependent variable is the proportion of the number of votes in the state legislative races over the number of votes in the presidential race in that precinct (“.95” indicates that 95% of voters in the presidential race also voted in the state legislative race, for example). I use local linear regression and local polynomial regressions on either side of the cutoff to show the robustness of my results, since despite have several thousand precincts there are relatively few bins of data in the analysis (bins in this case are congressional districts with a primary election vote margin within the window).

²⁰ I chose the ten percentage points window in part due to the relatively small number of bins, but my results generally hold when the window is expanded or shrunk.

Table 2.2: Regression Discontinuity Results: California and Washington State Legislature, Position 1

	Estimate	95% CI	<i>p</i> value	Observations
Vote Share				
Polynomial = 1	.101	[.082, .121]	.000	28292
Polynomial = 2	.112	[.084, .141]	.000	28292
Polynomial = 3	.141	[.096, .186]	.000	28292
Roll-Off				
Polynomial = 1	.072	[.058, .086]	.000	29248
Polynomial = 2	.070	[.048, .091]	.000	29248
Polynomial = 3	.183	[.154, .212]	.000	29248

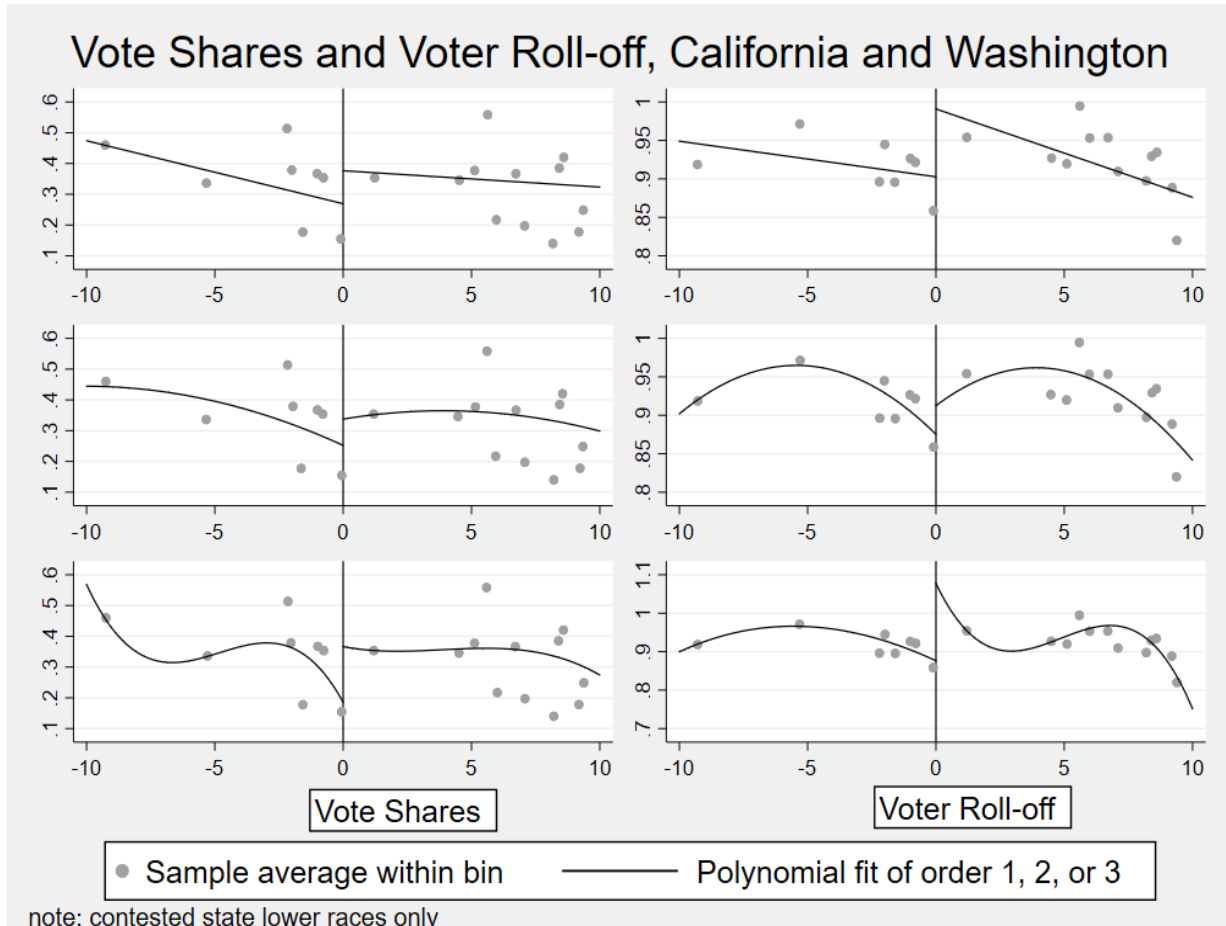
Note: Results include precinct-level data from 2012 and 2016 in California and Washington. The Washington results are for the first position in the lower state legislative chamber. The running variable is the result of the primary election: how close the party came to getting a candidate for Congress on the ballot, and results are limited to contested state legislative races.

The results in Table 2.2 show that in 2012 and 2016 in Washington and California, having a candidate for Congress just make the general election ballot is associated with an approximately 10 percentage point increase in the vote share for the lower state legislative chamber candidate from that party. Due to the possibility of over-fitting with higher-order polynomials in local polynomial regression, I believe that the estimates for the first order polynomials (local linear regression) are most reliable, but it is reassuring that the vote penalty is robust to multiple model specifications. Indeed, one need look no further than the third-order polynomial fit of the estimate for voter roll-off in Figure 2.1 for evidence of over-fitting leading to implausible results. Thus, I find support for my first hypothesis: state legislative candidates down-ballot from a

congressional election that did not feature a candidate from their party suffer an electoral penalty. Figure 2.1 shows these results graphically in the left pane.

The lower half of Table 2.2 shows that the presence of a congressional race in the precinct that features candidates from both major parties is associated with a higher percentage of ballot completion compared to ballot completion in precincts that did not have a contested congressional election. Again, this finding is robust to multiple model specifications, but I believe the findings from local linear regression to be most reliable. There is support for my second hypothesis as well: not only do voters abstain from voting in uncontested races (Fisk 2021; Patterson Jr. 2020) but they also appear to abstain from subsequent races on the ballot as well, even when those down-ballot races are themselves contested or possibly competitive. Figure 2.1 also shows these results graphically in the right pane.

Figure 2.1: Regression Discontinuity Results, California and Washington (Position 1)



Importantly, the top-two primary exists only in California and Washington (although “jungle primaries” and single-party runoff general elections exist elsewhere), two states where Democrats currently dominate at the state-level, but with heavily Republican rural areas. Vin a general election with two co-partisan candidates are still able to choose between candidates and will often choose the candidate who is ideologically closer to them (Fisk 2021). However, in single-party elections in other states voters can either choose to vote for a candidate who is winning automatically, vote for a third party candidate (if one is even available for whom to vote) who will not win, or to not vote at all. As such, it is important to know if the patterns of

increased roll-off and decreased vote share happen in other electoral systems, with different levels of professionalized state legislatures, campaigns, and different electorates. Thus, I now turn to an analysis of a nationwide precinct-level file to evaluate if these patterns generalize outside of California and Washington.

2.8 Nationwide Precinct-Level Results

Table 2.3 presents the results from OLS regression models on the share of votes received by Democratic and Republican candidates who ran in contested races for State Senate and State House. These models shows that state legislative candidates suffer when their party does not contest the congressional race in that precinct—but benefit when the opposing party does not contest that race.²¹ Despite frequent non-competitiveness and un-contestedness in state legislative elections (see Rogers 2015 and Burden and Snyder 2019), the precinct-level data includes enough observations for meaningful statistical models.

Independent variables in these regression models are the total votes cast for president in that precinct, to control for the heterogeneity in precinct sizes, the share of the presidential vote received by either Clinton or Trump in that precinct, and dummy variables indicating if the congressional race in that precinct was uncontested by either the Republican or the Democratic Party. The models also include county-level fixed effects, which will control for differences in state and county level election procedures (such as voting technology, primary election types, or rules governing write-in candidates), ballot order of the candidates or parties, and county party

²¹ Count models with the dependent variable being the number of votes the candidate received in the precinct using both quasi-poisson and OLS specifications are provided in the appendix. The results of these models and the models presented in the main text are substantively similar. In some cases, vote count models are more appropriate than vote shares models, particularly if the outcome variable is multinomial such as election results, but there is a tradeoff in interpretability of the models and coefficients (Mebane, Jr. and Sekhon 2004). There is also the problem of heterogeneity in precinct size in my data—vote shares by precinct are not potentially biased by the heterogeneously sized precincts, but vote count models may be.

organizational strength. County-level fixed effects also function as an additional control for precinct size in some cases.²²

Table 2.3: Vote Shares in 2016 Contested State Legislative Races

	Dependent Variable: Vote Share in Precinct for Candidate			
	Democratic	Republican	Democratic	Republican
	State House		State Senate	
Clinton Share	0.932 (0.003)		0.891 (0.005)	
Trump Share		0.935 (0.003)		0.897 (0.004)
No Democrat	-0.046 (0.004)	0.050 (0.004)	-0.103 (0.006)	0.105 (0.006)
No Republican	0.027 (0.002)	-0.024 (0.002)	0.091 (0.004)	-0.079 (0.005)
<i>N</i> Presidential Votes	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Observations	91,680	91,680	57,794	57,794
logLik	103370.910	103107.400	65066.990	67427.974
AIC	-203417.800	-202890.800	-127954.000	-132675.900
BIC	-187751.700	-187224.700	-118182.500	-122904.500

Note: County level fixed effects are included in the models but excluded from the table. “No Republican” and “No Democrat” are dummy variables where 1 indicates that the party did not contest the U.S. House race in the precinct in question. *N* presidential votes indicates the total number of votes cast for president in the precinct. The dependent variable in the models is the proportion of the vote in the precinct received by the Republican or Democratic candidate for state legislature, as indicated by the column headers. Robust Standard Errors in parentheses.

²² I also ran models which included the amount of campaign spending in the congressional district by candidates and affiliates PACs, which did not substantively change the results of the models, nor did including a variable in the models for State House which controlled for if there was a race for State Senate in that precinct (see appendix).

As expected, the percentage of votes cast in the presidential race received by Trump and Clinton is positively correlated with the vote shares for the Republican and Democratic candidates for state legislature. The dummy variables indicating that the congressional election in that precinct was uncontested by either the Democratic or Republican parties are negatively correlated with the vote shares received by state legislative candidates for that party, and positively associated (although the coefficients are smaller) with the vote shares received by the opposing party in the state legislative races.²³ This indicates that down-ballot candidates suffer when their party does not contest the congressional race, and that the opposing party benefits—at least in contested state legislative races, and that the results from California and Washington are not unique to those states.²⁴ These electoral penalties for co-partisan candidates exist for candidates for both the upper and lower state legislative chambers. Although these models do not control for other factors that affect candidate vote shares, such as candidate quality, incumbency status, or campaign fundraising (especially if there is a wide difference in the amount of money spent by candidates), they still show that parties suffer down-ballot when they leave their congressional “ballot lineup spot” blank.

Table 2.4 shows the results from OLS regressions intended to measure the extent of voter roll-off after uncontested congressional races.²⁵ The dependent variable is the proportion of votes cast in the presidential race that were also cast in the state legislative race (so, a value of .95 indicates that 95 percent of the total votes cast in the presidential race were cast in the state

²³ These results hold if the fixed effects are changed to the state level, and if fixed effects are excluded entirely.

²⁴ In the appendix I show results of models using vote counts for candidates rather than vote shares for candidates. In these models, the electoral penalty for a party not contesting races exists (i.e., the candidates whose party did not run a candidate for congress can expect fewer votes), but the electoral benefit for the opposing party is not present. Hence the evidence is stronger for the co-partisan penalty, rather than the opposing-party benefit.

²⁵ Other model specifications, including those for vote counts, are available in the appendix.

legislative race), a measure of ballot roll-off. I include results from both contested state legislative races and for all state legislative races. The two dummy variables of interest included in the models in Table 2.3 are in these models as well, as are the percentage of votes cast in the precinct for Clinton and the total number of votes cast in the presidential race.

Table 2.4: Voter Roll-Off in 2016 State Legislative Elections

	State House	State Senate	State House	State Senate
	Contested Races		All Races	
Clinton %	-0.010 (0.004)	0.091 (0.122)	0.013 (0.003)	0.017 (0.077)
No Democrat	-0.006 (0.003)	0.104 (0.092)	0.005 (0.003)	0.073 (0.054)
No Republican	-0.008 (0.001)	-0.012 (0.006)	-0.033 (0.001)	0.004 (0.005)
<i>N</i> Presidential Votes	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
<i>N</i>	91749	58147	144799	95836
logLik	81837.660	-89199.783	113921.181	-208118.672
AIC	-160351.300	180581.600	-223276.400	419609.300
BIC	-144684.000	190368.600	-200713.200	435576.400

Note: County level fixed effects are included in the models but excluded from the table. Coefficients are OLS estimates. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

In precincts that contain contested State House races and in precincts that have a State House election (contested or not), no Republican congressional candidate being on the ballot is

associated with a reduction in ballot completion. There is no statistically detectable effect of not having a Democratic candidate for Congress on the amount of voter roll-off. Importantly, these are small coefficients, not unlike the increase in roll-off shown in the regression discontinuity models from California and Washington. However, the presence of multi-member districts in some of these states (and the resulting high values of ballot completion due to the calculation of this dependent variable) makes this a conservative test of the presence of voter roll-off. If voters reacted to uncontested races by deciding to support the other major party, there would be no voter roll-off; instead, the presence of voter roll-off suggests that some of the changes in vote share shown in Table 2.2 and 2.3 are likely driven in part by roll-off induced change in the down-ballot electorate, rather than ticket splitting.

2.9 Survey Data Results

To test my first and second hypotheses at the individual level, I use the 2016 CCES Common Content survey, which asks respondents about their down-ballot voting behavior. I report results for both upper and lower state legislative chambers for all respondents who declare themselves to be either Republicans or Democrats.²⁶ Forty three of forty-nine state lower chambers held elections in 2016; Nebraska is unicameral, while Mississippi, Virginia, Louisiana, and New Jersey have their elections in odd years. Alabama and Maryland have their state legislative elections in even non-presidential years. However, respondents in every state reported voting in

²⁶ Due to the staggered nature of state legislative elections, it is possible that individuals will report voting in an upper or lower legislative chamber election even if no such election exists for them. Since the CCES does not include state legislative district as part of its dataset, I am unable to prevent these errors entirely. I cannot verify that the individuals in question faced a state legislative election, aside from excluding those who reside in states with no state legislative elections in 2016. Notably, many respondents of the CCES in states that in fact had no state legislative elections in 2016, or which had no state-level elections in 2016 reported voting in those races anyway (for example, Secretary of State races). It is unclear if these respondents are reporting behavior from years other than 2016, or if they are responding expressively to state for whom they would have voted if given the chance. This is a type of vote overreporting that vote validation through voter files cannot account for. For an expanded analysis of this type of expressive responding, see the appendix.

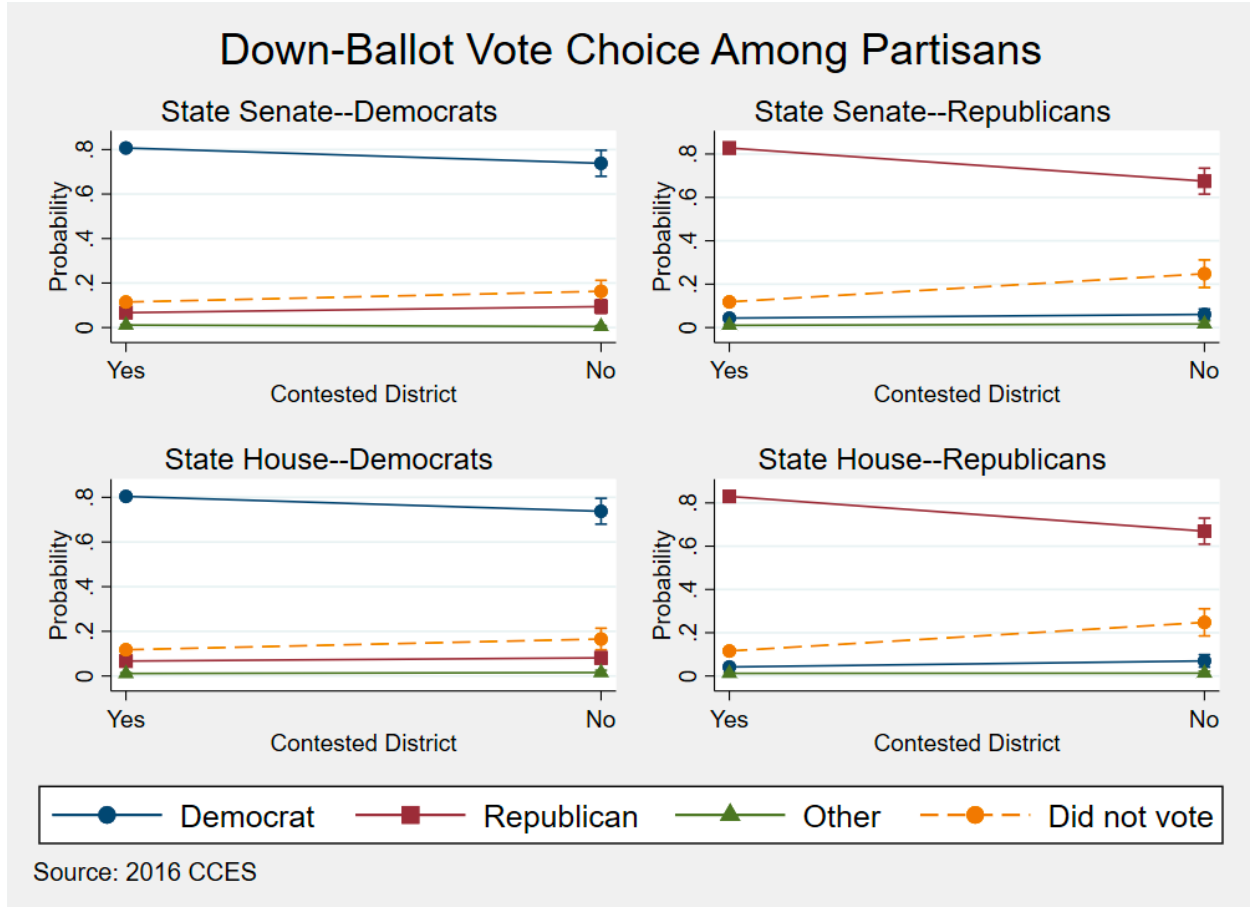
state legislative races, even when those races did not exist. As some of the self-reported vote choice in state legislative races appears to be expressive responding, I do not exclude individuals from those state that did not feature a state legislative election in 2016 in my models, since I have little reason to think that individuals who did have those state legislative elections are not also responding expressively as well.²⁷

Figure 2.2 presents the results from multinomial probit regressions with a categorical dependent variable of self-reported vote choice in 2016 state legislative elections. This variable includes if the respondent reported voting for the Democratic candidate, Republican candidate, another candidate, or chose not to vote. Unlike the precinct-level results, the consequences of uncontested races are starker for Republicans than for Democrats.²⁸ Republicans living in congressional districts uncontested by their party report being less likely to vote for Republican candidates in races for state legislature, and are more likely to report they did not vote in those races. This partisan asymmetry may be due to the higher amounts of polarization among Republicans, and thus more sensitivity to being put in the position of having to support another political party. There does not appear to be any meaningful or statistically detectable amount of ticket-splitting, either to the other major party or to third party candidates after these uncontested races. In short, the results presented in Figure 2.2 suggest that roll-off plays a major role in the lower vote shares and counts for candidates down-ballot from a race their party lost automatically.

²⁷ My results do not substantively change when I do exclude these individuals from the models, however.

²⁸ Full model specifications are in the appendix. Results are substantively identical when using a multinomial logistic regression specification.

Figure 2.2: Multinomial Probit Models on Down-Ballot Vote Choice



The individual-level data and the precinct-level data show the same pattern: state legislative candidates seem to suffer when they are on the ballot with a congressional race in which their party did not compete. In the survey data, the consequences are more severe for Republicans, while they are not consistently so in the precinct-level data. There is less evidence for ticket-splitting down ballot in the survey data, again in contrast to the aggregate data—this may be due to survey respondents not wanting to admit party disloyalty, but the evidence for voter roll-off exists in both the precinct-level and individual-level data. Next, I turn to a discussion of my third hypothesis, and a possible source of these patterns: differential turnout in contested and uncontested elections.

To test my hypothesis that turnout would be lower in uncontested districts, I ran a series of probit regressions using the 2016 CCES to determine if individuals who lived in uncontested congressional districts reported voting less often than individuals in contested congressional districts in that year. These models include demographic variables, post-election wave sample weights, and a dummy variable coded such that zero indicates that the respondent lives in an uncontested congressional district, and one indicates that their congressional district featured both Democratic and Republican candidates. The dependent variable in the first, third, and fourth models is a binary variable indicating if the person reported turning out to vote in 2016. The dependent variable in the second model is if the person reported having been contacted by a campaign, and in the fifth model is the extent of ballot roll-off that the respondent reported. Models 1, 2, 3, and 4 are probit regressions while Model 5 is an OLS regression.

Table 2.5 reports the results from these regressions—as shown in Model 1, I find no support for my third hypothesis in the survey data. Individuals in uncontested congressional districts do not appear to be less likely to vote.²⁹ Perhaps this is unsurprising, but it may be unique to presidential years, given the fact that in 2016 no U.S. House race was the highest-level race on the ballot. In order to further explore these results, I also evaluated the extent to which campaigns (or the lack of campaigns, given the fact that in an uncontested district the candidate has no particularly compelling reason to campaign absent an unusually strong challenge from a third party candidate) complicate this story. It is plausible to expect that individuals who live in congressional districts in which one party does not field a candidate to be contacted by campaigns less frequently than individuals living in contested districts, and this lack of campaign

²⁹ The variable indicating the congressional district was contested was positively associated with reported voter turnout, but the statistical significance failed to reach the conventional $p < .05$ level.

contact may be an important factor in determining turnout. There is no support for my third hypothesis in the first model.

Table 2.5: Voter Turnout, Electoral Competition, and Campaign Contact

VARIABLES	Model 1 Voted in 2016	Model 2 Campaign Contact	Model 3 Voted in 2016	Model 4 Voted in 2016	Model 5 Voter Roll-off
Campaign Contact			0.308 (0.039)	0.190 (0.111)	0.004 (0.005)
Contested District	0.105 (0.055)	0.141 (0.028)		0.043 (0.069)	0.032 (0.007)
Campaign * Contested				0.134 (0.117)	
Education	0.167 (0.014)	0.115 (0.007)	0.158 (0.014)	0.158 (0.014)	-0.007 (0.001)
White	0.177 (0.041)	0.113 (0.025)	0.171 (0.041)	0.169 (0.041)	-0.015 (0.006)
Female	-0.082 (0.037)	-0.059 (0.020)	-0.076 (0.037)	-0.075 (0.037)	-0.004 (0.004)
Political Interest	0.314 (0.021)	0.340 (0.013)	0.288 (0.022)	0.289 (0.022)	-0.004 (0.003)
Strong Party ID	0.364 (0.040)	0.189 (0.020)	0.356 (0.040)	0.356 (0.040)	0.060 (0.004)
Age	0.014 (0.001)	0.014 (0.001)	0.012 (0.001)	0.013 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.000)
Constant	-0.921 (0.104)	-2.437 (0.062)	-0.789 (0.094)	-0.828 (0.108)	0.879 (0.016)
Observations	48,377	51,788	48,321	48,321	33,805
R-squared					0.026

Robust standard errors in parentheses

The second model in Table 2.5 shows that individuals who are in uncontested congressional districts are less likely to have reported contact from a campaign relative to

individuals in contested districts, controlling for relevant demographic variables—approximately seven percent less likely, according to the post-regression predicted marginal effect of the uncontested race dummy variable. Model 3 shows that reporting having been contacted by a campaign is positively correlated with having turned out to vote in 2016, although the causal direction between propensity to be contacted by a campaign and propensity to vote is obviously ambiguous. The fourth regression model in Table 2.5 includes the interaction between having been contacted by a campaign and living in a contested district (1 = yes, in both cases). There is no statistically significant relationship between the interaction between campaign contact and living in an uncontested congressional district. Substantively, this means that in uncontested districts campaign contact is not important for motivating turnout according to this model specification.³⁰

The dependent variable in Model 5 is a variable noting the proportion of possible races (those races asked about on the CCES) that the respondent reported casting a vote in. This variable ranges from 0 to 1. This model is limited to self-reported voters, hence the lower number of observations associated with the regression. As shown in Table 2.5, campaign contact is not statistically associated with this operationalization of voter roll-off. However, the variable noting that the individual’s congressional district was contested in 2016 does have a statistically significant relationship between ballot completion and living in a contested congressional district, further supporting the findings shown in Figure 2.2 and the precinct-level results.³¹ This

³⁰ Regression results for the subset of CCES respondents who identified as either Democrats or Republicans are in the appendix and are substantively identical to the results that include all respondents. All models use post-election wave sample weights. Female is coded such that 1=male and 2=female. White is coded such that non-white=0 and white =1. Education is a six-category variable ranging from “No High School” (1) to “Post Grad” (6), and birth year is the self-reported birth year of the respondent. The results do not change when models are limited to major party identifiers, nor do they change when limited to only respondents whose turnout in 2016 was validated through voter files.

³¹ If this regression is run on self-identified Republicans only, there is a relationship between the contested-ness of the congressional district and voter roll-off, consistent with what is shown in the results in Figure 2.2.

suggests that reduced campaign contact may not be a mechanism for the down-ballot penalty of an uncontested congressional district through the campaigns reducing information costs about down-ballot candidates. Similarly, the multinomial probit regressions associated with Figure 2 (and shown in the appendix) show only slight correlations between campaign contact and voter roll-off, again indicating that campaign contact may not play a major role in these down-ballot penalties.

The primary takeaways from the CCES data are that voter roll-off appears to be the source of the electoral consequences seen in the precinct-level data. Respondents to the CCES are no less likely to report voting in 2016 if they are in an uncontested congressional district relative to respondents who live in contested districts. However, voters in uncontested districts are more likely to roll-off the ballot in down-ballot races, as shown in Figure 2.2, and are less likely to report having been contacted by a campaign as shown in Table 2.5. This campaign contact in uncontested races is positively associated with reported voter turnout, and so the reduced campaign contact in uncontested districts may have an indirect relationship with reducing turnout through increasing the informational or other costs to voting—although it is important to consider the electoral context when considering the costs of voting (Fraga and Hersh 2010). Reduced campaign contact is not associated with increased voter roll-off or split-ticket voting.³²

³² The fact that some of my results appear for Republican candidates or respondents but not for Democrats may speak to a “Trump effect” of him being more popular than down-ballot Republican candidates, thus voters who were supportive of Trump, but not other Republicans may have indicated so in the voting booth and on surveys. It is also possible that Republicans are more polarized and more averse to situations where they are forced to vote for Democrats. Evaluating this possibility is one reason among several that this work should be replicated for elections other than 2016.

2.10 Conclusion and Directions for Future Work

I applied the theory of withdrawn coattails, normally examined in the context of presidential candidate and congressional candidates, to uncontested congressional races and the subsequent down-ballot state legislative races. I hypothesized that candidates running down-ballot from congressional races in which their party did not field a candidate would suffer electorally. The regression discontinuity results showed that there are fewer voters down-ballot from uncontested races from Congress. Results using nationwide precinct-level data similarly showed that state legislative candidates suffer electorally when their party does not contest a congressional race (supporting my first hypothesis) and that voter roll-off is higher after these uncontested races (supporting my second hypothesis). Moreover, using the 2016 CCES I show that Republican respondents were more likely to report they did not vote in state legislative races if they were abandoned by their party at the congressional level. I found little evidence that uncontested congressional races have a detrimental effect on voter turnout, at least in 2016. This is consistent with Patterson's findings (2020). I find little evidence that less frequent contact from campaigns, one of the potential mechanisms of the electoral penalty, plays a role in this down-ballot penalty.

In short my findings indicate that political parties diminish the electoral chances of down-ballot candidates when they let the other major party win a congressional seat automatically, and the evidence more consistently suggests that voter roll-off plays an important role in that down-ballot electoral penalty. Some voters appear to encounter a race in which they cannot support their party and choose to not vote in at least some subsequent races. To return to the vignette described in the introduction, the Democratic Party not fielding a candidate for Congress against Hall Rogers in 2016 may have cost the Democratic incumbent candidate for Kentucky House of Representatives John Short his seat, as he lost by only a few hundred votes.

One interpretation of my results is that it may always be rational for parties to put a candidate for Congress on the ballot, even if that particular race is out of reach, due to the down-ballot consequences of uncontested races depressing the number of voters who cast votes in subsequent elections down-ballot. Competitive state legislative districts can be nested within uncompetitive congressional districts, and competitive legislative races can be determined by a few hundred votes. Given these results, it is possible that these withdrawn congressional coattails are not limited to state legislative candidates and in fact all down-ballot candidates may suffer when their party does not contest the congressional election. As candidates cannot be compelled to run for office, parties should take special care to support candidates who are down-ballot from uncontested races to attempt to mitigate this electoral penalty.

This research is (to my knowledge) the first large-scale examination of the down-ballot consequences, for parties and voters, of uncontested races—and how people react when democratic choices and accountability are impossible. It expands upon the findings that in an uncontested race many voters abstain and shows that those abstentions continue down the ballot (Fisk 2021; Patterson, Jr. 2020). There are many avenues for future research. First and foremost, this work should be replicated using data from other years to make sure that the electoral penalty is not a phenomenon limited to 2016. In midterm years the U.S. House election may be the highest-level election on voters' ballots, and so the consequences of uncontested congressional elections in midterm years (of which there were 77 in 2014 and 42 in 2018) may be particularly stark. The increasing levels of polarization also mean that voters may be increasingly averse to situations where they must vote for the other party, or not vote at all.

Future research should also examine how candidates running unopposed behave—for example, do they continue to fundraise in order to build their war chests for future elections? It is

also possible that legislators who frequently run unopposed are more effective lawmakers, in part due to their spending less time campaigning, but the causal direction of this potential relationship is plainly unclear. From a party infrastructure and candidate recruitment perspective, do uncontested races hollow out or reduce party capacity and campaign-staff professionalism, or are those resources simply redirected?

Another avenue of necessary research, one which the following chapter in this dissertation investigates, is the specific mechanism that motivates this electoral penalty and the withdrawn coattails effect in this instance. Do voters have a psychological reaction to seeing an uncontested race and being forced into a situation where they can't vote how they want, and discontinue voting as a way to spite the party that put them in that position (Del Ponte, Delton, and DeScioli 2021)? Is this a story of campaign effects, where lower-profile candidates rely on campaigning with higher-profile candidates in order to gain name recognition? Many voters approve of or at least accept the role of party leaders in the nomination process, but we don't know if this translates into blaming the party when there is no nominee (Albert and La Raja 2020). The mechanism for the effects of the coattails effect and withdrawn coattails effect is unknown (Jacobson 2019, p. 165), but I show in the next chapter of this dissertation that one possible mechanism for the uncontested races penalty is through protest voting.

When given the opportunity to either exit their ballot, voice their displeasure with their choices, or remain loyal to their party when their party doesn't run a candidate for office, voters do not have a unified response (Hirschman 1970). The evidence I find of vote switching after uncontested elections is consistent with other research examining the possibilities of exit, voice, and loyalty in the political context. Dissatisfaction with the party voters supported in the past

makes them more likely to vote for another party in a future election (Dassonneville et al. 2015), but that possibility requires more parties on the ballot than often appear in American elections.

Further, while these uncontested races are quite common in the United States, little is known about how individuals feel when they know their vote does not matter. At a time of eroding trust in institutions and increasing threats to democracy, elections in which democracy obviously does not function only serve to further erode the system. For example, voters in part vote due to feeling a civic duty, and presumably feel as though voting for their preferred party is the best way to accomplish that civic requirement. When they tried but weren't able to do so due to a lack of a candidate to support, this institutional failure will have downstream consequences for their faith in democracy.

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2.12 Appendix

Table 2.A1: Regression Discontinuity Results: California and Washington State

Legislature (Second Position)

	Estimate	95% CI	p value	Observations
Vote Share				
Polynomial = 1	.100	[.080, .119]	.000	28007
Polynomial = 2	.115	[.086, .144]	.000	28007
Polynomial = 3	.141	[.095, .186]	.000	28007
Roll-Off				
Polynomial = 1	.071	[.057, .085]	.000	28961
Polynomial = 2	.066	[.044, .088]	.000	28961
Polynomial = 3	.188	[.159, .217]	.000	28961

Note: Results include precinct-level data from 2012 and 2016 in California and Washington. The Washington results are for the second position in the lower state legislative chamber. The running variable is the result of the primary election: how close the party came to getting a candidate for Congress on the ballot, and results are limited to contested state legislative races.

Table 2.A1 shows the results from regression discontinuity analyses of state legislative elections in California and Washington in 2012 and 2016. The Washington data in this analysis is from the second position in the state legislative races (as Washington has multi-member districts). The results are substantively identical to the regression discontinuities shown in Table 2.1 using the first position in the Washington State House, although some of this can be attributed to the relatively small number of precincts in the analysis from Washington compared to California (about 24000 precincts in the analyses are from California). Figure 2.A1 shows these results graphically.

Figure 2.A1: Regression Discontinuity Results, Second WA House Position

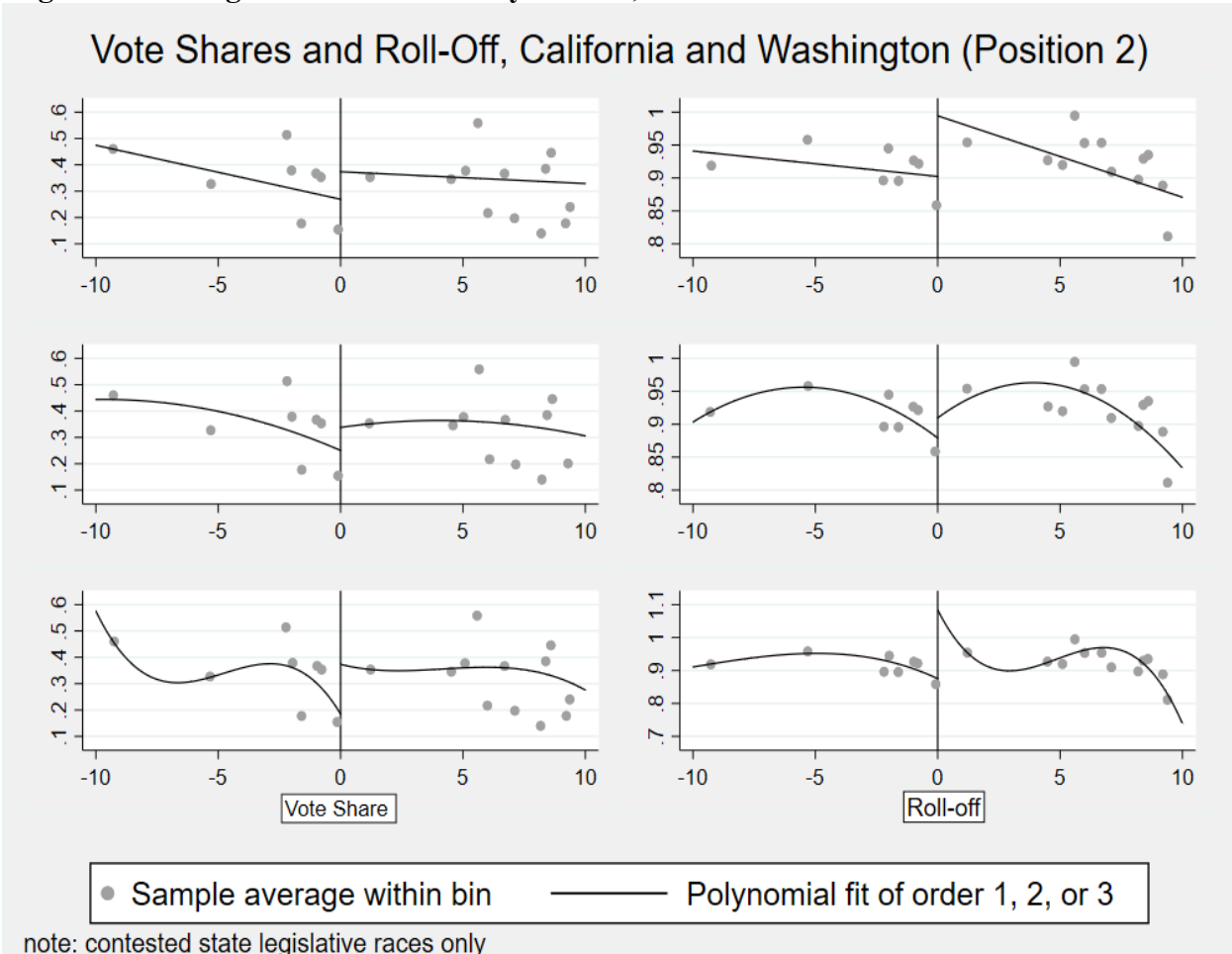


Figure 2.A2 shows the distribution of precinct level vote counts for Democratic and Republican state legislative candidates in contested elections. These vote counts (and related distributions) show that, as expected given the higher-level of aggregation in a small number of cases the variation in the data is quite large, but the mean vote counts are plausible and do not indicate any obvious coding error I made. This is also the case in Figure 2.A3, which shows the distribution of precinct-level vote shares for state legislative candidates in contested elections.

2.12.1 Detailed Description of Regression Discontinuity Running Variable

The running variable (or score) in the regression discontinuity models is the number of percentage points that were decisive in determining if the general election was between a Democratic and a Republican candidate. This is inclusive of third-party candidates, and inclusive of races in which the decisive candidate finished worse than third place. The running variable was rounded to the nearest first decimal place. See Table 2.A2 for a series of examples, and also see Table 1 and the related discussion in Patterson, Jr. (2020) for an explanation of this method.

Table 2.A2: Hypothetical Top-Two Primary Results

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3	Example 4
Democratic Candidate	50%	10%	40%	40%
Republican Candidate	45%	40%	10%	40%
Republican Candidate	5%	15%	5%	*
Republican Candidate	*	12%	15%	*
Libertarian Candidate	*	*	30%	20%
Margin (Running Variable)	n/a	-5	-15	20

2.12.2 Additional Details about Data Cleaning Procedure and Precinct Mismatches for Nationwide Precinct Level Data

In some states, data is only available at the town or county level for all or part of the state. For example, some data from Maryland is at the county level, and some data from Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut is at the town level. I cleaned the data of double-counted straight ticket, straight party, or affidavit votes. I hand checked each vote total for each race

against the official election results published by the states—in nearly every case the vote totals in the precinct-level data are within one percentage point of the official results published by the state, and in many cases the vote totals match exactly.³³

Once this precinct-level dataset was constructed, I combined it with Carl Klarner’s district-level data (Klarner 2018) to ensure that candidates and vote totals were not missed. I used data from the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives to determine which congressional elections were uncontested by either the Republican or Democratic Party.³⁴ I also generated indicators for if a precinct was in a contested state legislative district. Given the decentralization of election results and the sheer volume of state legislative races (5923 state legislative races, according to Ballotpedia, of which 42 percent were uncontested by one or the other major party), a case-by-case identification of contested or uncontested districts using the various state election websites was not practical, so precincts for which there was both no candidate for one party and no votes cast for one party in the data were coded as being an uncontested state legislative race.³⁵ However, the Klarner data also included variables noting that a particular state legislative race was uncontested—using those variables in place of my own did not change my results.

The plurality of precincts that were not matched between the presidential and U.S. House files (the two datasets which would have nationwide coverage) were from California. Of the 28,819 total precincts in California, 1,427 (5%) were not matched between the two files: these mismatches were not confined to one or two particular counties, and there appears to be no clear pattern to the type of precincts that were not matched—they were not clearly identified as being

³³ There are two states where data collection was notably incomplete—Texas does not seem to report precinct-level vote data in uncontested U.S. House or state legislative races, and the Indiana data was missing a few state legislative races. The precinct-level data did not include a county FIPS number for any jurisdiction in Alaska, since Alaska has no counties, nor a handful of precincts or towns from Maine and New Hampshire.

³⁴ That data can be found at <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.

³⁵ See https://ballotpedia.org/State_legislative_elections,_2016.

from absentee or overseas voters. Other major instances of unmatched precincts were from Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas—in the first two cases, candidates in the general election who do not face a major-party opponent do not appear on the ballot, so there are no results to report. Texas does not report precinct-level results from uncontested races. In total, there were 1,252,734 total votes cast in the presidential election in these unmatched precincts—less than one percent of the total number of presidential votes cast in my dataset. The relatively small proportion of precincts that were unmatched suggests that the unmatched precincts should not bias my estimates.

Figure 2.A2: Precinct Candidate Vote Count Distributions, Contested State Legislative

Districts

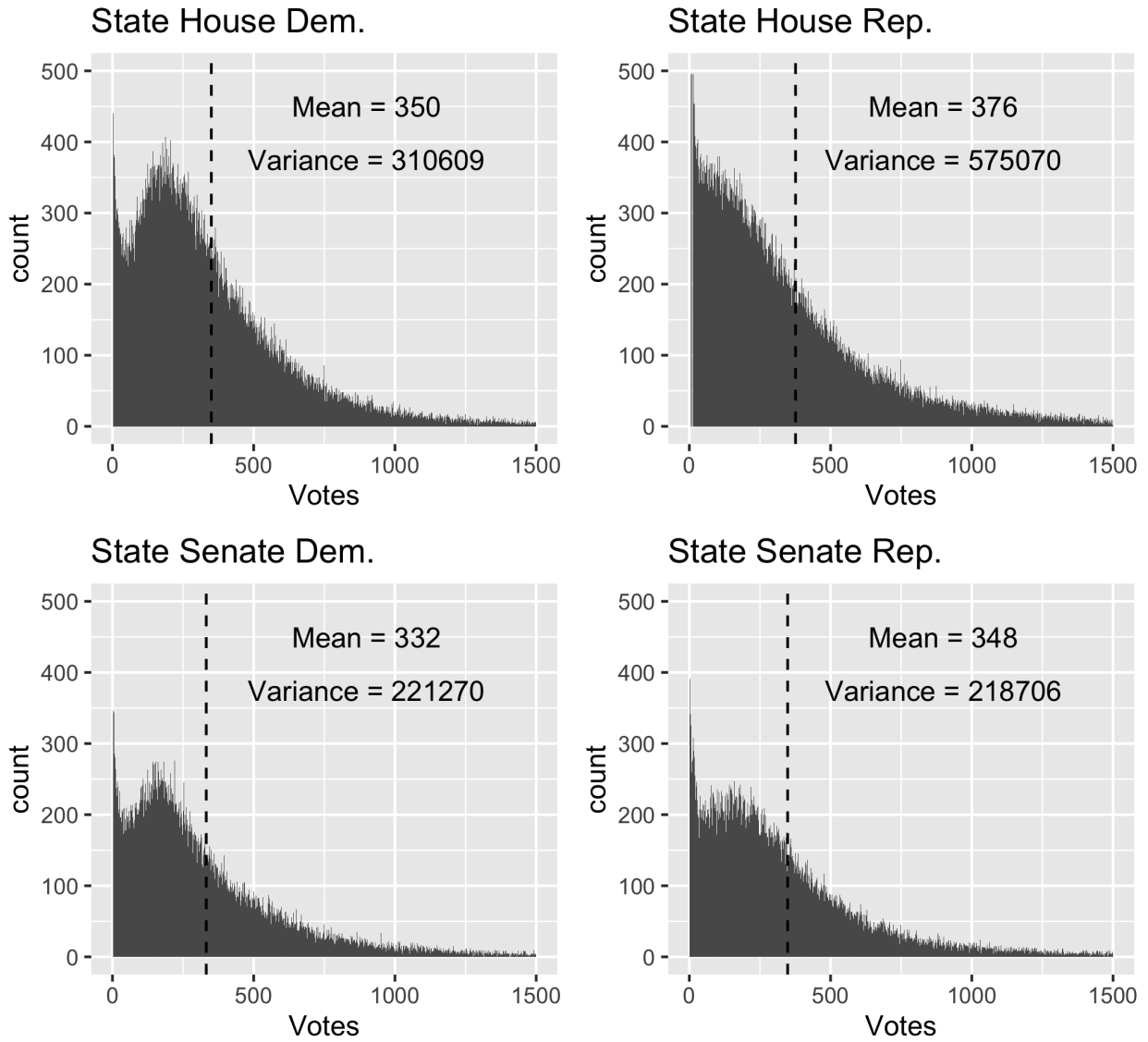


Figure 2.A3: Precinct Candidate Vote Shares, Contested Districts Only

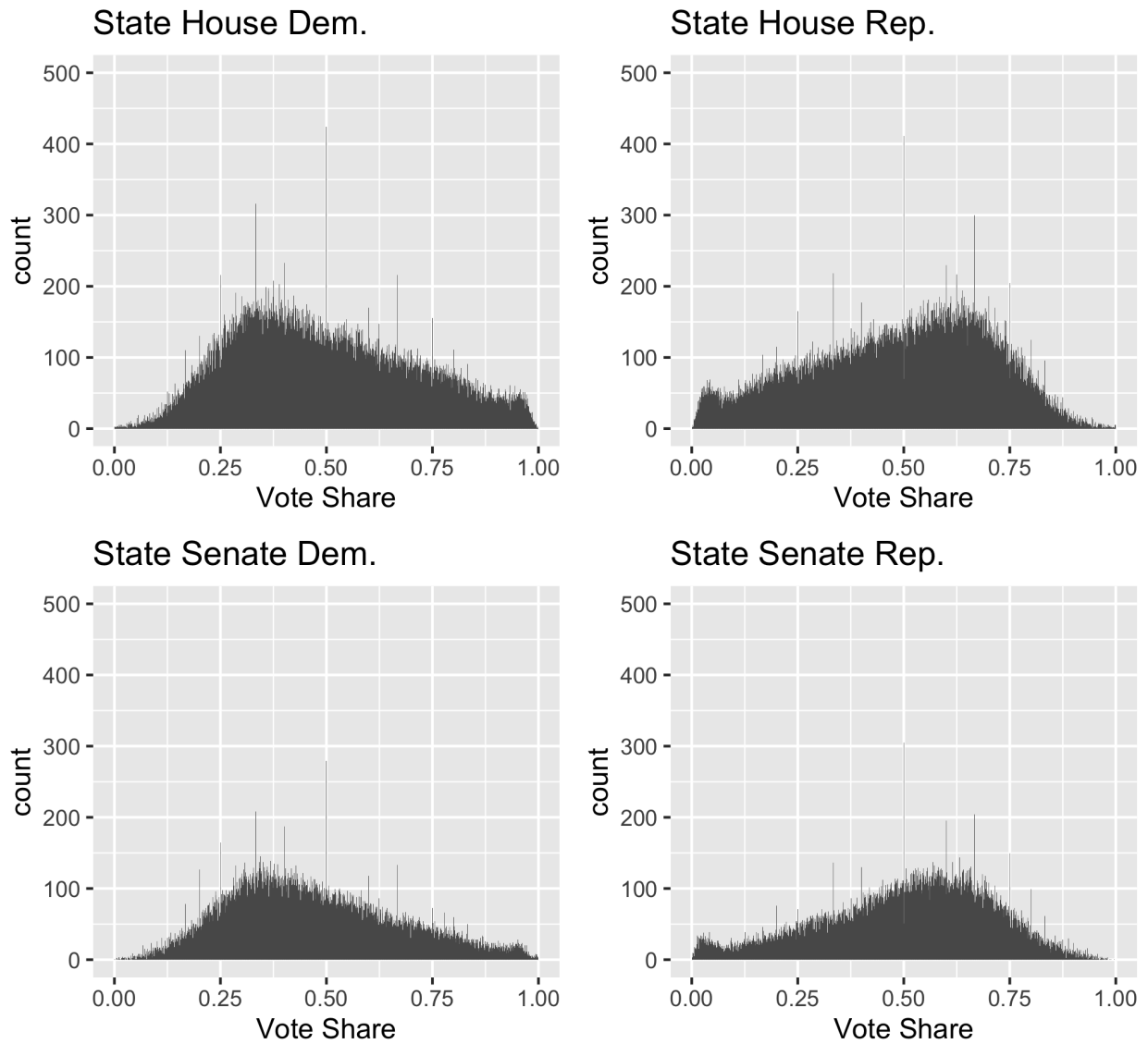
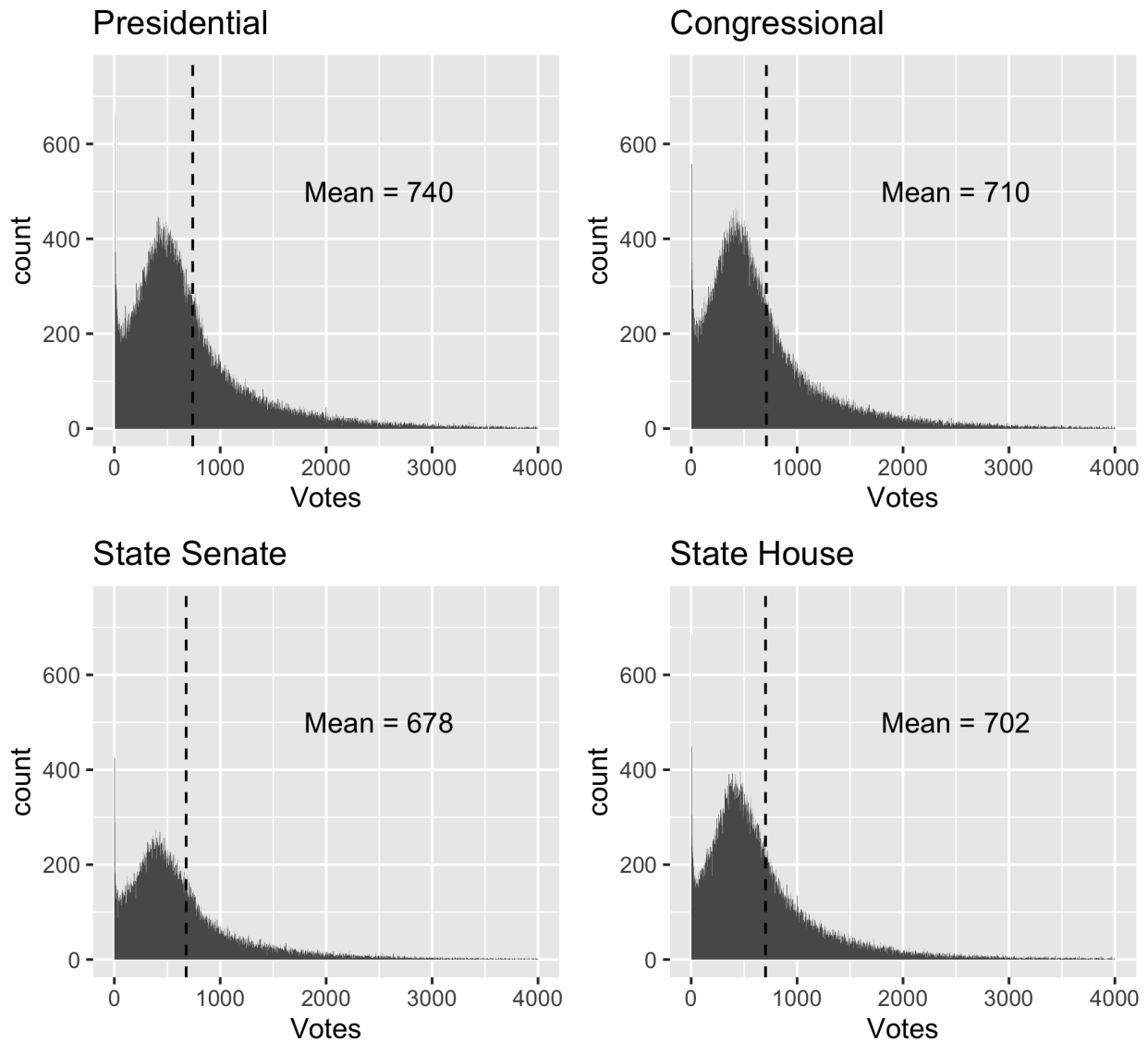


Figure 2.A4 shows the distribution of the total number of votes cast at the precinct level. As would be expected given normal patterns of voter roll-off, the presidential race featured the highest number of votes cast. Somewhat unexpectedly there were more votes cast in the average State House race than State Senate race, but this might be explained by differences in contestation and competition in those races.

Figure A2.4: Total Votes Cast in Precinct



2.12.3 Vote Counts for Candidates After Their Party Wins or Loses Automatically

Table 2.A3 describes the electoral fates of State Senate and State House candidates whose parties did not contest the congressional election. These are quasi-poisson regression models, and include county-level fixed effects, although the coefficient for those county-level effects have been excluded from the table. Given the heterogeneity in precinct size in my dataset,

and subsequent overdispersion present in the data, poisson regression for the vote count data is not appropriate. Quasi-poisson models allow for overdispersion, as the requirement that the mean and variance of the distribution be equal is relaxed. These models are limited to contested state legislative races. Given the size of the average effects of uncontested races is smaller for candidates from the winning party (in other words, they don't suffer much of an electoral penalty for their party's congressional candidate winning automatically), there is little evidence in this data for anticipatory party balancing.³⁶ As shown in the OLS vote share models in the main text, down-ballot candidates generally suffer when their party doesn't contest the congressional race. In some cases, the number of votes lost may be enough to swing a close election—a state legislative district has many precincts (the mean number in this dataset is 39 precincts per State House district and 90 precincts per State Senate district), and so even though the size of the effect is relatively small both in terms of vote share and vote counts per precinct, the additive effect is substantial across the entire state legislative district. Table 2.A3 shows the results from these quasi-poisson regression models, and Table 2.A4 shows the average marginal effects from these models as the coefficients from quasi-poisson regression models are difficult to interpret. These average marginal effects are at the precinct level—so, according to the model specification, Democratic candidates for State House can expect 34 fewer votes per precinct, on average, if their party doesn't field a candidate for Congress.

³⁶ Notably, the nature of my data described above may result in an overestimation of the size of the effect for Republican candidates, since the data from Vermont and Massachusetts is at the town level, and there were several unopposed Democrats in those states, the coefficient for there being no Republican may be larger than otherwise expected. However, there were contested races in other states with data at a higher-than-precinct level of aggregation (in CT, ME, and MD), which should temper that effect. Indeed, some state legislative seats in New England are allocated at the town level, and so excluding these states is not appropriate. Running regressions on a subset of the data that excluded these states changes the particular coefficients of my results but does not make them disappear with the exception of the results for Republican State Senate candidates—down ballot candidates in those states still get fewer votes when their party doesn't contest the congressional election in that precinct.

Table 2.A3: Quasi-Poisson Regression Models on Vote Counts for State Legislative

Candidates

Dependent Variable: Vote Count in Precinct for Candidate				
	Democratic	Republican	Democratic	Republican
	State House		State Senate	
Clinton Share	1.522 (0.022)		1.545 (0.039)	
Trump Share		1.814 (0.041)		1.564 (0.051)
No Democrat	-0.095 (0.036)	0.071 (0.046)	-0.671 (0.070)	0.311 (0.056)
No Republican	0.027 (0.017)	-0.200 (0.041)	0.117 (0.042)	-0.136 (0.068)
<i>N</i> Presidential Votes	0.000 (0.000)	0.00 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Observations	91,749	91,749	58, 147	58, 147
Dispersion Factor	312.701	896.689	583.414	862.278

Table 2.A4: Average Marginal Effects for Vote Count Models in Table A2.3

	Democratic Candidate	Republican Candidate	Democratic Candidate	Republican Candidate
	State House		State Senate	
No Dem. Congressional Candidate	-34	27	-229	-111
Confidence Interval	[-59, -9]	[-7, 61]	[-276, -182]	[-150, -72]
No Rep. Congressional Candidate	10	-76	40	-48
Confidence Interval	[-2, 21]	[-106, -45]	[12, 68]	[-96, -1]

Table 2.A5 shows the results from quasi-poisson regression models on the vote counts for Democratic and Republican state legislative candidates. In contrast to the models whose results are shown in Table 2.A3, the models for State House candidates shown in Table 2.A5 include two additional control variables that might affect the number of votes cast in state legislative races: the presence of multi-member state legislative districts in that state, and the presence of a state senate race in that district. Controlling for these additional variables does not diminish the relationships found in other models—both Republican and Democratic candidates for State House suffer when their party does not have a candidate for Congress on the ballot. Similarly, controlling for the presence of multi-member districts in the OLS models on vote shares received by candidates at the precinct level does not substantially change the results of those models.

Table 2.A5: Quasi-Poisson Regression Models on Vote Counts Controlling for Multi-Member Districts

	Dependent Variable: Vote Share in Precinct for Candidate	
	Democratic	Republican
State House		
Clinton Share	1.486 (0.017)	
Trump Share		1.842 (0.022)
No Democrat	-0.098 (0.022)	0.069 (0.021)
No Republican	0.025 (0.010)	-0.200 (0.015)
Multi-Member District	2.348 (0.076)	1.909 (0.088)
State Senate Race	-0.026 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.008)
<i>N</i> Presidential Votes	0.000 (0.000)	0.00 (0.000)
Observations	91,749	91,749
Dispersion Factor	244.253	761.546

Table 2.A6: Average Marginal Effects for Vote Count Models in Table 2.A5

	Democratic Candidate	Republican Candidate
	State House	
No Dem. Congressional Candidate	-35	26
95% Confidence Interval	[-68, -1]	[-0.04, 52]
No Rep. Congressional Candidate	9	-76
95% Confidence Interval	[-2, 19]	[-140, -12]

Table 2.A7 shows the relationship between uncontested congressional races and the total number of votes cast in state legislative races, both those that are contested and all state legislative elections in 2016. These are quasi-poisson models, and the dependent variable is the total number of votes cast in the precinct for the state legislative election. The results from these four models are mixed but do offer some support for the hypothesis that uncontested races increase roll-off: in contested races for state senate, as well as all races for state senate, no Democratic congressional candidate being on the ballot is associated with fewer votes being cast—as is no Republican candidate for Congress in races for state house. However, no Democrat being on the ballot is associated with a higher number of votes cast in all state house races. Given the fact that this is not a consistent relationship found in other models, this result may be due to the particular patterns of uncontested races rather than an uncontested race actually decreasing voter roll-off, as well as to the presence of multi-member districts, particularly in the lower chamber of state legislatures.

Table 2.A7: Vote Counts for Total Votes in State Legislative Races

	State House	State Senate	State House	State Senate
	Contested Races		All Races	
Clinton %	-0.056	0.036	-0.104	-0.121
	(0.029)	(0.044)	(0.018)	(0.025)
No Democrat	0.034	-0.381	0.075	-0.232
	(0.038)	(0.058)	(0.025)	(0.032)
No Republican	-0.041	0.016	-0.061	0.021
	(0.025)	(0.051)	(0.014)	(0.020)
<i>N</i> Presidential Votes	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
<i>N</i>	91749	58147	144799	95836
Dispersion Parameter	1006.418	1422.173	626.899	770.275

Note: County level fixed effects are included in the models but excluded from the table.

Table 2.A8: Third Party Candidate Vote Shares in State Legislative Races

	State House	State Senate	State House	State Senate
	Contested Races		All Races	
Clinton %	-0.012	-0.007	-0.026	-0.013
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)
No Democrat	-0.007	-0.017	-0.015	-0.038
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
No Republican	-0.007	-0.001	-0.003	0.010
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
<i>N</i> Presidential Votes	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
<i>N</i>	91680	57974	144639	95454
r.squared	0.957	0.932	0.868	0.860
adj.r.squared	0.956	0.931	0.866	0.858

Note: County level fixed effects are included in the models but excluded from the table.

Table 2.A8 shows the relationships between uncontested congressional races and the percentage of the total vote that third party candidates received in contested state legislative races and all races, regardless of if there were nominees from both major parties running for state legislature. Generally speaking, uncontested congressional races are associated with third party candidates receiving slightly lower percentages of the vote in state legislative elections. This again indicates that there is little vote switching after uncontested congressional races. The fact that strong incumbent candidates for state legislatures can deter strong third-party candidates

from running (and the fact that states have differing requirements for third party candidates to even make the ballot) also plays an important role in these patterns.

Table 2.A9: Multinomial Probit Models on Vote Choice among Republicans

Democratic Candidate	State Senate Vote Choice		State House Vote Choice	
	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error
Vote for Trump	-1.015	(0.127)	-0.923	(0.121)
Orphaned Voter	-0.261	(0.207)	-0.168	(0.203)
Political Interest	0.168	(0.072)	-0.001	(0.091)
Strong Republican	-0.371	(0.103)	-0.254	(0.106)
White	-0.271	(0.153)	-0.352	(0.175)
Education	-0.051	(0.036)	-0.028	(0.033)
Birth Year	0.011	(0.004)	0.009	(0.004)
Campaign Contact	0.519	(0.105)	0.532	(0.107)
Constant	-22.596	(6.945)	-18.191	(7.152)
Republican Candidate				
Vote for Trump	0.632	(0.103)	0.580	(0.101)
Orphaned Voter	-0.761	(0.147)	-0.786	(0.145)
Political Interest	-0.031	(0.041)	-0.017	(0.040)
Strong Republican	0.320	(0.066)	0.320	(0.065)
White	0.179	(0.134)	0.141	(0.135)
Education	-0.003	(0.022)	0.000	(0.022)
Birth Year	0.004	(0.002)	0.003	(0.002)
Campaign Contact	0.263	(0.063)	0.276	(0.062)
Constant	-6.355	(4.456)	-5.545	(4.442)
Other Candidate				
Vote for Trump	-0.610	(0.280)	-0.644	(0.266)
Orphaned Voter	-0.241	(0.281)	-0.453	(0.226)
Political Interest	-0.209	(0.086)	-0.057	(0.100)
Strong Republican	0.212	(0.192)	0.244	(0.181)
White	-0.124	(0.295)	-0.304	(0.264)
Education	-0.033	(0.066)	-0.028	(0.060)
Birth Year	0.013	(0.005)	0.016	(0.005)
Campaign Contact	0.099	(0.191)	0.290	(0.182)
Constant	-26.247	(9.378)	-32.542	(9.060)
N	11310		11717	
Log Pseudolikelihood	-6364.395		-6644.824	
chi2	506.705		541.692	

Tables 2.A9 and 2.A10 show the full model specifications and results for the multinomial probit regressions on state legislative vote choice for self-identified Democrats and Republicans that are visualized in Figure 2.2.

Table 2.A10: Multinomial Probit Models on Vote Choice among Democrats

Democratic Candidate	State Senate Vote Choice		State House Vote Choice	
	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error	Coefficient	Robust Standard Error
Voted for Clinton	0.642	(0.094)	0.638	(0.095)
Orphaned Voter	-0.347	(0.151)	-0.337	(0.148)
Political Interest	-0.020	(0.043)	0.012	(0.042)
Strong Democrat	0.266	(0.060)	0.293	(0.061)
White	-0.083	(0.065)	-0.065	(0.064)
Education	-0.029	(0.021)	-0.019	(0.021)
Birth Year	0.005	(0.002)	0.004	(0.002)
Campaign Contact	0.070	(0.067)	0.085	(0.064)
Constant	-8.611	(3.966)	-7.589	(3.873)
Republican Candidate				
Voted for Clinton	-1.539	(0.113)	-1.535	(0.107)
Orphaned Voter	0.040	(0.179)	-0.066	(0.167)
Political Interest	0.134	(0.072)	0.065	(0.063)
Strong Democrat	-0.195	(0.106)	-0.071	(0.096)
White	-0.033	(0.111)	0.126	(0.111)
Education	-0.065	(0.036)	-0.001	(0.031)
Birth Year	0.015	(0.003)	0.013	(0.003)
Campaign Contact	-0.032	(0.104)	0.122	(0.099)
Constant	-28.613	(6.326)	-26.125	(6.391)
Other Candidate				
Voted for Clinton	-0.884	(0.141)	-0.591	(0.151)
Orphaned Voter	-0.614	(0.228)	-0.052	(0.201)
Political Interest	-0.016	(0.071)	0.119	(0.081)
Strong Democrat	0.111	(0.122)	-0.010	(0.156)
White	0.000	(0.124)	-0.006	(0.154)
Education	0.026	(0.038)	-0.010	(0.043)
Birth Year	0.019	(0.003)	0.020	(0.005)
Campaign Contact	0.235	(0.119)	0.210	(0.146)
Constant	-37.404	(6.812)	-40.219	(9.341)
N	16620		17169	
Log Pseudolikelihood	-8713.251		-9144.049	
chi2	742.922		691.213	

Tables 2.A11 and 2.A12 show the same models described in Table 2.5 in the main text but are limited to respondents whose voter turnout could be verified by Catalist, and to respondents who self-identified as either a Republican or a Democrat respectively. The results in both cases are substantively identical to the results in Table 2.5: respondents in contested congressional districts are more likely to report having been contacted by a campaign, and campaign contact is positively associated with reporting voting in 2016. Being contacted by a campaign is not correlated with increasing ballot completion but living in a contested congressional district is.

Table 2.A11: Contested Congressional Districts and Turnout, 2016 CCES Validated Voters

VARIABLES	Model 1 Voted in 2016	Model 2 Campaign Contact	Model 3 Voted in 2016	Model 4 Voted in 2016	Model 5 Voter Roll-off
Campaign Contact			0.158 (0.078)	0.028 (0.171)	0.006 (0.005)
Contested District	0.057 (0.098)	0.159 (0.034)		-0.011 (0.135)	0.031 (0.007)
Campaign * Contested				0.150 (0.195)	
Education	0.109 (0.036)	0.096 (0.008)	0.104 (0.035)	0.105 (0.035)	-0.009 (0.002)
White	0.180 (0.105)	0.044 (0.032)	0.177 (0.105)	0.179 (0.104)	-0.021 (0.006)
Female	0.046 (0.090)	-0.045 (0.023)	0.050 (0.091)	0.051 (0.091)	0.001 (0.005)
Political Interest	0.281 (0.041)	0.286 (0.016)	0.264 (0.039)	0.265 (0.039)	-0.008 (0.003)
Strong Party ID	-0.130 (0.101)	0.097 (0.023)	-0.134 (0.101)	-0.133 (0.100)	0.051 (0.004)
Age	0.009 (0.003)	0.013 (0.001)	0.008 (0.003)	0.008 (0.003)	-0.000 (0.000)
Constant	0.765 (0.264)	-1.894 (0.080)	0.832 (0.271)	0.835 (0.260)	0.874 (0.018)
Observations	31,335	31,516	31,299	31,299	23,050
R-squared					0.021

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Table 2.A12: Contested Congressional Districts and Turnout, 2016 CCES Party Identifiers

VARIABLES	Model 1 Voted in 2016	Model 2 Campaign Contact	Model 3 Voted in 2016	Model 4 Voted in 2016	Model 5 Voter Roll-off
Campaign Contact			0.280 (0.049)	0.163 (0.154)	0.002 (0.006)
Contested District	0.125 (0.075)	0.148 (0.035)		0.062 (0.093)	0.029 (0.008)
Campaign * Contested				0.134 (0.159)	
Education	0.149 (0.018)	0.109 (0.009)	0.140 (0.018)	0.140 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.002)
White	0.179 (0.052)	0.103 (0.031)	0.173 (0.052)	0.172 (0.052)	-0.020 (0.006)
Female	-0.055 (0.049)	-0.046 (0.025)	-0.051 (0.049)	-0.051 (0.049)	-0.003 (0.005)
Political Interest	0.302 (0.028)	0.292 (0.018)	0.281 (0.029)	0.282 (0.029)	-0.011 (0.004)
Strong Party ID	0.218 (0.048)	0.159 (0.025)	0.212 (0.049)	0.210 (0.049)	0.034 (0.005)
Age	0.014 (0.001)	0.014 (0.001)	0.012 (0.001)	0.012 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.000)
Constant	-0.708 (0.143)	-2.243 (0.084)	-0.571 (0.131)	-0.625 (0.147)	0.945 (0.019)
Observations	31,183	32,386	31,141	31,141	22,017
R-squared					0.021

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Figure 2.A5: Campaign Contact and Down-Ballot Vote Choice Among Partisans

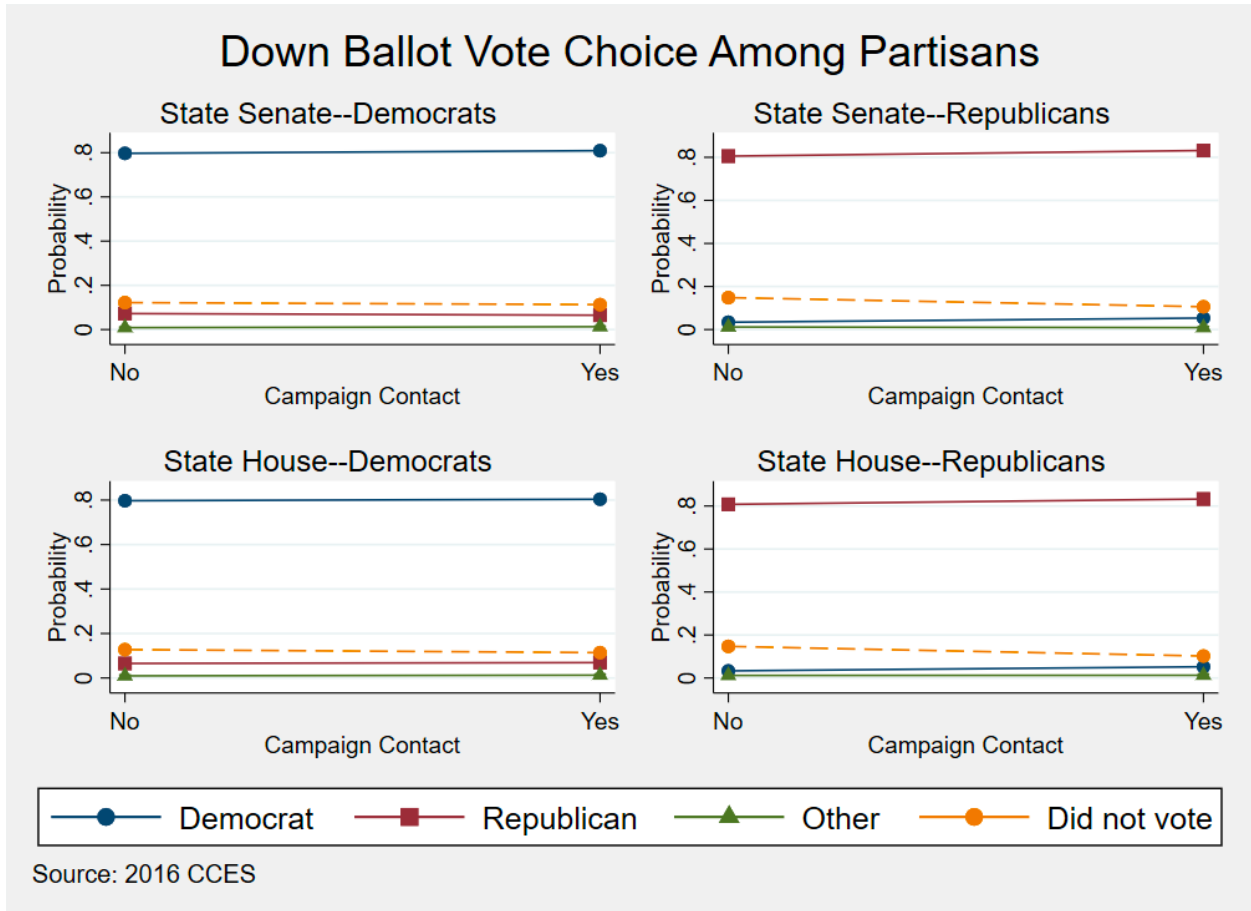


Figure 2.A5 shows the relationship between reported contact from a political campaign in 2016 and reported down-ballot vote choice among partisan respondents to the 2016 CCES. Among Republicans there are very slight improvements in down-ballot vote loyalty when that person has reported having been contacted by a campaign, but these differences between the respondents who reported and who did not report contact from campaigns were small and not substantively important.

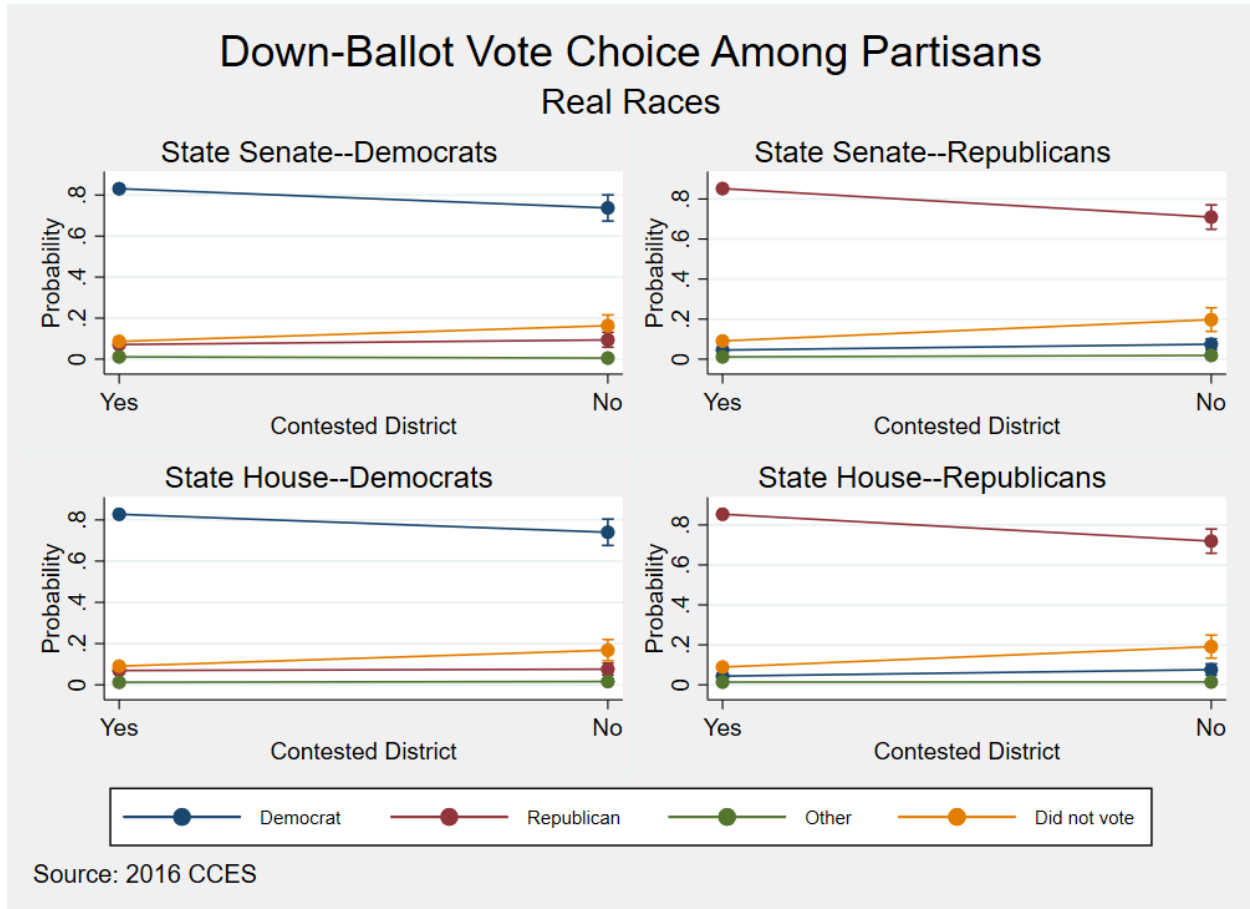
Table 2.A13: Expressive Responding in Down-Ballot Vote Choice Among Democrats

	State Senate		State House	
	Coef.	Rbst. Std. Err.	Coef.	Rbst. Std. Err.
Democratic Candidate				
Voted for Clinton	0.68	0.139	0.705	0.144
Orphaned Voter	1.11	0.52	1.388	0.532
Real Legislative Race	1.463	0.095	1.689	0.102
Orphaned * Real Race	-1.906	0.557	-2.139	0.567
Political Interest	-0.015	0.064	0.039	0.061
Strong Democrat	0.39	0.086	0.439	0.087
White	-0.253	0.096	-0.255	0.096
Education	-0.034	0.03	-0.005	0.03
Birth year	0.007	0.003	0.007	0.003
Campaign Contact	0.066	0.096	0.095	0.093
Constant	-13.199	5.7	-13.442	5.654
Republican Candidate				
Voted for Clinton	-2.328	0.181	-2.318	0.171
Orphaned Voter	2.206	0.623	2.524	0.602
Real Legislative Race	1.63	0.183	1.54	0.285
Orphaned * Real Race	-2.509	0.698	-3.013	0.67
Political Interest	0.217	0.115	0.146	0.099
Strong Democrat	-0.187	0.172	-0.011	0.155
White	-0.175	0.185	0.062	0.179
Education	-0.087	0.058	0.026	0.05
Birth year	0.022	0.005	0.02	0.005
Campaign Contact	-0.092	0.164	0.148	0.156
Constant	-43.239	10.332	-40.83	10.297
Other Candidate				
Voted for Clinton	-1.709	0.267	-1.077	0.31
Orphaned Voter	-11.884	0.554	-8.852	0.678
Real Legislative Race	1.185	0.307	2.96	0.492
Orphaned * Real Race	10.494	0.73	8.482	0.782
Political Interest	-0.045	0.14	0.25	0.175
Strong Democrat	0.247	0.248	-0.028	0.326
White	-0.093	0.258	-0.232	0.329
Education	0.065	0.077	0	0.089
Birth year	0.035	0.007	0.039	0.01
Campaign Contact	0.467	0.236	0.347	0.306
Constant	-70.714	13.563	-81.261	19.727
N	16620		17169	
Log Pseudolikelihood	-8447.67		-8813.68	
chi2	2860.29		2951.117	

Table 2.A14: Expressive Responding in Down-Ballot Vote Choice Among Republicans

	State Senate		State House	
	Coef.	Rbst. Std. Err.	Coef.	Rbst. Std. Err.
Democratic Candidate				
Voted for Trump	-1.633	0.202	-1.478	0.195
Orphaned Voter	-1.611	1.032	-0.046	0.984
Real Legislative Race	1.456	0.27	1.798	0.273
Orphaned * Real Race	1.405	1.071	-0.107	1.029
Political Interest	0.338	0.121	0.068	0.151
Strong Democrat	-0.647	0.181	-0.42	0.188
White	-0.448	0.239	-0.629	0.261
Education	-0.088	0.063	-0.047	0.057
Birth year	0.018	0.006	0.015	0.006
Campaign Contact	0.731	0.176	0.754	0.183
Constant	-37.905	11.522	-30.619	11.713
Republican Candidate				
Voted for Trump	0.761	0.14	0.711	0.139
Orphaned Voter	-1.067	0.41	-1.135	0.396
Real Legislative Race	1.396	0.106	1.696	0.111
Orphaned * Real Race	0.065	0.458	0.158	0.446
Political Interest	-0.021	0.058	-0.007	0.058
Strong Democrat	0.437	0.091	0.467	0.092
White	0.28	0.182	0.175	0.187
Education	-0.008	0.031	0.004	0.03
Birth year	0.006	0.003	0.005	0.003
Campaign Contact	0.321	0.086	0.326	0.087
Constant	-12.373	6.106	-11.441	6.087
Other Candidate				
Voted for Trump	-1.257	0.671	-1.276	0.603
Orphaned Voter	-12.073	0.771	-7.723	1.265
Real Legislative Race	2.133	0.481	3.706	0.712
Orphaned * Real Race	11.849	0.934	7.031	1.33
Political Interest	-0.365	0.173	-0.081	0.21
Strong Democrat	0.51	0.456	0.606	0.431
White	-0.149	0.637	-0.608	0.533
Education	-0.085	0.162	-0.062	0.147
Birth year	0.028	0.01	0.033	0.01
Campaign Contact	0.044	0.487	0.374	0.431
Constant	-56.301	20.486	-69.121	18.865
N	11310		11717	
Log Pseudolikelihood	-6144.76		-6355.89	
chi2	1451.55		928.61	

Figure 2.A6: Down-Ballot Vote Choice Among Partisans, Real Races



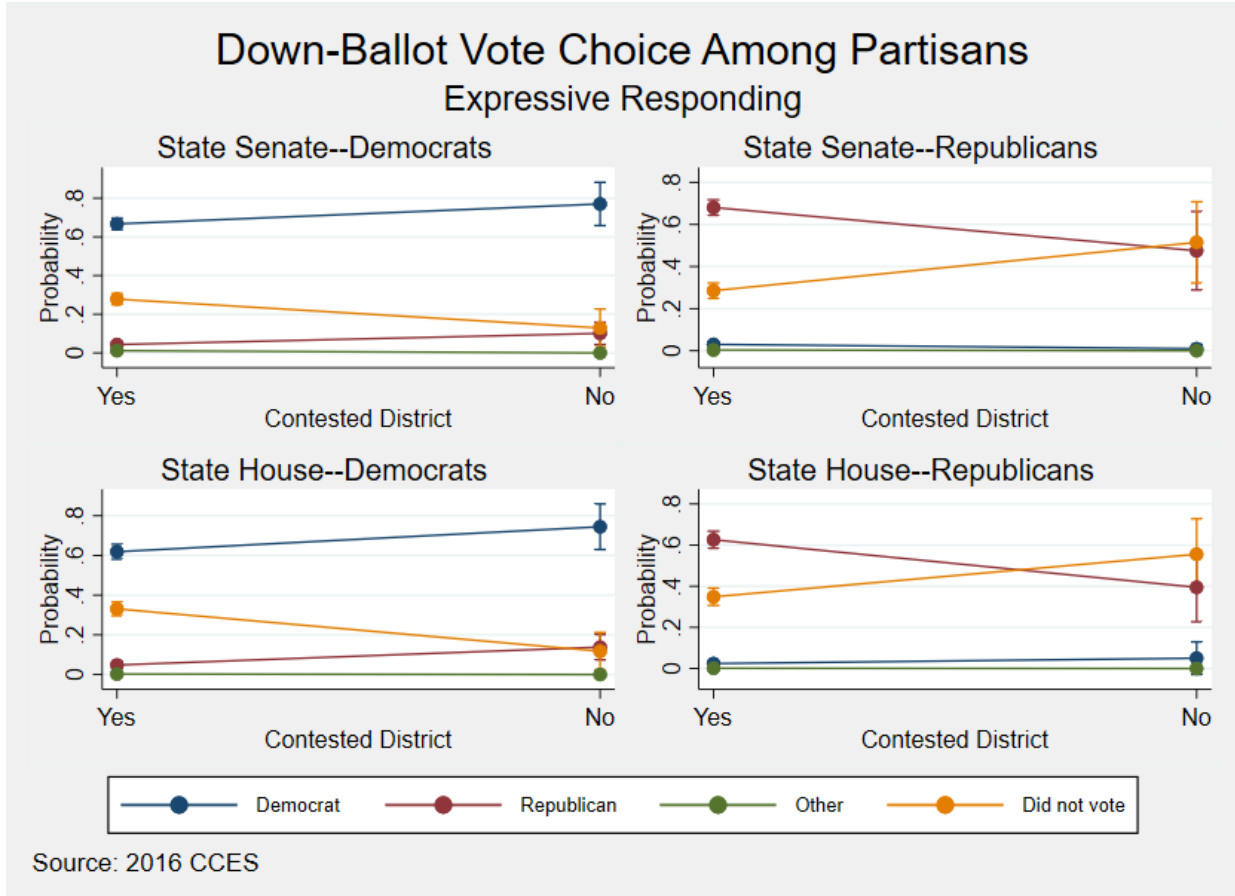
Tables 2.A13 and 2.A14 show the results from multinomial logistic regressions on down-ballot vote choice for Democrats (Table 2.A13) and Republicans (Table 2.A14), similar to Tables 2.A9 and 2.A10. These models include an interaction term between variables indicating that the voter was abandoned by their party at the congressional level and if their state had legislative elections in 2016. Marginal effects from these models show that respondents who are abandoned by their party are more likely to report supporting their party, and less likely to report that they did not vote in that race, when the legislative races existed. This reflects the fact that some respondents are genuinely aware of the presence, or lack thereof, of down-ballot elections on their ballot. Importantly, regardless of if there were state legislative elections in their state in 2016, both

voters who were and who were not in an uncontested congressional district most often stated that they supported their party's candidate in 2016.

This pattern is also evident in Figures 2.A6 and 2.A7, which show the marginal effects plots from multinomial logistic regressions on down-ballot vote choice among Democrats and Republicans. Figure 2.A6 shows the marginal effects for models including only respondents in states which held state legislative elections in 2016, and Figure 2.A7 shows the patterns for respondents in states that did not have any state legislative elections in 2016.³⁷ Taken together, these models indicate that the findings shown in Figure 2.2 are not due to purely expressive responses from survey participants who did not face state legislative elections.

³⁷ Due to the fact that the CCES does not include state legislative district in their publicly released data, I had to use the less precise measure at the state level. However, since state legislative district elections are often staggered among years, some respondents who live in districts that were not up for election in 2016 will have been coded as having a “real” election. Without state legislative district data for respondents, this imprecision is unavoidable.

Figure 2.A7: Down-Ballot Vote Choice Among Partisans, Expressive Responding



Chapter 3: How Survey Respondents React to Single-Party Elections³⁸

Abstract

In this chapter I examine the extent to which survey respondents believe that political parties have a responsibility to nominate candidates to run in elections. I also evaluate how survey respondents react to uncontested elections that are either due to a party choosing to conserve its resources or to the top-two primary. To do so, I use an original survey experiment placed on a NORC AmeriSpeak survey in 2018, and a bank of questions about the role of parties placed on an NORC AmeriSpeak survey in 2019. I find that some survey respondents do believe that parties have a responsibility to nominate candidates, but the reason that a race is uncontested does not appear to matter to survey respondents. However, survey respondents do appear to have an awareness of and pre-existing beliefs about the reason these uncontested races happen, suggesting Americans notice when their vote does not matter.

³⁸ My thanks to Walter Mebane and Nick Valentino for helpful comments and suggestions, and to Jon Miller for his suggestions as well as for help with the survey experiment. I also thank Professor Rob Mickey, Graduate Student Instructors Justin Heck, Jared Cory, Yunsieg Kim, Augusta Gudeman, Lena Gankin, and students of POLSCI 111 Introduction to American Politics for their help in pretesting my survey experiment questions. I also especially thank Steven Moore for his help crafting survey questions. I also thank participants at the 2018 MPSA conference for their helpful suggestions. All errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

“Uncontested elections have a detrimental affect on the democratic process and have an impact on down ballot races.”--a survey respondent

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter in this dissertation showed that there is an electoral penalty down-ballot from a race in which a party does not field a candidate, and penalty appears to be due to increased roll-off. This is consistent with and expands the evidence that in down-ballot elections, uncontested or single-party races exhibit increased voter roll off (Hall 2007; Streb et al. 2009; Fisk 2020) and that party organizational activity at one level of the ballot can affect electoral fates at other levels of the ballot (Frendreis et al. 1990; Doherty et al. 2021). In this chapter, I build on the analysis presented in the first chapter by using survey data for additional insights into how citizens view the role of parties in the electoral system and how they react to uncontested races when directly prompted with that information.

I assess if survey respondents in NORC AmeriSpeak survey fielded in 2019 believe that a political party has a duty to find candidates for office (a commonly accepted duty of political party organizations in political science scholarship). I analyze the relative importance that survey respondents place on that and four other tasks the political science literature has identified as being the responsibility of a party organization: influencing candidate issue positions, fundraising for those candidates, deciding which races in which to run candidates, and deciding which candidate of the available options to nominate as the party nominee. Second, I use a survey experiment fielded on an NORC AmeriSpeak survey fielded in 2018 to identify if the reason that parties fail in one of those tasks—finding candidates for office—matters for how respondents react to those uncontested races. I find that partisan survey respondents do react negatively to reading about their party not competing in an election, but that there does not

appear to be a negative participatory effect from reading about those uncontested races. I also find that some survey respondents have pre-existing beliefs about the causes of uncontested elections. Some believe that uncontested races are due to individual choice, but others blame systemic forces such as the two-party system or gerrymandering.

3.2 Political Parties and the Public

Political parties have several definitions in scholarly literature—among others, parties are conceived as a collection of policy demanders, interest groups, and social groups or as a unified ideological movement (Cohen et al. 2008; Grossman and Hopkins 2016); as creatures that exist to serve office- and benefit-seekers (Mayhew 1974; Aldrich 2011); a group attempting to gain power (Schattschneider 1942); or as a multilayered set of coalitions with interlocking goals (Herrnson 2009). Despite these differences in the definitions of political parties, Key’s conception of the tripartite model of parties (parties in the electorate, parties in the government, and parties as organizations) is commonly accepted (1964, p. 163-165).

While parties in government and parties in the electorate are easily identifiable and commonly discussed, it is less clear how the public conceives of political parties as organizations (Roscoe and Jenkins 2016, p. 2). As Key notes, party organizations are complex structures, which may or may not appear to act in unison (Key, Jr. 1961 p. 438). Scholars also believe that parties have a critical role in the electoral process. As Schlozman and Rosenfeld (2015, p. 140) succinctly describe the ideal role of local parties: “*They support candidates up and down the ticket, encourage promising figures to run and offer assistance to those who do, monitor party affairs, and help make sure that state conventions, platforms, and the like reflect partisans’ concerns.*”

Given these low visibility but multidimensional duties, it is understandable that the public may not have well-defined definitions of or responsibilities for parties as organizations in contrast to the other ways they think about parties. For example, when thinking about an election voters might think of the party purely as a label and a way to identify candidates for office whom they are likely to support or oppose on retrospective or prospective grounds. It is less likely that they think about the organizational infrastructure of a political party that helps those candidates coordinate their campaigns. Aside from activists who participate in the nomination process or actively campaign, how the party as an organization functions is likely opaque. If Mayhew's definition of parties as existing to serve candidates in their bids for election or re-election is correct, in a race without a candidate from that party there is no reason for the party to exist after the nomination stage, and given the diminishment of local parties the likelihood that people interact with a political party is quite small, despite their potential importance.

How parties-as-organizations function or not function can have downstream consequences for citizens. For example, the extent to which the candidate nominating process is democratic is correlated with subsequent faith in democracy (Shomer et al. 2016), as is the amount of organizational resources parties have at their disposal (Webb et al. 2022). In addition, local party organizational capacity and activities can have beneficial effects on the electoral fates of higher-level candidates (Frendreis et al. 1990; Doherty et al. 2021), but many of those party-as-organization tasks, such as providing the infrastructure for fundraising or coordinating campaign events between candidates, can be invisible to the public.

The responsibility for finding candidates for one office may fall upon one party organization—the congressional district or state party, for example. However, the fact that party organizations are an esoteric set of overlapping institutions is probably not something that voters

consider when assigning blame for uncontested races. Voters are often not able to correctly attribute blame in federal systems even with regards to common governmental duties such as property taxes (Sances 2017). After all, there is no sub-party classification noting the specific party organization that nominated the candidate on the ballot—and one organizational level of the party may be relatively weak while another super- or sub-organization of that party is stronger (Gibson et al. 1985). In addition to the multiple layers and organizations of political parties that may or may not coordinate their actions and candidates, the top-two primary specifically can muddle the relationship between parties and candidates (Manweller 2011).

In contrast to their electoral importance for candidates, parties as organizations have little importance in the day-to-day lives of citizens. When asked what they like or dislike about the Democratic or Republican parties, ANES respondents frequently discuss political positions and perceptions of the party with regards to social groups, but do not discuss the parties as organizations (e.g. Kalmoe 2019).³⁹ It is unclear, then, to what extent the public believes that parties as organizations have important duties in a democratic system, and subsequently how the public will react when parties fail to fulfill those duties. There are circumstances in which voters express displeasure with their political party, however.

3.3 Protest Voting

When presented with a set of options they find unsatisfactory, voters have three options: they can choose to not vote and exit the electorate or party, they can voice their displeasure with their party in some way, or they can grit their teeth and remain loyal to their party despite this displeasure (Hirschman 1970). As Hirschman (1970) notes, “voice” is “any attempt at all to

³⁹ Of the approximately 2000 responses to the “what do you like about the Democratic Party” open-ended response question on the 2016 ANES, fewer than 10 mentioned aspects of the party as an organization (either calling them “well organized” or complimenting their slate of candidates) whereas nearly every other response focused on political positions or representation of groups or economic classes of people.

change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs...” (p. 30) and “There are a great many ways in which customers, voters, and party members can impress their unhappiness on a firm or a party and make their managers highly uncomfortable... (p. 73-74). Protest voting is an operationalization of this “voice” option, as it is an opportunity for voters to express their displeasure with a party or candidate and attempt to get them to change their behavior in the future.⁴⁰

As Schimpf (2019) states: “protest voters are motivated by wanting to signal discontent stemming from perceived failures of their most preferred party.” I accept and adopt this definition of protest voting, with a slight addition. In the context of an uncontested race, voters do not have a chance to meaningfully voice their displeasure with their party in that race—but in a down-ballot race where their party has a candidate on the ballot, the voter does have such an opportunity. Subsequently, I include both casting an insincere vote (*voting for a party other than one’s preferred party*) or withholding their vote entirely (*roll-off*) in the next meaningful race on the ballot as meeting the criteria of casting a protest vote. Withholding one’s vote in a race can be a meaningful act of protest and participation—for example, some who abstain from voting in a particular race would likely vote for a “none of these candidates” option, given the opportunity (Brown 2011). In an election without a co-partisan candidate, voters can either withhold their vote entirely from that race or vote for a non-favored party—and the reason a voter is put in that position in the first place can be ambiguous.

⁴⁰ In this paper I discuss protest voting, using the definition presented in the text. I do not discuss “strategic voting,” where voters cast a sincere vote for a candidate who they do not support in hopes of influencing the outcome of an election.

3.4 Competition, Contestation, and Protest

There are many reasons that an election may be uncontested by a political party. Due to the hollowing out of political party infrastructure in the primary election era, it's possible that a political party can put in a good faith effort to find a candidate to run in a particular election yet fail due to their limitations. Conversely, a party may not even attempt to find a candidate, either due to negligence or to a belief that resources would be better used in other races. Regardless of the reason that a party has no nominee on the ballot, voters may notice that they have no opportunity to cast a meaningful vote in that race.

For example, they may feel forced to vote for an incumbent who has performed poorly in office--an election with no candidate opposing the incumbent, that incumbent is completely insulated from any possibility of democratic accountability for their performance in office. As many people can't identify the competitiveness of their congressional race, the first-time voters (particularly in-person voters) will know they can't vote for the party of their choosing in a down-ballot race is when they reach that part of their ballot (McDonald and Tolbert 2012). It is unlikely that voters who have already invested their time and fulfilled their civic duty by turning out to vote will react positively to such a situation.

3.5 Hypotheses

I expect that when the reason for an uncontested race is specified as either the top-two primary or the party choosing to not run a candidate, respondents will more often respond negatively than when the reason for the uncontested race is left to their imagination. In both cases there are institutional forces that are preventing voters from supporting their party, and this should lead to negative reactions such as frustration or disappointment. I also expect that respondents who read about their party not competing due to the top-two primary will be more

likely to participate in the future due to the specific negative emotions elicited by this situation—namely anger, which motivates political participation (Valentino et al. 2011; Valentino and Neuner 2017). In addition, I expect that those who are told about their party not competing due to the top-two primary will support institutional reform, as losers under institutional arrangements are more likely to support institutional reform.

Hypothesis 1: Respondents who read about parties not competing due to the top-two primary or to the party conserving resources will more often respond negatively than when the reason for the uncontested race is unspecified.

Hypothesis 2: Respondents who are told about their party not fielding a candidate due to the top-two primary will be more likely to participate in the future compared to those who are told about their party not fielding a candidate due to finite resources.

Hypothesis 3: Respondents who are told about their party not fielding a candidate due to the top-two primary will support institutional and electoral system reform.

3.6 Data

To examine the particulars of how voters react to these uncontested races, I present three evaluations of how people evaluate the role of parties in the nomination process: first, I ask respondents how important they evaluate five tasks of parties in democracies to be; second, I use a survey experiment to evaluate the effect of parties not fielding a candidate on respondents self-

assessed likelihood of participating in a future election and perceptions of their party, and finally I ask respondents to describe their reactions to the prompt describing the uncontested races.

I use two surveys to provide my descriptive analysis and test my hypotheses. The first survey is an NORC-Amerispeak sample, part of the Michigan Scientific Literacy Study, fielded in November and December of 2018 via the internet and phone.⁴¹ As the title of the study implies, the primary focus of the study is beliefs about science, and not political attitudes. This was the second wave of a two-wave panel study, and the first wave was fielded in February and March of 2018. Of the initial 2859 respondents in the first wave of the sample, 2312 remained in the November-December wave, which went into the field after the midterm elections. The demographics of the sample are shown in the appendix, and the sample was drawn so to be nationally representative of the 18+ population.

All respondents in the sample were treated in a 2x2+1 experimental design, which was pretested on a sample of undergraduate students. In the treatment conditions, respondents were told that either the Republican or Democratic Party does not field a candidate in some congressional elections because of either the top-two primary (which is briefly described) or due to the party choosing to use its resources elsewhere. The control condition briefly stated that single-party elections exist, because one party or the other will run a candidate and the other will not but not stating that just one party has done so. Full text of the treatments is available in the appendix. I test my third hypothesis using two sets of data: first, the open-ended response coding included a category stating that the respondent made some claim about the law needed to change (not including gerrymandering or money in politics); second, I ask respondents if they believe

⁴¹ The 2018 and 2019 AmeriSpeak adult panel survey items discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 4 were appended to a national survey funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (cooperative agreement: NNX16AC66A) at no marginal cost to NASA as a part of a larger cooperative agreement. This study was determined to be exempt by the University of Michigan IRB, reference # HUM00110782.

that America needs a strong third party using the ANES question wording. This belief may also be reflected in differences in approval rating for the parties between experimental conditions.

Table 3.1: Experimental Design

Party Not Competing	Republican		Democratic		Control
	Top-Two	Choice	Top-Two	Choice	
Total N	455	485	454	460	458
Co-partisans	110	114	180	178	229 partisans

Table 3.1 shows the design of the survey experiment. The “co-partisans” row indicates the number of Republicans or Democrats in each condition who were told about their party not fielding a candidate, including members of both parties in the control condition. As is typical for surveys at the time, there were more self-reported Democrats in the sample than there were self-reported Republicans, hence the difference in the number of co-partisans by condition. I do not present separate analyses of Republicans and Democrats, however, as I have no reason to expect that Republicans and Democrats respond differently to encountering an uncontested race. Table 3.2 shows the demographics of the experimental conditions, with the top-two and party choice conditions unified (that is, combining the conditions which said the Democratic or Republican party didn’t contest a race due to the top-two). There are no major differences in the sample between conditions, with the exception of the control condition having a fewer percentage of women than the two treatment conditions. However, there is no reason to expect that reactions to

uncontested races would be different by gender identity, so this difference between conditions should not affect the validity of my experiment.

Table 3.2: NORC 2018 November-December Wave Demographics

Unweighted (weighted)	Top-Two	Party Choice	Control	Total
Percent White	62(62)	63(66)	63(64)	63(64)
Percent Hispanic	16(17)	14(13)	16(19)	15(16)
Percent Female	57(54)	55(53)	50(45)	54.7(51.6)
Percent at least some college	84(61)	85(61)	81(57)	84(60)
Percent Republican	22(23)	22(24)	23(24)	23(23)
Mean age	49	50	49	49
n	909	945	458	2312

After the experimental treatment describing the uncontested elections, respondents were asked how they felt about that uncontested race. Open-ended response questions are useful when categorizing protest voting—for example, Birch and Dennison (2019) find in their analysis of open-ended responses that one major reason that respondents state they cast a protest vote is dissatisfaction with their own party. Next, respondents were asked if they believed they would participate in future elections, either through voting or through donating money. In addition, respondents were asked if they believed that the US needed a strong third party, and the extent to which the respondents approved of the Republican and Democratic parties. The coding scheme of these variables is available in the appendix. Throughout this paper I include all respondents in my analysis, regardless of if they included a valid response to the experimental prompt (which

was an attempt at an attention check, further discussed in the final section of this paper), including when I limit my analysis to party identifiers.

In addition, a battery of questions aimed at assessing how important the respondents believed five tasks related to the nomination process are in terms of political parties. These questions were placed near the end of the second wave of an NORC AmeriSpeak panel study (the 2019 version of the Michigan Scientific Literacy Study), which was fielded in November-December of 2019. Sample demographics of this panel are available in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. As with the 2018 AmeriSpeak survey, questions that appear earlier in the survey focused on scientific literacy and knowledge, and politics was not the primary topic about which respondents were asked.

Respondents were asked about five responsibilities of party organizations which are necessary for their roles in democracy: influencing candidate issue positions, recruiting candidates to run for office, fundraising for candidates, deciding which races in which to run candidates for office, and deciding which possible candidate to nominate from their party. These questions were modeled after a study of political elites at presidential nominating conventions (Abramowitz et al. 2001) and were intended to gauge how survey respondents think about the role of parties. While these questions are not aimed at directly testing my hypotheses, it is important to understand the extent to which the public views providing candidates for whom to vote a party's responsibility—if they do not have this pre-existing belief, then they will not fault a party for failing in that task.

3.7 Panel attrition

As both the 2018 and 2019 surveys were the second wave of two-wave panel studies, it is important to consider the role panel attrition may play in my results. According to Olson and

Witt (2011), the politically engaged are increasingly more likely to remain in panel studies. While their study focused on the ANES, an explicitly politics-focused survey, and the MSLS is not primarily focused on politics, it is plausible that the respondents who remain in the two-wave panel study are more politically engaged than the general population. This should be considered in attrition to the fact that the politically engaged are more likely to participate in surveys in the first place (Brehm 1993 p. 70). Thus, respondents are more likely to have a response to a relatively complex prompt about a political situation and may have more informed opinions about the role of political parties than the general population.

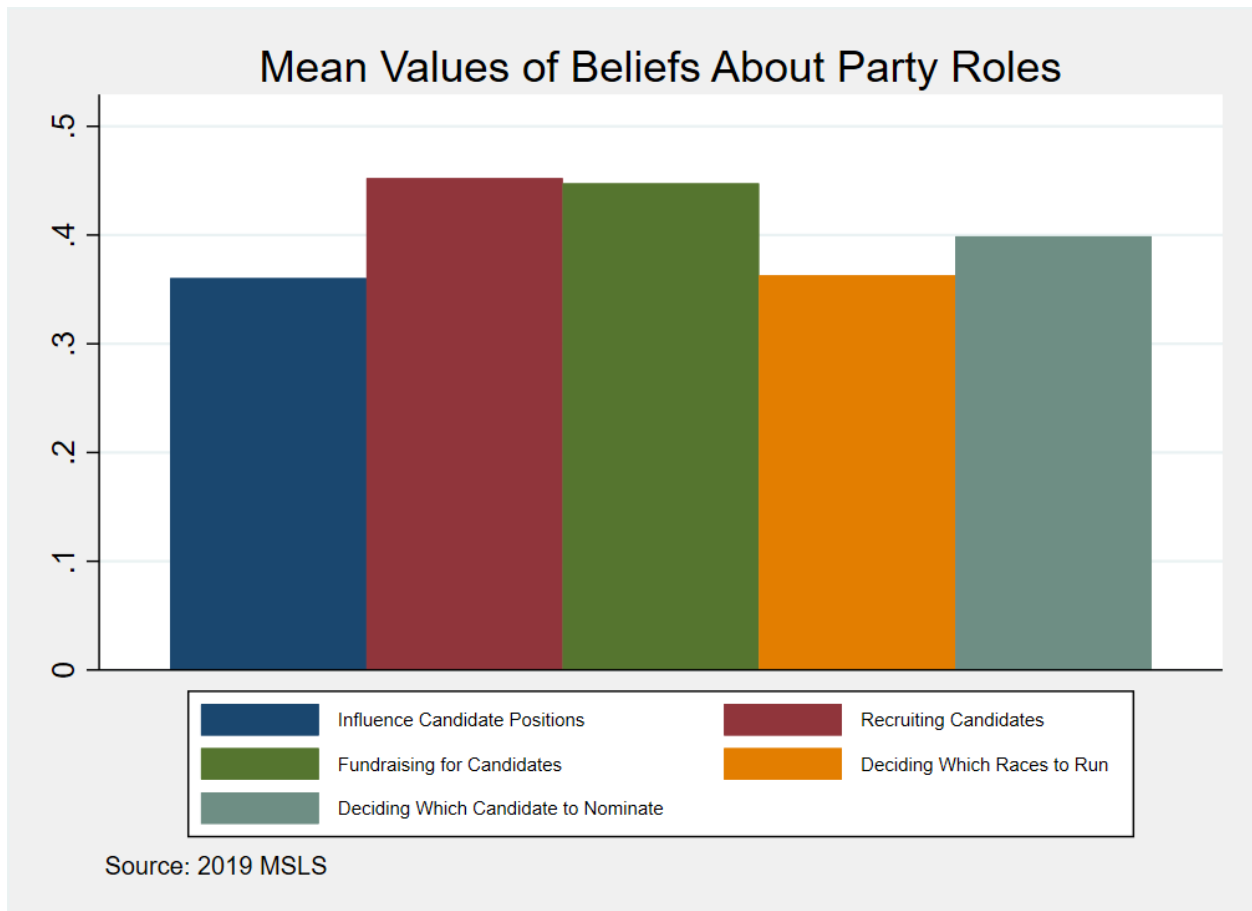
Counterbalancing that consideration is the fact that the more politically engaged may also be more willing to accept that parties do not always run candidates in every race, as they know that parties' resources are finite. They may also be more able to identify a third-party candidate who is close to their beliefs for whom to vote in that race. While the implications for comparing turnout rates and other forms of political engagement among panel respondents to the general population are clear, there is no obvious answer for how panel attrition might affect the validity of my experiment. In any case, as the survey data used in this chapter was from the second wave of panel studies, the potential role of panel attrition in my results must be acknowledged particularly regarding the external validity of my survey experiment.

3.8 The Role of Parties in the Nomination Process

Figure 3.1 shows that the two party roles on which respondents place the highest value are recruiting candidates to run for office, and fundraising for candidates who are running for office. Table 3.3 shows these findings in more detail, and that approximately 30 percent of respondents say it's either extremely or very important for political parties to recruit candidates to run, and to decide which races in which to run candidates. Similar to Albert and La Raja's (2021) findings,

some people believe that parties have a role in the candidate nomination process. There is variation in the extent to which local party leaders engage in some of these behaviors including candidate recruitment (Doherty et al. 2021), which may partially explain the heterogeneity in beliefs among the public about how active parties are in the process.

Figure 3.1: Beliefs about the Role of Parties in the Nomination Process



Survey respondents place slightly more importance on political parties ensuring that there are candidates to run for office, and on parties fundraising for those candidates, than they do parties deciding where or where not to run candidates for office, or for parties to influence candidate issue positions. The proportion of respondents who stated that it was extremely or very

important for a party to recruit or fundraise for candidates was statistically-significantly higher than those who responded that it was for any of the other three tasks.⁴² Overall, this implies that respondents believe that it is more important for parties to provide and support candidates than for parties to attempt to “put their thumb on the scale” and influence the process beyond that (see Hassell 2018 for a recent discussion of how parties influence the nomination process).

Table 3.3: Beliefs about Party Role in Nomination Process

Party Role	% Extremely important	% Very important	% Moderately important	% A little important	% Not at all important	% Haven't thought about it
Influencing Candidate Issue Positions	4.3	13	31.5	20.5	14.8	14.9
Recruiting Candidates to Run	6.6	22.3	33.6	14.7	8.9	12.7
Fundraising for Candidates	7.8	21.4	31	14	11.9	12.6
Deciding which races to run candidates	5.2	15.6	29.5	15.1	16.6	16.2
Deciding which candidate to nominate	7.7	17.1	29.3	15.5	15.7	13.4

Note: The statistics in this table include survey weights, and does not exclude respondents who gave the same answer to each question

⁴² This is according to tests of proportions comparing the proportion of respondents who responded that it was extremely or very important for a party to complete those tasks between all categories. The proportion of respondents who replied that it was extremely or very important for a party to recruit candidates was not statistically different than the proportion who responded that it was extremely or very important for a party to fundraise for candidates.

Importantly, the inner workings of political parties are an esoteric topic, and so survey respondents are not likely to have strongly held attitudes about these questions. As such, there were some respondents who stated that all of those issues were extremely important, and others who stated that they hadn't thought about the issue for each of these party responsibilities. I accept that those who state that they haven't thought about those five party tasks as valid (and not an indication that the respondents were inattentive or rushing through the survey) responses, but many respondents who state that all five of these tasks are extremely important are probably respondents who were inattentive, rushing, or answering in such a way to please the questioner. There were 407 respondents who gave identical answers (excluding that they hadn't thought about it) to the five questions about party roles. Table 3.A6 in the appendix excludes those who exhibit response sets in this bank of questions, aside from those who reported that they hadn't thought about it to all questions. There are modest differences in the distributions of responses, but the primary takeaway remains: of these 5 responsibilities, the two that respondents place the most value on are recruiting candidates and fundraising for those candidates.

This provides important theoretical support for my findings in the first paper: if people believe that it is important for political parties to recruit candidates to run for office, a failure to do so might be punished by voters.⁴³ This confirmed other existing research that some members of the public do view recruiting candidates for office as an important responsibility of political parties (Albert and La Raja 2021). I now turn to an examination of how respondents reacted to reading about political parties failing to provide candidates, and the role that the attribution of blame for uncontested races plays in voter reactions. To do so, I analyze the open-ended

⁴³ Unsurprisingly, limiting responses in Table 3.3 to just party identifiers produces slightly higher, on average, importance placed on the role of parties but not dramatically so (typically on the order of 5 percentage points higher in the extremely or very important categories).

responses that respondents provided after reading the prompt about uncontested elections. Despite reading prompts where (in two of the conditions) the reason for parties not competing was explicitly given, some respondents appear to have pre-existing beliefs about the causes of these single-party elections other than the reasons given in the experimental treatments.⁴⁴

Table 3.4: Explicit Blame for Uncontested Elections in Open-Ended Responses

Blame Attribution	Experimental Condition			Total
	Top-Two Primary	Party Choice	Unspecified	
Explicitly blamed party	14(45%)	34(58%)	9(27%)	57(46%)
Explicitly blamed electoral system	8(26%)	6(10%)	6(18%)	20(16%)
Explicitly blamed individual candidates	9(29%)	19(32%)	18(55%)	46(37%)

There were 123 respondents who put explicit blame for an uncontested race in their open-ended responses, the plurality of whom put explicit blame on the party. Table 3.4 shows the distribution of these responses. Interestingly (and interpreted with due caution, given the small sample) blaming the party for the situation was the most common response for respondents in both the top-two experimental condition and the party choice condition, while the majority of respondents who directly attributed blame in the control condition blamed individual candidates.⁴⁵ What this

⁴⁴ This attribution of blame was not expected prior to coding the open-ended responses. I created these three categories after reading all of the open ended responses, and realizing that many of them fit into at least one of these three categories.

⁴⁵ The chi-squared test of statistical independence between these two categorical variables was statistically significant: chi-squared (4)=10.98, $p < .03$, suggesting that the differences in response patterns—especially explicitly blaming the party when told that the party was not competing to conserve resources—is statistically meaningful.

may suggest is that when a race is uncontested by a party and a voter isn't directly provided with an explanation for the situation, some may blame individuals rather than the associated political party. It also indicates that there is some pre-existing belief that uncontested races are the fault of individual candidates, as a handful of respondents in all conditions made this attribution despite both experimental conditions attributing the situation to institutional factors—either the electoral system or to a political party. It should be noted, though, that it was a very small proportion of respondents who provided this specific blame—far more common responses were statements about how these situations made respondents feel, or what they thought it implied for democracy.

The fact that respondents blame the party for an uncontested race, even when the electoral system is explicitly stated as the reason for the lack of candidate in the prompt, might indicate that voters are not sympathetic to excuses about structural disadvantages that parties face and instead want them to compete no matter what. Indeed, one respondent in their open-ended response explicitly stated that “*you still have to fight the good fight.*” This heterogeneous set of explanations for the reason that a party fails to fulfill one of its duties requires further investigation. Particularly in a time of declining faith in political institutions and populist or ideologically extreme takeovers of party establishments it is important to better understand how the public views the relationship between democratic institutions, such as parties, and themselves.

These results should be interpreted with caution given the small number of responses that placed explicit blame for the situation.

Figure 3.2: Distribution of Open-Ended Responses by Experimental Condition

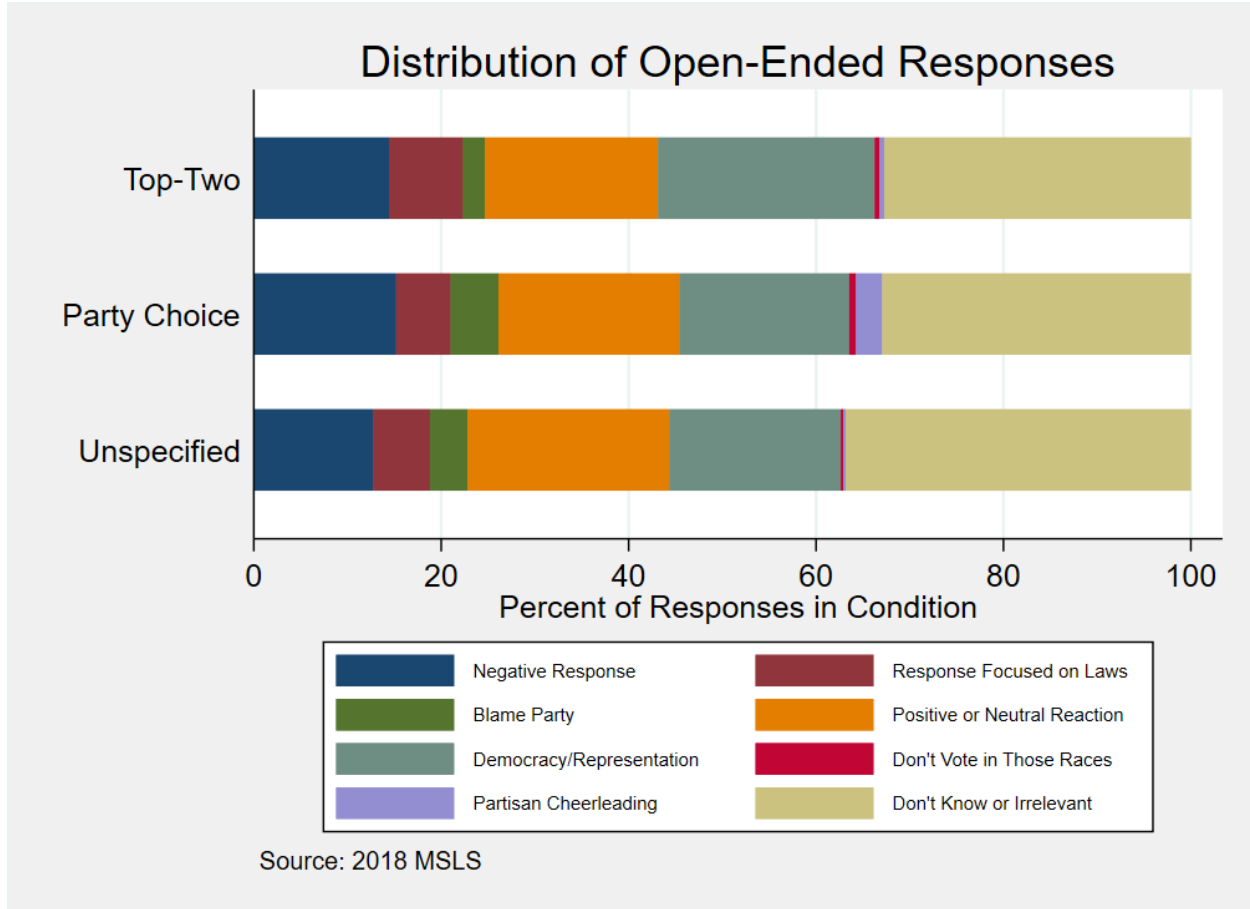


Table 3.5 and Figure 3.2 show the distribution of responses to the question asking respondents to describe their reaction to the experimental prompt describing uncontested races. There were 2005 non-missing responses to this question, of which approximately two-thirds were relevant and substantive responses beyond “I don’t know.” The full coding scheme is available in the appendix, but for ease of interpretation the responses were categorized into 7 categories (from an original 20). These categories include 1. negative responses, such as indicating anger, frustration, disappointment, or a statement to the effect of “it’s not good”; 2. responses that focus on laws, such as the two-party system, gerrymandering, or money in politics; 3. responses that explicitly blamed one or both parties or were general anti-politics statement; 4. responses that indicate

neutrality or fatalism about the situation or a statement that the situation is good; 5. responses that focused on implications for representation, democracy, or electoral fairness; 6. statements that the respondents don't vote in those races; and 7. responses that were some variety of partisan cheerleading, including statements that uncontested races are good when their party benefits. Distribution of responses across the full coding scheme, and the coding scheme itself, are available in the appendix.

Table 3.5: Distribution of Open-Ended Responses by Experimental Condition

Response (Percent of Responses)	Top-Two	Party Choice	Unspecified	Total
Negative Response	113(14%)	125(15%)	51(13%)	289(14%)
Response focused on laws	62(8%)	48(6%)	24(6%)	134(7%)
Blame party	18(2%)	42(5%)	16(4%)	76(4%)
Positive or Neutral response	145(19%)	159(19%)	86(22%)	390(19%)
Response focused on democracy or representation	181(23%)	149(18%)	73(18%)	403(20%)
“I don’t vote in those races”	4(1%)	6(1%)	1(0%)	11(1%)
Partisan cheerleading	4(1%)	23(3%)	1(0%)	28(1%)
I don’t know, disengagement, irrelevant, or other	256(33%)	271(33%)	147(37%)	674(34%)
Total	783(100%)	823(100%)	399(100%)	2005(100%)

Note: Cell contents are column percentages. These values do not include survey weights.

Responses placed in the “other” category included responses that were still relevant, but not categorizable according to the coding scheme. For example, *“the whole point of voting is to make sure our vote can help this nation turn around for the better. if the democrats want to let*

the republicans win than i see no point in supporting the democratic party” and *“you still have to fight the good fight.”*” Despite these responses and some other responses not fitting any of the pre-defined categories, they still show that the respondent had engaged with and thought about the prompt.

Among all respondents that provided a non-missing reaction to the prompt, approximately 20 percent focused on the implications for representation or democracy. An example of this response is as follows *“obviously, democracy does not work unless there is a discussion of ideas and issues, which cannot happen in an uncontested election.”* Interestingly, this was the most common category of response among those in the top-two experimental condition. Another 19 percent of responses described indifference or positivity in reaction to the prompts, including statements that it was good strategy for parties to conserve their resources but recognized the drawbacks of that strategy *“while it is a shame that there are not a diverse point of view in these districts, it is also understandable that a party will not spend the money in a district that is heavily weighted to the other party.”*

The open-ended responses showed a varying amount of engagement with the prompt, but some respondents provided thoughtful and complex responses to the situation of uncontested races. Between the thoughtfulness of some responses and the explicit attribution for uncontested races that some respondents provided despite the prompts to the contrary, it also appears that some voters do notice and think about uncontested races. Some other notable responses include the following.

“I was disappointed that there were uncontested positions. I had no idea that happened often and not knowing ahead of time meant I had nobody I knew to write in. I think the way the

elections are set up (only by people who have a lot of money) is like if you spend the most you win.”

“Not sure that this is a fair process. If the statement above is true then I would be concerned on where the monies are being disbursed. I might also feel abandoned by my own political party, if they were not concerned enough about supporting me to represent the people.”

“I’m OK with uncontested races if there are no opposing candidates who WANT to run, but I do not support a system where opposing candidates are prevented from running”

“I think if a party does not offer a candidate in any particular location it makes those in their party feel abandoned. There are always some people of all parties in every town but they won’t come out if they feel isolated and ignored.”

“I find it terrible that there isn’t an option. We had many candidates like this on our ballot in November and I was disappointed with several of them but there was no other candidate to vote for.”

Overall, there are no dramatic differences in the distributions of types of responses by experimental condition—that is, reading about a party not participating in an election due to the top-two primary compared to the party choosing to sit out the race did not produce noticeably

different responses by my coding scheme.⁴⁶ As all respondents to the survey were presented with the treatments, not just the partisans, I now show the distribution of responses for just the partisans who were told about their party not competing (the “orphaned voters,” in the terminology of Chapter 2, also referred to as “co-partisans”) in Table 3.6, compared to other respondents in Table 3.7.⁴⁷

Table 3.6: Open-Ended Responses among Co-partisans by Experimental Condition

Responses (Percent of Responses)	Top-Two	Party Choice	Unspecified (party identifiers)
Negative Response	49(19%)	50(20%)	29(13%)
Response focused on laws	25(10%)	12(5%)	12(5%)
Blame party	5(2%)	14(6%)	9(4%)
Positive or Neutral response	28(11%)	43(17%)	59(26%)
Response focused on democracy or representation	69(27%)	51(20%)	40(18%)
“I don’t vote in those races”	1(0%)	2(1%)	0(0%)
Partisan cheerleading	0(0%)	3(1%)	0(0%)
I don’t know, disengagement, or other	84(32%)	77(31%)	79(35%)
Total	261(100%)	252(100%)	228(100%)

Note: Cell values are column percentages. Values in Tables 3.6 and 3.7 do not incorporate survey weights but including survey weights does not change the overall takeaways.

⁴⁶ The simulated p-value for a Fisher’s exact test of variation in count data by category was statistically significant for Table 3.5 (simulated p-value < .001), but this is likely due to the relatively high number of responses and categories. Substantively, the differences in response patterns are not meaningful between treatment conditions.

⁴⁷ See Figures A3.1 and A3.2 in the appendix for visual representations of these distributions.

Table 3.6 shows the distribution of responses among respondents who were told that their own party did not contest an election (“co-partisans”), because of either the top-two primary or to conserving resources. The control condition, which mentions both parties but does not specify the reason for uncontested races, includes party identifiers for comparison. Among partisans, the proportion of responses that were negative among all responses was statistically significantly higher in the party choice condition compared to the control condition (p value for test of equivalence of proportions = .037), but not statistically significant between the top-two condition and control condition (p value = .077). Table 3.7 shows the distribution of responses for all non-co-partisan respondents. The only statistically significant pattern is that co-partisans in the two treatment conditions more often responded negatively to the prompt than did others in the treatment condition (p=.013 in both comparisons).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In the appendix, I show the distribution of responses for those who were told that the party other than theirs did not compete—notably, the “partisan cheerleading” responses were primarily from that group of respondents and included responses indicating *schadenfreude*. Importantly and unsurprisingly, people told about the party opposite theirs not competing in an election less often provided a negative response in the top-two and party choice conditions than did co-partisans (test of proportions p-value < .03 and .02, respectively).

Table 3.7: Open-Ended Responses among Other Respondents by Experimental Condition

Responses (Percent of Responses)	Top-Two	Party Choice	Unspecified
Negative Response	64(12%)	75(13%)	22(13%)
Response focused on laws	37(7%)	36(6%)	12(7%)
Blame party	13(2%)	28(5%)	7(4%)
Positive or Neutral response	117(22%)	116(20%)	27(16%)
Response focused on democracy or representation	112(21%)	98(17%)	33(19%)
“I don’t vote in those races”	3(1%)	4(1%)	1(1%)
Partisan cheerleading	4(1%)	20(4%)	1(1%)
I don’t know, disengagement, or other	172(33%)	194(34%)	68(40%)
Total	522(100%)	571(100%)	171(100%)

I thus find limited support for Hypothesis 1: among partisans who read about uncontested races, specifying the reason for the uncontested race does appear to produce a negative response more often, but there is no difference in the proportion of responses that were coded as negative among all survey respondents. In other words, partisans appear to care if **their** party does not field a candidate more than the broader public cares that **a party** has no candidate. This suggests that partisans are sensitive to the reason that their party does not compete, but the broader public is not—and that partisans who cannot vote for their own party due to the top-two primary may subsequently assess how well that electoral system is working for them. Considering the recent rhetoric about “rigged elections,” it is unsurprising that some partisans have a negative reaction to races where one candidate or party wins automatically. I now examine if being told about uncontested elections affects intentions about participation in future elections.

Table 3.8: Future Participation by Experimental Condition (All Respondents)

	Top-Two Primary	Party Choice	Unspecified
Vote in Presidential Race	.88	.88	.86
Vote in Congressional Race	.84	.84	.81
Vote in State Legislative Race	.83	.84	.82
Vote in other State Races	.78	.79	.77
Donate to candidate	.21	.21	.23
Donate to party	.17	.17	.17
Donate other	.14	.13	.15
Need Third Party	.61	.62	.62
Dem Approval (%favorable)	49%	49%	47%
Rep Approval (%favorable)	32%	28%	35%

Table 3.8 shows the differences between experimental conditions for all survey respondents on several measures: likelihood of voting in selected 2020 elections; willingness to contribute money to candidates, parties, or other campaign organization; statement assessing if the respondent believes America needs a third party; and the percentage of respondents that approve of either the Republican or Democratic party. There are no meaningful differences between the conditions in terms of likelihood of voting, donating in the future, party approval ratings, or if the country needs a third party. This experimental treatment, then, does not appear to affect how survey respondents report their future political participation, or their feelings about the party system in the U.S. Understandably given the political trends at the time this survey was fielded (November and December 2018) the approval rating for the Democratic Party is higher than that

of the Republican Party, but there aren't meaningful differences between conditions for either party. There is no support for the second or third hypotheses in Table 3.8.

Table 3.9: Future Participation by Experimental Condition (co-partisans and Partisans)

	Co-Partisans			All Others		
	Top-Two Primary	Party Choice	Unspecified (Partisans)	Top-Two Primary	Party Choice	Unspecified (Nonpartisans)
Vote in Presidential Race	.93*	.92*	.91*	.85	.86	.81
Vote in Congressional Race	.91*	.88*	.86*	.81	.82	.75
Vote in State Legislative Race	.89*	.89*	.87*	.80	.82	.75
Vote in other State Races	.85*	.84*	.84*	.75	.77	.69
Donate to candidate	.24	.22	.26*	.20	.21	.18
Donate to party	.19	.18	.21*	.16	.17	.11
Donate other	.15	.14	.17	.13	.12	.12
Need Third Party	.54*	.51*	.55*	.64	.66	.74
In-Party Approval	87%	86%	86%	88%	86%	

*For interpretation, the star in the voting in the presidential race in the co-partisan top-two condition (.93) is statistically significantly higher than the corresponding voting in the presidential race among others in the top-two condition (.85) at the $p < .05$ level, as indicated by the asterisk. Cells without an asterisk are not statistically significantly distinguishable from their corresponding cell in the other super-column.

Table 3.9 shows the same as the earlier Table 3.8, except it disaggregates the data between co-partisans told about their party not competing (or partisans in the control condition), and the

other respondents in each condition.⁴⁹ Again, there is little difference among the conditions in terms of self-assessed likelihood of voting, making donations, if a third party is needed, or approval of their own party among co-partisans. The difference in likelihood of voting in the congressional race between the top-two condition and the control condition is just barely statistically significant among co-partisans, but given the coding of the variable and the lack of differences in the likelihood of voting in other races this result should be treated with skepticism. The differences between the co-partisans and other respondents, however, are statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This is due to including those who do not identify with a political party in the “others” condition—there are no statistical differences between partisans who read about **their party** not competing and partisans who read about **the other** party not competing (see appendix). Thus, I find no support for hypothesis two: reading about a party not competing due to the top-two primary is not mobilizing. There is no difference in self-reported turnout or donation intention between the experimental conditions, either among the broader set of survey respondents or among partisans.

Finally, I tested if learning about uncontested races due to the electoral system makes respondents more likely to endorse changes to the electoral system. There was no statistically significant difference in the responses between the top-two and control conditions, nor were there differences in party approval between the experimental conditions among co-partisans or among other respondents in if the U.S. needs a third party (but there were differences between co-partisans and other respondents). Co-partisan respondents in the top-two condition did more often state that the laws needed to change (excluding campaign finance or gerrymandering law)

⁴⁹ This includes members of the opposite party than what is described as not competing, as well as those who do not identify with either the Republican or Democratic Party. The comparison between co-partisans and opposite partisans by experimental condition is available in the appendix.

than those who were in the control condition ($p=.001$). These respondents who believe that the electoral system needs to change, however, may also have general anti-party sentiment (Van Heerde and Bowler 2007) so it is unclear the extent to which beliefs about the electoral system and about the party system can (or should) be thought of as independent of one another. Thus, I find partial support for my third hypothesis—those who read about their party not competing did more often state that they felt that laws needed to change.⁵⁰

3.9 Discussion

As shown in Table 2.1 of Chapter 2, uncontested races are common at the congressional level and are even more so at the state legislative level. There appears to be an electoral penalty for a party for leaving a race without a candidate, due mostly to increased voter roll-off. The goal of this chapter was to examine how individuals react to uncontested races, and thus identify some potential mechanisms for this electoral penalty. The open-ended responses provide the most insight into the potential mechanisms of this penalty, and the content of the open-ended responses are consistent with the theory of protest voting wherein voters cast an insincere vote in order to show discontent with their party (Schimpf 2019). In this case, an insincere protest vote can include voting for a party other than their own, or choosing to withhold their vote entirely in a subsequent race.

Some respondents had negative reactions to reading about their party not competing in an election (and more often had negative responses when they read about their own party not competing), and others thought such a practice was bad for democracy and representation. These

⁵⁰ Co-partisans who read about their party not competing more often stated that laws needed to change than did partisans who read about the opposite party not competing ($p = .05$). This indicates that reading about a party not competing in an election is only meaningful for respondents when it is their party doing so. While some citizens certainly endorse the importance of two-party elections regardless of if it is their party not competing, partisans are especially sensitive to their party not running in an election.

reactions may make it more likely that voters will not support their party or roll off in protest in a subsequent election (when that action is a meaningful signal about their discontent). Further analysis of the open-ended responses showed that other members of the public appear to have pre-existing thoughts about the cause of uncontested elections, indicating that respondents were not just satisficing from the prompts and had encountered and thought about these situations in real life.

The quantitative results from the survey experiment are generally small and not substantively important in terms of willingness to vote or make political donations in the future. This shows that, at least for the comparison of these two possible reasons a party may not have a candidate on the ballot, there is no difference in the effect reasons for uncontested races between the top-two primary and a party conserving its resources in terms of future participation or beliefs about the party system in the U.S. There were differences between co-partisans reading about their party not competing and others reading about a party not competing, but these differences are due to the less politically engaged being included in the comparison (i.e., these differences disappeared when comparing co-partisans and out partisans). It is possible that these null results are due to the specific comparison: the top-two primary is only used in a handful of states, and so few voters in a nationwide sample are familiar with those elections. It's also possible that the null results are because the survey experiment is simply underpowered, as discussed in the following section.

What the individual and aggregate level data shared is that any reactions and subsequent electoral penalties to uncontested races are small, but in close elections they may be decisive. A handful of voters per precinct who are aggravated with their party not competing in one race and decide to punish their party in some way may be enough to turn a competitive race. While I

found only limited support for my first and third hypotheses, and no support for my second hypothesis, analyzing the open-ended responses led to several theoretical insights, and confirmation that some members of the public do have negative reactions to when their party does not compete. Further work is necessary to better understand individual-level responses to uncontested elections.

3.10 Areas of Future Work and Improvement

There are several areas of improvement to the work presented in this chapter that future work should address. It is likely that the politically engaged and politically disengaged have different beliefs about these uncontested races. For example, the more politically engaged may be more likely to recognize the strategy behind conserving resources for use in more winnable races. This and other differences in beliefs about uncontested races should be explored in depth. Similarly, it is necessary to know how people conceive of political parties as organizations, and subsequently what their duties are. If the public considers political parties as essential to representative democracy or impediments to democracy is unknown—and if people aren't aware of parties as organizations (and instead focus solely on parties in government and parties in the electorate), it is understandable that they don't have clear expectations for what parties' jobs are. To the extent that citizens of a democracy believe that they and their favored political party have a social contract in a representative democracy, what do citizens believe is an appropriate course of action to take when their party violates that social contract?

Beyond the necessary descriptive work to establish the reasons that people believe uncontested races occur and what they believe their recourse for such a situation can be, there are many improvements that could be made to the survey experiment. First, the co-partisan treatments are underpowered, both in terms of the number of treated respondents but also in

terms of the strength of treatment. While the reaction of members of the party that won the election automatically is important, as they exist in the democratic system too, they also are not suffering the lack of representation due to an uncontested race. A revised survey experiment would increase the number of treated partisans and would also make the treatment more explicit and less complicated—a shorter prompt, not emulating a newspaper article would likely suffice. If possible, using the respondents’ location to feed them reports of uncontested races that they actually face or have faced may increase the realism of the situation for respondents.

Another improvement to the survey experiment is not using the open-ended questions as an attention check (and instead including a more conventional attention check that confirms that the respondent understood the main point of the prompt). This improvement could ensure that respondents understand the cause of an uncontested election—but, as Table 3.4 showed, respondents appear to have pre-existing beliefs about the causes of uncontested races. Comparing respondents who read about contested and uncontested races (that is, including a control condition of contested elections instead of uncontested elections with an unspecified cause) is a necessary improvement to understand how respondents interpret uncontested races. More detail about respondents’ psychological reactions to uncontested races would also be illuminating. While respondents were presented with an opportunity to describe their reactions to the prompt, very few described themselves as angry or frustrated; more direct measurement of emotional reactions could reveal if those emotions are a potential mechanism for my findings.

Notably, the survey experiment attributed uncontested races to either the electoral system or to political parties conserving resources. The open-ended responses in reaction to those prompts, however, suggested that many respondents also believe that these races where one candidate wins automatically are the fault of individual candidates. Future work should ask

respondents to identify the cause of uncontested races, perhaps providing them with a list of possible reasons but also with an opportunity to describe other reasons they believe uncontested races occur. A future survey experiment subsequently could use these respondent-generated attributions for uncontested races in the treatments.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge how my findings may or may not generalize. As the survey experiment was fielded immediately after the November 2018 elections—a period of both high political engagement and polarization—survey respondents may be particularly sensitive to situations that deprive them of their right to vote for the party and set of candidates they support and react abnormally strongly. This is particularly possible given the threats to American democracy in the Trump era. Alternatively, as this survey was fielded immediately after an election, respondents might be abnormally disengaged from politics—they’d just voted, after all, and thus may not be thinking about politics and so may be less sensitive to situations where they could not vote for their party.

3.11 References

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3.12 Appendix

Table 3.A1: Responses to Opposite Party Not Competing

Response (Percent of Responses)	Top-Two	Party Choice	Unspecified (party identifiers)
Negative Response	25(12%)	31(12%)	29(13%)
Response focused on laws	11(5%)	14(5%)	12(5%)
Blame party	4(2%)	6(2%)	9(4%)
Positive or Neutral response	56(26%)	64(25%)	59(26%)
Response focused on democracy or representation	47(22%)	49(19%)	40(18%)
“I don’t vote in those races”	1(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Partisan cheerleading	4(2%)	13(5%)	0(0%)
I don’t know, disengagement, or other	67(31%)	78(31%)	79(35%)
Total	215	255	228

Table 3.A1 shows the distribution of responses from respondents who were told about the opposing party not competing (that is, Democrats told that there was no Republican candidate on the ballot due to either the top-two primary or to party choice, and vice versa). Again, Democratic and Republican identifiers in the control condition are included for comparison. There are no notable differences between the treatment and control conditions in terms of the distributions of responses, and thus by that crude measurement it appears that respondents did not have a measurable reaction to reading about the party opposite theirs not competing.

Table 3.A2: coding scheme for experiment outcome variables

Variable	Values	Description
Likelihood of voting in race	0, .25, .5, .75, 1	0=Not at all Likely, 1=Extremely Likely
Donate in future election	0, .25, .5, .75, 1	0=Not at all Likely, 1=Extremely Likely
Need third party	0,1	0=Existing parties adequate, 1=Need third party
Party Approval	1-7	1=Extremely Favorably, 7=Extremely Unfavorably (note: three categories indicating favorable approval are presented in tables)

Table 3.A3: Distribution of Open-Ended Responses, Full Coding Scheme

Frequency (Col %)	Top-Two	Party Choice	Unspecified	Total
Anger	1(.1)	4(.5)	0	5(.3)
Disappointment or Frustration	15(1.9)	25(3)	10(2.5)	50(2.5)
Indifference or Fatalism	126(16.1)	124(15.1)	81(20.3)	331(16.5)
General Negative Response	97(12.4)	96(11.7)	41(10.3)	234(11.7)
I don't know/No reaction	106(13.5)	120(14.6)	56(14)	282(14.1)
It's a good thing	18(2.3)	7(.9)	4(1)	29(1.5)
Disengagement or disinterest	18(2.3)	23(2.8)	9(2.3)	50(2.5)
Irrelevant	37(4.7)	33(4)	24(6)	94(4.7)
Preference for 2 party elections	53(6.8)	69(8.4)	28(7)	150(7.5)
Blame party or anti-politics statement	18(2.3)	42(5.1)	16(4)	76(3.8)
Laws should change	36(4.6)	5(.6)	4(1)	45(2.2)
Good strategy	1(.1)	28(3.4)	1(.3)	30(1.5)
Reject premise of question	11(1.4)	13(1.6)	4(1)	28(1.4)
Other	84(10.7)	82(10)	54(13.5)	220(11)
Bad for democracy	17(2.2)	16(1.9)	8(2)	41(2)
Unfair or shouldn't be allowed	111(14.2)	64(7.8)	37(9.3)	212(10.6)
Blame money in politics	11(1.4)	29(3.5)	10(2.5)	50(2.5)
Blame gerrymandering	15(1.9)	14(1.7)	10(2.5)	39(2)
Don't vote in these races	4(.5)	6(.7)	1(.3)	11(.6)
Partisan cheerleading or schadenfreude	4(.5)	23(2.8)	1(.3)	28(1.4)
Total	783	823	399	2005

Table 3.A3 shows the distribution of responses by experimental condition using the entire coding scheme. There are no dramatic differences between condition—but it is notable that respondents more often say “the law should change” when in the top-two condition or claim that it is a “good strategy” or blame the party when in the party conserving resources condition. Respondents also stated that non-competition was bad for democracy more often than noncompetition due to parties conserving resources.

Responses were initially coded by an undergraduate student and the author, and disagreements were reconciled by the author. Coding included identifying all individual components of the response that fit the provided categories as well as the overall theme of the response. The overall theme of the response is presented in the following tables. Complete coder agreement on the overall categories was approximately 66%, and partial coder agreement was a further 4% ($Kappa=.56$). The plurality of disagreement was on what constituted “other,” and differences in assessment of similar categories (e.g., disappointment or frustration vs. general negative response). When there was partial agreement on the coding, the agreed-upon individual component code was used as the overall code. When there was no agreement between the coders, I used the undergraduate’s code as the overall code as he was not told of the experimental treatments and thus his coding could not be biased by that knowledge. Coding was done using a dataset of responses that was separate from any data about which condition respondents were assigned to.

The relatively modest level of intercoder reliability is also partially due to the addition of the final two categories as I was coding—these two types of responses were relevant and numerous enough that I assessed they needed their own category, and thus the undergraduate coder did not have those two categories as options.

In the process of coding these open-ended responses, I noticed that some respondents were referring to uncontested races in the passive voice—something that happened, without any direct attribution of blame. Other respondents took the time to directly attribute what they believed the cause of these uncontested races to be. I therefore coded this direct attribution into one of three categories: placing explicit blame on a political party, placing explicit blame on the electoral system, and placing explicit blame on individual candidates (e.g., “if nobody wants to run you can’t force them”). The distribution of these responses is shown in the main text, in Table 3.4.

Table 3.A4: Full Coding Scheme and Compressed Coding Scheme Conversions

Compressed Coding Scheme Category	Full Coding Scheme Components
Negative Response	Anger; Frustration or Disappointment; General Negative Response
Response focused on laws	Blame gerrymandering; Blame money in politics; statement that law should change
Blame party	Blame party or anti-politics statement
Positive or Neutral response	Indifference or Fatalism; It’s a good thing; Good strategy
Response focused on democracy or representation	Preference for two party elections; bad for democracy; Unfair or shouldn’t be allowed
“I don’t vote in those races”	Don’t vote in those races
Partisan cheerleading	Partisan cheerleading or schadenfreude
I don’t know, disengagement, or other	I don’t know/No reaction; Disengagement or disinterest; Irrelevant; Reject premise of question; Other

Table 3.A4 shows the conversion between the full coding scheme, shown in Table 3.A3, and the compressed coding scheme shown in the tables in the main text. Due to the similarity between codes, which was the source of much of the coder disagreement, and for ease in interpretation, similar categories of the full coding scheme were combined into the compressed coding scheme. As with any choice regarding recoding variables, other combinations of codes per over-arching category could lead to different interpretations of the data.

Table 3.A5 shows the distribution of responses to the five party-as-organization tasks in the NORC 2019 sample but excluding respondents who gave the same answer to every question—aside from those who said “they haven’t thought about it” to every question, as I interpret those responses as genuine. There are no substantive differences in the interpretation of this table and Table 3 in the main text—recruiting candidates to run for office and fundraising for those candidates are still the most important party tasks, according to these respondents.

Table 3.A5: Distribution of Responses to Questions About Party Tasks Excluding Response

Sets

Party Role	% Extremely important	% Very important	% Moderately important	% A little important	% Not at all important	% Haven't thought about it
Influencing Candidate Issue Positions	3.4	12.6	28.6	22.8	13.3	18.8
Recruiting Candidates to Run	6.3	24.3	31.2	15.4	5.9	16
Fundraising for Candidates	7.9	23.2	28	14.6	9.6	15.9
Deciding which races to run candidates	4.5	15.9	26	16	15.6	20.5
Deciding which candidate to nominate	7.7	17.8	25.8	16.5	14.5	16.9

note: this table includes survey weights

Table 3.A6: Comparing Co-partisan and Opposite Partisan responses

	Co-Partisans			Opposite Partisans	
	Top-Two Primary	Party Choice	Unspecified (Partisans)	Top-Two Primary	Party Choice
Vote in Presidential Race	.93	.92	.91	.94	.92
Vote in Congressional Race	.91	.88	.86	.90	.89
Vote in State Legislative Race	.89	.89	.87	.88	.89
Vote in other State Races	.85	.84	.84	.83	.83
Donate to candidate	.24	.22	.26	.24	.28
Donate to party	.19	.18	.21	.21	.23
Donate other	.15	.14	.17	.13	.15
Need Third Party	.54	.51	.55	.55	.56
In-Party Approval	87%	86%	86%	88%	86%

Table 3.A6 shows the comparison between those who were told about their party not competing (including partisans in the control condition) and those who were told about their opposite party not competing (Democrats who were told about the Republican Party not having a candidate and vice versa). As this table shows, the differences reported in Table 3.9 in the main text are due to the inclusion of nonpartisans (and thus, the less politically engaged) in the comparison. There appears to be no mobilizing or demobilizing effect of reading about your own party not competing compared to other partisans.

Figure 3.A1: Open-Ended Responses among Co-partisans by Experimental Condition

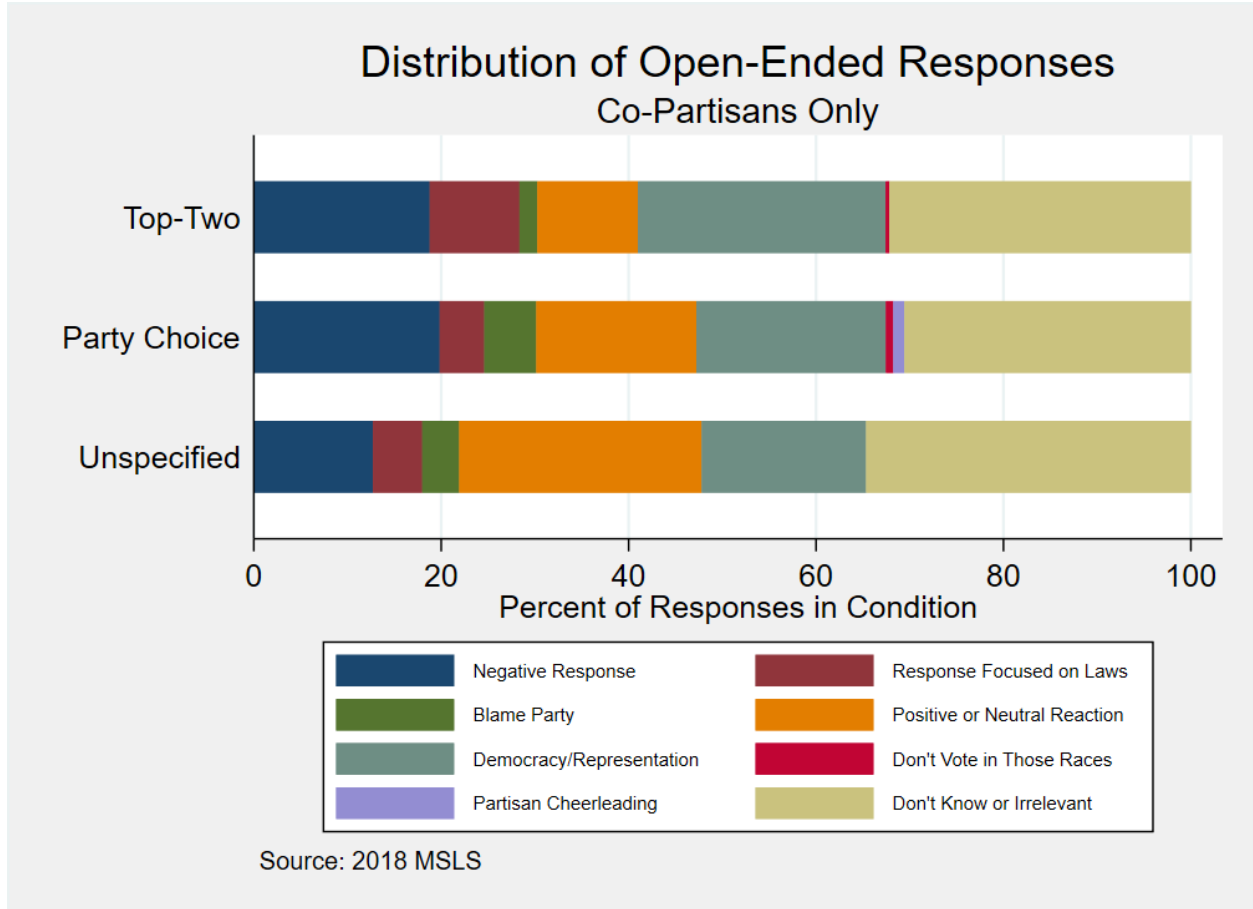
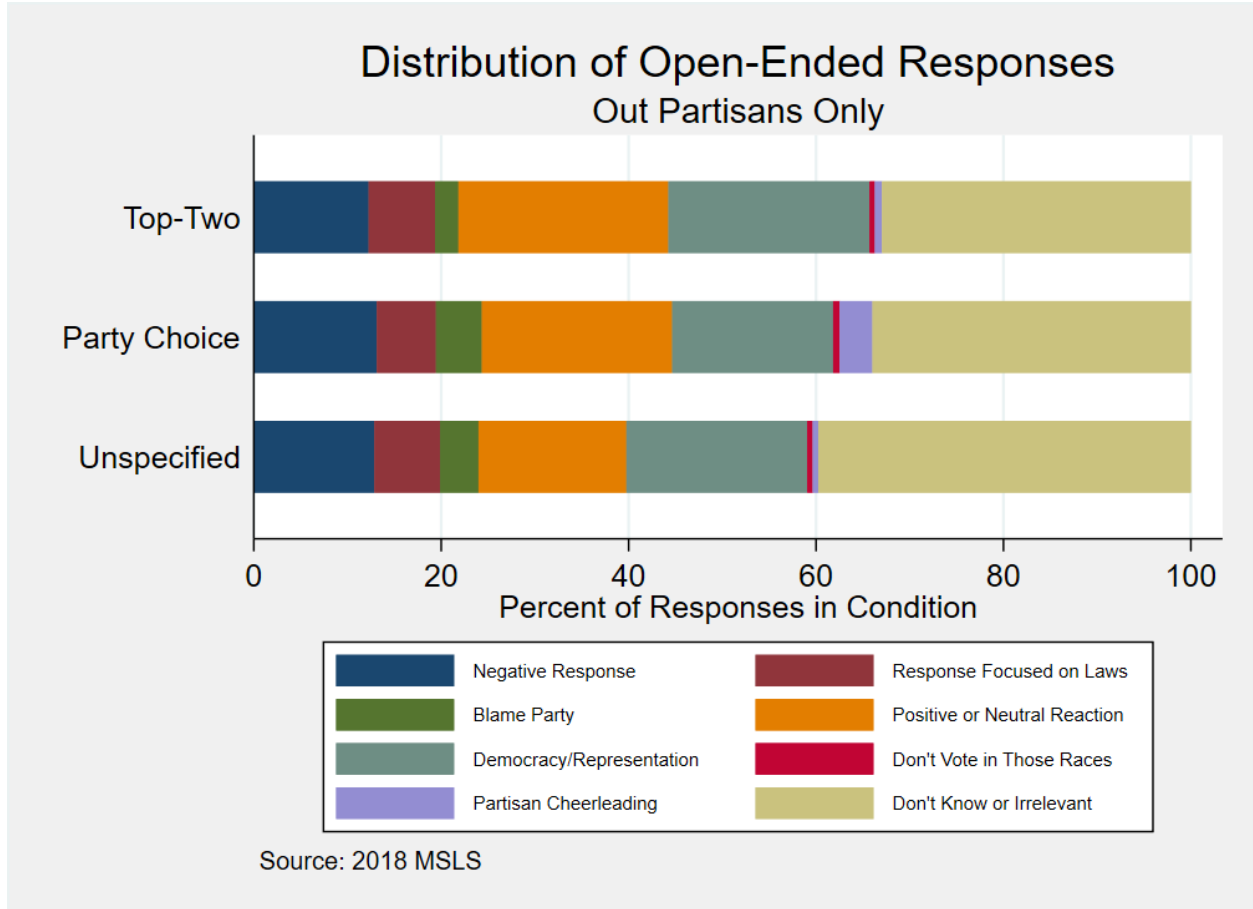


Figure 3.A2: Open-Ended Responses among Out Partisans by Experimental Condition



3.12.1 Survey Experiment Prompts and Other Survey Questions

NORC 2019 November-December Wave

Q37.

How important a role do you think a political party should play in:

		Extremely Important	Very Important	Moderately Important	A little Important	Not at all Important	Haven't thought about it
Q37a	Influencing candidates' issue positions						
Q37b	Recruiting candidates for office						
Q37c	Fundraising for candidates						
Q37d	Deciding which races to run or not run candidates						
Q37e	Deciding which candidate of the available choices should be the nominee						

NORC 2018 November-December Wave

Q56A. In many congressional elections, a Democratic candidate will win automatically because they are not opposed by a Republican candidate. In some cases, the Republican party will not have a candidate in the general election because election laws, such as primary elections where candidates from all parties are on the ballot and only the two candidates who get the most votes run in the general election even if those two candidates are from the same party, prevent Republican candidates from being on the ballot in the general election.

What do you think, and how do you feel, about these uncontested or single-party general elections? Please provide your response in the box below.

INSERT TEXT BOX

Q56B. In many congressional elections, a Republican candidate will win automatically because they are not opposed by a Democratic candidate. In some cases, the Democratic party will not have a candidate in the general election because election laws, such as primary elections where candidates from all parties are on the ballot and only the two candidates who get the most votes run in the general election even if those two candidates are from the same party, prevent Democratic candidates from being on the ballot in the general election.

What do you think, and how do you feel, about these uncontested or single-party general elections? Please provide your response in the box below.

INSERT TEXT BOX

Q56C. In many congressional elections, a Republican candidate will win automatically because they are not opposed by a Democratic candidate. In some cases, this is because the Democratic Party will choose to not spend any money or invest any resources into the race because they want to use those resources elsewhere.

What do you think, and how do you feel, about these uncontested or single-party general elections? Please provide your response in the box below.

INSERT TEXT BOX

Q56D. In many congressional elections, a Democratic candidate will win automatically because

they are not opposed by a Republican candidate. In some cases, this is because the Republican Party will choose to not spend any money or invest any resources into the race because they want to use those resources elsewhere.

What do you think, and how do you feel, about these uncontested or single-party general elections? Please provide your response in the box below.

INSERT TEXT BOX

Q56E. In many congressional elections, Democratic or Republican candidates will win automatically because they are not opposed by the other major party.

What do you think, and how do you feel, about these uncontested or single-party general elections? Please provide your response in the box below.

INSERT TEXT BOX

Use of the five groups stops here and all following questions are asked of all respondent unless there are separate branching instructions.

Q57. How likely is it that you will vote in each of the following elections in 2020?

	Extremely Likely	Very likely	Moderately Likely	Slightly likely	Not at all likely
Presidential election					
U.S. House of Representatives election					
State legislative elections					
Other state elections					

Q58. How likely would you say you are to contribute money to a candidate in 2020?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Moderately likely
- Slightly likely
- Not at all likely
- Prefer not to answer

Q59. How likely would you say you are to contribute money to a political party in 2020?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Moderately likely
- Slightly likely
- Not at all likely
- Prefer not to answer

Q60. How likely would you say you are to contribute money to any other group for or against a candidate or party in 2020?

- Extremely likely
- Very likely
- Moderately likely
- Slightly likely
- Not at all likely
- Prefer not to answer

Q61. How favorably or unfavorably do you feel towards the Republican Party?

- Extremely favorably
- Very favorably
- Moderately favorably
- Neutral
- Moderately unfavorably
- Very unfavorably
- Extremely unfavorably
- Prefer not to answer

Q62. How favorably or unfavorably do you feel towards the Democratic Party?

- Extremely favorably
- Very favorably
- Moderately favorably
- Neutral
- Moderately unfavorably
- Very unfavorably
- Extremely unfavorably
- Prefer not to answer

Q63. In your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job of representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?

- They do an adequate job.
- They do such a poor job that a third major party is needed.

3.12.2 Coding Scheme for Open-Ended Responses

Instructions

Code each entry up to four times for distinct responses in the categories outlined below. Code each entry in the order that the responses appear—so, if a response states “This makes me angry, but it is the two party system” then this response would be coded as 1 in the first column and 3 in the second column. If there is no response, just leave it blank—this includes a numeric entry, or punctuation. In addition, please code the overall theme of the response—what you judge to be the predominant expression—in the fifth column of the spreadsheet, which has been labeled to that effect.

If you aren't sure what the most prominent expression of the response is, go with the first mentioned category. Examples of the most prominent response would be if the respondent repeats points (or repeats the substance of a point but in different language), if they include exclamation points, or any other way that a person might emphasize their points. This does not include the response being in all caps—this was done to signify the respondent took the survey by phone. But if some of the response is in all caps but not all of it, you can consider the all caps portion as being emphasized.

If an item is in Spanish, please copy and paste the text into Google translate and code that translation. If you feel a response doesn't fit into one of the categories, we'll discuss it via email. As always, please work independently—so don't email the other coder with questions about specific entries. Note: if the text mentions “they,” you can likely infer that the respondent is referring to either a political party or to a political candidate.

Categories

1. Direct statement of anger
2. Direct statement of frustration, disappointment, or any other negative emotion
3. Expressing sentiments in line with “That’s the way it is,” or “I’m not concerned,” or “it’s fine,” including expressions of ambivalence, fatalism, and indifference
4. General statement of “it’s not good” or “it’s a bad idea” or disagreement without rejecting the premise of the question
5. No reaction, not sure, or I don’t know
6. Expressing that it is a good thing
7. Expressing disengagement or disinterest
8. Irrelevant response, including stating that the respondent does not wish to comment
9. Statement of general preference for two party elections but no direct statement of opposition to single-party elections
10. Blame one or both parties, or the political system
11. Affirmative statement that the law or electoral system should change, but does not mention gerrymandering or redistricting
12. Stating that “it is a good strategy”
13. Rejecting the premise of the question or prompt, including stating that they don’t believe the situation described actually happens
14. Other
15. Statement that “it is bad for democracy”
16. Statement that the situation is unfair, or that single-party elections should not be allowed by laws, norms, or morals

17. Blame the role of money in politics. this includes mentions of corruption or candidates buying their election
18. Blame gerrymandering
19. Statement that the respondents does not vote in uncontested elections
20. Statement of partisan loyalty or cheerleading, including statements that they are fine with the described situation if it is their party who benefits

For respondents who explicitly place blame for uncontested elections, use the following codes to identify who or what they blame. This does not include general statements of “elections should be contested” or “there should be candidates from both parties on the ticket,” but does include statements such as “parties should work to place candidates on the ticket in all races” or “if no candidate chooses to run, there’s nothing that can be done” as they explicitly identify the reason the respondent identifies as the cause of an uncontested race.

1. Blame a political party for uncontested races
2. Blame the electoral system for uncontested races
3. Blame individual candidates for uncontested races

Chapter 4: Does the Source of the Problem Matter for How Voters React to Problems Casting Their Ballot?⁵¹

Abstract

Voters may have a positive experience casting their ballot, or they might encounter problems when doing so such as a long wait to vote. Voters might attribute these problems to any number of positive reasons, such as high voter turnout, or negative reasons, such as broken voting machines. I use an original survey experiment fielded in 2018 to test if the attribution of a specific Election Day problem—a long wait to vote—matters for how voters respond. I find that those who read about these long lines were slightly more likely to report willingness to vote in the future but were no more likely to participate in politics in other ways. The reason for the long lines did not matter. In addition, I find that individuals who reported problems voting in the 2016 election were more likely to report voting in down-ballot races.

⁵¹ My thanks to Walter Mebane and Nick Valentino for helpful comments and suggestions, and to Jon Miller for his suggestions as well as for help with the survey experiment. I thank the MIT Election Data and Science Lab and its funders for their generous support of this project through a New Initiatives Grant, and participants in the 2021 ESRA Conference hosted by MIT for their feedback. All errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

The previous two chapters described how voters react when they cannot vote for the political party they support, and how they understand political parties' roles in the electoral system. I showed that this institutional dysfunction has consequences for voters—some react negatively when their party does not field a candidate, and this reaction leads some to not support their party in down-ballot races. I now turn to an examination of how institutional dysfunction interferes with representation in a different context: when voters encounter a problem while attempting to cast their ballot.

4.1 Introduction

According to the 2016 Survey on the Performance of American Elections, in-person voters overwhelmingly had positive experiences while voting, including relatively short waits and favorably rating the poll workers with whom they interacted (Stewart III 2017). Despite these generally positive experiences, some voters inevitably encounter problems while casting their ballot. Voters might wait in line for an extended period of time or encounter an administrative problem with their registration status when checking in to vote. Voters may attribute these problems to various sources; for example, a long line to vote could plausibly be due to lining up in the morning before the polling place is open and a sign of enthusiasm, or rather an indication that there are too few poll workers assigned to polling places or neighborhoods (Stein et al. 2019; Pettigrew 2017). The future consequences of these problems include depressed turnout in current or future elections and decreased confidence that votes are counted as voters intended (Cottrell, Herron, and Smith 2021; Harris 2021; King 2020; Pettigrew 2020). I focus on voters' more immediate responses to encountering a problem on Election Day and expect that when voters encounter problems on Election Day some will become more motivated to participate in order to preserve and maximize their right to vote.

I use the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017) and an original survey experiment fielded on an NORC-AmeriSpeak panel in 2019 to explore these immediate reactions to Election Day problems. I find that voters who report problems while voting are more likely to report voting in down-ballot races compared to those who report no problems while voting. I also find that there is little difference in how voters react to Election Day problems that are framed as either benign or nefarious in origin. In both cases, voters who read about Election Day problems were slightly more likely to report willingness to vote in a future presidential election, and in down-ballot races, than those who read about an Election Day that ran smoothly.⁵²

4.2 Election Administration and Voter Reactions

In a study of recent elections in Wisconsin, Burden et al. (2016) found that approximately one in 100 voters encounters an “incident” while voting, such as requiring a replacement ballot after making an error on their original or a problem with their voter registration. As Stewart III (2017) notes, while most voters have a smooth experience while voting, some endure lengthy waits, broken voting machines, or problems with their voter registration. Indeed, problems while voting can cascade: in a polling place, one potential voter encountering an administrative problem can result in a longer wait to vote for others (Stewart and Ansolabehere 2015). A negative experience voting can be due to discriminatory policy choices, such as the allocation of fewer voting machines to polling places that serve predominately African Americans resulting in lower

⁵² The 2018 and 2019 AmeriSpeak adult panel survey items discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 3 were appended to a national survey funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (cooperative agreement: NNX16AC66A) at no marginal cost to NASA as a part of a larger cooperative agreement. This study was determined to be exempt by the University of Michigan IRB, reference # HUM00110782. The specific questions discussed in this chapter, and their pre-testing, were funded by an MIT Election and Data Science Lab New Initiatives Grant.

turnout, or to potential voters receiving less information in response to questions about the voting process (Mebane, Jr. 2006; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015).

Voters' experiences while casting their ballot can have wide-ranging consequences. As Suttman-Lea (2020) describes, poll workers can use well-intentioned but idiosyncratic interpretations of election law, shaping voters' experiences at polling places. Those who have a poor evaluation of the poll workers they encounter have less confidence in the election, even after controlling for other factors as experiencing long lines, but when individuals state they had a positive experience at the polling place or with poll workers they are also more likely to believe their vote was counted (Hall and Moore 2014, p. 182; King 2017). However, as Garnett (2019) notes in her study of voter perceptions of elections outside the United States, the causal direction between the belief that votes are counted fairly and positive perceptions of election officials is unclear. Those who believe that votes are not counted fairly may subsequently evaluate poll workers more negatively.

Despite how voters can struggle with holding elected officials democratically accountable (see Sances 2017, for example), in election administration the "street level bureaucrats" who run elections are not ambiguous. It is a straightforward exercise for voters to encounter a long line to vote and identify the poll workers whose duty is ensuring a polling place is run smoothly. Voters are able to punish or reward politicians for conditions or for their actions under certain circumstances, including punishing gubernatorial but not senatorial candidates for state economic conditions, and attributing local road conditions to local officials (Arceneaux 2006; Atkeson and Partin 1995; Burnett and Kogan 2016).⁵³ Poll workers cannot be replaced or held

⁵³ This raises the obvious question of if voters who encounter problems while voting hold their local election officials accountable through their vote (that is, voting against incumbent local election officials when possible) but that question is outside the scope of this research.

accountable through voting, but many poll workers are volunteers and could be supplanted by other volunteers. In other words, individuals who encounter problems while voting might choose to volunteer as a poll worker to make sure such problems don't happen again in the future. By doing so, these potential new volunteers may feel that they are fulfilling their civic duty, or get some other benefit related to "doing their part" that can motivate poll worker volunteers (Clark and James 2021; McAuliffe 2009). In contrast, poor experiences with government or lower confidence in election administration may reduce political efficacy and subsequently turnout (Alvarez et al. 2008; Birch 2010).

4.3 Psychological Reactance, the Cost-Benefit Analysis, and Voting

Downs (1957) and Riker and Ordeshook (1968) describe a theory of voter turnout in which it is rational for individuals to vote if the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs, and for potential voters to abstain when the costs outweigh the benefits of voting. Costs of voting can include those that are easily quantified—the time it takes to travel to the polling place, for example—and those costs that aren't tangible, such as the information costs from learning about the candidates and offices on the ballot. A recent index intended to measure the cost of voting in the United States also included the registration and voting procedures (Li et al. 2018), but as Blais (2000, p. 91; Blais et al. 2019) notes the costs of voting are generally minor, and likely exert only a small influence on a potential voter's likelihood of turning out to vote.

The perceived cost of voting varies from person to person based on both demographics and socio-political characteristics (Santana and Aguilar 2019), but demographics and other factors contribute to who rolls off the ballot after they turn out to vote as well. As McGregor (2019) describes, factors such as being contacted by a politician might have negligible effects on turnout, but more of an effect in reducing roll-off. In addition, factors such as home ownership

affect both turnout and roll off. This suggests that experiences on Election Day that might affect future turnout, such as long lines, could also affect down-ballot participation.

Reilly and Ulbig (2018) find evidence that this is the case; in a simulated election, where potential voters were made to wait before casting their vote, that increased waiting to vote was associated with an increased rate of ballot completion, indicating that when the cost of voting increases individuals might become more committed to fully using that right (p. 94-95). Increasing the cost to vote can have heterogeneous effects, based on the electoral context: in non-competitive elections, poor weather reduces turnout but in competitive elections there is no participation penalty and turnout may even slightly increase, possibly due to increased campaign activity in response to the poor weather (Fraga and Hersh 2010). In a competitive election the benefit of voting is higher, due to potentially casting the decisive vote, but the duty-related benefits individuals might get from voting in that competitive race also increase. Voters may be more willing to endure higher costs in the form of problems while voting, particularly if they feel their right to vote is threatened.

Psychological reactance is the state in which an individual feels as though her or his rights or freedoms are threatened, the threat induces an individual to place a higher-than-normal value on that right, and the person is subsequently motivated to act to preserve or regain the right (Brehm 1966; Wicklund 1974). Reactance can be spurred by personal or impersonal threats to freedom (Brehm and Brehm 1981) and so circumstances in which the right to vote is perceived as threatened, even if such a threat is not a direct statement that the right to vote will be taken away, can provoke reactance. However, the importance that an individual places on a right, as well as the magnitude of the threat to that right, determines the extent of the reactance that an individual experiences (Wicklund 1974). A person who has shown up to a polling place

definitionally values their right to vote, and the importance of the right to vote will never be higher to that person than when they are about to do so.

When an individual's right to vote is threatened by a purge from the list of registered voters, those individuals may become more likely to vote through experiencing psychological reactance (Biggers and Smith 2020). Anger may also motivate individuals to act to preserve their right to vote if it is threatened by voter ID laws (Valentino and Neuner 2017). Anger is both a key aspect of psychological reactance and an important motivator of political participation (Dillard and Shen 2005; Valentino et al. 2011).⁵⁴ Reactance does not necessarily require hostile intent on the part of the instigator; for example, some voters may have a reaction to feeling over-pressured to vote by their own party, and react in such a way to preserve their right to abstain (Mann 2010; Matland and Murray 2012; Murray and Matland 2015).

Those who encounter a problem while voting and consider leaving the polling place without voting must also consider the likelihood that the other people in line will observe them doing so and may feel shame at that possibility. The threat of feeling shame motivates political participation (Panagopoulos 2010; Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2010) as does publicizing voting history and turnout. Political participation has a social benefit in that those who participate are viewed more positively by others than those who do not, and people are motivated to vote if they think their household or neighbors will know if they do not (Anoll 2018; Gerber, Green and Larimer 2008; Panagopoulos, Larimer and Condon 2014; Gerber et al. 2014). In the context of being forced to leave a polling place without voting, a person's lack of voting will be publicized without the trouble of an organization sending out a mailing describing their voter turnout history—their neighbors can watch the person leave the line. In short, both the threats to the right

⁵⁴ For a recent review of the research on psychological reactance, see Rosenberg and Siegel (2018).

to vote as well as the consequences of leaving the line without voting will motivate those who encounter problems at the polling place to protect their right to vote if possible.

4.4 Hypotheses

A person who experiences an administrative problem while voting has definitionally chosen to vote, and so impediments to exercising that right will (for some) produce a reactive state, and a desire to protect their threatened right to vote. These individuals clearly place value on exercising their right to vote and will act to protect that right if they feel it is threatened. Since they have already turned out to vote in this election, these voters can protect and maximize their right to vote by not only becoming more determined to vote in this election, but also by casting a more complete ballot and being more likely to vote in future elections. Voters who successfully vote after encountering a problem are either more committed to voting or are more able to bear the increased costs of doing so and can thus “stick it out” (Lamb 2021). Election Day problems are not created equally, however, and the reason for the problem may shape the voter’s reaction.⁵⁵ A nefarious problem should prompt voters to protect their right to participate, but innocent errors may reduce political efficacy and subsequently turnout.

Hypothesis 1: When potential voters encounter problems due to intentional malfeasance, they will be more likely to report willingness to vote in upcoming elections, but will be less likely to vote in the future if election problems are due to innocent mistakes.

Hypothesis 2: When potential voters encounter problems due to intentional malfeasance they will be more likely to report willingness to participate in the electoral system in

⁵⁵ Continuing to vote, and voting a more complete ballot, after the cost of voting increases may also be due to potential voters succumbing to the sunk cost fallacy. As noted above, anger and reactance, my proposed mechanisms, are closely related—and anger may make people more likely to succumb to the sunk cost fallacy (see Coleman 2010; Dijkstra and Hong 2019).

ways other than voting, but if the election problems are due to innocent mistakes the respondents will be less likely to volunteer.

Turnout and participation in future elections are two of several indicators of a pro-participatory effect of encountering problems while voting. Another is maximizing the right to vote in that election by being more likely to vote a complete ballot. Increased down-ballot participation among those who encounter problems while voting could come from two mechanisms. First, if the cost of voting goes up, individuals who would normally vote in fewer races on the ballot might want to maximize the benefit they get from voting, to balance out the costs they endured (and protect their right to vote). Second, the higher cost of voting might deter people who were unlikely to vote in many down-ballot races from turning out to vote at all. This would skew the electorate towards more committed individuals who are more likely to vote down-ballot regardless of the problems they encounter. In either case, this would result in decreased roll-off.

Hypothesis 3: When voters report problems voting in person, they will report voting in more races than in-person voters who do not report any problems while casting their ballot.

4.5 Data

In order to examine the relationship between Election Day experiences and participation, I placed a survey experiment on a wave of the Michigan Scientific Literacy Study, an NORC AmeriSpeak panel, which was fielded in November and December of 2019 by phone or online,

in English or Spanish, depending on the respondent's preference.⁵⁶ This survey was the second wave of a two-wave panel study, the first wave of which was fielded in February and March of 2019. The initial wave of the survey included 2738 respondents, of which 545 did not participate in the second wave. The initial wave used an address-based sample, and (with proper weights) was designed to be nationally representative. Respondents who participated in the second wave of the survey were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions, described below. Prior to the election-related questions, respondents were asked numerous questions about their understanding of and beliefs about science (the primary focus of the survey), as well as standard political and demographic questions such as party identification and employment status. Table 4.1 shows the demographics of each experimental condition, and aside from the control group being slightly less educated on average than the other two conditions, the demographics across conditions are similar.

After the scientific knowledge and literacy portion of the survey, respondents were presented with one of three brief pseudo news stories describing a recent election in a town called Springfield (the state is not specified, but there are Springfields in over 20 states so the name should not invoke reactions tied to a specific Springfield for all respondents). These prompts, shown in full in the appendix, described one of the following situations in the form of a pseudo news article: a recent election which there were problems with poll workers being unhelpful in only certain neighborhoods, a recent election in which there were scattered reports of polling place problems across town, attributed to election officials' training, but not limited to one neighborhood, and a recent election that was described as well-run. Each of the 2163

⁵⁶ Importantly, this survey experiment occurred prior to the Republican claims that the 2020 election was rigged, and so respondents to the survey experiment would not necessarily have attributed mistakes or biases to that "rigging" or to the related claims of voter fraud through absentee voting. Candidate and President Trump made similar claims about the 2016 and 2018 elections being "rigged" however.

respondents read one of these news stories, and the demographics of those assigned to each condition are shown in Table 1.⁵⁷

Treatments were pretested on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. After excluding bots and other suspicious respondents, those who read the prompt were able to correctly identify the subject of the treatment news story approximately 90 percent of the time.⁵⁸ AmeriSpeak respondents in all three conditions passed the attention check at a similar rate (see appendix), but I focus on the differences between conditions regardless of if the respondents passed or did not pass the attention check after reading or hearing the prompt. All data from the survey experiment reported is this intention-to-treat effect.

Table 4.1: Experimental Conditions Demographics

	Biased Officials	Innocent Mistakes	Control
N	743	689	731
Percent Female	55	55	51
Percent White	63	61	63
Percent Republican	22	24	22
Percent College Educated or more	36	38	31
Percent Pass Attention Check	91	90	91

Once respondents had read the news story to which they were assigned, they were asked to identify the topic of the news story to confirm that they had understood the prompt. They could then describe their reaction to the story in an open-ended format, and then were asked how

⁵⁷ The full text of the experimental treatments, as well as the related survey questions, is available in the appendix. For question wordings of questions from the 2016 CCES, please see the user guide available on the Harvard Dataverse.

⁵⁸ Respondents were paid a flat fee of \$1 for their participation, as the survey was projected to take approximately four minutes of their time.

likely they were to participate in future presidential, congressional, and state-level races.⁵⁹

Respondents were also asked how likely they were to donate money to a campaign, volunteer for a campaign, or to volunteer as a poll worker in a future election.

In addition to the survey experiment, I use the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017) to test my expectation that those who report encountering problems voting in person are more likely to vote down-ballot. This survey includes pre- and post-election waves and asks respondents about their political beliefs and voting behavior. It includes respondents from all 50 states. Importantly, and rarely for national surveys, the CCES (currently called the CES) asks respondents about their down-ballot participation and vote choices. In 2016, all respondents who reported voting were asked about their vote choice for President, U.S. House, Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Senate, and State House. Some respondents were asked about the vote for Senator and Governor as well, if their state had those races in 2016. Subsequently, every respondent was asked about their vote choice (including an option stating that they did not vote in that race) in no fewer than six races, and perhaps as many as eight, despite only a handful of states holding elections for attorney general or secretary of state elections in 2016.

Indeed, many respondents claim they voted in non-existent races, such as reporting voting in an Attorney General race in 2016 when their state holds those elections in off-years. As such, I interpret down-ballot participation and vote choices as at least partially being driven by expressive responding, and do not exclude respondents who report they voted in non-existent

⁵⁹ Survey experiments designed to motivate reactance and anger, and then measure future turnout using voter files to verify said turnout (Biggers 2021) may provide conservative estimates of the effect of reactance on turnout if the treatment is far prior to an election. During the time between the treatment and the election the feelings of anger and the reactive state may fade, reducing the apparent effect on turnout. There is no opportunity for those feelings to fade, however, in the context of encountering a problem while in the process of casting a ballot. Assuming these individuals are not deterred and continue to successfully vote, they can react immediately to the problems they are encountering.

races. I use these reports of down-ballot participation to create a variable, ranging from zero to one, that indicates the proportion of races that the respondent was asked about that they also reported casting a vote. The distribution of this variable is shown in the appendix.

In addition to asking about down-ballot participation, the CCES asks respondents about their vote method (in-person or by mail) and their experiences voting, including the amount of time they waited to vote, if they encountered registration or voter ID problems, if they went to the wrong polling place, and an opportunity to describe other problems they faced. These open-ended descriptions included, among many other idiosyncratic types of problems, problems with the voting technology, address or name discrepancies in their voter registration, or problems with the vote-by-mail process. In 2016, respondents were also asked if they felt intimidated while voting.⁶⁰ Descriptive statistics for the responses to these questions in both the 2016 and 2018 CCES post-election waves are in Table 2, but generally problems while voting in recent elections are rare. In 2016, thirteen percent of in-person validated voters who responded to the CCES post-election wave reported encountering one or more problems while voting, most frequently a wait time over 30 minutes to vote.

According to the 2016 Election Administration and Voting Survey, approximately 82 percent of the 140 million voters in that election voted in person – either early or on Election Day.⁶¹ If even two percent of those voters encounter a problem while voting, as the CCES,

⁶⁰ I created dummy variables for each of these questions, with zero indicating that the respondent stated they did not encounter a problem while voting, and one indicating that the respondent stated they had the type of problem in question. As such, in-person voters who did not respond to the “did you encounter a problem voting” question that preceded the specific problem questions are excluded from the analysis, but this should not bias the estimates in either direction. There were 58 individuals who reported voting but skipped the problems questions, of which 41 of whom reported voting in person. A regression with a variable indicating the respondent skipped the questions about problems voting on demographic variables did not show any statistically significant relationship between skipping those questions and age, race/ethnicity, education level, political interest, or strong party identification further indicating that those who skipped those questions should not bias my results. The comparison I make in this paper, then, is between those who reported problems and those who reported they did not encounter a problem.

⁶¹ The EAVS report is available on the election Assistance Commission website <https://www.eac.gov/>.

Wisconsin administrative data, and the Survey on the Performance of American Elections indicate (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2017; Burden et al. 2016; Stewart III 2017), several million voters encountered these types of problems while voting in person in 2016.

Table 4.2: Percent of Respondents who Reported Problem While Voting

Type of Problem	2016	2018
Felt Intimidated	3.0% [2.65, 3.31]	n/a
Had a problem with voter registration	0.9% [.69, 1.07]	0.4% [.26, .48]
Waited longer than 30 minutes	9.3% [8.82, 9.85]	4.9% [4.5, 5.2]
Went to the wrong polling place	0.4% [.30, .55]	0.1% [.07, .22]
Experienced some other problem	1.0% [.76, 1.16]	0.9% [.72, 1.01]
Problem with voter ID	0.7% [.50, .83]	0.3% [.20, .38]

*Source: the 2016 and 2018 CCES Common Content. Respondents to the 2018 CCES were not asked if they felt intimidated while voting. Values include post-election wave validated voter survey weights, and the variables are limited to in-person validated voters according to Catalist (the voter file vendor). The bracketed values are the 95 percent confidence intervals.

4.6 Participation

Figure 4.1 shows the means and 95 percent confidence intervals of respondents’ self-reported likelihood of voting in the 2020 presidential, congressional, and state races.⁶² The variable shown ranges in value from zero to one at .25 increments, with zero indicating the respondent chose “not at all likely” and one “extremely likely.” This is an ordinal variable, thus the interval between categories is unknown and the results should be interpreted with caution. That said, there is no difference, according to t-tests of the difference between groups, in average response

⁶² See appendix for question wording.

value between individuals who read about biased election officials and those who read about widespread but non-nefarious problems on Election Day in terms of respondents' self-assessed likelihood of voting in the future presidential, congressional, or state races. It does not appear that the attribution of the Election Day problem matters for future turnout intention.

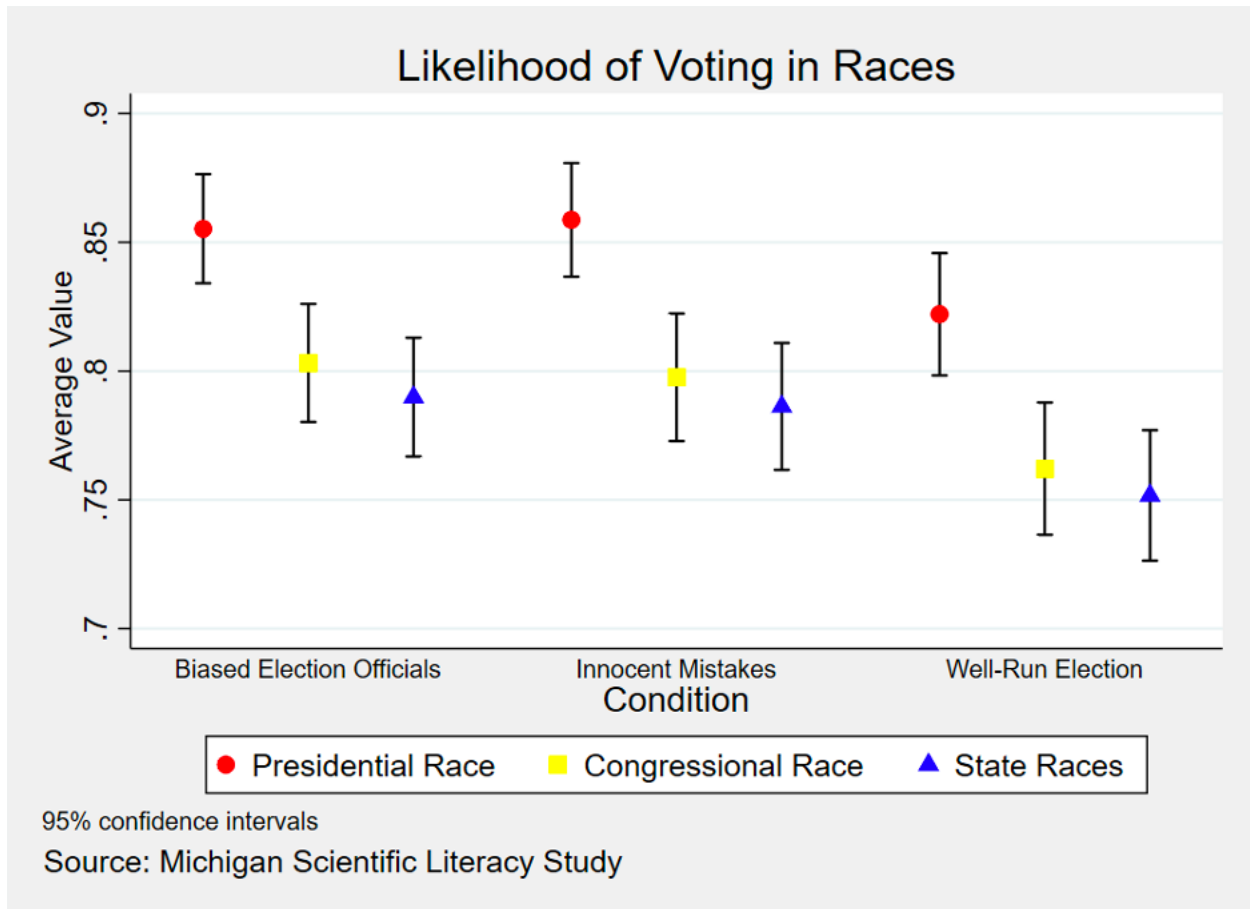
There are statistically significant differences (according to t-tests of the difference between the average values), however, between both of these conditions and the control condition of a well-run election.⁶³ With the exception of the difference between the innocent mistakes and control conditions in the likelihood of voting in state races, individuals who read about Election Day problems—regardless of the indicated source of those problems—were more likely to believe they would vote in the 2020 elections than those who read about a well-run election. The differences in the values of these variables, though, are substantively quite small despite being statistically significant—generally between .03 and .04, and those values are determined by the coding scheme described above.

This suggests that reading about Election Day problems, regardless of the source of those problems, has a slight mobilizing effect for respondents, even if the effect is temporary or purely expressive. As shown in Figure A4.1, what appears to be driving these results is not a uniform shift in responses (that is, a general slight shift towards being more likely to vote apparent in all categories of the variable) but rather respondents in the two treatment conditions being slightly more likely that they were “extremely likely” to vote and less often stating they were “not at all likely” to vote. Differences-in-means tests comparing the share of respondents who were extremely likely to vote showed no consistent differences between conditions, nor did tests

⁶³ Statistical significance was determined by a series of t-tests comparing the means of these variables between the two experimental conditions. The statistics from those difference-in-means tests are presented in the appendix.

comparing the share of respondents who reported being not at all likely to vote between conditions—it is the combination of the changes in those two categories driving the results.

Figure 4.1: Likelihood of Voting in the 2020 Elections by Experimental Condition



Thus, I find limited support for the first hypothesis—reading about biased election officials does appear to slightly mobilize respondents, but contrary to expectations so does reading about innocent mistakes. These results are consistent with the proposition that reading about barriers to voting, regardless of what the barrier is attributed to, seems to motivate survey respondents to express willingness to protect that right. It is also consistent with the possibility that increasing the cost of voting will induce some potential voters to become more invested in voting due to the

sunk cost fallacy. It is also important to note that these respondents may be drawing upon personal experiences, or pre-existing beliefs about the causes of Election Day problems when reacting to these prompts. I now turn to the possibility that those who read about Election Day problems are motivated to participate in other ways—does this slight pro-participatory effect appear when respondents are given the opportunity to state they’ll get involved in the election?

Figure 4.2: Non-Voting Participation by Experimental Condition

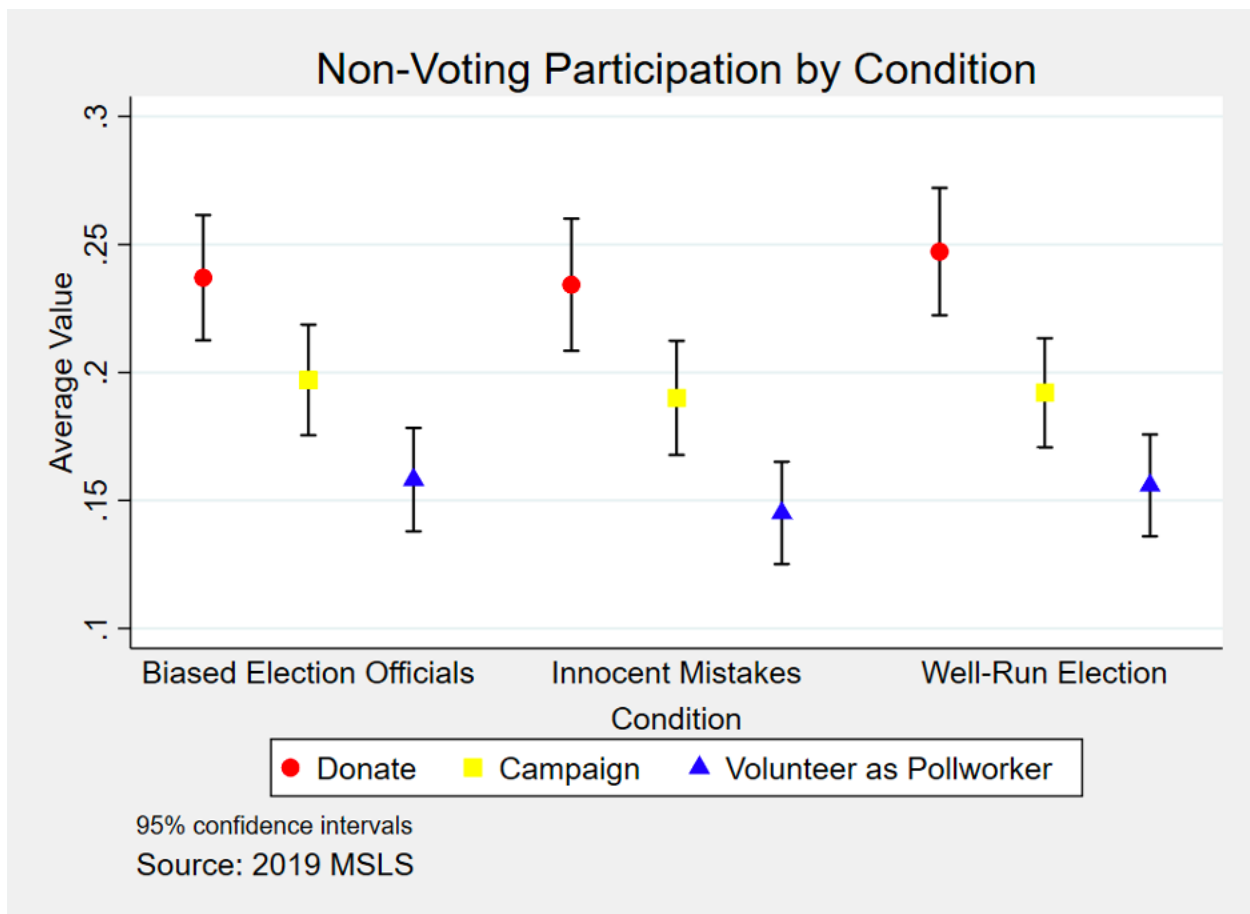


Figure 4.2 shows the lack of differences by experimental condition in willingness to donate to a party, campaign on behalf of a candidate, or to volunteer as a poll worker. Reading about election administration difficulties, whether those problems were due to intentional malfeasance

or to innocent mistakes, did not cause survey respondents to report any more or less willingness to donate, campaign, or volunteer as a poll worker. I find no support for the second hypothesis that intentional malfeasance would make respondents more likely to participate while innocent mistakes would make voters less likely to do so. This suggests that respondents who may view voting as a way to protect their threatened right to vote may not view other ways of participating the same way.

In sum, evidence from my survey experiment shows that reading about Election Day problems, regardless of the reason given for those problems, has a slight mobilizing effect for respondents in terms of voting, but not for other ways citizens can participate such as donating to a campaign or volunteering as a poll worker. Participating in future elections is only part of the story, though: voters encountering problems in real life as they vote can react then and there by casting a more complete ballot after they experience problems at the polling place. I now turn to an examination of survey data reporting those experiences.

4.7 Down-ballot Voting

The models specified in Table 4.3 focus on the relationship between Election Day problems and down-ballot participation among 2016 in-person voters using data from the 2016 CCES. The dependent variable in all models is the share of possible races in which a respondent reported voting (for example, if a voter reported participating in seven of eight possible races the value of this variable would be .875). Approximately 60 percent of in-person voters reported voting in all possible races, while approximately 14 percent reported voting in fewer than half of the possible races. All models shown in Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3 are OLS regressions, are limited to self-reported in-person voters and include robust standard errors due to heteroscedasticity. All models also include county-level fixed effects, as elections are frequently administered at the county

level and aspects of election administration that affect roll-off such as voting technology varies at the county level within states. These county-level effects also account for policies such as the presence of straight ticket voting that may or may not exist at the state level which also affect the amount of ballot roll-off.

Model 1 includes all types of problems voters could encounter (or, at least all the types of problems the CCES asked respondents about), while Models 2 through 7 include just one type of problem per model. Feeling intimidated at the polling place and waiting to vote are associated with participating in more down-ballot races in both the first model and the models that include individual problems. Figure 4.3 shows the coefficient plots from the variables of interest in the models presented in Table 4.3. The dots in the graph area of Figure 4.3 are coefficient estimates, bounded by 95 percent confidence intervals.

Table 4.3: Problems Voting and Down-ballot Participation in the 2016 CCES

	Full Model		Individual Models				
	Dependent Variable: Down-ballot Participation						
Voter ID Problem	0.0122 (0.0187)	0.0305 (0.0183)					
Registration Problem	0.0122 (0.0159)		0.0265 (0.0160)				
Other Problem	0.0032 (0.0151)			0.0071 (0.0151)			
Wrong Polling Place	0.0276 (0.0240)				0.0405 (0.0238)		
Felt Intimidated	0.0385 (0.0081)					0.0435 (0.0082)	
Wait Time to Vote	0.0048 (0.0015)						0.0054 (0.0015)
Age	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0009 (0.0001)	-0.0009 (0.0001)	-0.0009 (0.0001)	-0.0009 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)
White	-0.0283 (0.0037)	-0.0289 (0.0038)	-0.0289 (0.0038)	-0.0289 (0.0038)	-0.0289 (0.0038)	-0.0288 (0.0037)	-0.0282 (0.0037)
Education	-0.0046 (0.0011)	-0.0045 (0.0011)	-0.0045 (0.0011)	-0.0045 (0.0011)	-0.0045 (0.0011)	-0.0046 (0.0011)	-0.0046 (0.0011)
Political Interest	0.0034 (0.0019)	0.0036 (0.0019)	0.0036 (0.0019)	0.0036 (0.0019)	0.0036 (0.0019)	0.0034 (0.0019)	0.0034 (0.0019)
Strong Party ID	0.0621 (0.0029)	0.0625 (0.0029)	0.0625 (0.0029)	0.0626 (0.0029)	0.0625 (0.0029)	0.0623 (0.0029)	0.0626 (0.0029)
Constant	0.8620 (0.0101)	0.8758 (0.0094)	0.8757 (0.0094)	0.8762 (0.0094)	0.8759 (0.0094)	0.8735 (0.0094)	0.8641 (0.0101)
Observations	31,089	31,124	31,124	31,124	31,124	31,163	31,124
R-squared	0.0271	0.0258	0.0258	0.0257	0.0258	0.0266	0.0263
Number of Counties	2,353	2,353	2,353	2,353	2,353	2,353	2,353
RHO	.366	.366	.367	.367	.367	.367	.366

Robust standard errors in parentheses

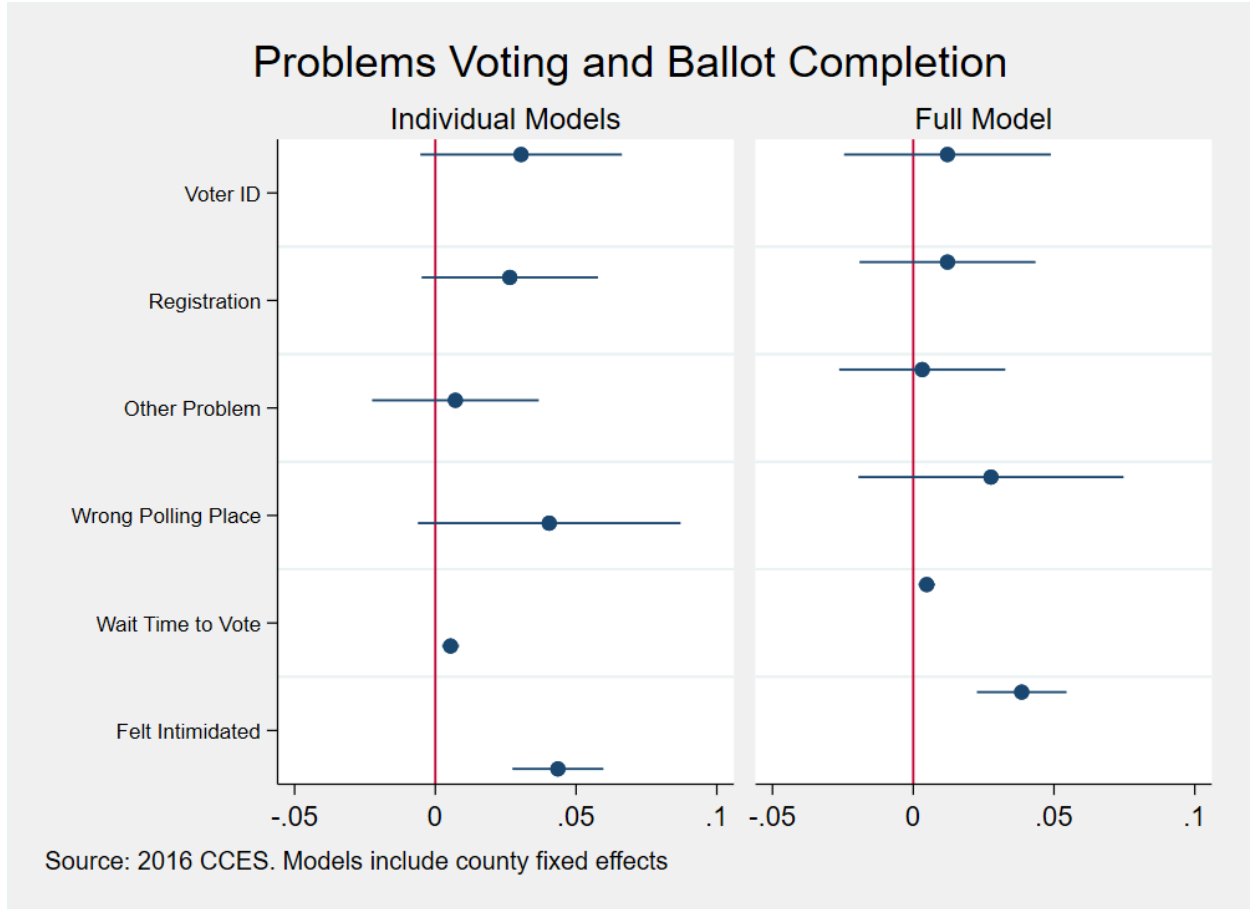
While the coefficients are small (generally on the order of an increase in ballot completion of .05 or less for the significant results), they indicate that *conditional on being able to vote* those who encounter problems while voting appear to cast more complete ballots, but not all problems motivate this response—waiting to vote and feeling intimidated while voting have a positive

relationship with ballot completion, but no other problem reported by the CCES has such a relationship. While some who encounter a long line may leave the line, those who remain in the line may be particularly determined to vote (Lamb 2021). Feeling intimidated while voting could clearly make a person feel as though their right to vote is threatened, thus prompting reactance and actions to protect that threatened right.

As the CCES vote choice measures are reliant on self-reported down-ballot voting behavior (and as there is no way to verify down-ballot participation beyond confirming the person turned out to vote and that the down-ballot races in question actually exist), these results are most appropriately interpreted as showing a correlation between recalling problems while voting in person and stated participation in down-ballot races.⁶⁴ It is also important to note the endogenous relationship between voting and encountering problems while voting (that is, only voters are exposed to problems while voting and only voters can vote down-ballot, and those who vote more often are more often exposed to problems) when generalizing from these results. Nevertheless, I find evidence in support of my third hypothesis: among voters, those who encounter problems while voting (and who persist to cast a ballot) appear to be motivated to maximize their right to vote by casting a more complete ballot compared to voters who did not encounter a problem.

⁶⁴ See appendix for an examination of the role expressive responding may play in these findings. In short, there is some evidence that validated voters tend to report voting in slightly fewer down-ballot races overall than do respondents whose voter turnout cannot be validated in general (.83 vs. .84 rates of ballot completion, which are statistically significantly different due to the large sample size). Perhaps this is not surprising, as the motivations for overreporting turnout are likely similar to the motivations for reporting voting in non-existent races or a complete ballot.

Figure 4.3: Problems Voting and Down-ballot Participation in the 2016 CCES



4.8 Discussion

I find evidence that survey respondents who read about Election Day problems are slightly more likely to express willingness to vote in future elections than are respondents who read about well-run elections, regardless of if the Election Day problems are attributed to malfeasance or to innocent mistakes. Survey respondents who read about Election Day problems, however, are no more or less likely to report a willingness to volunteer for a campaign, donate to a campaign, or volunteer as a poll worker than are individuals who read about well-run elections. This suggests that reading about Election Day problems motivates survey respondents to want to protect their

right to vote by voting—but respondents do not connect other forms of participating with protecting their right to vote.

Given that their self-professed intention to vote may be of limited value in predicting future turnout (Rogers and Aida 2014), the future turnout finding is most appropriately interpreted as survey participants expressively responding that they are more likely to vote. It does not necessarily mean that they actually are more likely to vote in the future. Further evidence that respondents will act to protect their right to vote is found in down-ballot participation: experiencing a problem while voting in person is associated with casting a more complete ballot and so *conditional on continuing to cast a ballot* there is a small pro-participatory effect of experiencing a problem while voting. Of course, this does not excuse these problems—no voter should have an excessive wait or feel intimidated while voting. As many as two percent of people leave the line before voting (some may eventually return and vote). The extent to which these potential voters would have completed their ballot had they remained in line is unknown, so it is possible that these results are due to change in the composition of the electorate instead of attitudinal change (Spencer and Markovits 2010; Stein et al. 2019).

Voters may attribute registration problems, problems with voter identification, or going to the wrong polling place to a lack of preparedness on their own part, to benign mistakes by election officials, or to nefarious actions by those election officials. For example, a potential voter being told that they lack the necessary ID to vote might be interpreted by that voter as either evidence that they were unprepared, or that election officials are unfairly targeting them, or making a clerical error. There is no plausibly benign reason for feeling intimidated at a polling place, however. In that case, voters may quite reasonably interpret that intimidation as a threat to

their right to vote, and may explain the distinction between feeling intimidated and other problems in my results.

4.9 Conclusion, Limitations, and Directions for Future Work

I have demonstrated that in some cases voters react to administrative problems at polling places by becoming slightly more likely to report a willingness to vote in the future, and to participate down-ballot in the election in which they experienced the problem. However, they are not more likely to report willingness to participate in the future in ways other than voting. This suggests that people will react to threats to their right to vote by acting to protect that right, and they view voting as the way to protect that right. I find no evidence in my survey experiment that the attribution of problems while voting matters for how respondents react to those problems.

There are several possible reasons that the attribution of problems did not matter in the survey experiment. First, a survey experiment is inherently unrealistic in most cases, and unable to simulate a real-world situation in which an individual faces hurdles to voting. Waiting for an hour to vote is substantially quite different than reading about waiting for an hour to vote, particularly as part of a survey that takes under an hour to complete. Similarly, indicating a willingness to vote in a future election is a low-cost answer for survey respondents (especially when there is no possibility of validating their voting behavior through voter files) and has a normatively “correct” answer which might override the treatment effects.⁶⁵ As Rogers and Aida note, asking about voter turnout intention prior to an election is of limited value when predicting who will actually vote, as many people claim they will vote who actually do not and vice versa—

⁶⁵ However, the fact that there were minor differences in turnout intention between the treatment conditions and control condition discount this possibility, as do the lack of differences in the non-voting participation measures. It is unclear if citizens view volunteering at a polling place as morally desirable as voting, but given the relatively few people who volunteer to help at polling places it is unlikely that survey respondents have well-formed or longstanding beliefs about that issue.

a phenomenon they characterize as “prospective participatory bias” (2014). There is no way to verify that these individuals who reported they were more likely to vote did so, and approximately 16 percent of respondents to a previous wave of the Michigan Scientific Literacy Study overreported their voter turnout in 2016 (Miller et al. 2020). This indicates that validating eventual turnout is a necessary step to evaluate if reading about Election Day problems actually makes respondents more likely to vote.

The findings in this chapter suggest the need for future examination of the differing responses to problems voters might encounter when casting a ballot. First, it is necessary to establish to what potential voters attribute the problems they encounter: how many voters view long lines as indicators of high turnout, and how many view long lines as an indicator of insufficient staff and voting machines? Descriptive work to establish voters’ beliefs about the sources of these problems would enrich the existing work on the frequency of these problems. More direct measurement of the mechanisms that may explain the patterns shown above is also necessary: direct measurement of anger, reactance, confidence in democracy, and the presence of the sunk cost fallacy in reaction to problems while voting will enhance future analyses of this topic.

More work on how voters respond in the moment to these Election Day problems and their attribution is also necessary—for example, do voters who experience problems voting hold local election officials accountable by voting against them when given the opportunity? Similarly, given the fact that anger and psychological reactance are generally short-term states, do voters who experience them in reaction to Election Day problems maintain the memory of those states for future elections and vote accordingly, or has the effect of feeling their right to vote is threatened faded from memory by the time of the next election? Further research could

directly address if, when their right to vote is threatened, potential voters' cost-benefit analysis of voting is altered; evidence in this paper and others suggest that this is the case, but that proposition is not directly tested. This would also speak to the possibility of the sunk-cost fallacy explaining some of my results.

Another area of future research related to this work is to follow up with other survey experiments, and to shift the blame for the problems away from election officials and to the voters. Both experimental treatments in this paper shared the fact that the problems were unambiguously the fault of local election officials. It is possible that voters will respond differently to Election Day problems if those problems are the fault of other voters, or if the voter themselves feels as though are responsible (forgetting their required ID at home, for example).

In addition, while official administrative data on Election Day problems is rare, merging that data with county or precinct-level election results would allow for a more in-depth exploration of the patterns I find (see among others Pettigrew 2021 and Cottrell, Herron, and Smith 2021). If ballot roll-off is lower in precincts documented problems on Election Day, it would support my findings that voters are indeed hoping to “get their money’s worth” when voting is more costly. Stein et al. (2019) note that at the county level there appears to be no relationship to the average length of time that it takes to fill out and cast a ballot and the overall rate of ballot completion, but the work presented here suggests that the time a voter spends waiting may make them more likely to cast a complete ballot. Administrative data is also a potential way to account for the endogeneity problem discussed with my regression results.

In addition, other work (Pettigrew 2021; Cottrell, Herron, and Smith 2021) has shown that waiting in line in one election slightly decreases the likelihood of turning out in a subsequent election. This stands in contrast to my findings of a slight pro-participatory effect in the same

election. It is possible that both are true, however. Immediately after experiencing a problem, the emotional reaction to an Election Day problem can affect voting behavior, but by a subsequent election, perhaps years in the future, the pro-participatory emotions will probably have faded. The memory of the increased cost to voting may persist.

A substantial limitation of my survey experiment is related to its external validity. In the post-2020 world, with former President Trump spreading the “Big Lie” about the 2020 election having been stolen, there have been numerous news stories about Trump loyalists becoming local election officials in response to that conspiracy theory. This suggests that political leaders making perceived election-related problems more salient can motivate people to react to those (in this case fictional) problems and that the scope of election problems that might motivate participation goes beyond what is addressed in this paper. Another limitation of this work is the ethics involved in making survey experiment treatments stronger—it is not ethical to induce less faith in democracy and democratic institutions to satisfy scholarly curiosity about what happens when people face problems while voting. While stronger treatments might generate stronger results, it is unethical to make survey respondents believe election officials act nefariously, in contrast to the reality of nearly all election officials acting with integrity and being the bedrock of democracy.

Another limitation of this work is the slight differences in demographics among the experimental conditions. The control condition is slightly less educated and more male, on average, than the two treatment conditions, and so this group may be less likely to participate in politics in general. To test this possibility, I ran regression models with the likelihood of voting in the future as the dependent variable, and a simple dummy variable indicating treatment/control status as the independent variable of interest. As expected given the results shown above, a

bivariate regression shows a statistically significant positive relationship between being in the treatment group and the likelihood of voting in the future; but depending on which demographic controls are subsequently included in multivariate models, the statistical significance of that relationship disappears. This illustrates the importance of replicating and improving the survey experiment in order to better understand the extent of real-time reactions to Election Day problems.

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4.11 Appendix

Table 4.A1: Survey Experiment Attention Checks

	N Assigned	% Passed Attention Check	N Successfully Treated
Biased Officials	743	90.7	674
Innocent Mistakes	689	90.3	622
Well Run Election	731	90.6	662

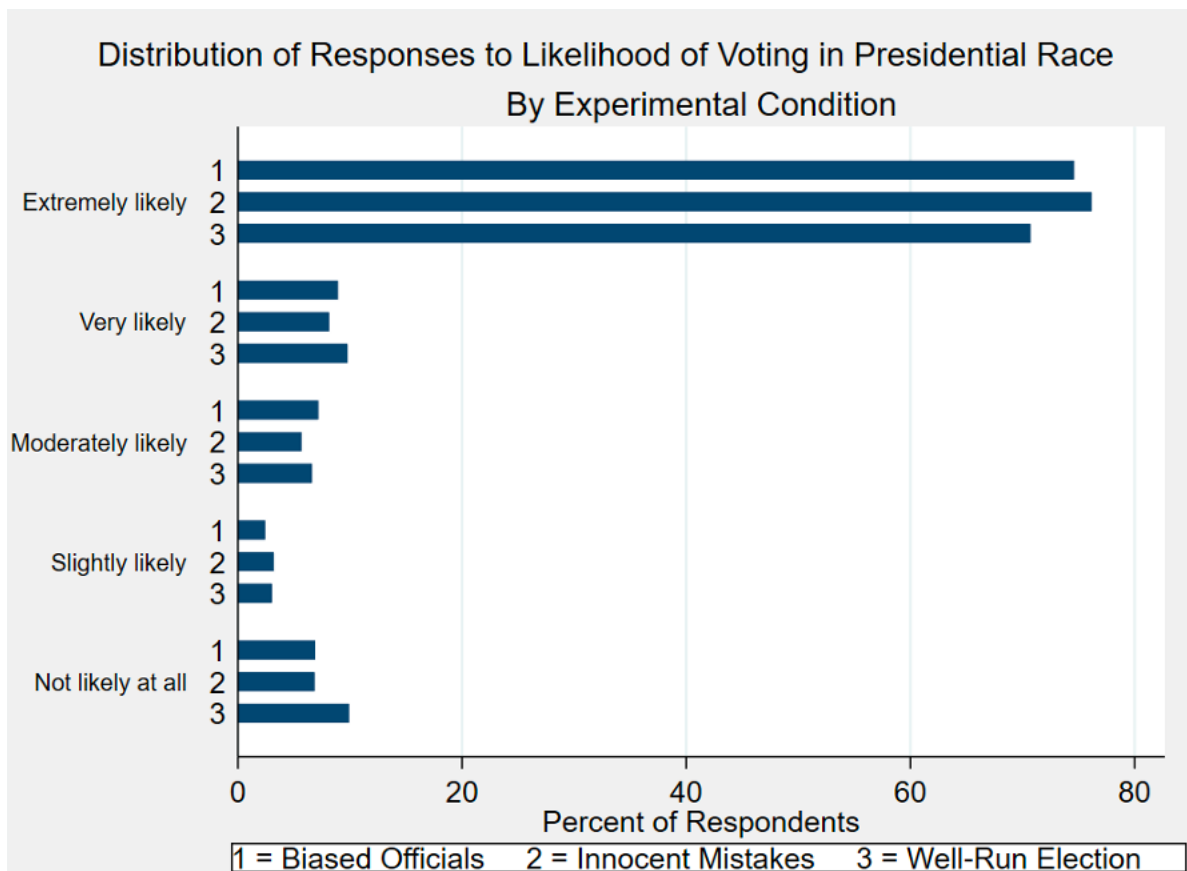
Table 4.A1 shows the results of the attention check in the NORC data by experimental condition. Respondents in each condition, including the control condition, passed the attention check at satisfactory rates. Table 4.A2 shows the mean values that are presented graphically in Figure 1 (the effect of reading about election problems on the likelihood of voting), as well as the 95 percent confidence intervals around those means. These are the intention to treat estimators—that is, they include all respondents assigned to each condition, and not just those who passed the attention check. The mean values of the biased officials and innocent mistakes treatment conditions are generally outside the confidence intervals of the estimates for the control condition, but as noted in the main text the differences in values are small.

Table 4.A2: Survey Experiment Results: Likelihood of Voting in 2020 Elections

	Biased Officials	Innocent Mistakes	Control
Presidential Race [95% CI]	.85 [.83, .88]	.86 [.84, .88]	.82 [.80, .84]
Congressional Race [95% CI]	.80 [.78, .83]	.80 [.77, .82]	.76 [.74, .79]
State Vote [95% CI]	.79 [.77, .81]	.79 [.76, .81]	.75 [.73, .78]

The difference between the treatment and control conditions is due to the combination of respondents in the treatment conditions more often stating that they are “extremely likely” to vote and less often stating they are “not at all likely” to vote. This is shown graphically in Figure 4.A1, as respondents in the control condition chose “extremely likely” and “not at all likely” slightly less and more often, respectively, than did respondents in the treatment conditions.

Figure 4.A1: Response Patterns in Likelihood of Voting by Condition



Although I have no a priori expectations that there would be differences in response patterns by party identification—in theory, any voter regardless of partisanship would react to reading about problems on Election Day—the possibility that exists that partisans and those who choose to not identify with a party also differ in institutional trust, trust in democracy, and political

engagement and thus may react differently to the survey prompt. Figure 4.A2 shows the response patterns to the same question as Figure 4.A1—how likely respondents believed they were to vote in the 2020 presidential election—broken down by party and by experimental condition. While Democrats and Republicans responded roughly similarly to the survey prompt in terms of their self-assessed likelihood of voting for president in 2020, those who did not designate themselves as members of those two parties (which includes those who said they were independent, as well as those who selected “other” or that they did not know) were less likely to say that they would vote, as would be expected.

Figure 4.A2: Likelihood of Voting in Presidential Race by Party and Condition

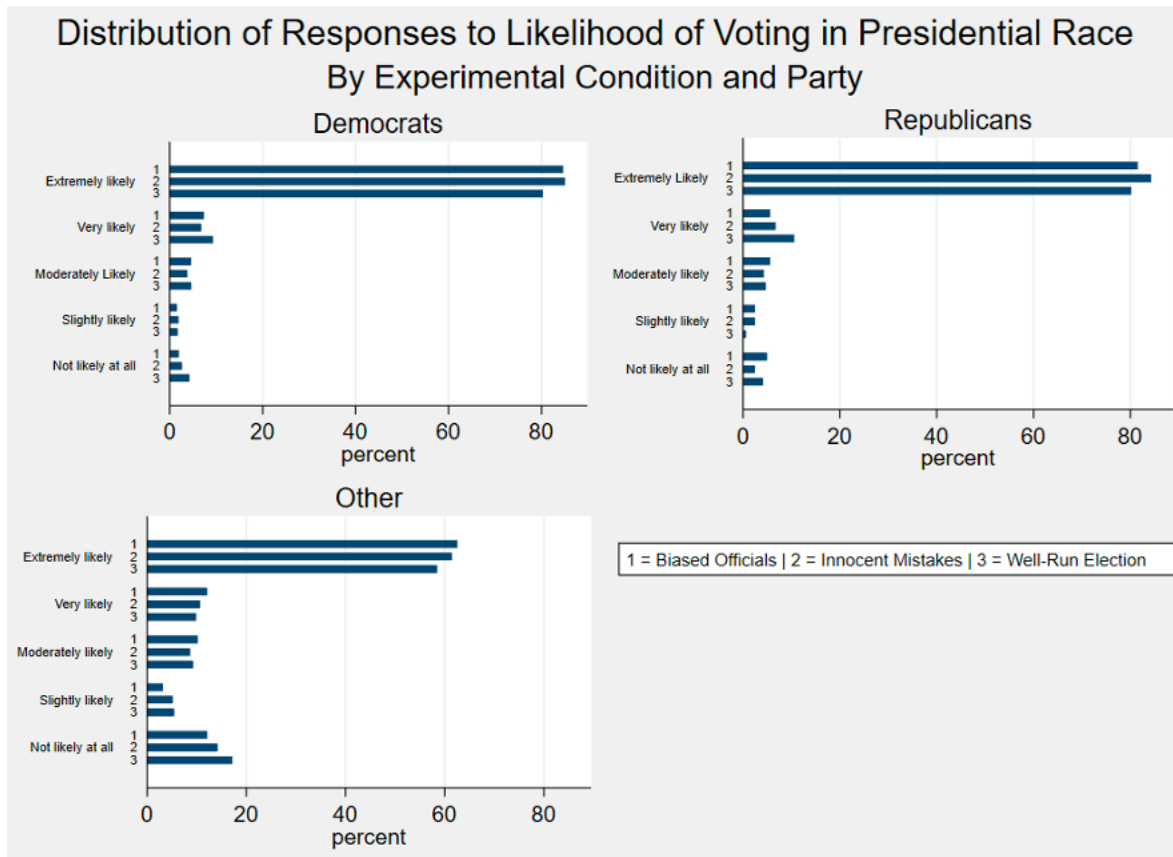
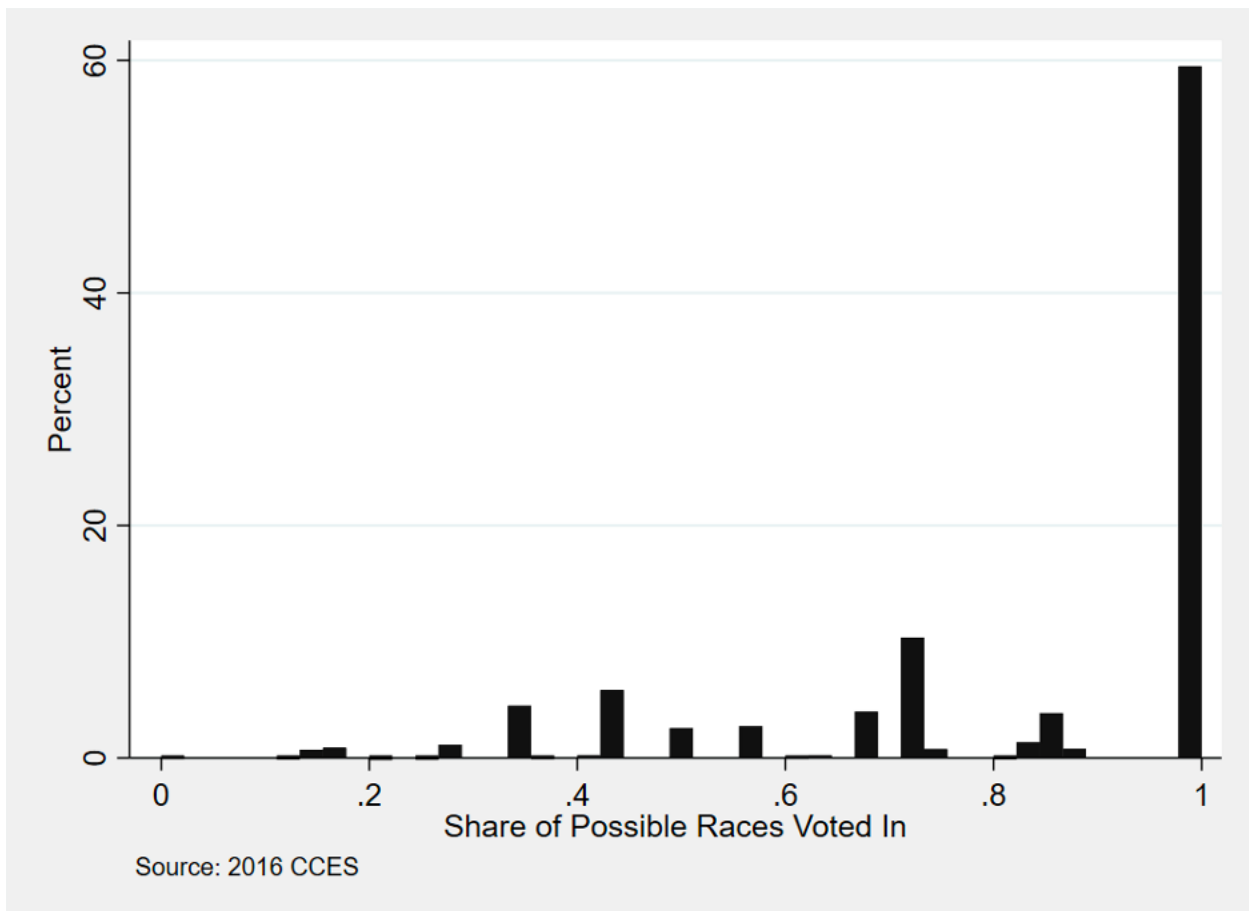


Figure 4.A3 shows the distribution of the proportion of all possible races that respondents to the 2016 CCES reported casting a vote in. Nearly 60 percent of respondents reported voting in all possible races, as shown by the rightmost bar in the distribution, but there is some variation in the data. Between the pattern of respondents stating that they voted in non-existent races and the fact that many voters roll-off the ballot in down-ballot races, this distribution partially reflects expressive responding of the respondents indicating their participation, and not their actual participation with complete accuracy.

Figure 4.A3: Proportion of Possible Races in Which Respondent Reported Voting



The 2012, 2014, and 2018 CCES surveys, in addition to the 2016 CCES shown in the main text, asked respondents about their vote choice down-ballot; for president, Senate, House of

Representatives, Governor, Treasurer (in 2018 only), Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Senate, and State House. Respondents could state they voted for the Democratic candidate, the Republican candidate, a third party candidate, another candidate, or that they did not vote in that race. For some down-ballot elections (AG, SOS, State Senate, and State House) respondents could state that there was no election for that office. In the case of the elections for Senate, Governor, and statewide offices (in 2018) respondents were not asked about their vote choice in those races if they did not exist in reality—but respondents were always asked about their vote choices in state legislative races. I created a variable to describe the proportion of the total possible races that respondents reported voting in. In 2016, the mean value of this variable was .83 and in 2018 it was .95, indicating that many survey respondents report voting in all the available down-ballot races, contrary to the roll-off reflected in actual election results.⁶⁶

Table 4.A3 shows models regression ballot completion in 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 on problems voting. These models include in-person voters only, as well as county-level fixed effects and robust standard errors. Waiting to vote is positively correlated with down-ballot participation in 2014 and 2016, while voter ID problems and going to the wrong polling place were associated with increased ballot completion in 2012 and 2014, respectively. Voter registration problems appeared to reduce roll-off in 2018. In short, experiencing a problem while voting is associated with down-ballot participation, but the specifics of what type of problem is associated with down-ballot participation changes from year to year. But it must be stressed

⁶⁶ The difference between values in 2016 and 2018 is likely due to differences in how respondents were fed questions about down-ballot races in the two surveys. In 2016, respondents saw more races they could not have voted in due to those races not existing (specifically, statewide state-level races) compared to 2018, when there was more geographic specificity in accounting for which races existed in respondents' states, and thus which races respondents were asked about.

again that these are the results only for those who reported successfully casting a ballot and does not account for those who were turned away from voting due to these or other problems.

Table 4.A3: Problems Voting and Down-ballot Participation Over Time

VARIABLES	Dependent Variable: Down-ballot Participation			
	2012	2014	2016	2018
Registration Problem	-0.0205 (0.0187)	0.0035 (0.0110)	0.0066 (0.0159)	0.0165 (0.0082)
Voter ID Problem	0.0442 (0.0201)	-0.0061 (0.0134)	0.0136 (0.0186)	-0.0172 (0.0144)
Wrong Polling Place	0.0279 (0.0251)	0.0408 (0.0147)	0.0340 (0.0223)	-0.0144 (0.0170)
Other Problem			-0.0006 (0.0151)	0.0010 (0.0075)
Wait Time to Vote	0.0023 (0.0014)	0.0113 (0.0019)	0.0042 (0.0015)	0.0017 (0.0010)
Felt Intimidated			0.0384 (0.0082)	
White	-0.0211 (0.0043)	-0.0126 (0.0039)	-0.0279 (0.0037)	-0.0096 (0.0025)
Age	0.0000 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0007 (0.0001)	-0.0002 (0.0001)
Education	-0.0042 (0.0010)	-0.0017 (0.0010)	-0.0038 (0.0011)	-0.0032 (0.0007)
Strong Party ID	0.0545 (0.0027)	0.0422 (0.0025)	0.0639 (0.0029)	0.0291 (0.0016)
Constant	0.8348 (0.0085)	0.8914 (0.0081)	0.8673 (0.0085)	0.9635 (0.0054)
Observations	29,962	26,116	31,447	31,009
R-squared	0.0178	0.0174	0.0272	0.0150
Number of Counties	2,389	2,240	2,358	2,330
RHO	.380	.425	.364	.382

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Table 4.A4 has identical model specifications as Table 4.3 in the main text but does not include county-level fixed effects or robust standard errors. These models are presented as a robustness check, as county-level fixed effects control for important differences in election administration that might affect roll-off and the types of problems that voters encounter. Robust standard errors are also important due to the heteroscedasticity indicated in the data. Removing these two model specifications does not dramatically change my results—feeling intimidated while voting and waiting to vote are both still associated with increased down-ballot participation. Figure 4.A4 shows the results from these models graphically.

Table 4.A4: Down-Ballot Participation in 2016 without County Fixed Effects or Robust Standard Errors

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Dependent Variable: Down-ballot Participation						
Voter ID Problem	-0.0042 (0.0166)	0.0210 (0.0160)					
Registration Problem	0.0527 (0.0145)		0.0624 (0.0141)				
Other Problem	0.0274 (0.0137)			0.0328 (0.0137)			
Wrong Polling Place	0.0277 (0.0205)				0.0457 (0.0203)		
Felt Intimidated	0.0208 (0.0082)					0.0312 (0.0078)	
Wait Time	0.0074 (0.0013)						0.0081 (0.0013)
Age	-0.0007 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)
White	-0.0113 (0.0031)	-0.0136 (0.0031)	-0.0132 (0.0031)	-0.0135 (0.0031)	-0.0135 (0.0031)	-0.0133 (0.0031)	-0.0118 (0.0031)
Education	-0.0075 (0.0009)	-0.0074 (0.0009)	-0.0074 (0.0009)	-0.0074 (0.0009)	-0.0074 (0.0009)	-0.0075 (0.0009)	-0.0076 (0.0009)
Political Interest	-0.0033 (0.0018)	-0.0033 (0.0018)	-0.0034 (0.0018)	-0.0032 (0.0018)	-0.0033 (0.0018)	-0.0034 (0.0018)	-0.0035 (0.0018)
Strong Party ID	0.0569 (0.0027)	0.0576 (0.0027)	0.0576 (0.0027)	0.0577 (0.0027)	0.0575 (0.0027)	0.0574 (0.0027)	0.0574 (0.0027)
Constant	0.8804 (0.0078)	0.9027 (0.0071)	0.9012 (0.0071)	0.9021 (0.0071)	0.9025 (0.0071)	0.9008 (0.0071)	0.8841 (0.0077)
Observations	31,111	31,146	31,146	31,146	31,146	31,185	31,146
R-squared	0.0243	0.0221	0.0227	0.0223	0.0222	0.0228	0.0235

Standard errors in parentheses

Figure 4.A4: Down-Ballot Participation in 2016 without County Fixed Effects or Robust Standard Errors

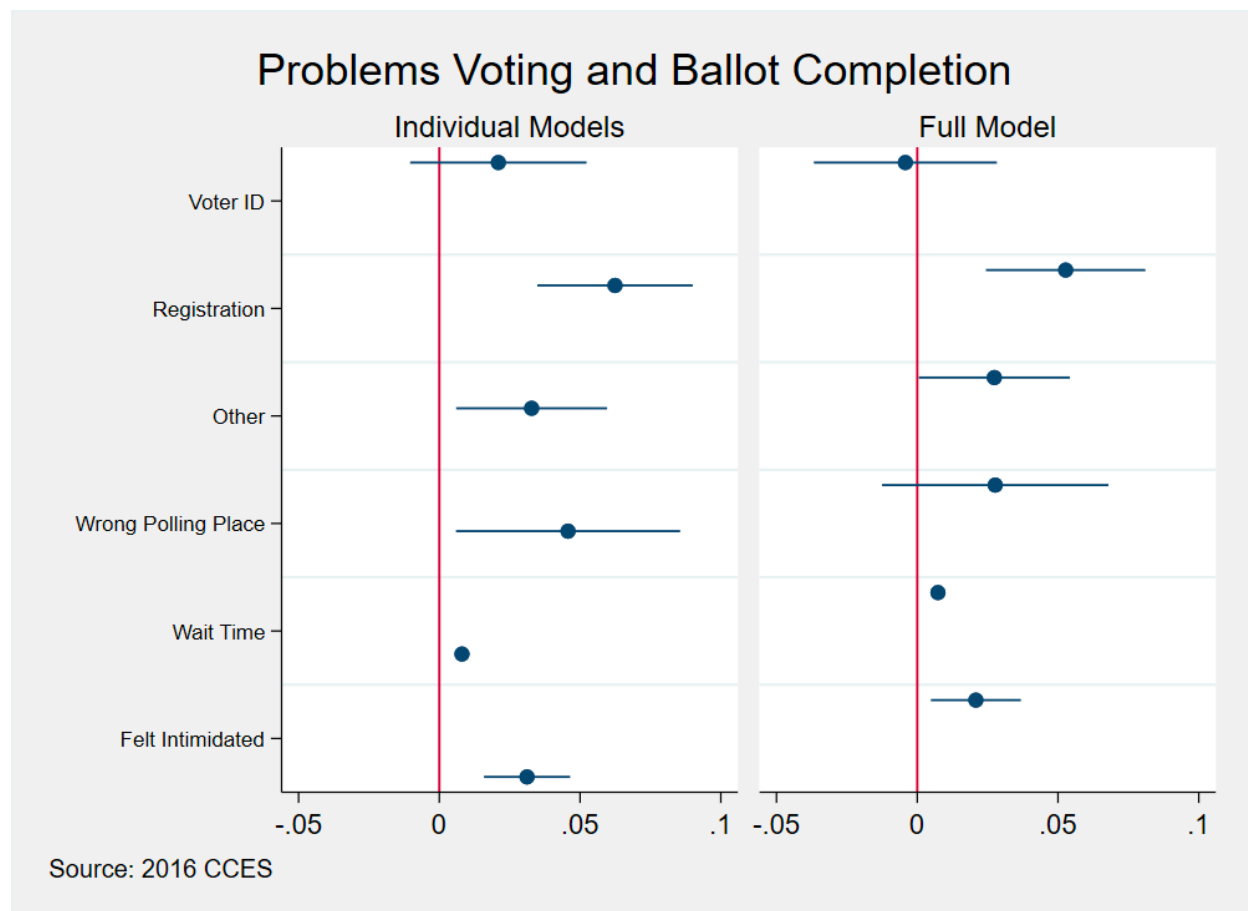


Table 4.A5 shows the results of limiting my analysis of the 2016 CCES to in-person validated voters. Vote validation data is provided by Catalist, LLC a voter file vendor that merges personal information provided by survey respondents with vote history from state voter files and thus can confirm or disconfirm a survey respondent’s self-reported turnout, but not their vote choices. As discussed in the main text, much of the down-ballot participation reported by respondents appears to be expressive responding. It is prudent to analyze the results for respondents whose voter turnout, if not their down-ballot participation, can be confirmed. These models continue to include the county-level fixed effects, survey weights, and robust standard errors. Among

validated voters, waiting to vote is not associated with casting a more complete ballot, but feeling intimidated while voting continues to be so. Thus, the slight pro-participatory effect of feeling intimidated while voting is robust to multiple model specifications and the strictest possible subsample of voters.

Table 4.A6 shows the models specified in the main text in Table 4.3, but with an additional control variable ranging from zero to four, describing the presence of the Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Senate, and State House elections in the respondents' state. Due to collinearity, the county fixed effects were dropped from the model. Reporting feeling intimidated continues to be associated with casting a more complete ballot. However, some of this correlation may be due to individuals whose voter turnout in 2016 could not be confirmed by Catalist. Figure 4.A5 shows the marginal effects of the interaction between reporting feeling intimidated and the respondents' turnout being validated by Catalist (essentially, Model 6 from Tables 4.3 and 4.A6, with an added interaction term). The difference in the predicted value of ballot completion between validated voters who did and did not report feeling intimidated is not statistically significant. However, among people who reported voting whose turnout was not validated, those who stated they felt intimidated while casting their ballot did cast more complete ballots as shown by the left side of Figure 4.A5. This suggests that some of the "effect" of feeling intimidated on down-ballot participation may be due to expressive responding. Still, mechanism driving the fact that those who report feeling intimidated while voting also generally report voting in more races down-ballot requires further investigation.

Table 4.A5: Problems Voting and Down-ballot Participation Among Validated Voters

VARIABLES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Dependent Variable: Down-ballot Participation						
Voter ID Problem	-0.0351 (0.0305)	-0.0212 (0.0294)					
Registration Problem	0.0093 (0.0261)		0.0136 (0.0262)				
Other Problem	0.0209 (0.0158)			0.0223 (0.0158)			
Wrong Polling Place	0.0373 (0.0348)				0.0400 (0.0343)		
Felt Intimidated	0.0326 (0.0116)					0.0327 (0.0117)	
Wait Time	0.0015 (0.0016)						0.0017 (0.0016)
Age	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)	-0.0005 (0.0001)
White	-0.0335 (0.0037)	-0.0338 (0.0037)	-0.0338 (0.0037)	-0.0338 (0.0037)	-0.0338 (0.0037)	-0.0333 (0.0037)	-0.0333 (0.0037)
Education	-0.0063 (0.0013)	-0.0063 (0.0013)	-0.0063 (0.0013)	-0.0063 (0.0013)	-0.0063 (0.0013)	-0.0063 (0.0013)	-0.0063 (0.0013)
Political Interest	-0.0003 (0.0024)	-0.0003 (0.0024)	-0.0003 (0.0024)	-0.0003 (0.0024)	-0.0003 (0.0024)	-0.0006 (0.0024)	-0.0006 (0.0024)
Strong Party ID	0.0531 (0.0032)	0.0532 (0.0032)	0.0532 (0.0032)	0.0532 (0.0032)	0.0533 (0.0032)	0.0532 (0.0032)	0.0533 (0.0032)
Constant	0.8811 (0.0115)	0.8861 (0.0108)	0.8857 (0.0108)	0.8853 (0.0108)	0.8856 (0.0108)	0.8848 (0.0109)	0.8826 (0.0115)
Observations	23,017	23,035	23,035	23,035	23,035	23,062	23,043
R-squared	0.0219	0.0213	0.0213	0.0214	0.0214	0.0216	0.0213
Number of Counties	2,203	2,204	2,204	2,204	2,204	2,204	2,203
RHO	.393	.393	.392	.392	.392	.392	.392

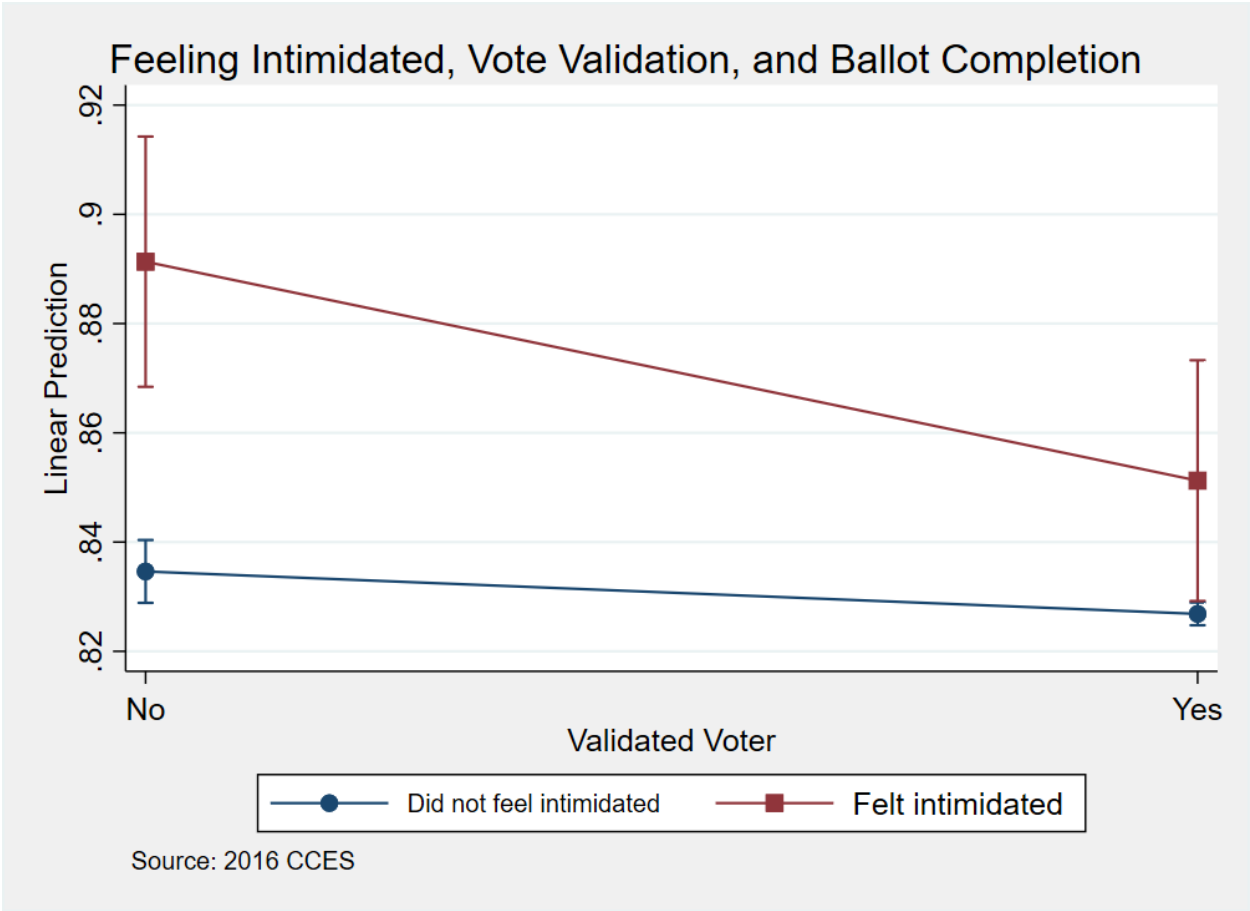
Robust standard errors in parentheses

Table 4.A6: Down-Ballot Participation, Controlling for Number of Races on Ballot

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Dependent Variable: Down-ballot Participation						
Voter ID Problem	0.0296 (0.0179)	0.0488 (0.0172)					
Registration Problem	0.0104 (0.0161)		0.0277 (0.0157)				
Other Problem	0.0060 (0.0134)			0.0114 (0.0134)			
Wrong Polling Place	0.0136 (0.0233)				0.0305 (0.0231)		
Felt Intimidated	0.0401 (0.0079)					0.0473 (0.0077)	
Wait Time	0.0070 (0.0013)						0.0076 (0.0013)
Age	-0.0007 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)	-0.0008 (0.0001)
White	-0.0336 (0.0032)	-0.0354 (0.0032)	-0.0353 (0.0032)	-0.0354 (0.0032)	-0.0354 (0.0032)	-0.0350 (0.0032)	-0.0338 (0.0032)
Education	-0.0059 (0.0009)	-0.0057 (0.0009)	-0.0057 (0.0009)	-0.0057 (0.0009)	-0.0057 (0.0009)	-0.0057 (0.0009)	-0.0059 (0.0009)
Political Interest	0.0026 (0.0018)	0.0029 (0.0018)	0.0029 (0.0018)	0.0029 (0.0018)	0.0029 (0.0018)	0.0027 (0.0018)	0.0026 (0.0018)
Strong Party ID	0.0624 (0.0026)	0.0631 (0.0026)	0.0631 (0.0026)	0.0632 (0.0026)	0.0632 (0.0026)	0.0629 (0.0026)	0.0630 (0.0026)
Number of Real Races	0.0667 (0.0014)	0.0669 (0.0014)	0.0668 (0.0014)	0.0669 (0.0014)	0.0669 (0.0014)	0.0668 (0.0014)	0.0666 (0.0014)
Constant	0.7340 (0.0087)	0.7530 (0.0083)	0.7531 (0.0083)	0.7535 (0.0083)	0.7535 (0.0083)	0.7508 (0.0083)	0.7366 (0.0087)
Observations	31,111	31,146	31,146	31,146	31,146	31,185	31,146
R-squared	0.1000	0.0982	0.0981	0.0980	0.0981	0.0988	0.0991

Robust standard errors in parentheses

Figure 4.A5: Feeling Intimidated While Voting and Vote Validation



4.11.1 Survey Experiment Question Wording and Survey Instrument

Springfield Post-Gazette

Post-Gazette de Springfield

Accusations of Bias Plague Election Officials

Acusaciones de prejuicios afectan a los funcionarios electorales

The local citywide election in Springfield last week left officials responding to reports of unprofessional conduct by their office. While the majority of voters were able to cast a ballot without incident, voters in some neighborhoods faced long lines at their polling places- some reportedly over two hours. The Post-Gazette received reports from voters in these neighborhoods that the workers at the polling places were unhelpful, and in some cases even hostile to those trying to vote.

Tras la elección local en toda la ciudad en Springfield la semana pasada los funcionarios debieron responder a las denuncias de conducta no profesional de su oficina. Si bien la mayoría de los votantes pudieron votar sin incidentes, los votantes de algunos vecindarios enfrentaron largas filas en sus lugares de votación - algunos de los cuales supuestamente duraron más de dos horas. El Post-Gazette recibió denuncias de los votantes de estos vecindarios de que los

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=1]

[SP]

Q38A.

What was the central topic of the article you just [CAWI: read; CATI: heard]?

¿Cuál era el tema central del artículo que acaba de [CAWI: leer; CATI: escuchar]?

- An article about a rich local family
 - An article about local election official bias
 - An article about the mayor of a small town
 - An article about national politics

 - Un artículo sobre una rica familia local
 - Un artículo sobre el sesgo oficial de las elecciones locales
 - Un artículo sobre el alcalde de una pequeña ciudad
 - Un artículo sobre política nacional
-

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=1]

[LARGE TEXTBOX; PROMPT]

Q38A_1.

[CAWI] In one or two sentences, what do you think or feel about these Election Day experiences?

[CAWI] En una o dos frases, ¿qué piensa o siente acerca de estas experiencias del día de las elecciones?

[SPACE]

Please enter your reaction in the box below:

Ingrese su reacción en el casillero a continuación:

[CATI] In one or two sentences, what do you think or feel about these Election Day experiences?

[CATI] En una o dos frases, ¿qué piensa o siente acerca de estas experiencias del día de las elecciones?

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=2]

[DISPLAY_Q38B]

[CAWI] Please read the following newspaper story and respond to the questions at the end of the story.

[CATI] I am now going to read you a short article.

[CAWI] Lea la siguiente historia del periódico y responda las preguntas al final de la historia.

[CATI] Ahora le voy a leer un breve artículo.

Springfield Post-Gazette

Post-Gazette de Springfield

Accusations of Mistakes Plague Election Officials

Acusaciones de errores afectan a los funcionarios electorales

The local citywide election in Springfield last week left officials responding to reports that their staff members were unprepared for Election Day. While the majority of voters were able to cast a ballot without incident, some voters faced malfunctioning voting machines and long lines at their polling places—some reportedly over two hours. The Post-Gazette received reports from some voters that the workers in the polling places did not seem adequately prepared for Election Day.

Tras la elección local en toda la ciudad en Springfield la semana pasada los funcionarios debieron responder a denuncias de que los miembros de su personal no estaban preparados para el día de las elecciones. Si bien la mayoría de los

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=2]

[SP]

Q38B.

What was the central topic of the article you just [CAWI: read; CATI: heard]?

¿Cuál era el tema central del artículo que acaba de [CAWI: leer; CATI: escuchar]?

- An article about a rich local family
 - An article about local election official mistakes
 - An article about the mayor of a small town
 - An article about national politics

 - Un artículo sobre una rica familia local
 - Un artículo sobre los errores de las elecciones locales
 - Un artículo sobre el alcalde de una pequeña ciudad
 - Un artículo sobre política nacional
-

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=2]

[LARGE TEXTBOX; PROMPT]

Q38B_1.

[CAWI] In one or two sentences, what do you think or feel about these Election Day experiences?

[CAWI] En una o dos frases, ¿qué piensa o siente acerca de estas experiencias del día de las elecciones?

[SPACE]

Please enter your reaction in the box below:

Ingrese su reacción en el casillero a continuación:

[CATI] In one or two sentences, what do you think or feel about these Election Day experiences?

[CATI] En una o dos frases, ¿qué piensa o siente acerca de estas experiencias del día de las elecciones?

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=3]

[DISPLAY_Q38C]

[CAWI] Please read the following newspaper story and respond to the questions at the end of the story.

[CATI] I am now going to read you a short article.

Springfield Post-Gazette

Post-Gazette de Springfield

Election Day Runs Smoothly

El Día de las Elecciones se desarrolla sin inconvenientes

The local citywide election in Springfield last week went smoothly, according to local officials and outside experts. The vast majority of voters were able to vote without incident or wait, although the Post-Gazette received a few reports of long lines. Experts consulted for this article praised the professionalism of the local election officials, noting that the isolated long waits to vote were probably due to many people voting during their lunch hour.

[CAWI] Lea la siguiente historia del periódico y responda las preguntas al final de la historia.

[CATI] Ahora le voy a leer un breve artículo.

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=3]

[SP]

Q38C.

What was the central topic of the article you just [CAWI: read; CATI: heard]?

¿Cuál era el tema central del artículo que acaba de [CAWI: leer; CATI: escuchar]?

- An article about a rich local family
- An article about a local election that ran smoothly
- An article about the mayor of a small town
- An article about national politics

- Un artículo sobre una rica familia local
- Un artículo sobre una elección local que transcurrió sin problemas
- Un artículo sobre el alcalde de una pequeña ciudad
- Un artículo sobre política nacional

[SHOW IF DOV_Q38=3]

[LARGE TEXTBOX; PROMPT]

Q38C_1.

[CAWI] In one or two sentences, what do you think or feel about these Election Day experiences?

[CAWI] En una o dos frases, ¿qué piensa o siente acerca de estas experiencias del día de las elecciones?

[SPACE]

Please enter your reaction in the box below:

Ingrese su reacción en el casillero a continuación:

[CATI] In one or two sentences, what do you think or feel about these Election Day experiences?

[CATI] En una o dos frases, ¿qué piensa o siente acerca de estas experiencias del día de las elecciones?

[GRID; SP] [DO NOT SHOW RESPONSE VALUES, ONLY LABELS]

Q39.

In the 2020 election, how likely do you think you are to:

En la elección de 2020, ¿qué tan probable usted cree que va a:

		Extremely likely	Very likely	Moderately likely	Slightly likely	Not likely at all
		1	2	3	4	5
Q39a	Vote in the presidential race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39b	Vote in the federal Senate or House race	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39c	Vote in state and local races	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39d	Donate money to a candidate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39e	Campaign on behalf of a candidate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39f	Volunteer to work at a polling place on Election Day	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

		Extremadamente probable	Muy probable	Moderadamente probable	Poco probable	Nada probable
		1	2	3	4	5
Q39a	Votar en las elecciones para presidente	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39b	Votar en las elecciones para senadores federales o miembros de la cámara	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39c	Votar en las elecciones estatales y locales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39d	Donar dinero a un candidato	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39e	Hacer campaña en nombre de un candidato	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Q39f	Trabajar como voluntario en un lugar de votación el día de las elecciones	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this three-paper dissertation, I have studied how people respond when two mechanisms and institutions of democracy—political parties and elections—do not function optimally. In the first two papers, I used nationwide precinct-level election results from 2016, election results from 2012-2018 in California and Washington, nationally representative survey data, and an original survey experiment to illustrate that there is a down-ballot penalty when a party does not contest a congressional election. I argue that a potential mechanism for this down-ballot penalty is protest voting, as evidenced by the open-ended reactions to reading about uncontested races. In the fourth chapter, I used nationally representative survey data and another original survey experiment to show how voters respond when they encounter problems at the polling place, and that voters appear to act to protect their right to vote when it is threatened. The reason the problem occurred does not appear to matter for respondents' reactions. When respondents report feeling intimidated while voting, they more often report voting in down-ballot races.

American democracy is threatened by forces actively trying to erode it for their own political gain and by decreasing faith in governmental institutions. Some of the governmental institutions that are (perhaps justifiably) losing the faith of the public are anti-democratic, such as the Supreme Court, but other institutions such as free and fair elections are also threatened. It is important, in the context of these threats to the democratic system, to better understand the relationship between the public and democratic institutions. It is to consider when those

institutions do not function optimally such as in an uncontested election where the votes definitionally do not matter for the outcome.

5.1 Directions for Future Work

5.1.1 Electoral Penalty for Uncontested Races

There are several important directions for future work to follow up the research presented in this dissertation. First, it is necessary to find out if the electoral penalty shown in the first chapter exists in years outside of 2016. It is possible that the heightened amount of polarization and negative affect in that campaign made voters more sensitive to being put in the position of not supporting their party, and thus the down-ballot penalty may not exist in a different political environment. This should be investigated in both presidential and midterm years. In the 2018 and 2020 elections uncontested races at the congressional level have been relatively rarer than in other elections, but in a midterm election a congressional race could be the highest-level race on the ballot for voters. Subsequently the effect of a party leaving a candidate off the ballot in that race may be larger. Recent redistricting reform at the state level, including in Michigan, may mean that there are more battleground state legislative districts, so even minor changes in vote totals, such as the ones I described in Chapter 2, could be magnified in importance. Combined between the two years, Democrats left 60 congressional districts without a Democratic candidate in the 2010 and 2014 elections, which might have contributed to their losses in state legislative elections in those years.

Merging precinct-level turnout data with precinct-level vote totals would also make it easier to disambiguate the effects of differential voter turnout due to uncontested races. Examining if this down-ballot penalty exists for co-partisan candidates in other offices (such as gubernatorial or other statewide candidates) would also contribute to the evidence for or against

this electoral penalty. An inherent difficulty in research that uses precinct-level election data is merging precincts over time, due to changes in local population and precinct boundaries, and so creative approaches are needed to measure the effect of uncontested races over time (similar difficulties exist with voter files and voters changing addresses but remaining in the voter file).

It is also necessary to find out the extent to which voters believe that they and their political party have a social contract. Political theorists have examined the idea of “political obligation” between voters and their political parties in an abstract sense, but we don’t know to what extent voters believe they have an obligation to their party, and their party has an obligation to them. Specifically, do voters believe that they have a duty to vote for their political party, and that their political party has a duty to provide candidates to support? If voters believe that they and parties have this relationship, do they also believe that parties should face sanctions when they fail to fulfill their duties? This is an abstract concept, so voters may not conceive of the relationship between themselves and their political party in those terms, but they probably think that their party owes them representation in exchange for their vote.

5.1.2 Encountering Problems While Voting

As mentioned above as an important direction for future work following up on Chapters 2 and 3, precinct-level data merged with other data is also a logical next step for examining how voters react in the moment to problems they encounter while voting. Municipalities, counties, and states often record the problems that voters encounter (although this data is rarely publicly available) and reports may be collected by voter help hotlines or local election officials as well. Merging the records of these reports with precinct-level voting data would permit testing if problems voting motivate down-ballot participation with direct records that do not rely on recall and self-reported voting. This would also allow for tests of the hypothesis that voters who encounter

problems while voting may hold incumbent local election officials, when they are on the ballot, accountable for those problems electorally. This is a particularly plausible and direct test of the theory of retrospective voting, as an example of government performance (the operation of a polling place) is readily available and top-of-mind if the voter experienced problems.

This is not to say that there are not important extensions of this work using descriptive survey data and survey experiments: while my survey experiment described problems voting due to two potential reasons, there are many other reasons voters might have a subpar experience at their polling place. Additional survey experiments testing these reasons are important—for example, the expiration of the consent decree governing how the RNC might use election observers in polling places as well as the expansion of laws that permit partisan observers in polling places increase the likelihood that voters of color will be intimidated while casting their ballots. Similarly, despite there being no evidence of wide-scale voter or electoral fraud, many on the political right believe, or at least profess to believe, that voter fraud is widespread. These voters may choose to roll-off less, in order to maximize their own vote, which they presumably believe is “legitimate” and offset the “illegitimate” votes.

In addition, while the 2016 CCES asked respondents if they felt intimidated while voting, that appears to have been a one-off question in the common content of that survey. As Republican-controlled states make it easier for partisan observers to be present in polling places (and the RNC consent decree has expired) feeling intimidated while voting may be an increasingly common experience. Testing how voters react immediately to direct threats to their right to vote is important, but is certainly far less important than preventing these attempts at disenfranchisement in the first place.

There are several noteworthy limitations of this research. The NORC survey data was collected during the Trump administration but prior to the “Big Lie” efforts, which may also limit the generalizability of the findings in the third paper, especially among Republicans. It is possible that Republicans might interpret any problem they have while voting as evidence that the entire system is corrupt and respond accordingly. The problems described in the survey experiment in the third paper are also focused on administrative errors, but this is a relatively small proportion of possible problems that people might experience while voting. And as with any use of survey data to predict future behavior, it is important to bear in mind that reported behavior and behavioral intentions do not necessarily align with real-world behavior, past or future.

5.2 Summary of Contributions

This dissertation makes several contributions to the study of and knowledge about elections and representation. First, the findings presented in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that political parties would be well served to put a candidate on the ballot in all possible cases, even when that candidate will lose in a landslide. Having a name on the ballot might prevent the down-ballot penalty that other, more competitive candidates face in the absence of a copartisan candidate. Of course running for office is not obligatory, so this is easier said than done, and many candidates do not want a landslide loss on their record. Even a minor investment in putting a name on the ballot, since most voters do not know if their congressional district is even competitive or not, might be enough to prevent a close loss down-ballot. As some respondents noted, not having a candidate on the ballot for whom to vote makes them feel “abandoned” by their political party, and avoiding those feelings are in a party’s (and democracy’s) best interests. This is particularly

true in a time of high polarization, when voters might be particularly reluctant to vote for members of the political party opposing their own.

Second, this dissertation has contributed to the discipline's knowledge about the consequences of long lines or other problems that in-person voters encounter on Election Day. While other research has examined how positive or negative experiences while voting can affect voters' beliefs that their vote is counted as they intended and their faith in democracy, I show that negative experiences while voting (notably, feeling intimidated while voting) is associated with slightly lower ballot roll-off. I argue that this is due to psychological reactance: in some cases, voters might interpret their right to vote as being threatened, and the best way to protect that right when they've already committed to voting is to maximize their vote by casting a more complete ballot. While reactance has been proposed as a mechanism for why attempts to suppress the vote might fail, I theorize that it might also have an effect at the polling place when people have a subpar experience voting. What this paper lacks, however, is an estimate of how many people are turned away from voting by the problems they encounter—any small reduction in ballot roll-off does not excuse the fact of those who are deterred from voting.

Finally, I expand the theory of protest voting and apply it down-ballot of the races with which the voter is dissatisfied. Casting a protest vote in a race where your vote doesn't matter isn't really a meaningful protest, nor is it likely to send a message to the political party since vote totals in those races don't matter. As such, waiting to cast that protest vote down-ballot from that race, in a contested or competitive race where the vote totals actually do matter and a vote may be decisive might make more sense to voters. In other situations, where their party does have a candidate on the ballot that the voter is not satisfied with (perhaps an incumbent who has performed poorly in office or is scandal-ridden) they can express their discontent by voting

against that candidate in protest. The ability to vote for or against an incumbent candidate, to cast a meaningful vote that might change the outcome of an election, is a fundamental part of democracy and democratic accountability. Situations where voters cannot do so are detrimental to democracy.

This dissertation focused on the relationship between members of the public and democratic institutions. Understanding this relationship, and what the public expects out of those democratic institutions, may help inform policymakers and other stakeholders in their efforts to bolster faith in democracy. This is especially critical at a time when American democracy is threatened by those who seek to gain or maintain power by undermining, seizing, or co-opting democratic institutions. A more hopeful note to end on, however, is that Americans do appear to notice when institutions of democracy fail, and some take steps to rectify that situation in their own way.