

An Expressive Utility Account of Partisan Cue Receptivity: Cognitive Resources in the Service of Identity Expression

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Abstract

What motivates citizens to rely on partisan cues when forming political judgments? Extant literature offers two perspectives on this matter: an optimistic view that reliance on cues serves to enable adequate decision making when cognitive resources are low, and a pessimistic view that reliance on cues serves to channel cognitive resources to the goal of expressing valued political identities. In the present research we seek to further understanding of the relative importance of these two motives. We find that individuals low in cognitive resources are not more likely to follow partisan cues than are individuals high in cognitive resources. Furthermore, we find the highest level of cue receptivity is observed for those individuals who have both a strong social identification with their party and high cognitive resources. This suggests that partisan cue receptivity more often involves a harnessing of cognitive resources for the goal of identity expression.

Keywords: Partisan Cues, Social Identity, Cognitive Reflection, Motivated Reasoning

Word Count: 7851

Over the last five decades, politically engaged Americans have become substantially more likely to hold issue attitudes that are consistent with those of their respective party elites and distant from those of opposing partisans (e.g., Abramowitz, 2010; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). This phenomenon is not merely a consequence of citizens adopting party affiliations that are consistent with their preformed attitudes; rather, people's party identities often influence the issue attitudes that they hold (e.g., Achen & Bartels, 2016; Layman & Carsey, 2002; Lenz, 2009; Levendusky, 2009). This in part reflects a tendency of partisans to adopt issue attitudes that are cued as party-consistent in the political information environment (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017; Bullock, 2011; Cohen, 2003; Kam, 2005; Malka & Lelkes, 2010).

One line of thinking within political science touts cue taking as an effective way of dealing with the democratic dilemma (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017; Lupia, 1994; Lupia & McCubbins, 2000). That is, cue receptivity is said to reflect the use of judgmental heuristics that allow one to make reasonably good political decisions without expending costly effort or possessing substantial cognitive resources (Lupia & McCubbins, 2000; Mondak, 1993a, 1993b; Popkin, 1991). According to a different perspective, however, cue taking more often reflects motivation to bolster and protect valued political identities by expressing and rationalizing the viewpoints cued to be consistent with these identities (e.g., Groenendyk, 2013; Johnston, Lavine, & Federico, 2017; Kahan, 2013; Malka & Lelkes, 2010).

In the present research, we seek to parse these competing explanations of partisan cue receptivity by examining individual difference moderators of party cue effects. While the *bounded rationality perspective* on cue taking posits highest levels of cue taking among those least inclined to think effortfully about politics (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017; Kam, 2005; Popkin, 1991), the *expressive utility perspective* posits higher levels of cue taking among those who are strongly identified with a party and are willing and able to think effortfully about politics (Kahan, 2013). We thus test the roles of social identity strength and cognitive resources on political cue-taking. Our key findings are that individuals with lower levels of cognitive resources are not especially inclined to follow partisan cues, and that the combination of high cognitive resources and a strong social identification with one's party is associated with the highest level of cue receptivity. These results are consistent with the idea that political cue-taking is often rooted in motives to channel cognitive resources to the pursuit of identity expression.

The Bounded Rationality Model of Partisan Cue Receptivity

Large swathes of the electorate in Western democracies are uninformed about basic political matters (Carpini, Keeter, & Delli Carpini, 1997; Converse, 1964; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014), a finding that raises challenging questions about the viability of self-government. To address these questions, some scholars have argued that heuristics, or shortcuts used in the process of making judgments, offer a solution to the low-levels of political knowledge in the general population (e.g., Lupia, 1994; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). A prominent example of this concerns receptivity to political cues, or a readiness to base one's attitudes on signals in political messages that indicate where groups stand on an issue. Rather than research the costs and benefits of a particular policy, a person can base his or her degree of support on their feelings toward groups that support or oppose the policy (Brady & Sniderman, 1985). The most prominent groups along these lines are the major political

parties, which are, after all, “the enduring foundation of American political conflict” (Lavine, Johnston, and Steenbergen 2012, p. 2; see also Downs 1957; Mondak 1993b; Popkin 1991; Rahn 1993; Sniderman et al. 1991). Thus, it is plausible that partisans can adopt value-consistent and interest-consistent political positions without expending costly effort to learn about relevant policies, and that they can do so by simply following party cues. Indeed, many have argued that this and other forms of heuristic use by less-informed citizens can lead to decisions which are similar to those made by fully informed-citizens (Lupia 1994; Mondak 1993b; Popkin 1991; although see Bartels 1996; Kuklinski and Quirk 2000; Lau and Redlawsk 2001). Following Kahan (2013), we refer to this view as *the bounded rationality perspective on partisan cue receptivity*.

Although many questions have been raised about the efficacy of heuristic use for the politically uninformed (e.g., Bartels, 1996; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001), there does exist evidence consistent with the bounded rationality perspective on cue-taking. For instance, Schaffner and Streb (2002) demonstrated that survey respondents were far more likely to indicate which candidate they prefer during low information elections, such as superintendent of public instruction and insurance commissioner, when the candidate’s party was mentioned in the survey question than when it was not (see also, Arceneaux, 2008). More directly relevant, Kam (2005) and Arceneaux and Kolodny (2009) found that those who were less politically aware were more likely to follow partisan cues than were those who were more politically aware. Thus, at least in some cases, personal and situational characteristics that render effortful political thinking less likely coincide with greater partisan cue-taking.¹

The Expressive Utility Model of Partisan Cue Receptivity

Although the bounded rationality model of cue receptivity has been very influential within the academic literature (for an overview, see Bullock, 2011), a different perspective has recently gained traction (Boudreau & Mackenzie, 2014; Groenendyk, 2013; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Kahan, 2013; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Petersen, Skov, Serritzlew, & Ramsoy, 2013; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). This perspective is based on two related strands of psychological research. The first strand assumes that political identity – most notably a party or ideological identity – functions as a social identity, defined as an emotionally laden self-categorization as a member of a particular social group (Huddy, 2001; Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Mason, 2013). Social identity theory posits that our self-esteem is, in part, contingent on our affiliation or standing within personally valued groups, and our standing within a group depends on “shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories” (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994, p. 454). A social identity will, therefore, impact information processing and judgment — specifically, a social identity “functions as a readiness to experience the world in ways that one is told are consistent with the socially prescribed meaning of” that identity (Malka and Lelkes 2010, p. 156; see also, Allen and Wilder 1977; Cohen 2003; Huddy 2001; Mackie, Worth, and Asuncion 1990).

The second related strand of research concerns motivated reasoning, defined as reasoning

¹Although Kam (2005) did not find evidence that those lower on the need for cognition relied more upon partisan cues.

biased toward reaching preferred conclusions (Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). It is well known that goals other than accuracy and effort conservation often motivate human thinking (Haidt, 2001; Lavine et al., 2012; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Especially relevant to the political domain, the desire to reach conclusions that are consistent with a valued identity can influence one's thinking (Lavine et al., 2012) such as by leading one to uncritically accept and promote identity-consistent information or to critically scrutinize, minimize, distort, or ignore identity-inconsistent information (Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2014; Groenendyk, 2013; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The defense and protection of one's social identity is often the impetus of motivated reasoning (Bolsen et al., 2014; Druckman, 2012; Groenendyk, 2013; Kahan, 2013; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014). Thus, in order to bolster and protect a valued social identity, a person may shift his or her attitudes upon learning where other identifiers – particularly elites and opinion leaders – stand. Crucially, this cue receptivity would involve effortful reasoning: specifically, “the presence of party cues would make individuals engage in effortful motivated reasoning to produce arguments for the correctness of their party's position” (Petersen et al. 2013, p. 831; see also Groenendyk 2013, Kahan 2013). Rather than compensating for low cognitive resources, this would involve channeling cognitive resources toward the goal of identity expression. Following Hamlin and Jennings (2011), Hillman (2010) and Kahan (2013), we refer to this as *the expressive utility model of cue receptivity*.

Distinguishing Between the Models of Partisan Cue Receptivity

If a person shifts a political position on the basis of exposure to a political cue, how do we know if this entails heuristic use – as the bounded rationality perspective suggests – or identity-based motivated reasoning – as the expressive utility model suggests? This is a complicated matter, as the motives underlying a behavior such as cue-taking are undoubtedly varied, complex, and difficult to empirically pinpoint. We presently attempt to gain insight useful for distinguishing these explanations by exploring the implications of social identity strength and cognitive resources for partisan cue receptivity.

Strength of Social Identity. Scholars have distinguished between instrumental vs. expressive notions of partisanship (e.g., Fiorina, 1981; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2004; Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2015), with some thinking of party identification as a reflection of substantive political positions and judgments (instrumental partisanship) and others viewing it as a social group attachment akin to a tribal affiliation (expressive partisanship). This distinction parallels that between the bounded rationality and expressive utility perspectives on cue-taking. To the extent that partisanship is instrumental, following party cues could reflect an effort-saving strategy to adopt the “correct” political position without engaging in costly information processing or possessing substantial cognitive resources. If, however, partisanship is primarily about identity expression and symbolism, then cue-taking would more likely reflect motives of identity-based self-expression.

People who identify with a social group will of course vary in their strength of social identification with this group, and recent research has directly measured strength of identification with both party and ideological groups (Bankert, Huddy, & Rosema, 2016; Devine, 2014; Huddy et al., 2015). Evidence suggests that strength of social identification with a party better predicts political activity than (a) substantive issue stances, (b) ideological intensity or, (c) traditional measures of partisanship (Bankert et al., 2016), supporting the

expressive account of partisanship. Furthermore, Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017) found that partisan cue receptivity was strongest among people high in need for affect. Noting that need for affect is a domain-general predisposition that would lead one to attach strong emotional significance to beliefs and attitudes, they argued that those high in this dispositional trait experience the strongest emotional push to follow the party. They furthermore argued that such individuals would be especially likely to translate this emotional intuition into partisan cue-following to the extent that they were low in need for cognition, a trait that would enable one to override partisan impulses with higher order reflection. We address this in further detail in the discussion but, for now, it will suffice to note that strength of social identification has not yet been directly tested as a moderator of cue receptivity; a gap that is filled by the present research.

A finding that cue receptivity is more pronounced among people with stronger political group attachments would be consistent with the expressive utility model, according to which those with the strongest group attachments will be most motivated to bolster their identity by adopting identity-consistent positions. However, one could argue that such a finding could be reconciled with the bounded rationality model as well. Specifically, strong identification with a party or an ideology might mean that one trusts elite partisans and ideologues to “do the thinking” for oneself, so to speak. This reasoning runs into problems, however, as heuristic use is specified as a strategy that would appeal to those who are not highly engaged with the relevant subject matter (in this case politics, e.g., Popkin 1991; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Nonetheless, examination of partisan identity strength alone as a moderator of cue effects would not provide an ideal test of the two competing perspectives. As we discuss soon, the interactive effects of partisan identity strength and cognitive resources on cue-taking would more clearly inform this debate.

Cognitive Resources: Systematic Thinking and Political Sophistication. The bounded rationality and expressive utility perspectives yield different predictions regarding the relationship between cue-taking and cognitive resources. According to the bounded rationality perspective, cue receptivity occurs when one does not have the knowledge and inclination to think systematically about politics. To this point, Goren, Federico, and Kittilson (2009, p. 806) write,

If the cue giver and recipient share a party label, the latter will trust the former and accept the message without reflecting much on message content. But if the cue giver and recipient lie across the partisan divide, the recipient will mistrust the source and reject the message, again without much reflection.

This argument comports with evidence that those who are less politically sophisticated – that is those with low levels of political interest and knowledge (Carpini et al., 1997) – are more likely to be influenced by political cues than are those who are more politically sophisticated (Kam 2005; cf Johnston et al. 2017). A great deal of social psychological research also suggests that receptivity to cues in persuasive arguments results from low motivation to effortfully think about the matter due to lack of personal relevance (see for instance, Chaiken, 1987; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In contrast, the expressive utility perspective predicts that cue receptivity involves more effortful thinking. As Kahan (2013, p. 409) explains:

If individuals are adept at using more effortful, System 2 modes of information processing, then they ought to be even better at fitting their beliefs to their group identities. Their capacity to make sense of more complex forms of evidence ... will supply them with a special resource that they can use to fight off counterarguments or to identify what stance to take on technical issues more remote from ones that figure in the most familiar and accessible public discussions.

In support of this view, Kahan (2013) found that those most inclined to engage in effortful processing were most likely to perceive bias in a test promoting a counter-attitudinal position on climate change. Similarly, Taber and Lodge (2006) found that motivated reasoning to defend prior attitudes was higher among the politically sophisticated (see also Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010; Taber, Cann, & Kucsova, 2009). Petersen et al. (2013) reported evidence that party cues yield a greater degree of systematic processing, suggesting that conformity to such cues will often reflect effortful motivated reasoning rather than heuristic use. Groenendyk (2013) finds that people are less able to defend their partisan identity when under a cognitive load. And, recently, Johnston et al. (2017) reported that partisans high in political sophistication were most likely to base their economic attitudes on political cues.

Thus, in contrast to the bounded rationality model, the expressive utility model implies that individuals with strong social identities will be most receptive to political cues when they are high - not low - in cognitive resources that enable systematic processing of political information. That is, a strong commitment to a political identity accompanied by a capacity to elaborate upon and rationalize a cued position will yield a tendency to bolster identity by adopting the party line. However, to the degree that strong partisan social identification represents a willingness to delegate decision-making power to elites, the bounded rationality perspective would predict that the combination of such a strong identification and low cognitive resources would yield the highest levels of cue-taking.²

The Present Research

In two studies we examine the psychological processes underlying partisan cue-taking, with a focus on comparing the bounded rationality and expressive utility perspectives. We do so by examining the implications of social identity strength and cognitive resources for partisan cue-taking.

Study 1: Trade Policy Experiment

Data and Methods. In July 2016, we recruited 888 participants from the Survey Sampling International online panel. In exchange for participation, SSI panelists receive points which they can exchange for various rewards. The sample was fairly representative of the US population: 59 percent female, 74 percent non-hispanic white, 9 percent black, and 10 percent hispanic. The median age was 38, and 45 percent of participants had at least a

²To our best knowledge there is no study that directly assesses the association between social identity and cognitive resources. Moreover, the association between cognitive reflection – a measure of cognitive resources – and ideology is absent (Kahan, 2013, p. 431) or very weak (Deppe et al., 2015; Yilmaz & Saribay, 2016).

college degree. Recent research suggests that probability and non-probability samples tend to yield similar results in between-subjects experiments (Mullinix, Leeper, Druckman, & Freese, 2016).

After responding to a series of demographic questions, participants were asked to indicate whether they “usually think of themselves as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or something else.” Those in the latter two categories were then asked if they thought of themselves “as closer” to one party or the other. Pure independents were excluded from the sample ($N=126$), leaving 456 Democrats and 306 Republicans. Those identified or leaned towards a party were then administered the eight-item partisan identity strength measure developed by Huddy et al. (2015) which directly taps the personal importance of one’s social identification with a party. Respondents rated items such as the following on a four-point scale (coded: never=0; sometimes=.33; often=.67; always=1): “When I speak about the [Democratic/Republican] party, I usually say “we” instead of “they””; “When people criticize the [Democratic/Republican] party, it feels like a personal insult”; and “When I meet someone who supports the [Democratic/Republican] party, I feel connected with this person.” We averaged the eight items to form the partisan identity strength measure ($M=.43$, $SD=.25$, $\alpha=.82$).³

Participants then completed two measures aimed at gauging inclination toward effortful thinking. The first was the the Cognitive Reflection Test (henceforth CRT; Frederick, 2005), which is a three-item test designed to assess the degree to which participants engage in intuitive or “gut” reasoning (“System 1”) or systematic thinking (“System 2”). Each question has an obvious, but incorrect, answer, and thus a correct response requires overriding the initial intuitive response. The CRT has the distinct advantage of being a performance-based (rather than self-report) measure, and has been shown to predict the use of heuristics (with intuitive responders showing a greater reliance on heuristics; Kahan 2013; Toplak, West, and Stanovich 2011). The three CRT items are:

- (1) “A bat and a ball cost \$1.10 in total. The bat costs a dollar more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?” (Correct answer = 5 cents; intuitive answer = 10 cents)
- (2) “If it takes 5 machines 5 minutes to make 5 widgets, how long would it take 100 machines to make 100 widgets?” (Correct answer = 5 minutes; intuitive answer = 100 minutes)
- (3) “In a lake, there is a patch of lily pads. Every day, the patch doubles in size. If it takes 48 days for the patch to cover the entire lake, how long would it take for the patch to cover half of the lake?” (Correct answer = 47 days; intuitive answer = 24 days)

Scores were computed as number of correct answers out of three, with higher scores indicating more systematic responding. In line with other studies, the mean of the CRT was quite low (.87 correct out of 3; Deppe et al. 2015; Kahan 2013; Yilmaz and Saribay 2016).

³Other methods of forming composites, e.g., IRT models, did not yield substantively different results.

The second measure of inclination toward systematic thinking was the 18-item need for cognition scale (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984). This scale measures the degree to which individuals engage in the type of reflective thinking that, in theory, should minimize the use of heuristics. While findings on the relationship between need for cognition and cue receptivity are mixed within political science (for a review, see Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017), studies in social psychology have shown that those who are low in need for cognition are more likely to utilize mental shortcuts than those who are high in need for cognition (e.g., Arceneaux & Johnson, 2013; Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992; Priester & Petty, 2003). Participants rated the 18 items on a 5-point scale (coded to range from 0 ("Strongly disagree") to 1 ("Strongly agree")). Sample items are "I would prefer complex to simple problems" and "Thinking is not my idea of fun" (reverse scored). After reverse scoring the appropriate items, we averaged the 18 item responses to form the need for cognition measure ($M=.59$, $SD=.14$, $\alpha=.82$)

After completing these measures, participants received information about a political policy and were informed – based on random assignment – that the policy was supported by either the party with which they identify or the other major US party (see also, Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017; Kam, 2005). We chose the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) issue because, at the time of the experiment, this was not an issue that was clearly supported by one party and opposed by the other (e.g., President Obama and many Republicans supported the TTIP whereas factions within both parties opposed the TTIP). Furthermore, a YouGov survey from April 2016 indicated that 73 percent of respondent either "don't know" or "hadn't heard enough" to make a decision when asked about the TTIP. Hence, by using the TTIP we were able to maintain verisimilitude of the partisan cued issue stances and avoid strong pre-treatment effects (see, Levendusky, 2009; Malka & Lelkes, 2010; Slothuus, 2015).

Some findings suggest that citizens rely more on party cues for complex issues – such as economic issues – compared to social issues – such as abortion (Johnston & Wronski, 2015). TTIP is an economic issue and has a high degree of complexity. Yet, each issue can also vary in the degree of complexity with which it is discussed (Bischof & Senninger, 2017; Brundidge, Reid, Choi, & Muddiman, 2014; Suedfeld, 2010; Tetlock, 1983, 1985). In this experiment, we framed the TTIP policy in simple or complex terms. Doing so allowed us to assess whether cue receptivity is conditional on the degree of complexity with which the issue is discussed. Participants in the "complex" frame condition saw the following policy description and question, which required participants to understand the logic of technical economic impacts of the trade deal and included a good deal of jargon (see Cooper, Bennett, & Sukel, 1996):

Some [Republicans/Democrats] believe that we should support the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a proposed trade agreement between the United States and the European Union that will benefit the economy by increasing foreign direct investment and reducing custom duties and tariffs, while some [Democrats/Republicans] believe that the proposal will increase low-wage imports, thereby harming American workers and small businesses.

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement, "We should support the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership."

In the “simple” frame condition participants saw a policy description and question framed around valence terms and ends rather than means, therefore not requiring an understanding of economic instruments:

Some [Republicans/Democrats] believe that we should support the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a proposed trade agreement between the United States and the European Union which is designed to promote trade and benefit the economy; while some [Democrats/Republicans] believe the proposal will harm American workers and small businesses.

How much do you agree or disagree with the statement, “We should support the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.”

Respondents were then asked to indicate their support on a five point fully-label scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (coded as 0) to "Strongly Agree" (coded 1; $M=.56$, $SD=.36$).

Results

We first tested the main effect of party cues. In an OLS model regressing support for the TTIP on cue condition, partisan identity strength, cognitive reflection score, and simple versus complex framing condition (Column 1, Table 1), participants increased their own support of the TTIP by about .08 points (on a 0 to 1 scale) when the party they identified with supported the TTIP relative to when the opposing party supported the policy (see also, Kam, 2005).⁴ Additionally, strong identifiers were more likely to support the policy, although we had no prior hypothesis about this effect.⁵

Next, policy support was regressed on in-party cue, a cognitive resource variable, identity strength, the two-way interaction between that cognitive resource variable and in-party cue, the two-way interaction between the measure of identity strength and in-party cue, and the two-way interaction between the measure of cognitive reflection and identity strength. First, we examined whether cue effects are stronger for those low in cognitive resources (Column 2, Table 1). The interaction effect between the in-party cue and the cognitive reflection test score was small and not significant ($b=.02$, $se=.03$, ns). When we regressed TTIP support on this same model but substituted the cognitive reflection score for the need for cognition, the interaction effect was also non-significant ($b=.16$, $se=.13$, ns). Thus we did not find support for the contention that partisan cue-taking serves to compensate for low cognitive resources, using two distinct measures of the latter.⁶

Additionally, (Column 2, Table 1), we examined whether the cue receptivity effect was enhanced among those who strongly socially identified with their party. Indeed, it was: the interaction effect between the variable indicating whether a participant received an in-party cue and partisan identity strength was positive and statistically significant ($b=.16$, $se=.06$,

⁴All subsequent models are OLS regression models.

⁵Party cue effects were equally strong across the complex and simple conditions. There was a main effect however—those receiving information framed in a complex way were .04 ($se=.02$, $p<.05$) points less supportive of the TTIP. Regressing TTIP support on a variable representing in-party cue, complex vs. simple frame, and their interaction, the interaction effect was small and not significant ($b=.03$, $se=.03$).

⁶All two-way interactions are identical when examined separately rather than controlling for other two-way interactions.

Table 1
Effect of Party Cue on TTIP Support

	(1)	(2)	(3)
In-Party Supports	0.08*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.05)	0.11* (0.06)
PID Strength	0.33*** (0.04)	0.37*** (0.07)	0.48*** (0.08)
CRT	-0.01 (0.02)	0.05 (0.03)	0.11** (0.04)
Complexity	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)
In-Party x PID Strength		0.16** (0.07)	-0.06 (0.12)
In-Party x CRT		0.02 (0.03)	-0.10* (0.06)
PID Strength x CRT		-0.16*** (0.06)	-0.30*** (0.08)
In-Party x PID Strength x CRT			0.28** (0.12)
In-Party x Complexity		-0.03 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
Constant	0.42*** (0.03)	0.40*** (0.04)	0.35*** (0.05)
Observations	755	755	755
R ²	0.12	0.14	0.15

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

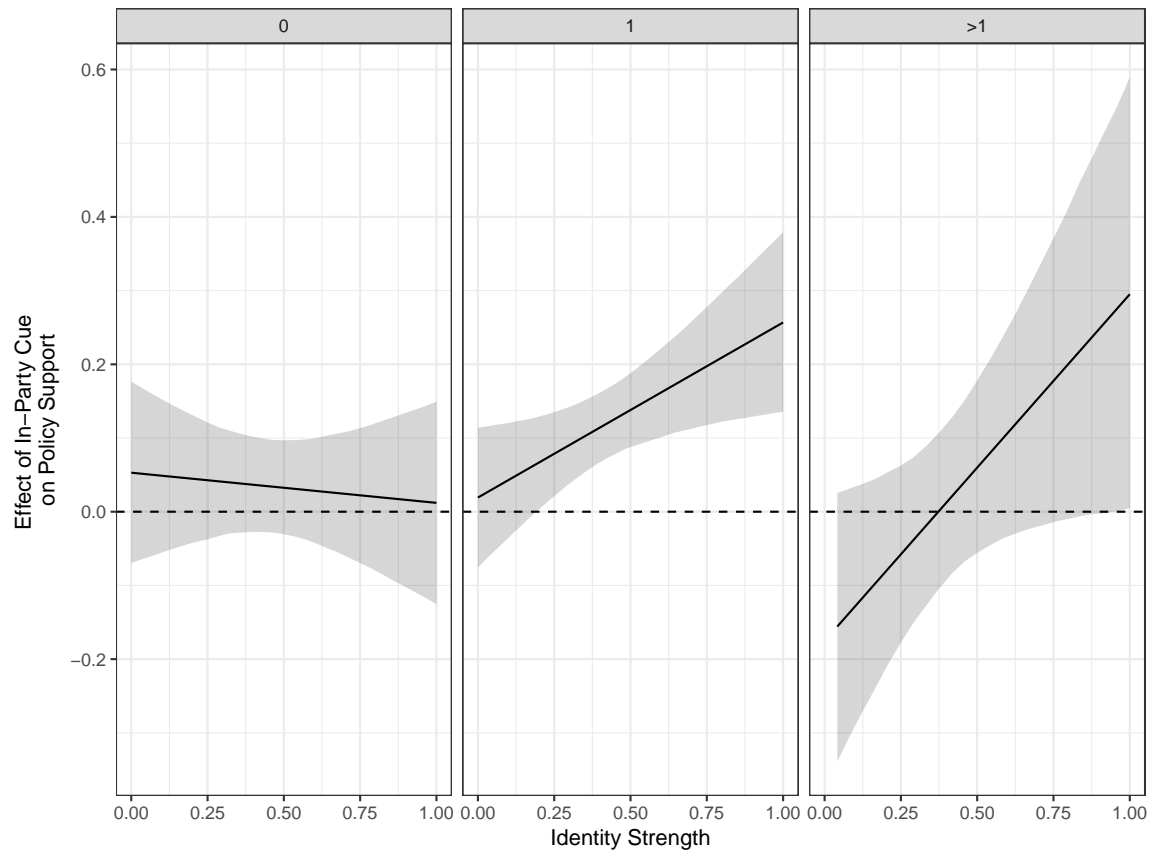
p<.05). Cues had no significant effect on support for the TTIP among those at the lowest levels of identity strength, and cues increased support by about .16 among those at the highest level of identity strength.

Finally, we tested the hypothesis derived from the expressive utility model that the combination of a strong partisan identity and high cognitive resources would yield especially strong levels of cue receptivity. Regressing TTIP support on in-party cue, CRT score, partisan identity strength, the three two way interactions among these variables, and the three-way interaction (Column 3, Table 1), the latter had a significant positive coefficient of b=.28 (se=.12, p<.05). Repeating this model but with need for cognition substituted for cognitive reflection test score, the three-way interaction was in the same direction and marginally significant b=.82 (se=.55, p=.10).

Consistent with the expressive utility model, strong partisan identifiers who were cognitively reflective were most moved by cues. Figure 1 plots the marginal effect of in-party cues at different levels of identity strength for people who scored 0, 1, or greater than 1 on the CRT, respectively. Party cues did not impact support for the TTIP at any level of

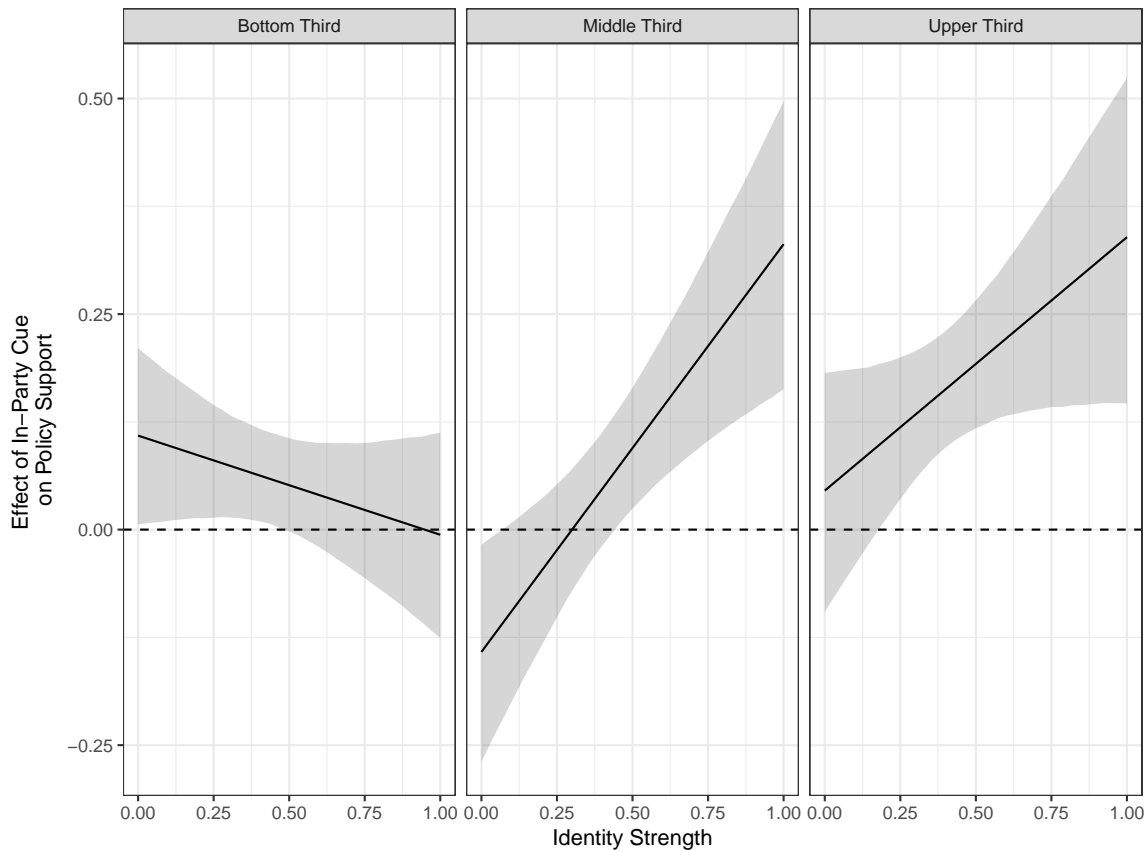
partisan identity strength among those who scored the lowest on the cognitive reflection test. However, among higher scorers the effect became stronger, with the strongest effects present for those who both scored high on CRT and the partisan identity strength measure.

Figure 1. Marginal Effect of Cues across Levels of Party Identity by Cognitive Reflection Score



Similarly, the interaction between party identity strength and receiving an in-party cue was not significant among those in the bottom third of the distribution of need for cognition ($b=-.12$, $se=.10$) but was among those in the middle ($b=.45$, $se=.14$, $p<.01$) and top thirds ($b=.32$, $se=.15$, $p<.05$) of the the need for cognition distribution. These interaction effects are plotted in Figure 2 (See Appendix A for the regression output). The left panel of Figure 2 shows that those who are the lowest in need for cognition are, if anything, less likely to adopt their party's stance as the strength of their identity increases. Among those who were medium (middle panel) to high (right panel) in need for cognition, the effect of receiving an in-party cue increases as identity strength increases. While the effect of receiving an in-party cue was roughly zero among those with the weakest party identity, among those with the strongest identity attitude toward the policy was .30 points more positive when receiving the in-party cue versus the out-party cue.

Thus, the evidence from Study 1 was consistent with the expressive utility perspective on

Figure 2. Marginal Effect of Cues across Levels of Party Identity by Need for Cognition

cue receptivity. Cue receptivity was not stronger among those disinclined toward complex thinking; rather, it was stronger among those with a combination of strong partisan social identification and inclination to reason systematically.

Study 2: Farm Subsidy Policy Experiment

The findings of Study 1 were consistent with the expressive utility perspective on partisan cue receptivity. The goal of Study 2 was to examine the replicability and robustness of Study 1's findings and to improve upon the methodology of Study 1. Thus while Study 2 also involves an experimental manipulation of partisan cues within an online survey, it differs from Study 1 in four key respects.

First, Study 2 uses a different policy domain from that of Study 1. Specifically, participants read descriptions of farm subsidy policy and rated their preferences concerning farm subsidies, an issue that is low salience and that is not distinctly associated with one of the two major parties (e.g., Malka & Lelkes, 2010). Second, the design of Study 2 includes a control group, allowing us to gauge partisan differences in issue stance absent cues (see for instance, Kam, 2005).⁷ Third, whereas Study 1 used the commonly employed 3-item

⁷Note that we do not manipulate the complexity of the issue in study 2 as we included this experimental

measure of cognitive reflection (Deppe et al., 2015; Kahan, 2013), Study 2 involved use of the longer and more reliable 7-item version of this measure (Toplak, West, & Stanovich, 2014). Finally, in Study 2 we included a measure of political sophistication, operationalized with a political knowledge battery. The importance of political sophistication to normative democratic theory is widely recognized (Carpini et al., 1997), but whether political sophistication is associated with more or less cue-taking is not clear (e.g., Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2013; Johnston et al., 2017; Kam, 2005; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Tilley & Wlezien, 2008). We presently add political sophistication as a measure of cognitive resources, along with the cognitive reflection test and the need for cognition measure, in order to explore the robustness of the present findings across different indicators of this key conceptual variable.

Data and Methods. In June 2017, we recruited 1253 Democratic (N=622) and Republican (N=631) participants (including leaners) from the Qualtrics online panel. In exchange for participation, Qualtrics panelists receive points which they can exchange for various rewards. The sample was 50 percent female, 74 percent non-hispanic white, 10 percent black, and 10 percent hispanic. The median age range was between 45 and 54, and 40 percent of participants had at least a college degree.

As in Study 1, respondents were administered the eight-item partisan identity strength measure. Scores were averaged and rescaled to lie between zero and one ($m=.64$, $sd=.21$, $\alpha=.88$). Then, respondents completed the seven-item Cognitive Reflection Test (Toplak et al., 2014). The seven-item test consists of the three items used in the 3-item CRT test – as was employed in study 1 – as well as an additional 4-items. The four items additional are included to increase the reliability and avoid floor effects (see for a discussion Toplak et al., 2014, p. 150). Scores were summed and rescaled to lie between zero and one (mean=.25, $sd=.27$, $\alpha=.75$). Next, respondents completed the 18-item Need for Cognition measure, scores on which were averaged (after reverse scoring appropriate items) and rescaled to lie between zero and one ($m=.18$, $sd=.23$, $\alpha=.85$).

Finally, political sophistication was operationalized using a multiple choice political knowledge battery, with items adapted from the NES and Clifford and Jerit (2016). We asked respondents 10 questions about policies, institutions, and national and international political officials. Scores were summed and rescaled to lie between zero and one (mean=.59, $sd=.29$, $\alpha=.81$). In line with earlier literature, scores on the three cognitive resource indicators – CRT, need for cognition, and political knowledge – were positively inter-correlated (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017; Bizer, Krosnick, Petty, Rucker, & Wheller, 2000; Toplak et al., 2014).

After completing these measures, participants were randomly assigned to one of three farm subsidy policy descriptions that differed only in terms of partisan cues. These descriptions were adapted from prior work by (Malka & Lelkes, 2010) in which, absent political cues, attitude toward farm subsidies did not differ as a function of political orientation in a nationally representative sample. The three conditions were Republicans Support (and Democrats oppose), Democrats Support (and Republicans oppose), and Control. In the *Republicans Support* condition, participants were told that Republicans support the U.S. government giving money to American farmers whereas Democrats oppose this policy. In

factor in our study 1 as a possible control variable. But the complex vs. easy framing of the issue did not affect our findings.

the *Democrats Support* condition participants were told that Democrats support the U.S. government giving money to American farmers whereas Republicans oppose this policy. Finally, in the *Control* condition participants were told that “various groups” support the U.S. government giving money to American farmers and “various other groups” oppose this policy. All information besides these specific cues was held constant across conditions. The text of the policy descriptions was as follows:

The U.S. government gives billions of dollars to American farmers every year. The reasons for this policy, which is supported by [Republicans/Democrats/various groups], are to protect American farmers from losing their jobs and to keep the cost of food low for Americans.

However, [Democrats/Republicans/various other groups] have argued that the government should stop giving money to farmers. They note that this policy prevents poor agricultural countries from growing economically and bringing their citizens out of poverty. Also, the money saved by Americans in food costs is taken from them in taxes anyway.

We created a condition variable indicating whether a respondent was told his/her party supports farm subsidies while their out-party opposes them (in-party supports condition), their out-party supports farm subsidies while their in-party opposes them (out-party supports condition), or only that various groups support farm subsidies (no cues condition).

After reading the description, respondents were asked the following question, which served as our outcome measure: “Do you support or oppose the U.S. government policy of giving money to American farmers?” The seven-point measure, which ranged from strongly oppose to strongly support, was recoded to lie between 0 and 1 ($m=.71$, $sd=.25$).

Results.

In-Party Versus Out-Party Cues. We begin with a set of analyses that parallel those from Study 1, comparing only respondents receiving in-party vs. out-party cues (and omitting respondents in the control condition) (Columns 1-3, Table 2). In a model including in-party (vs. outparty) cue, partisan identity strength, and CRT (Column 1, Table 2), those that received the in-party cue were .08 ($se=.02$, $p<.001$) points more in favor of the policy than those receiving the out-party cue, which is exactly the same effect size as in Study 1.

In Column 2 (Table 2), we report results of an analyses regressing policy support on a single cognitive resource variable, partisan identity strength, in-party cue, and the three two-way interactions among these variables. Examining whether cue receptivity is stronger among those with low cognitive resources, we found that CRT X in-party cue ($b = .08$, $se = .06$, Table 2 column 2) and NFC X in-party cue ($b = .17$, $se = .10$; see Appendix B Table 2) had positive but non-significant coefficients, while political sophistication X in-party cue had a positive and significant effect ($b = .20$, $se = .06$; see Appendix B Table 3). Thus, as in Study 1, evidence was not consistent with the view that cues are followed to compensate for lower cognitive resources. Greater political sophistication, in fact, went with greater cue receptivity, on average. Additionally, the interaction effect between the in-party cue and partisan identity strength was not significant ($b = .03$, $se = .08$). Thus, unlike Study 1, those higher in partisan identity strength were not, overall, more likely to follow cues.

The analyses testing the expressive utility perspective yielded findings consistent with those of Study 1. First, in a model including in-party cue, CRT, partisan identity strength,

all two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction, the latter was positive and significant ($b=.80$, $se=.30$, $p<.001$, column 3 2). The simple effect of in-party cue on policy support was highest among those both high in partisan identity strength and CRT (defined as one standard deviation above the mean for each variable; $b = .17$, $se = .04$, $p < .001$), with non-significant simple effects among those high in partisan identity strength but low in CRT (one standard deviation below the mean; $b = .02$, $se = .03$, ns) and low in partisan identity strength but high in CRT ($b = .05$, $se = .03$, ns), and a smaller but significant simple effect among those low in both partisan identity strength and CRT ($b = .09$, $se = .03$, $p < .01$).

Substituting political knowledge for CRT in the above model also yielded a positive and significant three-way interaction ($b = 1.20$, $se = .27$; see Appendix B Table 2). The pattern of simple effects was quite similar: in-party cue had the strongest influence on policy support among those high in both partisan identity strength and political knowledge ($b = .24$, $se = .03$, $p < .001$), with non-significant simple effects among those high in partisan identity strength but low in political knowledge ($b = -.01$, $se = .03$, ns) and low in partisan identity strength but high in political knowledge ($b = .05$, $se = .03$, ns), and a smaller but significant simple effect among those low in both partisan identity strength and political knowledge ($b = .09$, $se = .03$, $p < .01$).

Finally, in a similar model including NFC as the cognitive resource variable, the three-way interaction term was in the expected direction but was not statistically significant ($b = .78$, $se = .47$; See Appendix B Table 3). Thus, as in Study 1, test-based measures of cognitive resources – i.e., CRT in both studies and knowledge in study 2 – yielded stronger evidence for the expressive utility model than did a self-report measure (i.e., need for cognition).

In-Party vs. No Cues and Out-Party vs. No Cues. The initial analyses revealed an effect of in-party vs. out-party cues that was strongest among those who combined a strong partisan identity with a high level of systematic thinking or political sophistication. However, it is unclear from these analyses (and from the results of Study 1) how the partisan cues impact policy support relative to an absence of cues. For this reason we included a control condition in Study 2. In this section we report results of analyses that involve comparisons between each of the party cue conditions and the control (no cues) condition.

In a model regressing farm subsidy support on in-party supports and out-party supports dummy variables (with no cues as the reference category), partisan identity strength, and CRT score (Column 4, Table 2), we find that, compared to the control condition, there was a negative effect of out-party support ($b=-.07$, $se=.02$, $p<.01$), but no effect of in-party support ($b=.01$, $se=.02$, $p=ns$). These findings suggest that partisans did not increase their support of a popular status quo policy (maintaining farm subsidies) when told that their party supports (and the opposing party opposes) this policy, but did decrease their support of this status quo policy when told that the opposing party supports (and their party opposes) this policy. The asymmetric finding of party cues might be interpreted as a reflection of status quo bias: one favors existing subsidy policy as the default, and to the same extent that one would favor that policy had one received reinforcing partisan cues. Only when this status quo policy is supported by the opposition and opposed by one's own party does support decline. However, we did not predict this asymmetry and the interpretation we offer here is post-hoc.

We next examined whether the cue variables (relative to no cues) impacted policy sup-

Table 2
Effect of Party Cue on Farm Policy Support

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
In-Party Supports	0.08*** (0.02)	0.04 (0.06)	0.15** (0.07)	0.01 (0.02)	0.04 (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)
Out -Party Supports				-0.07*** (0.02)	0.004 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.07)
PID Strength	0.16*** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.07)	0.31*** (0.07)	0.18*** (0.03)	0.29*** (0.06)	0.25*** (0.08)
CRT	-0.17*** (0.03)	0.02 (0.10)	0.25* (0.13)	-0.16*** (0.02)	0.05 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.14)
In-Party x PID Strength		0.03 (0.08)	-0.14 (0.10)		-0.04 (0.08)	-0.07 (0.10)
Out-Party x PID Strength					-0.08 (0.08)	0.07 (0.11)
In-Party x CRT		0.08 (0.06)	-0.41** (0.19)		0.01 (0.06)	-0.12 (0.19)
Out-Party x CRT					-0.08 (0.06)	0.29 (0.19)
PID Strength x CRT		-0.38*** (0.15)	-0.75*** (0.20)		-0.31*** (0.12)	-0.16 (0.21)
In-Party x PID Strength x CRT			0.80*** (0.30)			0.21 (0.30)
Out-Party x PID Strength x CRT						-0.59** (0.29)
Constant	0.60*** (0.03)	0.57*** (0.05)	0.51*** (0.05)	0.66*** (0.03)	0.58*** (0.05)	0.60*** (0.05)
Observations	877	877	877	1,253	1,253	1,253
R ²	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.09	0.10

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

port differently across people high and low in cognitive resources (Column 5, Table 2). In three separate analyses, policy support was regressed on in-party cue, out-party cue, a cognitive resource variable, two-way interactions between that cognitive resource variable and each of the cue condition dummies, two-way interactions between the measure of identity strength and each of the cue condition dummies and a two-way interaction between the measure of cognitive reflection and identity strength. Starting with the cognitive resources, neither NFC nor CRT significantly moderated the effect of in-party cue or the effect of out-party cue. Political knowledge did not moderate the effect of in-party cue on policy support, but did negatively moderate the effect of out-party cue on policy support ($b = -.98$, $se = .35$, $p < .01$; See Appendix B Table 2). Again, those low in cognitive resources were not more likely to conform to cues, and those high in political knowledge specifically were more likely to follow party cues in one of the two conditions.

In the same model, we tested whether those with strong partisan identities were more likely to conform to cues. Partisan identity strength did not significantly moderate the effect of in-party or out-party cue on policy support.⁸

Finally, we examined whether the combination of strong partisan identity strength and high cognitive resources leads to the greatest amount of cue-taking (see Table 2, column 6). We first regressed policy support on the two cue condition dummies, CRT, partisan iden-

⁸Results do not change conditional upon the cognitive resource variable we include in the model.

tity strength, all two-way interactions (excluding between the two dummies), and three-way interactions between CRT, partisan identity strength, and each of the two cue condition dummies. In Table 2 (column 6), we present the result for CRT as an indicator of cognitive resources. Here the three-way interaction involving out-party cue was positive and significant ($b = -.59$, $se = .29$, $p < .01$) whereas that involving in-party cue was not significant.

To further examine this interaction, we plot the marginal effects of the condition dummies on policy support as a function of party identity strength for those at the bottom tertile, middle tertile, and upper tertile of the CRT score distribution (Figure 2). Among the least reflective respondents (left panel), in-party cues have no effect on attitude relative to control at any level of partisan identity strength, while out-party cue tends to have the strongest negative effect on policy support among those lowest in party identity strength (although the two-way interaction between party identity strength and out-party cue was not significant: $b = .14$, $se = .17$). Among those at the middle level of cognitive reflection, receiving an out-party cue did not influence policy support at any level of partisan identity strength, but receiving an in-party cue had its strongest impact at low levels of identity strength, although this did not reach significance ($b = -.36$, $se = .24$, $p = .13$). Finally, among the most reflective respondents (right panel), we see that out-party cue had its strongest effect among those most strongly identified with the party. Among these reflective participants, strong partisans are more likely to oppose a policy when faced with an out-party cue compared to weak partisans ($b = -.52$, $se = .22$, $p < .05$). Similarly, strong partisans from this group tend to increase support for a policy when faced with an in-party cue, compared to weak partisans, but the relationship is not significant ($b = .24$, $se = .23$, ns).

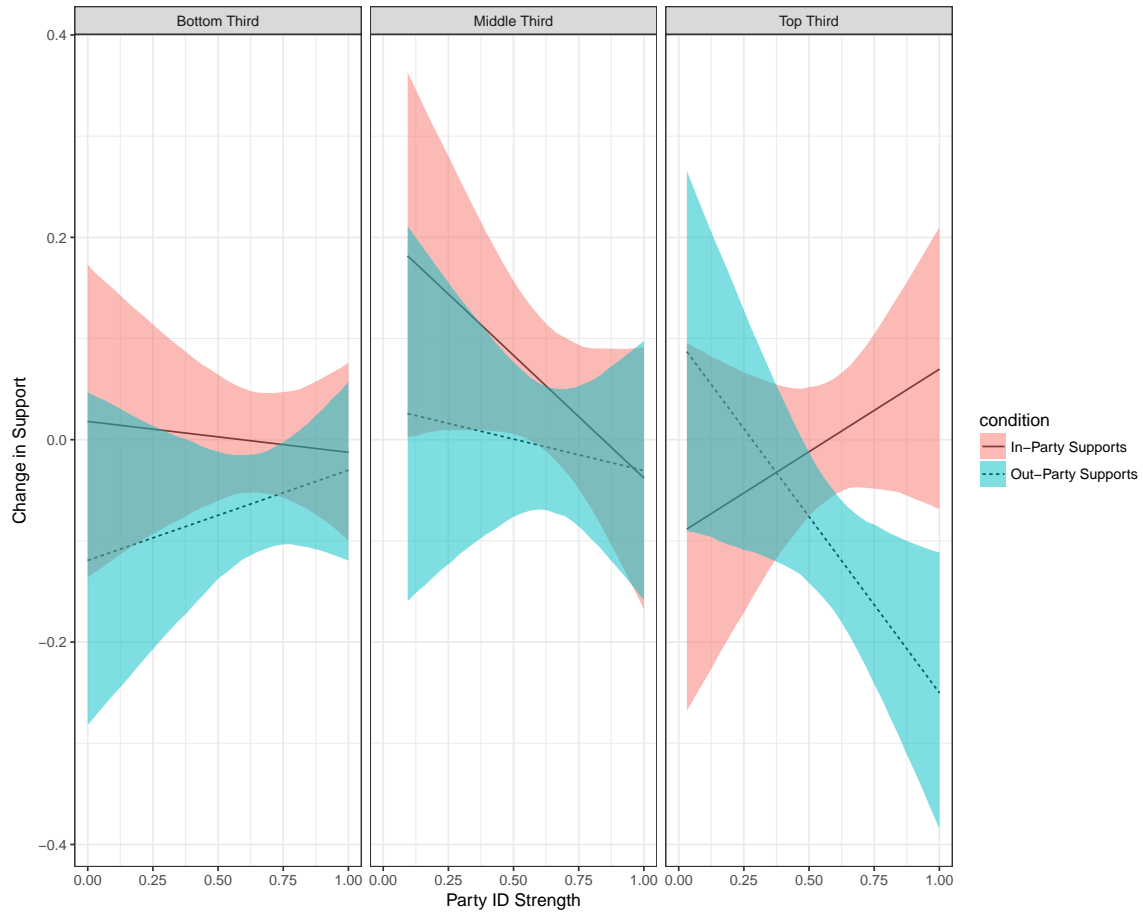
We next repeated the analysis testing three-way interactions substituting political knowledge for CRT. In this analysis, the interaction between political knowledge, in-party cue, and partisan identity strength was positive and significant ($b = .57$, $se = .28$, $p < .05$; See Appendix B Table 2) and the interaction between political knowledge, out-party cue, and partisan identity strength was negative and significant ($b = -.64$, $se = .28$, $p < .05$). Figure 4 plots effects of the two condition dummy variables on policy support as a function of partisan identity strength across those in the bottom, middle, and top thirds of the political knowledge distribution. As displayed, the effects of cues as a function of partisan identity strength differ across the political knowledge tertiles in a manner similar to the way they varied across the CRT tertiles. Once again, the effect of out-party cue on reduction in support was greatest among those who combined strong partisan identity with great cognitive resources.

We next repeated the analysis testing three-way interactions substituting NFC in as the cognitive resource variable. The three-way interactions were not significant, but were in the same direction as those involving the other cognitive resource variables.

Discussion

Political cues have the potential to improve political decision-making among people who lack the cognitive resources to engage in informed and systematic political reasoning. At the same time, they have the potential to inform strongly identified partisans about the stances their leaders are adopting, and to motivate these partisans to channel their cognitive resources to the goal of adopting and justifying the identity-consistent stances.

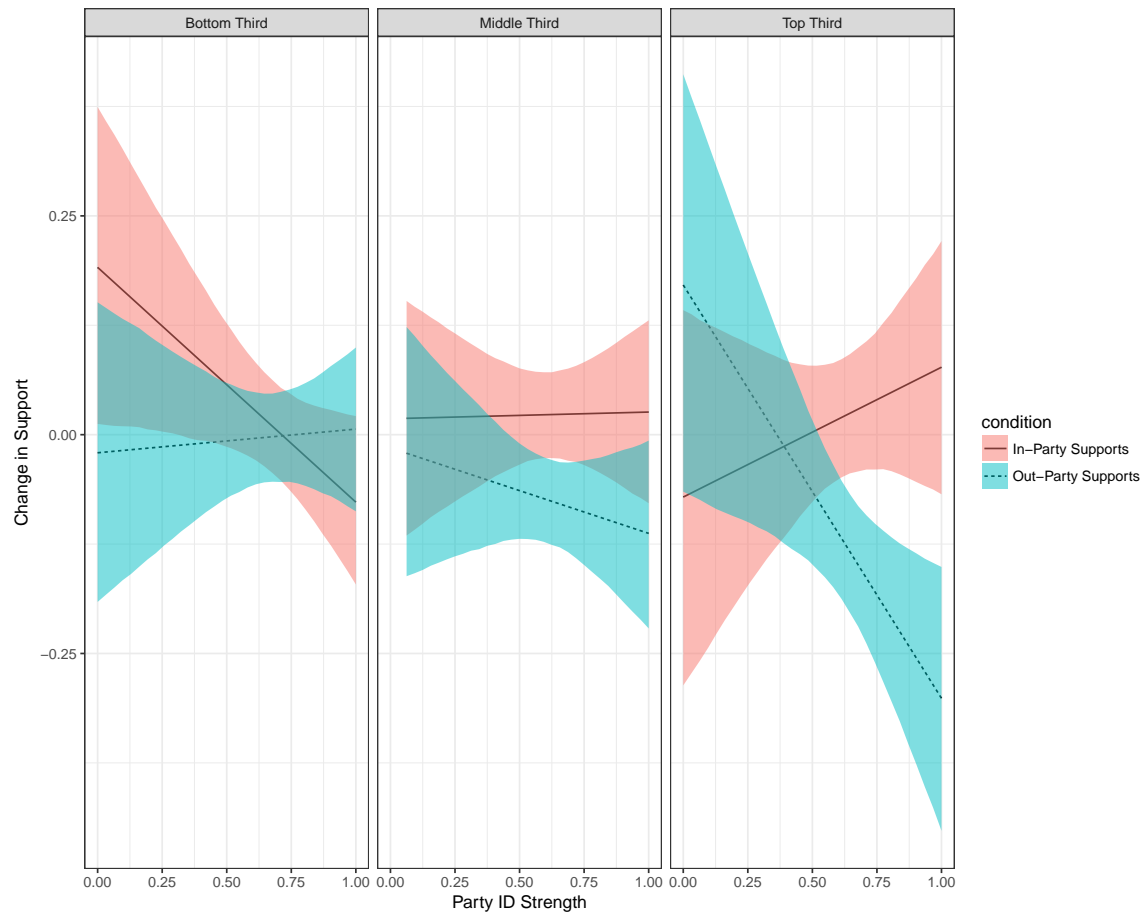
Figure 3. Study 2: Marginal Effect of Cues across Levels of Party Identity by Cognitive Reflection Score



Under what circumstances, and why, each of these two motives is more salient is a complicated matter that no single study can address. Our goal in this paper was to gain some insight into which motive tends to be more salient in partisan cue-taking. To do so we conducted two survey experiments in which partisans were presented with issue descriptions on which we would expect only weak priors, and were given cues indicating which party was associated with which stance. To the extent that cue-receptivity typically involves compensation for low cognitive resources, one would expect the greatest degree of cue following among those lowest in cognitive resources (as some studies have indeed found, eg, Kam 2005). Across two studies and three distinct measures of cognitive resources, however, we did not find support for this hypothesis. Individuals low in test-assessed systematic reasoning tendency, self-reported need for cognition, and test-assessed political knowledge were not more inclined than their high-resource counterparts to follow cues. In fact, those low in political knowledge were less inclined to do so than those high in political knowledge (see also, Johnston et al., 2017).

We did, however, obtain evidence that a particular subgroup was most likely to follow

Figure 4. Study 2: Marginal Effect of Cues across Levels of Party Identity by Political Knowledge



partisan cues. These were not individuals low in cognitive resources, but, to the contrary, were people who combined strong cognitive resources with strong social identification with their political parties. This is consistent with the expressive utility perspective on partisan cue receptivity: cues are followed to gain the psychological utility associated with adopting a reasoned position said to be consistent with an important political identification. Those most likely to toe the party line were those most likely to have an identity-based motive to do so as well as the cognitive resources to do so. Our findings, thus, are consistent with notions that cues are followed on the basis of politically motivated reasoning (e.g., Kahan, 2013; Petersen et al., 2013; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010) as opposed to motives to conserve effort by unreflectively following source cues.

It is of course foolish to posit a singular motive underlying partisan cue receptivity. It should go without saying that individuals sometimes follow political cues in order to save mental effort, sometimes do so to bolster and protect valued identities, and sometimes do so for a combination of these reasons. Indeed, the somewhat inconsistent findings to date concerning the roles of sophistication and effortful reasoning in cue receptivity (Kam

(2005), Bullock (2011), Petersen et al. (2013), Johnston et al. (2017), Malka (2014)) suggest complex motivational dynamics underlying this behavior. They furthermore suggest that various characteristics of the issues themselves (e.g., such as whether or not the issue is newly politicized) and the presentation of the cues (e.g., whether or not the cue is accompanied by supportive argumentative frames) will have implications for who follows the cues and why they do so.

This work complements and extends two recent projects on the role of reflection on political reasoning. First, Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017) argue that those who are the least likely to be affectively attached to issues or parties and the most likely to be reflective exhibit behavior most akin to democratic ideals. In particular, these low affect/high reflection citizens are less likely to conform to elite cues than those who are high in affect and low in reflection. This is because these citizens combine relative weak emotional attachments to party-consistent issue positions with a relatively strong tendency to engage in effortful reasoning that could override emotional intuitions. As our strength of party identity measures affective attachment to a party (Huddy et al., 2015), the present work investigates the effect of high affect/high reflection on political reasoning, and our results are in line with Arceneaux and Vander Wielen (2017) untested predictions which they suggest for future research. Specifically, strong cognitive resources combined with an emotional attachment to partisanship seems to lead to toeing the party line. Second, Groenendyk (2013) argues that cognitive resources are required to defend one's partisan identity—one reason partisan identities may remain stable among those high in cognitive resources is because they are able to rationalize changing attitude structures. The present findings reinforce that perspective as well.

Though this research provides novel evidence regarding social identity strength, cognitive resources, and cue receptivity, certain limitations restrict the scope of the conclusions that may be drawn. Foremost among these is that the present experimental stimuli cover only a small fraction of the universe of political messages (and accompanying cues and frames) that are operative in the American political information environment. Variation in issue type, features of the supportive framing, and many incidental wording-related features can influence not only the extent of cue-following but also the motives that underly it. In particular, we imagine that such effects would be muted among salient and politicized issues, on which many partisans already hold crystallized attitudes (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2017). Additionally, since we did not manipulate cognitive resources or partisan identity, the causal role of these variables is not known. Furthermore, one-shot experimental manipulations embedded within attitude surveys do not adequately capture political information environments that are characterized by a cacophonous stream of political messages from multiple sources being released over a period of time (Chong & Druckman, 2007). However, the present stimuli do convey dissonant partisan information flows, so in that way they correspond with a key aspect of the political information environment. Furthermore, the present results by and large dovetail with survey evidence that the most sophisticated and strongly identified partisans and ideologues have come to adopt party-line positions across a range of attitudes over the last several decades (see, Abramowitz, 2010). We look forward to future research that parses the circumstances under which motives for identity expression and effort conservation influence reactions to political cues.

We conducted our two studies in one political context. A question therefore arises as to

whether the present findings are limited to this particular political context. Recent studies have shown that partisan cue receptivity characterizes citizens of other countries besides the US as well (Bisgaard, 2015; Petersen et al., 2013; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). In Appendix C, we provide tentative evidence from a third study conducted in Denmark, using a design that resembles that of Study 1. In this study we found that Danish respondents who combined strong cognitive resources with strong political group identification – in this case, an ideological group – were the most likely to follow political cues. The results from Denmark, however, come from only one additional political context (and one that is also characterized by high development and stable democracy). Therefore, we welcome future research that would theorize and test whether and to what extent the predictors of cue receptivity generalize across contexts.

Our findings have potential implications for democratic politics. Although the mass public has not necessarily become more polarized in terms of attitude extremity (e.g., Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005), political elites certainly have (e.g., McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006) and highly engaged individuals have become far more likely to adopt party-line positions (Abramowitz, 2010; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Our findings are consistent with the perspective that elite polarization has the potential to trickle down to strongly identified partisans and ideologues, through identity-driven conformity. Ironically, reflective citizens, who are sometimes seen as ideal citizens, are the subset of strong partisan identifiers most likely to fall in line with the part, our study suggests. These individuals appear to have both the cognitive wherewithal and motivation to align new information with their prior attitudes and identities. Since higher levels of cognitive reflection and partisan identity strength are associated with higher levels of political activism (Bizer et al., 2000; Huddy et al., 2015), the effect may be self-reinforcing, wherein political elites polarize the strongly identified and cognitively reflective, who then elect more polarized elites.

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